

PHAVISMINDA Journal

Volume 16 & 17 (May 2018): 161-198.

DOING PHILOSOPHY IN CENTRAL AND SOUTHERN PHILIPPINES: INTERVIEWS WITH PHAVISMINDA PRESIDENTS VELEZ, GALLAMASO, AND SUAZO

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Abstract. The Philosophical Association of the Visayas and Mindanao (PHAVISMINDA), founded in 1979, is one of the oldest philosophical organizations in the country that continued to exist until the present time. This interview article focused on this organization as something distinct from the other major national philosophical organizations of the country, such as the Philosophical Association of the Philippines, the Philosophy Circle of the Philippines, and the Philippine National Philosophical Research Society. Using the method of oral history, this paper tried to document and assess: 1) how PHAVISMINDA differentiated itself from the other major Philippine national philosophical organizations; 2) PHAVISMINDA's general stand on the development of Filipino philosophy, the contextualization of philosophy to the realities of the Visayas and Mindanao, and the use of Cebuano language in philosophizing; 3) the trends of the research projects of its leading writers/thinkers; 4) its exemplary presidents and their lasting imprints on the organization; and 5) the general direction where the organization is heading. The respondents of this interview article are: 1) Dr. Amosa Velez, of the University of San Carlos, founding member of the organization, practically the first president, and three-time president; 2) Dr. Jane Gallamaso, of Xavier University, and the tenth president of the organization; and 3) Dr. Ruby Suazo, of the

University of San Carlos, and the twelfth and current president of the organization.

Keywords: Filipino Philosophy, Philippine Philosophical Organizations, Philosophical Association of Visayas and Mindanao (PHAVISMINDA), Amosa Velez, Ruby Suazo, Jane Gallamaso

Introduction

Founded in 1979, the Philosophical Association of Visayas and Mindanao (PHAVISMINDA) is the second oldest philosophical organization that still exists in the present in the Philippines. The oldest is the Philosophical Association of the Philippines (PAP) that was founded in 1973. But PAP, along with the Philosophy Circle of the Philippines (PCP), founded in 1982; the Philippine Academy of Philosophical Research (PAPR), founded in 1983; and the Philippine National Philosophical Research Society (PNPRS), founded in 1997, are philosophical organizations with, at least theoretically speaking, a national scope.¹ Hence, PHAVISMINDA might be the second oldest Philippine philosophical organization; but among the regional philosophical organizations in the country that continue to exist today, it could arguably be the oldest. Some of the other regional philosophical organizations in the country are: 1) the Philosophical Association of Northern Luzon (PANL), and 2) the Iloilo Philosophical Association (IPA).

Fr. Quintin Terrenal, SVD, while working at the University of San Carlos, convened the founding members of what will become PHAVISMINDA in May of 1979. The objectives of the said organization are:

to thresh out common problems in the teaching of philosophy and to work on their possible solutions; to update one's knowledge in philosophy through the seminars or workshops that the organization will

provide; to help members find topics for research in philosophy in the Philippine context; and to provide a venue for the publication of scholarly articles in this field.²

Pragmatically speaking, it was a time when the young PAP's annual gatherings were invariably held in Metro Manila or in locations near Metro Manila, and when travelling into this capital region from the central and southern parts of the Philippines was still very expensive and time consuming, thereby practically excluding the Visayan and Mindanaoan philosophy enthusiasts from the PAP's beneficial activities. Hence, for the Visayan and Mindanaoan philosophy enthusiasts, PHAVISMINDA's first, second, and third objectives were not construed as redundant to the advocacies of the unreachable PAP. As a consequence of its fourth objective, the *PHAVISMINDA Journal* was established in 1996. Fr. Terrenal is now in the retirement home of his religious order and celebrated his 97th birthday this year, but the philosophical organization that he founded had just recently organized its 39th conference and will turn 40 years old next year.

This interview article focused on PHAVISMINDA as something distinct from the other major national philosophical organizations of the country. Using the method of oral history, this paper tried to document and assess: 1) how PHAVISMINDA differentiated itself from the other major Philippine national philosophical organizations; 2) PHAVISMINDA's general stand on the development of Filipino philosophy, the contextualization of philosophy to the realities of the Visayas and Mindanao, and the use of Cebuano language in philosophizing; 3) the trends of the research projects of its leading writers/thinkers; 4) its exemplary presidents and their lasting imprints on the organization; and 5) the general direction where the organization is heading.

Methodology

The methodology used by this paper is oral history that was originally popularized by the American historian Allan Nevins in 1948. Working at a time when the telephone was already widely used, Nevins realized that such technology had drastically reduced the people's use of written memoranda and written correspondence – documents that are valuable to historians. To compensate for this reduction of possible documentary sources, Nevins decided to gather views, thoughts, and information from living informants, which he archived afterward for other researchers' future use. Oral history is now understood as a purposive collection and preservation of elicited data. The methodology utilizes a recording device to produce “near-verbatim transcripts.”³ Oral history is the most appropriate methodology for this paper in the sense that there are also not much written accounts yet about PHAVISMINDA, or even about the national philosophical organizations in the country.

The respondents of this interview article were selected from the organization's roster of presidents, as presented in the following table:

Name	Home Institution	Years
Dr. Amosa Velez	University of San Carlos	1979-1981
Fr. Quintin Terrenal, SVD	University of San Carlos	1982-1985
Dr. Agustin Sollano, Jr.	Cebu State College	1986-1987
Dr. Rolando Gripaldo	Mindanao State University	1988-1989
Dr. Prisciliano Bauzon	University of Southern Mindanao	1990-1991
Mr. Jose Ivan Natalaray	University of Saint La Salle	1992-1995
Dr. Amosa Velez	University of San Carlos	1996-1999
Mr. Nestor Castor	Notre Dame of Marbel University	2000-2002
Dr. Amosa Velez	University of San Carlos	2003-2004
Dr. Jane Gallamaso	Xavier University	2004-2006

Dr. Eddie Babor	Holy Name University	2006-2010
Dr. Ruby Suazo	University of San Carlos	2010-Present

Based on their strategic points on the roster, which more or less translate to their strategic perspectives on the history and evolution of PHAVISMINDA, the following respondents were selected: 1) Dr. Amosa Velez, as she is one of the founding members of the organization, as she practically served as the first president, as she served two other non-contiguous terms as president, one during the late 1990s and another during the early 2000s, and as a representative president from the Visayas; 2) Dr. Jane Gallamaso, as a president during the early 2000s, and as a representative president from Mindanao; and 3) Dr. Ruby Suazo, the current president of the organization with a multiple contiguous terms, and as another representative president from the Visayas.

