

## **An Agonistic Approach to Filipino Philosophy**

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### **Abstract**

For the past century, philosophers in the Philippines have puzzled themselves in discussing the nature of Filipino philosophy. They wanted to propose a kind of philosophizing that embodies the Filipino way of thinking. Moreover, they were unanimous in their claims that such philosophy should exhibit the characteristics of western philosophy while exhibiting the Filipino consciousness. Their goal was to create a philosophy that embodies the Filipino way of life and national identity. Ironically, however, the same aspiration has led most of the country's top philosophers to dismiss the possibility of the ordinary people's contribution to the development of the cause. They refuse to step down from their extensively elaborated ivory towers of rational exuberance in their insistence on a Filipino philosophy that is alienated from the ordinary people's lifeworld. The paper does not intend to discuss the nature of this Filipino consciousness. Neither does the paper argue for the possibility of a Filipino philosophy being itself futile. After all that has happened in the country's social and political sphere, the question of philosophy's relevance in the lives of the Filipino people arises. "Why more Filipino philosophy?"<sup>1</sup> is the question that all Filipino thinkers have to answer to make sense of the need for a genuinely Filipino philosophy. The paper proposes an agonistic approach to Filipino philosophy discourse to answer the question.

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<sup>1</sup> A question originally formulated in a class on Filipino Philosophy under Dr. Ruby Suazo.

**Keywords:** Filipino philosophy, Filipino consciousness, Radical Filipino Philosophy, Agonism,

## Introduction

I admit I was too reluctant and dismissive of the idea before my formal engagement with the Filipino philosophy course. Perhaps because of the biases I have when thinking of an original Filipino philosophy ala Plato and Heidegger. However, little did I know that I was being ignorant in my dismissal of the matter. The truth is that "a history of philosophy in the Philippines is coterminous with the beginning of the country called the Philippines."<sup>2</sup> Filipino philosophy, a form of cultural enlightenment that reflects the totality of every Filipino's way of life and experiences, has coexisted with the foundation of our country, the Philippines. The course opened the door for me to leave my ignorance behind, acknowledge the greater reality outside of Plato's cave, and be utterly mesmerized by the sun's brightness.

However, being new to this ironically alien soil, I am embarking on my journey towards fully understanding what Filipino philosophy is. It is without a doubt that I am almost groping in the dark, with little sparks of lights guiding me towards my end goal. Looking directly at the sun must have initially blinded my sight. Nevertheless, I guess this forms part of every serious philosophical endeavor. Thomas Aquinas wanted to burn all his writings after seeing the Divine Truth's vastness. Descartes revolutionized philosophy by painfully stripping himself of his identity, giving birth to the "Cogito". In his search for the nature of Truth, Heidegger was led to reconstruct the question of Being. Hence, to engage in revolutionizing philosophy entails the tedious work of re-examining life's fundamental truth claims and an absolute commitment to truth.

Nonetheless, I must reiterate that I am not giving parallelism of my humble endeavor to that of the great philosophers in history. As both life and science, a discipline of knowledge and praxis, philosophy

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<sup>2</sup> Alfredo Co, "In the Beginning a Petit Personal Historical Narrative of the Beginning of Philosophy in the Philippines," in *Across the Philosophical Silk Road*, Vol. VI (Manila: University of Santo Tomas, 2009), 27.

has evolved with the development of world-historical events. From the supposed importance of the philosophy of origin marked by a continuance of the *philosophia perennis* to its eventual fall during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, characterized by the subsequent birth of natural science in what Habermas calls scientivism,<sup>3</sup> philosophy remained all the more significant.

Furthermore, it is precisely from the death of the previous philosophy and the inevitable quantification of reason brought about by scientivism that Habermas calls for more philosophy. Habermas argues for a kind of philosophy that is empty of the biases of scientivism, a philosophy that is a "nonscientivistic" philosophy of science.<sup>4</sup> Such implies that despite the radical development of knowledge and the technical know-how of modern man, philosophy remains relevant.

