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The Public (Ir)Relevance of Philosophy

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Abstract

Philosophy is a discipline that generally suffers from a bad reputation. If not a negative image, the philosophically uninitiated public seems to have various but mostly mistaken views about what philosophy is about or what philosophers really do in their job. What is needed is a reinvigoration of the discipline in which not only are the mistaken views minimized, if not eliminated, but a positive image, rooted in the true and critical spirit of philosophy, is erected in their place. In this paper, I suggest two ways to alleviate the problem of public irrelevancy. One way is to produce work that can have a real impact on public policy. Such work can proceed in several directions: it can critically examine a policy or advance a certain policy. Another way, which is related to the first, is simply for philosophers to do more public philosophy. By public philosophy, I mean philosophy that is accessible and relevant to the public. With these two ways in mind, I conclude by suggesting certain mechanisms that can encourage the philosophical community towards this more public direction.

Keywords: Relevance of Public Philosophy, Filipino Philosophers and Public Policy, Public Intellectuals

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Introduction

In a recent article, Filipino philosopher Jeremiah Joven Joaquin explored the question of whether Filipino philosophers are publishing in top philosophy journals.[1] While he made qualifications about the meaning of "Filipino philosophers" and "top philosophy journals", his answer to the question is a qualified no. Joaquin provided understandable reasons why this is the case but looking at the bright side, he not only agrees with the sentiment of the late Rolando Gripaldo that "by 2051, there will be first-rate Filipino philosophers", but the data is showing that "we now have first-rate philosophers in the country."[2] This is because there are now an increasing number of Filipino philosophers housed under a university with a philosophy program who have published in top philosophy journals around the world. However, majority of Filipino philosophers are still not doing so, and Joaquin's article is intended "as a wakeup call for the current and future generations of Filipino philosophers to strive harder to produce quality works that would thereby be published by top philosophy journals."[3]

But should publishing in top philosophy journals be taken as the philosopher's ultimate professional end? I would argue for a negative answer. There are downsides in such a view if one has the goal of making philosophy relevant and beneficial to the public. Sure, there is a unique value for philosophers to test their ideas under the technical scrutiny of their peers, something that Joaquin himself emphasized,[4] and something that is ideally done in the context of the peer review process of journal publication. However, as Greg Littmann emphasized, "Publishing articles to be read only by peer professionals is not a professional end in itself, since in itself it provides no benefit beyond the profession."[5] Regardless of where they are originally stated, philosophical ideas, especially if they are deemed to be of great

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[1] Jeremiah Joven Joaquin, "Are Filipino Philosophers Publishing in Top Philosophy Journals?" in *Social Ethics Society Journal of Applied Philosophy* (June 2022): 127-147.

[2] *Ibid.,* 145.

[3] *Ibid.*, 128.

[4] *Ibid*., 143.

[5] Greg Littmann, "Writing Philosophy for the Public is a Moral Obligation," in *Essays in Philosophy* 15 (2014): 103-116.

good, should be made accessible to the public, or at least something whose benefits are felt by the public. Something deeply valuable is lost if the public does little to benefit from the insights of philosophers. With this paper, I provide reasons why philosophy should be made relevant to the public and what further steps philosophers can take to advance this ideal.

The Public Image of Philosophy

One reason why philosophy should be made relevant to the public is that philosophy suffers from inaccurate, if not bad, publicity. As Massimo Pigliucci and Leonard Finkelman bemoaned, "philosophy these days suffers from a significant public relations problem."[6] What seems to exacerbate this problem is that it is not uncommon for philosophers to express a kind of existential crisis regarding their profession: philosophers of even high academic stature are asking what the use of philosophy is,[7] while others are asking if philosophy makes any progress at all.[8] So, if there is an apparent existential crisis in philosophy, expressed vividly by philosophers themselves, it would not be surprising if the public does not have a default positive view of it.