One essential guide of recording oral history is the existence of a prior setup: there has to be an acknowledgement at least of “assumptions – if not hypothesis or questions – that direct the researcher’s attention to some aspects of behavior or testimony.”⁴ This must take place so that the interviewee is not misled into talking without aim. In order to avoid problems of method and aim, “it is necessary to understand precisely what it is one is about to evaluate.”⁵ Thus, very initial and raw questions were framed to seek directly the respondents’ testimony or the needed information. Then, initial correspondences and conversations were done with the selected respondents. Those with Suazo happened at San Carlos University, Cebu City. From there a phone conversation was made with Velez, along with emails and text messages with Gallamaso. The co-authors made it a point that the respondents were aware that the final output of the interviews will be published.

After reflecting on these short interactions and reviewing the sparse textualized history of the organization, the main

questions for the three separate interviews were crafted by the co-authors of this paper. It must be stated that one of the co-authors of this paper is a scholar who has dedicated more than two decades of his academic career researching on Filipino philosophy and has already produced scores of publications on this general topic. Both co-authors are from Southern Leyte and can perfectly and functionally relate with the Visayan and Cebuano cultures and languages that predominate PHAVISMINDA. Hence, the crafting of the main questions for the three separate interviews had been done with fairly reliable forestructures of understanding in the co-authors' minds and a clear overall direction of the research project at hand. The co-authors certainly did not just parachute into the lifeworld of PHAVISMINDA, forcefully elicited information from some cornered respondents, and quickly departed back to their home institutions to conjure this interview article. After the main questions were drafted, one of the co-authors of this paper went around Baybay City in Leyte, Cebu City, and Cagayan de Oro City to conduct the actual interviews. The testimonies were recorded and transcribed. Whenever needed, additional questions and clarifications were communicated to the concerned respondents, with their consequent answers spliced into the transcript. The edited and polished transcripts were sent to the respective respondents for their approvals before this final interview article was constructed.

The levels of oral history that were used in this interview article are: 1) systematic correspondence, 2) the "near-verbatim transcripts," 3) the objectives and analysis of data, and 4) the publication of this interview article for dissemination and archiving. The actual electronic voice recordings are momentarily kept by the co-authors. The paper opted to rely heavily on the transcripts, resulting to the interview format of this same paper, due to the conviction that the project was able to capture the voices of key actors in the still-evolving history of PHAVISMINDA.

An interview article can only be as good as its respondents, the design of the interviews, and the usefulness and appropriateness of the resultant interviews to the goals and objectives of the same interview article. Furthermore, without a reliably identified oral history archive, this paper deemed that this same paper could effectively serve as the repository of these valuable voices for future researchers who might be interested in PHAVISMINDA in particular and Filipino philosophy in general.

Significance of the Paper

This interview article is significant in a number of aspects and levels: 1) it provides some oral histories of PHAVISMINDA and stands as the first academic publication on this important Philippine philosophical organization; 2) it offers the people of Luzon, especially those in the National Capital Region, an appreciation of how philosophy is done and pursued at the central and southern parts of the Philippines; 3) it creates an opportunity for PHAVISMINDA to reflect on its history and its evolution, specifically its engagement with Filipino philosophy, its utilization of the Filipino language or Cebuano language, and its anchorage on the diverse, colorful and dynamic Visayan and Mindanaoan realities; 4) it gives the other Philippine philosophical organizations, especially the regional organizations, a benchmark for their respective histories, evolutions, directions, and re-directions; 5) it educates the other Philippine philosophical organizations, especially the ones with a national scope, on how to deal with PHAVISMINDA and the other regional philosophical organizations; 6) it demonstrates the usefulness of the methodology of oral history in exploring the many facets of Filipino philosophy; and 7) it argues for the value of a carefully planned and designed interview article as a legitimate medium for analyzing and, in the process, developing Filipino philosophy. The authors of this paper also intend this to

be their tribute to PHAVISMINDA on its 40th year of existence and service to the Philippine academe and Filipino philosophy.

Interview with Dr. Velez

Velez finished her master's and doctor's degrees in philosophy at the University of San Carlos. She was Chair of the said university's philosophy department from 1979 to 1991. She specialized in phenomenology and Cebuano philosophy. As already mentioned, she is one of the founding members of PHAVISMINDA and practically served as its first president, as the elected president served only for two months. She again became president of PHAVISMINDA from 1996 to 1999, and still again from 2003 to 2004. Velez retired as a philosophy professor in 2003.

The first correspondence with Velez was through a phone conversation on May 12, 2018, which was followed by some exchange of text messages. The actual interview was conducted on June 5, 2018, in Cebu City. Below is the transcript of this interview:

(Author-1): What were the circumstances behind the foundation of PHAVISMINDA?

Amosa Velez: The need for philosophy teachers and philosophy graduates to attend philosophical conferences and seminars within their reach. Because PAP has conferences and seminars yearly but sometimes in Baguio, in Manila, which are not easily accessible then for the great majority of us from the Visayas and Mindanao... first, because of expenses, then, distance. They might not be allowed to leave their families for several days to go to Baguio or Manila. So, in order for the philosophy teachers in the Visayas and Mindanao and philosophy graduates to attend such philosophical conferences, the one who founded this association thought of having an association here in the Visayas and Mindanao. Another circumstance was to encourage

philosophy teachers and graduates to do research in philosophy and publish their researches. That is why PHAVISMINDA has a journal. . .

(Author-1): What do you think is the difference between PHAVISMINDA and PAP?

Velez: The difference is, well, PAP is National. It caters to all philosophy teachers, and teachers of related subjects, those who teach subjects other than philosophy.... PHAVISMINDA, from its very name, is for the philosophy teachers and philosophy graduates, and those who may not be teaching philosophy but interested with philosophy, in the Visayas and Mindanao.

(Author-1): What do you think is the difference between PHAVISMINDA and PCP?