Philosophy is what binds us to our reality of being rational, and our knowledge of the world's ultimate causes and reasons is made manifest through philosophy. As Heidegger calls Dasein, we are a "Being-in-the-world," and our state of situatedness reminds us of our noble task to bring the truth of things to light. Romualdo Abulad rightly asserts, "Philosophy is the expression of what is greatest and noblest in the human spirit."<sup>5</sup>The same Filipino thinker emphatically asserts that "No doubt, there is academic or professional philosophy in the Philippines, backed up yet by some publications, both books, and journal articles, which cannot be mistaken for anything other than philosophy, and so I propose that we already happily lay to rest the question as to whether or not there is Filipino philosophy, natural or academic."<sup>6</sup>

Nonetheless, the question for us then is, Why more Filipino philosophy? The question entails that even though the country's leading Filipino philosophers have established the nature of Filipino

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<sup>3</sup> Jurgen Habermas, "Why more Philosophy," *Social Research*, Vol. 38, No. 4, *Critical Perspectives on the Social Sciences* (WINTER 1971): 651.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 653.

<sup>5</sup> Romualdo Abulad, "The Filipino as a Philosopher in search of Originality," *Karunungan* Vol.2, (Philippines: De La Salle University Press, 1985) 15.

<sup>6</sup> Romualdo Abulad, "The Role and Mission of Philosophy Today," PHAVISMINDA Conference, Jaro, Iloilo, 21-23 May 2015.

philosophy. Nonetheless, its relevance to the ordinary people's plea for emancipation and development remains ambiguous and superficial. For this reason, Rolando Gripaldo argues for the recognition of the existence of Filipino philosophy in three senses (traditional, cultural, and national) in the hope that our understanding of Filipino philosophy becomes decentralized.<sup>7</sup> The attempt to decentralize Filipino philosophy is brought about by its marginalized existence. Gripaldo writes, "Philosophy in the Philippines is marginalized, and its image among the masses is distorted and generally negative."<sup>8</sup>

Furthermore, Abulad, in answering the question, admonishes every Filipino philosopher to progressively develop a philosophy worthy of the acclamation of our nation and the world. He emphatically asserts, "But, if authentic, this Filipino Philosophy shall transcend the limits of this country, and thinkers of other lands shall recognize its perennial quality."<sup>9</sup> The need to progressively develop a philosophy indigenous to our country's people and history is grounded in the presupposition that we have not yet found a way toward realizing this goal. He encourages all Filipino philosophers to embrace the task and the moral responsibility to surmount our mediocrities to make a dent in the entire history of philosophy. The goal is not to remain under the regressive form of philosophizing prevalent in the country but to progressively aim at developing a philosophy worthy of the name Filipino philosophy.

### **The Search for A Filipino Philosophy**

Over the past century, Filipino philosophers puzzled themselves in articulating the possibility of a genuinely original Filipino philosophy. However, none have yet definitely created a distinctive philosophy that is truly Filipino. Although there have been significant attempts to conceptualize and objectify the goal, no past and present Filipino philosopher has successfully created a philosophy that is universally acknowledged in its rigor, which can be rightfully referred to as authentic Filipino Philosophy. It cannot be denied,

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<sup>7</sup> Rolando M. Gripaldo, "Is There a Filipino Philosophy", 5.

<sup>8</sup> Rolando M. Gripaldo, "Filipino Philosophy and Nation Building", 11.

<sup>9</sup> Romualdo Abulad, "Options for a Filipino Philosophy," Karunungan, (1984):

however, that the country has produced brilliant philosophers whose publications and scholarships are at par with the West for the past centuries.

