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Filipino Philosophy?

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Preliminary Considerations

The subject matter is obviously philosophy, which I think would significantly depend on, just the same, a philosophical approach. The title is in a form of question. I admit, it has been inspired by Martin Heidegger's *What is Philosophy?*² In answering the question, transcendence of thought is required because that is the very nature of a philosophical investigation.

At the start, I am less motivated to discuss the subject matter for two reasons: First, the question itself may not make sense because it is not at all leading us to any answer. Second, answers to the question are no longer necessary because the issue or controversy has already been settled long before or prior to this attempt. I will try to explain these points in the succeeding paragraphs.

Filipino Philosophy?

The question 'what is Filipino philosophy?' entails a logical presumption; that is, there is Filipino philosophy. Is there really a Filipino philosophy? This question arises from our main question and the resolution of which is the logical antecedent of the main issue involved herein. The answer to this question is directly related and intimately linked with the subsequent main

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question; and so, the resolution of such issue determines whether or not the answer to the main question is still necessary.

Undeniably, philosophy is fundamentally Greek. The word *philosophia* was coined by Pythagoras, a Greek mathematician, from the Greek words *philos* or *philia* and *sophos* or *sophia* whose nominal meanings are associated with “love, passion, or friend” and “wisdom” respectively. Not only by reason of etymology that philosophy is said to be Greek; Certain Western political claims and assertion should be noted: philosophy started in Greece – the father of philosophy, Socrates, was Greek and the first philosophers were Greeks.

Acceptance of the aforementioned propositions and arguments from the bases of ‘documented’ historical facts would lead us to series of material implications $[(A/B) \equiv (-A \supset B)]$. Let us begin with the notion of ‘Greek philosophy.’ ‘Greek philosophy’ is basically a tautology. It is tautologous because philosophy from the very nature is Greek. Similarly, even ‘Western philosophy’ is practically redundant. As a necessary consequence, ‘philosophy’ implies that it is precisely Greek and Western. So, to speak of ‘Western philosophy’ or ‘Greek philosophy’ is to fall into the logic of redundancy $\{A \equiv [A \& (A/B)]\}$. I will make use of ‘wine’ as an analogy. By denotation, ‘wine’ is the result of the fermentation of grapes. ‘Grape wine’ then is a tautology.

Inevitably, we are using logic to philosophize about philosophy in the attempt to come up with a metatheory of philosophy even considering that philosophy itself is a metatheory. By metatheory, what I mean is that philosophy is the theory of a theory.

The word ‘logic’ was coined by a Greek thinker, Parmenides, from the Greek word *logos*, which may mean reason or discourse.³ If philosophy is ‘love

of wisdom’ and we search for wisdom using logic, then logic is the tool of every philosophical inquiry. Obviously, even the tool of philosophy is Greek. How is it ever possible to argue that there is non-Greek logic if logic originated in Greece and was systematically developed by a Greek thinker, Aristotle, who is regarded as the ‘father of logic’?⁴

This is the reason why ‘Chinese philosophy,’ Indian philosophy,’ and all other ‘Eastern philosophies’ are not acknowledged as legitimate philosophies by the West because they are non-Greek (non-Western). In short, to classify them as philosophies is an error. To classify certain products as ‘strawberry wine,’ ‘rice wine,’ *etcetera*, is an error because ‘wine’ is the product of fermented grapefruit. Out of respect for cultural distinctness, it is basic to identify *wine* (fermented grapefruit) as different from *Tapuy/Baya* (fermented rice), *Basi/Palek/Intus* (fermented sugarcane juice), *Tuba or Bahalina* (fermented palm or coconut sap), *Agkud* (fermented ginger juice), or *Kabawaran/Mandara* (fermented honey), and not to call all these products of fermentation as wines. To always attach the word ‘wine’ to these fermented products entails that they cannot be independent of the Western influence. Wine does not refer to the process of fermentation but to one of the many products of fermentation.

Duly considering the foregoing premises, it is argued that there is no such a Filipino philosophy. How can there be a Filipino philosophy when Alfred North Whitehead has already concluded in his book *Process and Reality* that “[t]he safest general characterization of philosophical tradition is that it consists of a series of footnotes to Plato”?⁵

Despite of these clear justifications, there are still thinkers who claim and insist that Filipino philosophy exists on some problematic bases (but not delimited to) like:

A philosophy is Filipino if the language used is Filipino;

A philosophy is Filipino if the citizenship of the one philosophizing is Filipino;

A philosophy is Filipino if the classes or categories used are indigenous Filipino.

Firstly, I consider the first one as problematic because mere translation of the philosophical writings of Plato from Greek to Filipino does neither make the philosophy Filipino nor alter the identity of philosophy. Secondly, even the citizenship of the one philosophizing should not be the ground. I cannot consider Plato's philosophy Filipino if, hypothetically, he has changed citizenship from Greek to Filipino. Philosophy should be understood as an activity non-referent to citizenship. Lastly, it is even harder to establish a Filipino philosophy from the bases of the classes or categories used. When do we say that the class or category is authentic Filipino? In case certain standards or measures to classify classes or categories exist, their purity, most likely, is still questionable.