Velez: Is that still existent? . . . I was once invited to be a member of that at the time when I was still teaching. But I am not very familiar with PCP. I was a member for a year only and I was not able to attend any of its conferences.

(Author-1): What is the general stand of PHAVISMINDA on the initiatives towards establishing and developing Filipino philosophy?

Velez: PHAVISMINDA is an open-minded association, in the sense that it is receptive to all philosophies, whether they are coming from the East or the West. It is within the mind frame of PHAVISMINDA that Filipino philosophy is something possible and workable, and it is therefore welcome. In fact, graduate researches are encouraged by the association to be relevant to the Filipino situation, and that would already bring forth Filipino philosophy. . . Many of the researches might be on Western or Eastern philosophy, but we encourage our graduate students to connect these to Filipino thinking, or to Filipino philosophy.

(Author-1): Is PHAVISMINDA interested in a Philosophy that is anchored on the realities of the communities in the Visayas and Mindanao?

Velez: Yes, especially when it comes to the ethical dimension of some activities, or some Cebuano interests like the care of nature, the ethics that involves other things, not only human beings, but also animals and plants. . . . In fact, Ryan Urbano is on that theme.

(Author-1): Who do you think are the leading thinkers/writers of PHAVISMINDA?

Velez: For one, the founder, Father Quintin Terrenal, SVD. He has done many researches. These have been published in different journals. He has also written a book on Rizal. Many of his researches are grounded on Filipino realities. . . . Some of his works are not published yet, but hardbound in the office. Then, there is Ryan Urbano and Ruby Suazo. They have publications that are accessible online. . . . Then, there is Brother Romualdo Abulad. He was our chair. I think, he is now the dean of studies at Christ the King Mission Seminary. . . . I think Maria Marjorie Purino also writes. She is often invited to a Buddhist temple in Manila. Her area of interest is Suzuki's Zen Buddhism.

(Author-1): Who do you think are the exemplary presidents of PHAVISMINDA, and what are their lasting imprint on the organization?

Velez: I go back again to Father Terrenal, the founder of PHAVISMINDA. When he became president, we had a PHAVISMINDA newsletter containing reports of recent and future conferences. The succeeding presidents discontinued that newsletter. PHAVISMINDA itself is his most lasting imprint. He also saw to it that a journal will be established. He was the one who really put up that journal.

(Author-1): What was your reaction when Dr. Gripaldo, one of your past presidents, founded the PNPRS?

Velez: I am not aware that he founded that. Lately? I have not attended any PNPRS meeting. I stopped attending meetings after I retired. . . . We were good friends but we had not much communication. He was a president of PHAVISMINDA also.

(Author-1): Are there common themes in the research projects of the various members of PHAVISMINDA?

Velez: I cannot say anything for sure, because as I said PHAVISMINDA is an open association and its members have the freedom to choose the topics they want to work on... As I said also, our graduate students are encouraged to make their research works relevant to the Philippine situation. But not at all times they would do that.... Everybody in PHAVISMINDA can do his or her research according to his or her style or interests. . . .

(Author-1): Is there any initiative among your members, who are mostly Cebuano-speaking, to philosophize and publish using the Cebuano language?

Velez: They are interested, but there is no other one, as far as I know, who wrote in Cebuano language. I have an article in *PHAVISMINDA Journal* entitled “Mga Yangongo sa usa ka Bata” (“The Persistent Questions of a Child”)... “Yangongo” is something like a persistent question, like that of a child who is incessantly asking questions from his parents. I think there could be no literal translation for that. It is like the German “Angst” that cannot be exactly translated into English.... “Yangongo” are successive questions that are thoroughly made here and now and their answers must be given. “Yangongo” is an intellectual need. Answers must be given to those questions that disturb the mind. I am also writing a Cebuano book, and this will be published soon. In 2014, Manuel Dy and I wrote a philosophy of man book in Cebuano. We are done with the project, but there

are still revisions and editing to be made. Its publication had been delayed because he became busy with the ethics subject of the K to 12 curriculum.

(Author-1): Do you think that PHAVISMINDA was able to achieve its original vision?

Velez: I think so. PHAVISMINDA and PAP had joint conferences two times already. But PHAVISMINDA is an independent association, it is not part of PAP, it is not an extension of PAP. It is an association in itself. And speaking of whether PHAVISMINDA has attained its original goal, yes. The association is brought even to the doorsteps of the members, because conferences are not only held in Cebu but also in Negros, in Panay, in Mindanao. In Mindanao, we had conferences in Cotabato, Lanao del Sur, Lanao del Norte, Misamis, Davao, Musuan in Bukidnon, when Gripaldo was president, and Koronadal or Marbel, down in the South.... Although, sometimes our attendance is not very big, just about 30 or 40 on the average; but as long as the quality of participation and intellectual interactions are there, those conferences would be good. Then, we have the *PHAVISMINDA Journal* for the publication of the fruit of the members' research projects. PHAVISMINDA has encouraged its members to publish.

Interview with Dr. Gallamaso

Gallamaso finished her graduate studies at one of the leading universities in the National Capital Region. She was Chair of the philosophy department of Xavier University from 2001 to 2007, and from 2013 to 2016. Currently, she is the research ethics coordinator at the same university. She specializes in oriental philosophy. She served as president of PHAVISMINDA from 2004 to 2006.

The first correspondence with Gallamaso was through some exchange of emails and text messages. The actual interview was

conducted on May 19, 2018, at the office of the Philosophy Department of Xavier University, Cagayan de Oro City. Below is the transcript of this interview:

(Author-1): What do you think is the difference between PHAVISMINDA and PCP?

Jane Gallamaso: Well... PHAVISMINDA is an association of all schools from Visayas and Mindanao so it is more of a Visayas and Mindanao association. PCP is all over the country, Luzon... Visayas... Mindanao. Although I noticed, most of the members are from Luzon or Manila, and very few members are from Mindanao and Visayas. But PHAVISMINDA is really centered in Visayas and Mindanao, even if the founding group was just really from San Carlos University... I do not know the mission and vision of PCP. All I know is the mission and vision of PHAVISMINDA, which is strengthening the philosophy of both groups of islands through regular conferences, seminars, conventions, and then journal writing... And of course, added to that would be the camaraderie of teachers from both groups of islands... Most members of PCP are from Ateneo de Manila, University of the Philippines Diliman, De La Salle University, the leading schools. I remember that in PCP you will find the great figures like Emerita Quito, Florentino Timbreza, Alfredo Co, and later on Rolando Gripaldo.