By this time, the country's discourses in philosophy could be, I would say, almost similar to that of Europe and America. I can attest that this is verified by my experiences attending national and international philosophy and social sciences conferences. We have come a long way from the dogmatism of scholasticism characterized by our Aristotelian-Thomistic metaphysics heritage to our current diversified philosophical traditions embedded in the country's top universities and personified by their philosophic heroes both in the past and present. For this reason, Alfredo Co said, "The period of new thoughts brought about the emergence of a new philosophical landscape in the Philippines."<sup>10</sup>

Traditions of philosophy in the Philippines during this time are marked by personalities whose mastery of their supposed philosophical traditions is known to all. Hence, Emerita Quito, Ramon Reyes, Leovino Garcia, and Romualdo Abulad are known authorities in continental philosophy. Antonio Pinon, Manuel Pinon, Pedro Gabriel, Atty. Jose Espinosa and Ariston Estrada became the foremost authorities in Thomism. Claro Ceniza and Armando Bonifacio are in Logical Positivism. And Alfredo Co is known as an expert in Chinese philosophy.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, standing side by side with these Filipino scholars who went to study abroad are the locally produced Filipino philosophers: Florentino Timbreza, Manuel Dy, Fr. Leonardo Mercado, and Magdalena Villaba, who initiated a radical shift in the country's philosophical interest from scholasticism to include Eastern and Western philosophies.<sup>12</sup>

The above narrative does not even mention yet our contemporary philosophers who have made impressions in the discourse of philosophy in the country: Amable Tuibeo and Paolo Bolaños of UST, Tomas Rosario and Ranier Ibana of Ateneo, Zosimo Lee of UP, Julius Bautista of St. Louis University in Baguio and at the University of San Carlos in Cebu Leonardo Estioko and Ruby Suazo,

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<sup>10</sup> Alfredo Co, "In the Beginning a Petit Personal Historical Narrative of the Beginning of Philosophy in the Philippines," 39.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

Agustin Martin Rodriguez of Ateneo, Ryan Urbano of Cebu Technological University, Ryan Maboloc of Ateneo de Davao, Jeffrey Oca of Eastern Visayas State University, Napoleon Mabaquiao and Feorillo A. Demetrio III of DLSU and many others.<sup>13</sup>

Reflecting upon the development of philosophy in the country and the countless names of Filipino scholars, Abulad argues that it is idle to ask more about the possibility of Filipino philosophy. Abulad's claim is rooted in the idea that anyone who is a Filipino, who is conscious of his history and values, and who engages in the rigor of philosophical discipline produces a Filipino philosophy. Nonetheless, the question remains whether we have created a philosophy that is faithful to the indigenous worldview of ordinary Filipino. That is, whether we have created a philosophy capable of understanding deeply "the woes of the people all borne through countless years of patient suffering which is sustained only by an unquenchable hope of redemption."<sup>14</sup> The persistent marginalization of philosophy in the country brings the need to reflect on this question. Filipino philosophy, which remains to be characterized by its western academic biases, does not represent the people's popular consciousness.

Undoubtedly, the growing numbers of Filipino philosophers answered the previous question of whether a genuinely Filipino philosophy is possible. We have grown so much in our philosophizing that we are no longer interested in the narcissistic tendency of acclaiming an original Filipino national philosophy, a philosophy that some proposed to contain the totality of every Filipino's historical narrative and universal consciousness. That is a national philosophy that embodies the Filipino spirit as a people and nation born from our deep-seated insecurities due to our colonial history.

Claro Ceniza insisted on realizing Filipino philosophy in the hope that it would fill in the gap in our identity as a people and nation, whose history is marked by horrendous atrocities and insecurities

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<sup>13</sup> See Romualdo Abulad, "The Role and Mission of Philosophy Today," PHAVISMINDA Conference, Jaro, Iloilo, 21-23 May 2015.

<sup>14</sup> Romualdo Abulad, "The Filipino as a Philosopher in search of Originality," 15.

proliferated by our previous colonizers.<sup>15</sup> However, in contrast to Ceniza's negative connotation of our colonial history, Abulad sees our historical emptiness as a strategic position to rise from the ashes of our colonial history and begin a new way of thinking.<sup>16</sup> For him, our lack of national identity due to our colonial history must not waver us to search and create a philosophy that reflects our collective consciousness as a people, with specific world views, and a nation. Emerita Quito insists that for a notion of Filipino philosophy to be genuinely reflective of the consciousness of the masses, it must embrace the folk spirit of the Filipino people. She writes that "This collective mind, this general attitude toward life, this concerted effort to acquire wisdom which is manifest on the popular or grassroots level constitutes the folk spirit (Volksgeist) of the Filipino, and it should (or will) eventually emerge as a formalized philosophy on the academic level."<sup>17</sup>