In the Philippine context, philosophy is usually viewed as a preparation for the priesthood, which is to be expected since virtually all seminaries have philosophy as their only undergraduate program. The rationale behind this is simple and goes far back to the scholastic tradition of Augustine and Aquinas, which is the view that philosophy is the handmaid of theology. A good and well-educated priest should not only be expected to love the spiritual life but also be ready to defend the faith from secular objections. Another usual view of philosophy in the country is that it is a good preparatory step if one decides to proceed to Law or any Legal Studies. Much like in the scholastic view, this second view sees the value of philosophy as merely instrumental: it prepares one to become a good lawyer. While

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[6] Massimo Pigliucci and Leonard Finkelman, "The Value of Public Philosophy of Philosophers," in *Essays in Philosophy* 15 (2014): 100.

[7] Philip Kitcher, *What's the Use of Philosophy?* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023).

[8] Russell Blackford and Damien Broderick, eds., *Philosophy's Future: The Problem of Philosophical Progress* (New Jersey: Wiley Blackwell,

the connection between law and philosophy is not as historically intricate as that of philosophy and theology, the view of philosophy's value as largely dictated by its being a good preparation for law is not surprising. Since the legal profession champions good argumentative and reasoning skills (among others), skills that are naturally at home in philosophy, it is unsurprising that many philosophy graduates would later proceed to law or that those who desire to become lawyers would choose philosophy as their undergraduate preparation.

There is nothing wrong with that in the same way that there is nothing wrong with viewing philosophy as a handmaid to theology. But to view the value of philosophy as ultimately reducible to what those two views indicate is to do a great disservice to the discipline. The potential of philosophy far exceeds both its being a handmaid to theology and its being a mere preparatory program for law. Philosophers of whatever leanings should make it a point to emphasize that philosophy is, at its core, a standalone discipline. Philosophy can legitimately be seen as a handmaid of theology, but it can also provide a critical lens to it, as many atheist-philosophers have attested. Philosophy can serve as a preparatory program for law, but it can also step back from such instrumentalism and ask whether certain laws are logically consistent or even morally questionable. The unifying aspects of philosophy seem to be its inquisitive and critical nature, with a focus on reasoning and argumentation.

Some topics are uniquely delegated to the examination and analysis of philosophers: the nature of science, the morality of certain actions, and the possibility of knowledge, among many others. But philosophy need not be circumscribed by the examination of such usual topics (however philosophically rich they are) since its inquisitive and critical nature means that anything can be put under philosophical scrutiny. The first philosopher that comes to mind here is Socrates, well-known for his *elenchus*, or what traditionally has been known as the Socratic method: the persistent, perhaps even annoying, habit of asking people questions about their cherished beliefs and their understanding of commonsensical notions. Such incessant questioning is a trademark of philosophy: it is not content with letting hidden assumptions stay buried, the moral implications of a certain view be unexplored, or a certain worldview be taken as beyond question. By its nature, philosophy should make everyone ideologically uncomfortable: no idea, however deep-rooted, should be

left unturned. Philosophy, by nature, breaks us away from the merely familiar, shakes the most fundamental grounds of our beliefs, and amidst this uncertainty and unsettling condition, compels us to seek intellectual comfort in the exercise of our reason.

But a wholly critical stance is not sufficient to squeeze out the benefits of philosophy. After all, a global skeptic—one who doubts everything—cannot establish, for the pain of contradiction, the truth of his own position. More so, anyone whose learning of philosophy is constricted in such a stance clutches on thin air, for while he might have been able to demolish all philosophical views he happens to encounter, he is nevertheless left with no solid philosophical ground to stand on. Thus, the critical stance should be coupled with a constructive approach to philosophy: philosophers should also advance through reasoning and arguments a set of beliefs, values, perhaps even a worldview, that they take to be rational and something that they expect reasonable people to uphold. While the critical examination of beliefs, values, and worldviews is difficult in itself, the more challenging task for a philosopher is to advance their own views that will inevitably become subject to the philosophical scrutiny of others. This is the time, as Alvin Plantinga describes it, "to take the next and more dangerous step, leaving the safety of the philosophical bunker from which one snipes at other views for the more risky business of exposing one's own views on the subject."[9] These two approaches in philosophy can be wielded to typify the image of philosophy as not only intellectually stimulating but also publicly relevant. In the next two sections, I lay out how philosophy can be publicly relevant in terms of philosophy's engagement with public policy and philosophers' attempt to do "public philosophy."