(Author-1): How about the difference between PHAVISMINDA and PAP?

Gallamaso: PAP is also... composed of members from Manila and Luzon. But in the past five or ten years, they have expanded in Visayas and Mindanao. This started because some members of both associations joined in a particular conference and they talked about the two organizations' memberships. Then, PAP held conferences in Visayas and Mindanao.

(Author-1): So, talking about the advocacies of the three philosophy organizations, what are the distinct features of PHAVISMINDA?

Gallamaso: PCP is more on professional development through talks, seminars... They would invite schools all over Manila to hear talks of Quito, or Timbreza, or Co. It is more like philosophy professors meeting together for professional faculty development by listening to lectures. With PAP it is more on conferences, and exchange of paper presentations. But I guess later on they have other projects. With PHAVISMINDA, it is paper presentations plus the journal. PAP also has a journal because of De La Salle. I just do not know what happened to PCP. With PHAVISMINDA, it is themed paper presentations and journal publications. Orlando Ali Mandane started the practice of journal publication in 2006.

(Author-1): What is the general stand of PHAVISMINDA on the initiatives towards establishing and developing Filipino philosophy?

Gallamaso: PHAVISMINDA is amenable to that. Eduardo Babor started that in PHAVISMINDA... He delivered a paper on Filipino philosophy in 2007, and he encouraged us that we should welcome any form of Filipino philosophy, because that is what we should be doing. Filipino philosophy should mean not only Tagalog philosophy. But could also be Visayan philosophy, although written in the English language. That would still be Filipino philosophy because the realities that are dealt with are Filipino realities, like Filipino values, which are distinctly from Visayas or Mindanao... Then, even earlier than that, we invited Leonardo Mercado to talk about Filipino philosophy. So basically, we are very open to Filipino philosophy and that is where we should be going. When Babor died, PHAVISMINDA's desire for Filipino philosophy did not die with him.

(Author-1): Is PHAVISMINDA interested in a Philosophy that is anchored on the realities of the communities in the Visayas and Mindanao?

Gallamaso: Very much. If something happens in Visayas or Mindanao, for instance problems on peace, or politics, or education, the members will propose peace, or politics, or education, as a theme in the coming conference. PHAVISMINDA often addresses pressing questions and problems emanating from the Visayan and Mindanaoan contexts.

(Author-1): Who do you think are the leading thinkers/writers of PHAVISMINDA?

Gallamaso: We cannot call them philosophers but scholars or professors of philosophy. . . . But these are scholars or professors who gave their whole lives to writing, to PHAVISMINDA, and to the propagation of love of philosophy in Visayas and Mindanao. So, I would say Babor. . . because he really wrote enormously. He was not only a lawyer, he really had that passion for publication, for PHAVISMINDA. In fact, he visited schools and told them to publish... And then...there are many others... among the younger ones is Mandane. . . among the older ones, I would say Aмоса Velez... she writes and gave her whole life and soul to PHAVISMINDA... then Romualdo Abulad. Among the younger ones again is Ryan Urbano.

(Author-1): Are there common themes in the research projects of the various members of PHAVISMINDA?

Gallamaso: Yes. When we have the business meeting: for this year, education; for this year, politics; for this year, critical theory; for this year, on hermeneutics. So before the conference, the members would agree on specific themes. Although there are years that the scholars will present freewheeling topics: whatever is it that you have come up and written, please come together and share. *Pero* most of the time it is theme-based.

(Author-1): I am actually talking about the corpus of works written and presented by the PHAVISMINDA members all throughout these years. Do you think there are common themes in such corpus of works?

Gallamaso: I cannot recall any common themes. Perhaps you can take a look at the articles published in the *PHAVISMINDA Journal*.

(Author-1): Who do you think are the exemplary presidents of PHAVISMINDA, and what are their lasting imprint on the organization?

Gallamaso: Velez, because she is very meticulous when it comes to a lot of things, when it comes to the finances. So far, she had one of the longest terms as president of PHAVISMINDA... I would consider Babor also as another exemplary president of PHAVISMINDA.

(Author-1): Is there any initiative among your members, who are mostly Cebuano-speaking, to philosophize and publish using the Cebuano language?

Gallamaso: There are none, except that of Babor... So, none as an association... Although, the desire and the thought of it is very much welcome. In the future, I think, that will be the trend. It was actually considered before, only that the members have not come together and sit down on how things should be done... There are individual efforts. Here at Xavier University, we have a journal called "Kuan." It is a Filipino journal but it was not sustained because of the change of leadership in our philosophy department. It was supposed to be offered to PHAVISMINDA, but the plan did not materialize.

(Author-1): The medium of "Kuan" is Cebuano language?

Gallamaso: Cebuano! I do not know if I have a copy. But I am sure the philosophizing was written in pure Cebuano... It would have

been amazing if we were able to sustain it. In PHAVISMINDA, there is no such organizational initiative. But I am sure everyone would be amenable to the idea.

(Author-1): Do you think that PHAVISMINDA was able to achieve its original vision as an organization?

Gallamaso: Yes, because it is able to continue until now. It is able to preserve clearly its vision, that it should be Visayas-based and Mindanao-based. It is able to preserve its structure. For example, there is a stipulation that the treasurer should only be from San Carlos University. This was followed, and this is one of the reasons why the organization survived the years. San Carlos University is there to oversee the organization.

(Author-1): What do you think are the main accomplishments of PHAVISMINDA?

Gallamaso: . . . Other philosophical associations, they come and go, they die, they become inactive. PHAVISMINDA is very much active. This continuity of existence is one of its best accomplishments... Second, its pioneering institution, San Carlos University, is able to preserve it, it actively holds everything together. Third, PHAVISMINDA is able to continue providing professional growth to its members. Every year, without fail, it has a conference... Fourth, it is able to publish...

(Author-1): What do you think will be the future of PHAVISMINDA?

Gallamaso: ... There was a time... that PAP and other philosophical associations from Manila came to PHAVISMINDA and woo it to join them. That was in 2007, I guess. I think Gripaldo initiated that wooing. But he was asked to leave the room. During the closed-door meeting... Ateneo de Davao was represented there, and Babor was there... we did not want to merge with PAP and with other philosophical organizations.