### **A Radical Approach to Filipino Philosophy**

What is truly remarkable in the development of philosophy in the country is its highly academic nature, both in its practice and methodology. It is noteworthy that when we speak of Filipino philosophy, we mean a philosophical enterprise that is a product of purely academic discourse. Such an understanding of Filipino philosophy often eliminates the possibility that non-philosophers or academicians have a role in the actual development of the matter.

Indeed, there are good reasons to adhere to the idea that Filipino philosophy tends to be exclusivist in the traditional sense of purely academic. First, most of the country's proponents of philosophy are scholars and academicians. As mentioned above, the idea of Filipino philosophy is necessarily intertwined with the development and scholarship of the country's Filipino philosophers. The second reason is linked to the colonial history of the country. Most Filipino philosophers adhere to the idea that our consciousness as a people

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<sup>15</sup> Ceniza, Claro R. "Self-Identity and the Filipino Philosophy." *Sophia Journal of Philosophy*, 1982, 17 – 25.

<sup>16</sup> Romualdo E. Abulad, "Options for a Filipino Philosophy," 17 - 31.

<sup>17</sup> Emerita Quito, *The State of Philosophy in the Philippines*, (De La Salle University: De La Salle University Research center, 1983), 10.

started not later than the Spanish colonization period. The history of philosophy in the country is co-terminus with the emergence of our country, the Philippines.<sup>18</sup> It is said that before the coming of the Spaniards into the country, no Filipinos existed as people living in one consciousness and identity. They were indigenous tribes living among diversified communities with animistic beliefs and religions.<sup>19</sup> Lastly, in relation to the second reason, it is said that initially, there was no genuine Filipino philosophy. The reason behind this presupposition is their persistent claim that we did not have a body of literary and philosophical works before the coming of the Spaniards to the Philippines. And that "If we did not have a corpus of literary and philosophical works before the coming of the Spaniards, then it follows that [Filipino] philosophy could have evolved after the creation of the country."<sup>20</sup>

Despite the insistence of a universalized spirit, constituted by the totality of every Filipino consciousness, as the indelible mark of a genuinely Filipino philosophy, the idea of a philosophy that embodies the Filipino world views and life experiences is ironically above the reach of the ordinary people. Like its predecessors (western philosophy), such a traditional understanding of Filipino philosophy remained on the top of its pre-established ivory tower. Gripaldo emphatically asserts, "The onslaught of Oriental and Western philosophies in the Philippines has marginalized Filipino philosophy."<sup>21</sup> It is undeniably true that philosophy, in the sense of the academic discipline, in the country started when the first Filipino intellectuals embarked on the journey in search of a Filipino philosophy. Consequently, this has led some Filipino thinkers to argue that any works published and written by a Filipino thinker are Filipino in substance and nature.<sup>22</sup>

However, the journey did not lead them to know who is Filipino. Instead, a highly westernized conceptualization of rationality, person, and philosophy, which is inimical to the indigenous way of life

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<sup>18</sup> Alfredo Co, "In the Beginning a Petit Personal Historical Narrative of the Beginning of Philosophy in the Philippines," 27.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 30-31.