Despite the impossibility of the existence of Filipino philosophy, I am not saying that there can be no Filipino philosophers. The main contention here is that there is no Filipino philosophy but there are Filipinos doing philosophy; Filipino philosophy does not exist, but philosophies of different Filipino philosophers exist because Filipinos are lovers of wisdom too. Each Filipino's philosophy is personal since the search for the meaning of one's existence is neither a collective nor a national task. I am a Filipino, but my philosophy is not

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necessarily true to all Filipinos; hence, cannot hastily be generalized as “Filipino Philosophy.”

Philosophy as a discipline is Greek yet we can distinguish a German philosopher from a French philosopher or from an American philosopher or even from a Filipino philosopher. A philosopher is identified and recognized from the basis not of citizenship but of nationality.⁶ While citizenship is a political concept, nationality is a racial or anthropological concept. Paulo Freire is a Brazilian philosopher because his nationality is Brazilian even if he changes and embraces another citizenship, and because he is a philosopher; yet, we cannot say that Paulo Freire’s philosophy is a/the ‘Brazilian philosophy.’ In like manner, we cannot talk about German philosophy from the basis of Martin Heidegger’s nationality and philosophy because Heidegger was a German philosopher; or French philosophy from the basis of Jacques Derrida’s nationality and philosophy because Derrida was a French philosopher. Nationality, therefore, is attached before a philosopher’s name not for the purpose of generalization but for the purpose of identification.

Who is then a Filipino philosopher? One is said to be a Filipino philosopher if the nationality of the one philosophizing is Filipino, that despite of the ‘Greekness’ of the philosophical methodology, he is rooted in the Filipino historical, colonial, and neo-colonial experiences. Philosophy as a discipline is a system. Its rules and standards are imposed by the West. One is recognized as a philosopher according to whether the ‘Western game’ is played well. This is the politics in/of philosophy.

To be more exact, I can say that as a formal discipline, philosophy is undeniably Greek; but as a system of thought, it is not exclusively for the

Greeks. That is why we can talk about *tetsugaku* (Japanese origin), *zhexue* (Chinese origin), *cheolhak* (Korean origin), or *batnayan* (Filipino origin). Philosophy is, fundamentally, the quest for the meaning of human existence. What gives the human person the opportunity to search for the meaning of his⁷ life is his incompleteness and imperfection.

Philosophy is an activity of interrogation, a mode of asking fundamental questions. It is precisely an inquisitive attitude of questioning, searching, looking for the meaning of life - wisdom. Its dynamism and open-endedness explain the impossibility of an absolute answer. Hence, philosophy, more than a 'noun,' is a 'verb.' What really matters in philosophy are not the answers to certain questions but the questions themselves.

Concluding Remarks

The meta-philosophical discussion on 'what is Filipino philosophy?' is an attempt to provide clarifications of apparent misconceptions about philosophy '*as a discipline*', that whenever we talk about 'non-western' philosophy (more specifically Filipino philosophy), so to speak, we are basically applying a Western concept to non-western systems of thought either by orientalism or by occidentalism (inverted orientalism). We are comparing different systems of thoughts and literatures by the Western standards.

'*As a system of thought*' however, philosophy is not an exclusive invention of the Greeks. Like other Western philosophers, Filipino philosophers ask philosophical questions. We can say that the question that any philosopher raise is one which is philosophical if it is valuable to him to the extent that such question consumes his very being and leads him to engage in an incessant search

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without let-up until a satisfactory (satisfactory for the time being) answer is achieved. Otherwise, the question is simply one which is ordinary – a non-philosophical question. When one asks the questions – *what is a good life?* or *what is there to live for?* – these seem to be interrogative sentences that make the introduction of citizenship or nationality an unpardonable impertinence because these questions are the very questions that define our humanity.⁸

NOTES

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²Martin Heidegger, *What is Philosophy?* (Washington: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc, 1956), 109.

³See Robert Sherrick Brumbaugh, *The philosophers of Greece* (New York: SUNY Press, 1981), 50.

⁴For an introduction to Aristotle's logic, a collection of works known as the *Organon*, see Robin Smith, 'Aristotle's Logic', *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2020 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), available at: <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2020/entries/aristotle-logic/>>.

⁵Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1969), 39.

⁶'The philosopher must be a citizen of no country'. Michael Walzer quoting Ludwig Wittgenstein, 'Philosophy and Democracy', in *Political Theory*, Vol. 9, No. 3 (August 1981): 379.

⁷Whenever I have conformed to contemporary English usage in this paper and used 'man' or 'men,' it should be understood to speak of all humans inclusively, male and female of every age. In other words, the term 'man' or 'men' is taken in its generic sense. Even the pronouns 'he' and 'him,' just the same, never imply sexist biases. Consistently then, the term is used in the same meaning throughout. I see the relevance of defining the term in order not to offend feminist readers.

⁸"I think that no one will seriously advocate the view that there is such a thing as British physics, or German mathematics or Greek geometry. These disciplines apparently do not wear national colors and it is even absurd to suggest that they do. It is in the nature of science in fact to be no respecter of national boundaries or of political divisions. Should that be less true of philosophy?" Fr. Ranhilio C. Aquino, 'Filipino Philosophy?', in *The Manila Times*, 19 June 2019, available at: <<https://bit.ly/3pu9VB7>>.