Doing so might make us lose our identity... So, during that time, we were really against that... We can invite them to talk, to give talks, but they should not become part of the decision-making processes of PHAVISMINDA... I do not know the future of PHAVISMINDA now, because when Suazo became president, he attends the conferences of PAP, and Mark Calano of PAP joined us. There is this connection already. So, I am just so scared that we will lose the identity of PHAVISMINDA.

(Author-1): What is wrong with collaborating with PAP?

Gallamaso: . . . Merging is not okay... I think the continuity of PHAVISMINDA is secured if we know our own domain and stick to it... Babor and Ryan Maboloc of Ateneo de Davao resisted that attempt before... We called it “Manila Imperialism.” . . . We have Manila Imperialism. However, at that time PHAVISMINDA was not open for a merging or collaboration as it wants to protect its own goals and identity as a Visayan and Mindanao association.

Interview with Dr. Suazo

Suazo finished his master’s degree in philosophy at the Christ the King Mission Seminary, Quezon City, and his doctor’s degree in philosophy at the University of San Carlos. He is a professor of philosophy at the University of San Carlos. He specialized in continental philosophy, political philosophy, and Filipino philosophy. He is serving as the president of PHAVISMINDA since 2010, the longest incumbency so far recorded in the history of the said organization. He is also serving as the managing editor of the *PHAVISMINDA Journal*.

The initial face to face conversation with Suazo happened on May 12, 2018, at the University of San Carlos, Cebu City. The actual interview was conducted on May 24, 2018, at the Hostel, Visayas State University, Baybay City, on the occasion of the 39th PHAVISMINDA Conference. Below is the transcript of the interview.

(Author-1): What do you think is the difference between PHAVISMINDA and PAP?

Ruby Suazo: I think there is no difference between PHAVISMINDA and PAP. I have been attending the conferences of both organizations for so many years now, and I think they just share the same objectives, that is offering a venue for the sharing of researches and of gleaning new topics for future researches. So, actually, there is not much difference between the two.

(Author-1): What do you think is the difference between PhAVisMinda and PCP?

Suazo: I think PCP at the moment is actually an organization of students. It is really for philosophy students while PHAVISMINDA is for professionals. However, we also accept philosophy students as members if they will apply for membership. So, most of the members of PHAVISMINDA are actually philosophy teachers; while the members of PCP are mostly students if I am not mistaken. Although, their mentors are also there to advise them.

(Author-1): What is the general stand of PHAVISMINDA on the initiatives towards establishing and developing Filipino philosophy?

Suazo: I think PHAVISMINDA does not have a general stand as far as the establishment and development of Filipino philosophy is concerned. Everything boils down to the individual philosophy teacher or philosopher who is actually interested or not to delve into Filipino philosophy. There is no consensus about PHAVISMINDA's stand on Filipino philosophy. This can actually be gleaned from the different papers presented by the conference participants. If ever PHAVISMINDA does Filipino philosophy, this could just be triggered by the fact that for a particular conference the theme is on Filipino philosophy.

(Author-1): Is PhAVisMinda interested in a Philosophy that is anchored on the realities of the communities in the Visayas and Mindanao?

Suazo: Yes! Basically, that is the objective, or one of the objectives, of PHAVISMINDA when it was established by Fr. Quintin Terrenal, SVD: to really "help members find topics for research in philosophy in the Philippine context." PHAVISMINDA, apart from being an avenue for updating knowledge in philosophy and threshing out problems in teaching philosophy, is indeed an avenue also for research in philosophy most especially that which has a kind of consideration of the Philippine context. So it is doing philosophy in the Philippine context.

(Author-1): Who do you think are the leading thinkers/writers of PHAVISMINDA?

Suazo: I do not know if it is appropriate to say "leading" but if we try to start then from the very beginning, the people that will come to my mind are Fr. Terrenal, the founding leader of PHAVISMINDA. Aside from being the founder of PHAVISMINDA, he also wrote articles on Philosophy, Filipino folk tales, and his philosophical reflection on EDSA revolution. Dr. Virginia Jayme is another luminary of PHAVISMINDA. She wrote philosophical papers in academic journals such as *Philippiniana Sacra* and *Silliman Journal*. . . There is also Fr. Michael Moga, SJ. He was also one of the founding members of PHAVISMINDA. I have known him to have written some books on the philosophy of the human person. We also have Dr. Amosa Velez and Dr. Rosario Espina. With the recent generation, we have Ryan Urbano, the present chair of the Philosophy Department of the University of San Carlos; Ryan Maboloc from Ateneo de Davao University; Orlando Mandane, Jr., and Maria Majorie Purino, both from the University of San Carlos. Mandane is the current editor-in-chief of *PHAVISMINDA Journal*. There is also Jeffry Ocaj from Silliman

University. Ranie Villaver is also from our department. He is just starting to write but at least he is able to publish in an international journal. There is also Raymund Pavo of the University of the Philippines Mindanao. If it is not too much, I may include myself here.

(Author-1): Are there common themes in the research projects of the various members of PHAVISMINDA?

Suazo: No. There are no common themes because we come from diverse philosophical fields and we have diverse interests. For example, Fr. Terrenal is into Medieval philosophy, some sort of Indigenous philosophy, and modern philosophy. Then Dr. Jayme was into Levinas and phenomenology. Urbano is into applied ethics. Mandane is into philosophy of technology. Purino is into Buddhism. Villaver is into Chinese philosophy. Oca is into critical theory. I write about Filipino philosophy and Paul Ricoeur. So basically, we do not share common interests; and so, we have no common theme.

(Author-1): Who do you think are the exemplary presidents of PHAVISMINDA, and what are their lasting imprint on the organization?

Suazo: Basically, I can think only of Fr. Terrenal, as he was the one who really brought up the idea of organizing this association, and also bringing up the idea of having publications. Dr. Velez is also instrumental in bringing in the emphasis for publication. When research culture was not yet ingrained in PHAVISMINDA, she brought in professors from Manila to speak in our conferences. It was also during the time of Dr. Velez that *PHAVISMINDA Journal* came into being. . . I think there may still be other exemplary presidents, but I am not familiar with them as I joined PHAVISMINDA only in 1999. . .