<sup>21</sup> Rolando M. Gripaldo, "Is There a Filipino Philosophy", 1.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.



and the ordinary Filipino's worldview, was later introduced to fit the ideals of authentic Filipino philosophy. Abulad argues that "we have not yet found our way to that indigenous philosophy which will bring us above the narrow confines of even the greatest philosophical systems from abroad."<sup>23</sup> Therefore, every Filipino philosopher's goal is to establish a philosophical framework that embraces the uniqueness of every Filipino's way of thinking. Such philosophy must be rooted in the depths of the Filipino people's historicity and consciousness. This indigenous form of Filipino philosophy carries the marks of originality and universality. Moreover, Quito adds, "This indigenous philosophy may be said to be an *élan* or a spirit that permeates the Filipino and without which he feels a certain malaise."<sup>24</sup>

In over-emphasizing the need for an original Filipino philosophy, ala Plato or Heidegger, we seem to forget that universality, being the main ingredient of originality, must spring from the depths of every Filipino consciousness. It must be based on every Filipino's life experiences and reflect their specific world views. This goal can only be achieved if we recognize the legitimacy of the ordinary Filipino's claim for authentic rationality and conscious experience. For this reason, the universalization of the Filipino consciousness in Filipino philosophy must not be derived from sheer rational universality. Still, it must be derived from the specificity of each common tao's experiences and fundamental world views. Furthermore, it can only be possible if such universality possesses what Quito refers to as the people's folk spirit (*volksgeist*).<sup>25</sup>

The more we deny the ordinary people's capacity to engage in rational discourse and to insist on their world views, the more we separate our ideals of Filipino philosophy from that which is truly Filipino. Mercado explains that "Filipinos for centuries were always aware of their world view and express their philosophy through their world view. So they always had their philosophy even if not a book on it was written."<sup>26</sup> Furthermore, that "Filipino philosophy is implied in

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<sup>23</sup> Romualdo Abulad, "Rationale for a Filipino Philosophy," in *Sophia Journal of Philosophy*, 1982, 9.

<sup>24</sup> Emerita Quito, *The State of Philosophy in the Philippines*, 12.

<sup>25</sup> Emerita Quito, *The State of Philosophy in the Philippines*, 12.

<sup>26</sup> Leonardo Mercado, *Filipino Philosophy: Its Elements and Relevance*, (Manila: Logos Publications, 2005), 29.

the people's way of thinking and behaving."<sup>27</sup> Moreover, it is for this reason that Abulad insisted on the need to recognize the validity of the ordinary people's worldviews in conceptualizing an indigenous philosophy. He explains that "universality, we say, is one indication of originality. However, it should be universality that springs from the depths; otherwise, it feeds on pseudo-verities with no backing from the ground."<sup>28</sup> The same philosopher reminds us that we must not deceive ourselves into thinking that only academics can be philosophers.<sup>29</sup>

The only reason scientific or formal philosophy is limited to the academe is that such discipline does not form part of the everyday lives of ordinary people. That is, "The reason why this predicament still prevails in this part of the world is that so far scientific philosophy remains virtually unheard of outside the academe."<sup>30</sup> Furthermore, Philosophy in the Philippines often posits a negative and distorted connotation among the masses.<sup>31</sup> Nevertheless, this does not mean that ordinary Filipinos and even those pre-Hispanic people in the country do not have genuine thoughts and culture. On the contrary, they possess the purest form of consciousness. A consciousness driven by knowledge of things is understood not from the scientific point of view but through everyday practices, interpersonal engagements, and language games. The purity of consciousness that is presupposed here entails the unadulterated rationality of our indigenous brothers and sisters, enabling them to uphold their ancient cultures and traditions amidst the scientification and globalization of reason. In elucidating the purity of consciousness of our indigenous brothers and sisters, Karl Gaspar emphatically asserts that what is common in the narratives of the lifeworlds of our ancestors is their unadulterated and pure child-like innocence.<sup>32</sup> He further adds, "Truly, the incredulity of these narratives can only come about from people whose consciousness has not been dominated by the pressures of

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<sup>27</sup> Leonardo Mercado, *Elements of Filipino Philosophy*, 31.

<sup>28</sup> Romualdo Abulad, *The Filipino as a Philosopher in search of Originality*, 4.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> Rolando M. Gripaldo, "Filipino Philosophy and Nation Building", 11.

<sup>32</sup> Karl Gaspar, *Handumanan: Digging for the Indigenous Wellspring*, (UP

rationality."<sup>33</sup> I once attended a house blessing here in Calamba, a town in Misamis Occidental, where the officiating minister was the priest of the Subanen community of the place. The blessing was an entirely different experience. I never thought that such ritualistic expression of a supposedly Catholicized tradition is still being practiced in its purest form up to this present day.