Philosophy and Public Policy

Policies that are directed towards the public, or to some sections of the public, inevitably initiate change in society: whether by way of compelling certain behaviors or prohibiting others, or by implicitly promoting or undermining a certain set of values, and even implicitly supporting or discouraging a certain worldview or ideology. Given the

[9] Alvin Plantinga, *Warrant and Proper Function* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), v.

nature of public policy, it is an area where philosophers can take their unique expertise and skills, such that philosophy can be seen as beneficial or relevant to the public. How should philosophy relate to public policy? I suggest two ways: philosophers can critically examine a policy or advance a certain policy. Let us go over these two.

Public policies, regardless of how simple or straightforward they look on the outside, contain within them certain assumptions or implicit philosophical principles, which largely go unnoticed and are consequently unexamined. This is where philosophers can make use of their analytic skills to uncover those assumptions and examine them, considering their logical consistency or lack thereof, or moral cogency or lack thereof, among other philosophical considerations. Consider, for instance, how Filipino philosophers Jeremiah Joven Joaquin and Hazel Biana critically examine a Philippine policy directly responding to the pandemic, The *Bayanihan* to Heal as One Act, honing down on one aspect of it that they describe as "a highly questionable provision on the criminalization of fake news."[10] The main claim in their paper is that the Section 6f of the *Bayanihan* Act, which criminalizes people who make and spread false information (on social media and other platforms), is not only unconstitutional "but actually facilitates the government's crackdown on dissent; that is, this piece of emergency legislation is being used to further wider political suppression."[11] One of the major assumptions of the paper is that free speech is inherently valuable in a free and democratic society. The paper then concludes by noting that the policy's motivation of ensuring public safety by criminalizing fake news may be questioned. And regardless of the reasoning behind the provision on fake news, it is clear that "their [Filipinos'] most cherished democratic right of free speech also hangs in the balance."[12] However, it is not immediately clear in the paper whether speech that proliferates fake news or spreads misinformation *by itself* should be protected in a free and democratic society. After all, not all speech, such as libelous speech, is constitutionally protected.

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[10] Jeremiah Joven Joaquin, and Hazel Biana, "Philippine crimes of dissent: Free speech in the time of COVID-19," in *Crime, Media, Culture: An International Journal* 17, no. 1 (2020): 37.

[11] *Ibid.,* 38.

[12] *Ibid*., 40-41.

Now, this is where other philosophers can take Joaquin and Biana's paper as a starting point in further examining the philosophical assumptions embedded in the law's provision. Certain questions already come to mind: What is the nature of free speech? Is spreading fake news or misinformation part of free speech, such that it should be protected? If such speech deserves to be protected, what is the value in such protection, given that fake news and misinformation can lead to harmful consequences for the public? These are questions that have great philosophical importance. There is already a burgeoning number of pieces of literature produced by philosophers on both the issue of free speech and fake news.[13]

One fruitful result of a critical examination of a public policy is that a thorough philosophical examination can refute some aspects of a public policy, such that those aspects are shown to be inconsistent with one another or with other public policies, or inconsistent with other things we hold to be valuable in a free and democratic society.