(Author-1): Is there any initiative among your members, who are mostly Cebuano-speaking, to philosophize and publish using the Cebuano language?

Suazo: I am only aware of Dr. Velez. Among our members, she has published "Mga Yangongo sa Usa ka Bata." She published it in the *PHAVISMINDA Journal*. She has also another one in the pipeline, a book on the philosophy of the human person in Cebuano. . . . But generally, I am not aware of so much interest among our members to philosophize or publish in Cebuano.

(Author-1): Do you think that PHAVISMINDA was able to achieve its original vision as an organization?

Suazo: Yes, I think so. Basically we say, we start from the first one: to thresh out problems in teaching philosophy. So, from time to time we have workshops in the past on teaching logic, ethics, and philosophy of man. I think we are able to accomplish that objective. The second one is to provide the avenue for updating. We also accomplished that, and learn new information in philosophy. But that kind of objective is already passé because through the internet we can easily access new information in philosophy. But the more important objective is to provide an avenue to share our researches. We also have to share the outputs of our researches and share them with other people. At the same time, there was that desire of PHAVISMINDA to have its own journal, and this one has also been accomplished. So generally, yes, PHAVISMINDA has been able to accomplish its objectives.

(Author-1): What do you think will be the future of PHAVISMINDA?

Suazo: Inasmuch as CHED now is into collaborative research, maybe we have also to venture into that possibility of doing collaborative research. Two minds are better than one. Maybe if we try to discuss or deal with a certain philosophical issue or

topic, then that may be enhanced or developed. So we are going to that direction and at the same time trying to really emphasize philosophizing in context. That is not so much about being partial about doing Filipino philosophy or Cebuano philosophy... Instead, it is more about doing philosophy or using any framework in philosophy, that will address a specific problem that we have in our context or place or in our country... But again, it is somehow freewheeling. We do not actually force people to be interested in this or that philosophy... So the directions that we are trying to take are: doing collaborative research in philosophy and doing philosophy in the Philippine context.

(Author-1): Do you think that there is a possibility that in the future PHAVISMINDA will merge with PAP or with PNPRS?

Suazo: There was an attempt of the late Dr. Gripaldo, to actually have a kind of a national organization in philosophy. But that did not pan out as Dr. Gripaldo would like to make PAP the mother organization. PHAVISMINDA did not like that idea of being subsumed under PAP. I had, however, a discussion with Dr. Paolo Bolaños of the University of Santo Tomas some years ago to create a federation of philosophical organizations in the Philippines. We even tried to come up with a name for that. What came to my mind was "Federation of Philosophy Associations in the Philippines"... That was just a starting point and no concrete steps were taken yet. But a federation of philosophical organizations in the country is the direction that I have been trying to suggest, so that the different regional organizations will still be able to maintain their identities and also maintain the objectives of why they were founded in the first place... In a Federation, the different organizations are still going to exist... but they will come together for a national conference. But I think nowadays this is not much of a problem, as people from one part of the country are routinely invited or welcomed to join in conferences held by or called by other philosophy

organizations... After all, we share the same interest in philosophy.

Synthesis/Conclusion

As mentioned in the introduction, this interview article tried to document and assess: 1) PHAVISMINDA's difference from the other major Philippine national philosophical organizations; 2) PHAVISMINDA's general stand on the development of Filipino philosophy, the contextualization of philosophy to the realities of the Visayas and Mindanao, and the use of Cebuano language in philosophizing; 3) the trends of the research projects of its leading writers/thinkers; 4) its exemplary presidents and their lasting imprints on the organization; and 5) the general direction where the organization is heading.

As to how PHAVISMINDA differentiated itself from the other major Philippine national philosophical organizations, although Suazo sees not much difference, Velez and Gallamaso perceived that PHAVISMINDA's role is to bring philosophy closer to the philosophy teachers and students in the Visayas and Mindanao. Velez and Gallamaso also noticed that PHAVISMINDA has a strong emphasis on research and publication that led to the establishment of its own journal. PAP may be the oldest philosophical association in the country, but for a long time, PAP did not have its own journal. PHAVISMINDA stands as second only to PAPR in having its own journal. But this was a considerable feat accomplished by PHAVISMINDA considering that PAPR is an elite group of doctors with pre-established research track records and that its journal for a time rode on the older journal of the philosophy department of DLSU. This is the same journal that later on became PNPRS's journal. Hence, PHAVISMINDA could be the first Philippine philosophical organization to create its own journal from the ground and from the talents and perseverance of its own non-elite members. This journal of PHAVISMINDA could be an interesting subject matter

of a succeeding research project as it is a window for the concerns and themes of this philosophical organization. Unfortunately, the time and space allotted for this present project do not allow us to peer into the contents of this journal.

As to PHAVISMINDA's general stand on the development of Filipino philosophy, and the contextualization of philosophy to the realities of the Visayas and Mindanao, Terrenal had the subtle marching order to philosophize within the context of the realities of the Philippines, especially the Visayas and Mindanao. This marching order had been engraved on the objectives of the organization itself. If followed by the members, such marching order would actually support the development of Filipino philosophy. Babor had a more explicit advocacy of supporting the development of Filipino philosophy. But such explicit advocacy for Filipino philosophy, although still alive among some members of the organization, is not a general stand of the organization. If sufficient time and space were allotted for this present project, it would have been interesting to isolate these strands of both subtle and explicit works on Filipino philosophy from the general corpus of central and southern Philippine philosophizing. It would have been interesting to look into the tension and dynamics between these strands' being regional and national at the same time. These things could be the subject matter of another succeeding research project.

As to the PHAVISMINDA's general stand on the use of Cebuano language in philosophizing, there is not much interest in the endeavor. But Velez, Manuel Dy of Ateneo de Manila University who is a Cebuano, Babor, and some philosophy teachers from Xavier University ventured into this domain of philosophizing. Their texts and ways of utilizing the Cebuano language should be studied further by scholars interested in Filipino philosophy. This present research project did not dare to ask the respondents about their perception on the use of Filipino language in philosophizing. But in another ongoing research

project supervised by one of the co-authors of this present interview article, the group of Cebuano philosophers who stood as the respondents, are not very enthusiastic about the practicality of using the Filipino language in philosophizing within the Cebuano-speaking areas of the country. This means for a long time, English would remain as the medium of philosophizing in central and southern Philippines, with a handful of mavericks experimenting every now and then with the Cebuano language.