Furthermore, they (the pre-Hispanic people) may not have developed a systematic government similar to ours. Still, the indigenous communities were indeed organized under one and diversified worldviews proper to each one of their tribes. In the same way that despite being a democracy for over a century, we remained differentiated and pluralistic in values. Although we belong to one nation and are under a socially constructed identity – Filipinos –we persist in being different and unique. In our attempt to capture the totality of Filipino ideals under the theme of Filipino philosophy, without it genuinely reflecting the ordinary people's overall consciousness, we tend to repeat the errors of past philosophies. By putting too much faith in the spirit of history and insisting on its universalization, which will inevitably cancel out the validity of any opposing claims, we have sacrificed the ordinary people's way of life to the altar of western rationality.

The tendency to blindly follow the flow of the universalization of the spirit at the expense and death of the competing particulars is itself a danger. We have become so earnest in identifying an original Filipino philosophy that we have become forgetful of the ordinary Filipinos' plea for redemption. "A holy earnest," as Habermas describes, "that has turned into a bestial earnest whose hubris presumes to the absolute, raging against whatever fails to bow to its presumptions."<sup>34</sup>

Indeed, I am not discrediting the attempts of some philosophers in the country whose works attempted to uncover the authentic Filipino worldviews through anthropological methods. Neither do I deny the possibility of engaging with authentic Filipino experiences based on applied philosophical analysis. Nonetheless, the truth remains that philosophy in the country is limited only to the

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup>Jurgen Habermas, "Why more Philosophy," *Social Research*, 641.

academe, and it is often empty of the ordinary people's presuppositions. We seemed to have created a barrier between us trained to philosophize and those outside the circle. We have created a dualism of the public sphere; the sphere for the cultured and the civilized in the form of elite education and philosophic training, and the sphere of the masses, of the uncivilized and the unintelligent.<sup>35</sup>

We seem to think that we hold the chalice of truth and are the only ones capable of knowing and distributing it. Wataru Kusaka rightly describes, "In a public sphere in which words are the medium of communication, people blessed with education opportunities, the ability to gather, analyze and disseminate information, and free time tend to enjoy the hegemonic position."<sup>36</sup>Ironically, in our earnest hope of founding a genuinely Filipino philosophy, we have painfully made our fellowmen aware of their supposed lack of skills, literacy, etiquette, and capabilities to engage rationally on the matter. By so doing, we have wounded our own people's dignity.<sup>37</sup>

For a genuinely Filipino philosophy to be of value for our development, it must be reflective of the ordinary people's way of thinking and their ordinary experiences. It must not be alien to the pluralism of values imminent in our current socio-political environment. It must take the form of a radical Filipino philosophy. By radical Filipino philosophy, I mean a philosophy " responsive to the historical and psychological needs of the Filipino."<sup>38</sup> That philosophy is expressive of the Filipino's profound experiences rooted in everyone's legitimate concerns for a life worthy of living.

A radical understanding of Filipino philosophy entails reformulating the consciousness that has persisted in the past formulation of Filipino philosophy. It is "personal and national and universal all at once. Moreover, it is bound to attract our people's fancy as an embodiment of their thoughts and aspirations."<sup>39</sup> That is a Filipino philosophy that is capable of interacting with the thoughts of

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<sup>35</sup>WataruKusaka, *Moral Politics in the Philippines: Inequality. Democracy and the Urban Poor*, (Manila: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2019), 35.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.

<sup>38</sup>Romualdo Abulad, "The Role and Mission of Philosophy Today, 1.

<sup>39</sup> Romualdo Abulad, "Rationale for a Filipino Philosophy, 9.

the masses and starts its speculations from the ideals of the ordinary Filipino. It is a philosophy that has radically transcended the state of "intellectual colonialism" prevalent in our tendency to parrot the West in their philosophies and the inherent bias towards absolutely identifying Filipino philosophy as western in orientation.