Consider, for instance, a hypothetical public policy that legalizes abortion in the Philippines. Suppose further that the basis of legalizing abortion is the bodily autonomy of women, as popularized by the pro-abortion slogan, "My body, my choice." One problem with this is that it seems inconsistent with the fact that prostitution is illegal in the Philippines. One plausible definition of prostitution is this: an exercise of bodily autonomy by allowing others to use one's body sexually in exchange for money. So, if legalizing abortion is predicated on bodily autonomy, then consistency requires that prostitution, for the same reason, should be made legal. So, if the state would deem it more reasonable to declare prostitution illegal even if it is a clear exercise of bodily autonomy, then consistency again requires that abortion cannot be made legal for the same reason. This is an example of a hypothetical public policy being shown to be inconsistent with another public policy.

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[13] On the theme of free speech, see the following: Donald Alexander Downs and Chris W. Surprenant, eds. *The Value and Limits of Academic Free Speech: Philosophical, Political, and Legal Perspectives* (New York: Routledge, 2018); Joshi, Hrishikesh, *Why it's OK to Speak Your Mind* (New York: Routledge, 2021). On the theme of fake news, see the following: Justin McBrayer, *Beyond Fake News: Finding the Truth in a World of Misinformation* (New York: Routledge, 2021); Bernecker, Sven, Amy K. Flowerree, and Thomas Grundmann, eds., *The Epistemology of Fake News* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021).

More so, a hypothetical public policy legalizing abortion can also be shown to be inconsistent with something we generally find valuable and something we believe to require protection in a free and democratic society: human life. Not only is the right to life constitutionally protected in the Philippines, but it is a right so basic that it usually trumps other valid considerations, such as the right to bodily autonomy. Thus, the hypothetical legalization of abortion would be inconsistent with the state's function of protecting and society's commitment to valuing human life. Philosophers who are on the side of legalizing abortion can argue that the fetus is not a human life or that the fetus is a human life, but some other considerations trump the fetus's right to life. Regardless of one's position in this hypothetical public policy on abortion, philosophy requires that a public policy must be internally consistent or consistent with other things that society or the state is committed to (such as the commitment to the protection of human life) in pursuing the public's interests.

Another way that philosophy can be fruitfully related to public policy is by way of introducing philosophical arguments or utilizing philosophical insights to advance a certain policy. This is where the constructive approach to philosophy comes in. Consider, for instance, a work by Enrique Benjamin R. Fernando III where he not only assessed and found wanting the philosophical arguments justifying biopiracy defined as (following Lowell Bautista) the "*means by which corporations from the industrialized nations claim ownership of, free ride on, or otherwise take unfair advantage of the genetic resources and traditional knowledge and technologies of developing countries.*"[14] More so, he outlined by way of conclusion "some policy recommendations that fill in some gaps in Philippine law that constitute the implementation of a *sui generis* system for protecting indigenous intellectual property rights."[15] This is a piece of philosophical work geared towards advancing a certain public policy.

In other cases, philosophical works need not necessarily justify the creation of a certain policy, as Fernando did, but rather suggest

[14] Enrique Benjamin R. Fernando III, "Biopiracy in the Philippines: Why a Sui Generis System should be adopted in Philippine Law for the Protection of Traditional Knowledge," in *Social Ethics Society Journal of Applied Philosophy* 6, no. 1 (2020): 1-25. Emphasis in the original.

[15] *Ibid.*, 1.

using philosophical arguments and principles on how a certain policy is to be implemented. Take the case of how Ivan Efreaim Gozum and Jove Jim Aguas in their paper utilized John Rawls' concept of distributive justice "as a possible guide in the Philippine *ayuda* distribution during the COVID-19 pandemic."[16] This is a work that is not only philosophical but also practical. Since the *ayuda* (assistance or help) program of the Philippine government in response to the pandemic aims to make use of taxes towards certain things (in this case as direct financial assistance for the public), taxes that come from the money of the Filipino people, the program requires not only a legal justification, but a political and moral justification as well. While this is not the main concern of Gozum and Aguas' paper, they nevertheless provided a reason why such a program is necessary. As they noted, "To mitigate the possible increase in the poverty rate, [these] workers and other members of the society must be aided by the state since it creates a domino effect that impacts their families and the businesses that incur income through the said members of the society."[17]

However, Gozum and Aguas's main concern in the paper is to utilize some philosophical concepts from John Rawls' political philosophy, specifically the so-called difference principle, in promoting "fair equality of opportunity, especially in the distribution of *ayuda*."[18] And what the difference principle requires is to prioritize the least advantaged. If the arguments of Gozum and Aguas are correct, then this is doing philosophy in the service of the public. They suggest a concrete way, rooted in philosophical considerations, by which a certain government program is to be implemented.