As to the trends of the research projects of PHAVISMINDA's leading writers/thinkers, there are no such discernible trends yet. But the three interviews yielded a rich list of the philosophical luminaries of PHAVISMINDA: Terrenal, Velez, Jayme, Espina, Moga, Abulad, Babor, Mandane, Suazo, Urbano, Maboloc, Purino, Oca, Pavo, and Villaver. Their texts should be individually studied further by scholars interested in Filipino philosophy. But Suazo already expressed a note that these writers came from very diverse philosophical backgrounds and interests. What this present interview article can do is to briefly introduce each of these luminaries and their general philosophical concerns.

Quintin Terrenal, SVD obtained his Ph.D. in Philosophy (1975) at the Catholic University of America. His doctoral dissertation entitled *Causa Sui and the Object of Intuition in Spinoza* that was later on published into a book is one his recent works in philosophy.⁶ As already mentioned, he is the founder of PHAVISMINDA. He was active in teaching philosophy mostly at the University of San Carlos where he served as chair of its philosophy department. Before he retired from his ministry in 1994, he already had done and written so much on medieval and Filipino philosophy.⁷

Amosa Velez received her Ph.D. in Philosophy (1998) from the University of San Carlos. One of her recent publications touched on Filipino Philosophy and Time.⁸ Her most recent publication revisited the chapter of her dissertation on the Filipino concept of *Nayanaya* where she clarified, out of collated

responses and her own critical evaluation, that in the midst of crestfallen situations, it is a “will to be.”⁹ As already mentioned, Velez is one of the few luminaries who dared to philosophize using the Cebuano language.¹⁰

Virginia Jayme received her Ph.D. in Philosophy (1990) from the University of San Carlos. Her dissertation was about Husserl’s phenomenology and Levinas’ responsible subjectivity. She retired as a philosophy professor at the same university. Her research interests are on Levinas, Aristotle, Eastern and Western philosophies. During her more active times, she published at the *Philippiniana Sacra*, the journal of UST Ecclesiastical Faculties.¹¹ She has also written a book on logic.¹²

Rosario Manzanares-Espina received her Ph.D. in Philosophy (2003) from the University of San Carlos. Her dissertation was about the notions of ideology in Marx and justice in Rawls. She is now a retired professor of political, social, and cultural philosophies at the University of San Carlos. Her recent writings concentrated on the themes of justice, equality, and human worth. She asserted that “the value of social equality rests on the assumption that the other is an equal because he possesses human worth expressing my respect for him and his point of view.”¹³

Michael Moga, SJ earned his Ph.D. in Philosophy (1970) from the University of Tulane, New Orleans, Louisiana. His dissertation was about the notion of inter-subjectivity in Heidegger. He taught philosophy at the Ateneo de Zamboanga University. He was also Visiting Professor at Fordham University, Bronx, New York. His recent essay focused on human existence. In it, he writes that the human person relates to its center in a form of ‘home’, which is earthly and is the source of identity through man’s relatedness, but also alienation, to it.¹⁴

Romualdo Abulad, SVD received his Ph.D. in Philosophy (1978) from the University of Santo Tomas. He pursued his postdoctoral fellowship at the University of Hamburg, Germany.

After being the chair at the University of San Carlos, he now lectures at Christ the King Mission Seminary and at the University of Santo Tomas. Apart from his being an authority in Kant, one of his recent essays centers on clarifying the concept of Hermeneutics as that which gets its core as an artistic expression.¹⁵ In context, his other recent publication on “Doing Philosophy in the Philippines towards a More Responsive Philosophy for the 21st Century” gave the advice that relevance and excellence can be achieved “not by watering down the seriousness of the discipline and adjusting to the whims of entertainment media, but by being true to its nature as a source of authentic ideas.”¹⁶

Eduardo Babor received his Bachelor of Laws (1999) from the Holy Name University, Tagbilaran City, and his Ph.D. in Philosophy (2004) at the University of San Carlos, Cebu City. Babor’s recent writings before his death rested well within the field of continental philosophy, with a special focus on Heidegger.¹⁷ He wrote on Heidegger’s take on Ontology’s relationship to Science,¹⁸ his deconstruction of understanding,¹⁹ his analysis of Nietzsche’s *Zarathustra*,²⁰ the mystery of God,²¹ and *Dasein*. Babor expounded *Dasein* in various contexts: in Fear, Dread, and Concern,²² as well as in its spiritual, temporal, and historical dimensions,²³ and its social and ethical dimensions.²⁴

Orlando Ali Mandane Jr. received his Bachelor of Philosophy (1996), M.A. in Philosophy (1999), and Ph.D. in Philosophy (2007) from the University of San Carlos. He is currently teaching at the same university and is the editor of both the *Philippine Quarterly of Culture and Society* and the *PHAVISMINDA Journal*. His research interests include Lao Zi and Zhuang Zi, and philosophy of technology. One of his recent works discusses technology and its manner of crafting the human person.²⁵

Ruby Suazo received his Ph.D. in Philosophy (2007) from the University of San Carlos, where he is currently teaching. His recent writings revealed his expertise on Ricoeur. One of his

recent works examined Ricoeur's ethics within politics, which tackled on the "creation of spaces of freedom" under the structure of the governed in democracies.²⁶ He also contextualizes Ricoeur's Reflexive Philosophy by clarifying the Filipino self through the significance of the family.²⁷

Ryan Urbano received his M.A. in Applied Ethics (2008) from the Linköping University, Sweden, and Utrecht University, the Netherlands. He received his Ph.D. in Philosophy (2010) at the University of San Carlos. He pursued his postdoctoral fellowship at the Justitia Amplificata Center for Advanced Studies, Goethe-Universität of Frankfurt am Main and the Freie Universität of Berlin. Currently, he is Chair of the Philosophy Department at the University of San Carlos. His recent and most cited work succeeded in arguing the relevance of Levinas' genuine ethical encounter as a vital element of interfaith dialogue.²⁸