Nonetheless, such bias toward identifying Filipino philosophy as western is the main reason philosophy in the country marginalized. The radical understanding of Filipino philosophy allows us to see the pressing need to bring down philosophy from its illustrious tower of rational exuberance to the masses. Because it is only when such philosophy is rooted in ordinary people's worldviews that our understanding of Filipino philosophy becomes genuinely liberating, Mercado asserts that "Filipino philosophy is a means of liberating the Filipino from mental bonds."<sup>40</sup>

### **Agonism in Filipino philosophy**

It has been argued in the above discussion that the inherent exclusivist approach in constructing a Filipino philosophy, which tends to exclude the ordinary Filipino in the actual discourse, is itself the problem. Ironically, we are looking for a Filipino philosophy supposed to embody the people's overall consciousness, yet they are inevitably set aside in the process. We persist in living in our imaginary world of the spirit that we have reduced the public sphere to sheer universalization. We forget that the "public sphere comprises not only an abstract discursive arena but also a concrete lifeworld."<sup>41</sup> It must be reiterated that by the public sphere, we mean a world where real people exist and continue to grow in knowledge as they progress in their search for truth and love.

Any conception of a Filipino philosophy that is envisioned to embody the totality of the Filipino consciousness must be mindful that each Filipino has her universe of truths and her attitude towards life. That is, the term Filipino in Filipino philosophy entails the collective mind of the people whose lives are differentiated and particularized by their efforts to engage with life and their peculiar ways of acquiring

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<sup>40</sup> Leonardo Mercado, *Elements of Filipino Philosophy*, 34.

<sup>41</sup> WataruKusaka, *Moral Politics in the Philippines*, 35.

wisdom. What that means is when we speak about the Filipino in Filipino philosophy, we mean not just a term that is the product of rational inference that correlates to a particular group of people but to the very people whose lives and history we apprehend. It must be understood that when referring to the Filipino consciousness, we are not just facing an abstracted phenomenon of any sort but a complex and agonistic reality.

The construction of the Filipino identity is at stake in the exclusivist approach to Filipino philosophy. With our presuppositions of Filipino subjectivity, marked by pre-established historicity and consciousness. We subtly have created a fantasy world upon which we shaped the Filipino consciousness according to our understanding—a constructed and universal understanding of the Filipino identity that is empty of its particularizations and contingencies. What is needed, therefore, is an agonistic production of new subjectivities. To battle against the persistent universalization of the Filipino identity in Filipino philosophy, a counter-hegemonic politics that fosters other forms of identification is needed.<sup>42</sup>

However, this can only be done by radically reformulating the ideals that have persisted in the past understanding of Filipino philosophy. The radicalization of our understanding of Filipino philosophy should eventually lead us to formulate a novel conception of Filipino philosophy that will enable us to recognize the value of the ordinary people's plea for redemption and actual development. The radical ideals of Filipino philosophy entail the concerted effort to break the rationalist barrier that inevitably separates Filipino philosophy from the consciousness of the ordinary and the indigenous Filipino. Radical Filipino philosophy allows for the particularization of values among complex and diversified individual Filipinos to flourish without being forgetful of Filipino philosophy—western heritage and tradition.

The agonistic approach in Filipino philosophy argues for fostering other forms of subjectivity. While in the traditional understanding of Filipino philosophy, a conception of subjective

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<sup>42</sup>Chantal Mouffe, *Agonistic Thinking the World Politically*, (London: Verso, 2013), 90.

Filipino consciousness is created, thereby realizing a sort of identification proper to us Filipinos. Nonetheless, a such presupposition of a Filipino consciousness and identity remained alien to the ordinary Filipino, being totally outside of their world views. A universalized imposition of what ideally a Filipino is can never be exhaustive of the realities of an actual Filipino. Such rational universalization limits the possibility of different expressions and identifications to transpire even though they posit legitimate claims to the nature of a Filipino. A young mother of four, whose husband left his family in dire poverty and absolute misery and whose life is seemingly beyond redemption, remains to posit a valid claim for recognition.

Moreover, the critical dimension of the agonistic approach in Filipino philosophy "consists in making visible what the dominant consensus tends to obscure and obliterate, in giving a voice to all those who are silenced within the framework of the existing hegemony."<sup>43</sup> That means agonism in Filipino philosophy entails bringing forward ordinary Filipinos' equally legitimate yet diversified claims in constructing a universalized Filipino identity. The persistent imposition of a Filipino's supposed nature and identity inherent in the traditional-western understanding of Filipino philosophy covers the authentic world views ordinary Filipinos are living in. The critical dimension of this radical understanding of Filipino philosophy does not necessarily mean that the process of reformulating Filipino subjectivity will end in lifting the "true Filipino identity." Such is the case insofar as the very structure of an agonistic fostering of other forms of identities "is always through insertion in a manifold of practices, discourse and language games that specific forms of individualities are constructed."<sup>44</sup> That is, agonism in Filipino philosophy denies the possibility of a universalized pre-established subjectivity to transpire. The Subanen priest who officiated the ritualistic ceremony in the house's blessing may have been schooled in the current education system and is the by-product of modern cultural indoctrination—nevertheless, his identity and the totality of his life experiences and world views, particularly Subanen.

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 93.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

The agonistic approach to Filipino philosophy is critical to the idea of a universalized and predetermined notion of Filipino consciousness. Such presupposition may not mean, nonetheless, that there is no such thing as Filipino identity. Rather agonism in Filipino philosophy sees Filipino consciousness as constituted by a manifold of contingencies and practices that need to be rightly recognized. A high rationalist and exclusivist approach cannot do justice. The tendency to arrogantly reduce the Filipino identity to sheer rational prescriptions and universalizations is the prevailing problem of the dominant process of Filipino identification. Therefore, an agonistic approach to understanding Filipino philosophy will serve as the backbone of Filipino identity. Mouffe further reiterates that "This is why the transformation of political identities can never result from a rationalist appeal to the true interest of the subject, but rather from the inscription of the social agent in a set of practices that will mobilize its affects in a way that disarticulates the framework in which the dominant process of identification takes place."<sup>45</sup>

The tendency to insist on a universal and absolute notion of Filipino consciousness is imminent in the current endeavor of Filipino philosophy, which is its crucial element. The problem, however, is that aside from the fact that ordinary Filipinos are set aside in the actual discourse of Filipino philosophy, their own identity is a rational imposition by those who insist on being rational and intelligent. A Filipino philosophy that embodies the people's consciousness must be cognizant of the life experiences of not just those who sit at the pedestal of knowledge but must likewise reflect ordinary people's sentiments and aspirations. The more we impose the traditional-western understanding of Filipino philosophy, the more we marginalize Filipino philosophy from the lifeworld of the ordinary people.

## **Conclusion**

The need to further the claims of Filipino philosophy in the question "Why more Filipino philosophy?" is derived from the inherent inefficiencies prevalent in the traditional-western understanding of philosophy. The value of such presupposition of a

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid.



Filipino philosophy rests in its capacity to lay bare the meaning of what it means to be a Filipino.

While the most brilliant philosophers in the country busy themselves calculating the limits and the overall diameter of this supposed Filipino philosophy, ordinary people are slowly creating a world of their own, seemingly apart from the rest. Philosophizing in the former instance remains detached from the ordinary people's way of life and is incapable of relating itself to the simple minds of the masses. It remains to be a philosophy resting on its ivory tower of rational exuberance.

What we think is required by our current generation is a philosophy capable of going down into the ground and digging deep into the depths of every Filipino's conscious experience and rationalization. What is needed is a radical philosophy that embodies the thoughts and aspirations of every Filipino without disqualifying those whose thoughts may come against another. Radical Filipino philosophy is a way of decentralizing the traditional-western conception of Filipino philosophy. It is a form of indigenous philosophy marked by rigor and inclusivity and accepts the legitimacy of every Filipino's call for emancipation.

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