Christopher Ryan Maboloc earned his M.A. in Applied Ethics (2008) from Linköping University, Sweden, and Norwegian University of Science and Technology, Norway. He earned his Ph.D. in Philosophy (2017) from the University of San Carlos where he was given the distinction of *maxima cum laude*. He has undergone training in democracy and governance through the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung in Bonn and Berlin, Germany. He is former Chair of the Philosophy Department of Ateneo de Davao University. His most recent work discusses the problem of structural injustice with the critique of the Rawlsian theory of justice using the philosophy of Iris Marion Young. He argued for a move beyond Rawls in order to overcome injustices within structures.²⁹

Maria Marjorie Purino earned her Ph.D. in Philosophy (2011) from the University of San Carlos. She pursued a fellowship at Engakuji Monastery, Japan, through the Sumitomo Foundation. Currently, she is teaching at the University of San Carlos. Her research interests are on Suzuki, Zen Buddhism, and post-modernism. One of her recent works highlighted the relationship

of the Early Heidegger and Daisetsu Teitaro Suzuki on the theme of postmodern being.³⁰ Her other more recent East-West comparative philosophical work centered on wisdom by revisiting *Chandogya Upanishad*, Cusanus' *Visio Intellectualis*, and Heidegger's *Aletheia*. She argued that wisdom is neither "about the possession of knowledge" nor the "reliance on a higher power or a transcendent being," but is about "the virtue of reverence" which converges the three traditions in seeing reality as a whole, awed by an Absolute Maximum, and communed in Being's clearing.³¹

Jeffry Ocay received his M.A. in History (2007) Silliman University. He received his Ph.D. in Philosophy (2012) at Macquarie University, Australia. He pursued his postdoctoral fellowships at The Chinese University of Hong Kong, and at the Goethe-Universität Frankfurt am Main. He is currently teaching in Silliman University. His recent work on the Struggle for recognition of the Penan people in Sarawak, Malaysia, showed his critical stance as he argued for a refusal under the historical phenomenon of globalization.³² He also wrote about the shifting patterns of American influence in the Philippines through technological domination.³³

Raymondo Pavo: he obtained his Masters in Philosophy from the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, Belgium. He is currently an assistant professor at the University of the Philippines Mindanao. His writing on *Filipino Philosophy and Postmodernity* discussed how philosophy can be nurtured and defended from various vantage points, and how it can give way for the development of Filipino philosophy.³⁴ His other recent work analyzed the plight of women small-scale miners in Jose Panganiban, Camarines Norte using as his framework from the philosophies of De Certeau and Foucault.³⁵

Ranie Villaver received his Ph.D. in Philosophy (2012) from the University of New South Wales, Australia. He is currently teaching at the University of San Carlos. His recent work

explored *Guiji* or Yang Zhu's possible conception of self. In its implications, he argues that Yang Zhu's concept of the "self" veers towards being non-egoistic.³⁶

Going back to the PHAVISMINDA's exemplary presidents and their lasting imprints on the organization are, three names came out: Terrenal, Velez, and Babor. Terrenal's lasting imprint on the organization was the very act of founding such organization and seeing to it that the journal would eventually be established. Velez's lasting imprint on the organization was her dedicated and nurturing management of the organization in various capacities. Babor's lasting imprint on the organization was his emphasis on research and publication, as well as his advocacy for the development of Filipino philosophy. It has to be noted that all of these three exemplary presidents are not only passionate organizers and managers but also interesting philosophy scholars in their own right. In fact, all the three of them were also identified as part of the philosophical luminaries of PHAVISMINDA.

As to where the organization is generally heading, the answer leans towards the preservation of PHAVISMINDA's identity as a philosophy organization of teachers and students from the Visayas and Mindanao. Any move that would erode such identity appears to be not welcome. But under the long incumbency of Suazo, PHAVISMINDA is becoming open to the idea of working with the other Philippine philosophical organizations through a federation. They found the initiative of PAP before of suddenly transforming itself into a federation and inviting other organizations to be subsumed under it as something suspicious. The era of the late 1970s and the early 1980s expensive and time consuming local travels is now replaced by competing airlines and faster sea crafts. Even the national philosophical organizations are now holding conferences at the regions more often. Perhaps we are now in more auspicious times to confederate the various Philippine

philosophical organizations for these to have a more powerful collective presentation within the country and abroad. But PHAVISMINDA is also correct on insisting the value of maintaining the identities and advocacies of the regional philosophical organizations. These two trends are now clear for PHAVISMINDA to be non-contradictory with each other. Suazo also would want to introduce the practice of collaborative research in the organization as a response to CHED's emphasis on interdisciplinarity.

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² Amosa Velez, "History of PHAVISMINDA," *PHAVISMINDA Journal*, 4 (2005): 104.

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⁶ Quintin Terrenal, *Causa Sui and the Object of Intuition in Spinoza* (Cebu City, The Philippines: University of San Carlos, 1976).

⁷ A featured list of the PHAVISMINDA founder's works can be found in *PHAVISMINDA Journal*, 4 (2005), 97-100.

⁸ Amosa Velez, "Filipino Philosophy: Why Not? Reflections on Filipino Philosophy of Time," in *PHAVISMINDA Journal*, 7 (2008).

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¹⁰ See for example Amosa Velez, "Mga Yangongo Sa Usa Ka Bata," in *PHAVISMINDA Journal*, 4 (2005), 1-8.

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¹² Virginia Jayme, *Introduction to Logic* (Cebu City: ABC Publications, 2002).

¹³ Rosario Manzanares-Espina, "Justice, Equality, and Human Worth," *PHAVISMINDA Journal*, 7 (2008): 61-71.

¹⁴ Michael Moga, SJ, "The Earthly Character of Human Existence," *PHAVISMINDA Journal*, 8 (2009): 19-28.

¹⁵ Romualdo Abulad SVD, "What is Hermeneutics?" *Kritike* 1:2 (2007), 23.

¹⁶ Romualdo Abulad SVD, "Doing Philosophy in the Philippines towards a More Responsive Philosophy for the 21st Century," *Suri*, 5:1 (2016): 19.

¹⁷ See for example Eduardo Babor, "Heidegger's Understanding of Understanding in Being and Time," *Kinaadman* 16:2 (2005); "Nietzsche's Zarathustra According to Martin Heidegger," *HNU Graduate Journal* 14:2 (2003), "Heidegger's Concept of Discourse, Fallenness, and Thrownness in Being and Time," *Kinaadman* 16:2 (2005).

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