More to the point, this focus on public policy opens the possibility of localizing the value of philosophy, which means that the value of philosophy becomes embedded in how it enlightens, examines, and evaluates issues confronting our local communities or our nation at large, regardless of whether these issues are of local or international concern. Since public policies are always tied up with local concerns, a philosophy that engages with public policy is likely to be of limited value, i.e., it might be valuable only to those people who

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[16] Ivan Efreaim Gozum, and Jove Jim Aguas, "Rawlsian Distributive Justice and the Philippine Ayuda Program During the Pandemic," in *Philosophia: International Journal of Philosophy* 23, no. 1 (2022): 202.

[17] *Ibid*., 210.

[18] *Ibid*., 211.

will be or are affected by that certain public policy. But this need not deter Filipino philosophers from engaging with our own public policies since public policies, once enacted, require compliance, and philosophers can be in a unique position to evaluate the reasonableness of that policy, especially regarding its implicit philosophical assumptions and, consequently, whether compliance in that case is reasonable or not. However, this localization of the value of philosophy might not appear attractive to many philosophers since whatever insights are gathered from such philosophizing are no longer universalizable but only localized. Such a localized philosophy does not have the timeless appeal of Descartes' *Meditations* or Kant's *Critique*. More so, such philosophizing runs the natural risk of becoming eventually outdated since the public policy in question may be changed to improve the effectiveness of the policy (and likely to the satisfaction of philosophers writing on it) or the facts on which the policy is based may themselves have become obsolete. This unalluring picture of a localized philosophy is even more exacerbated by the current academic trend to pass international standards on philosophical research, which largely means that such research should deal with things that are noteworthy from a Western standpoint or engage in discussions where Western philosophers are already familiar with. But while philosophical classics undoubtedly have that timeless appeal that will fascinate philosophers for centuries to come, this should not detract from the unique value that a localized philosophy dealing with a certain public policy has for this specific cultural milieu and in this period in time. Compared to the former kind of philosophy, the latter kind has a greater chance of becoming publicly relevant, and that is a good enough reason to pursue this kind of philosophy.

Now, one may dare ask: How is the critical examination of or support towards certain public policies by philosophers supposed to make philosophy relevant or beneficial to the public? Several answers may be provided. First, philosophy's engagement with public policy provides the link between the potential of philosophy to serve as both a critical and constructive tool in argumentation on the one hand and the public's interest on the other. Going back to one of our examples above, Fernando's paper makes use of philosophy to argue for the protection of indigenous intellectual property rights and recommends certain policies in pursuit of that aim. Now, if Fernando's work is

capable of persuading the relevant figures, like lawmakers or political lobbyists, such that the policy recommendation is thereby implemented, then the philosophical work would have benefited the public, or certain sectors of the public, even if the majority of them have not heard of Fernando's paper. Similar reasoning can be applied to both Joaquin and Biana's paper and Gozum and Aguas's article. One may object that such an instance of philosophical work shaping the implementation of certain public policies rarely occurs in the real world, even if it is deemed to be of real value. However, this is not a *substantial* objection but only a description of the current situation of the discipline. Hence, it can be remedied with a concentrated effort by those philosophers and non-philosophers alike who want to make it happen more frequently.

The second reason why philosophy's engagement with public policy makes philosophy publicly relevant is that such philosophical engagement elevates the quality of discourse surrounding the policies in question. Since public policies, by nature, affect the lives of the public in one way or another, it is natural to expect that many members of the public will be engaged in knowing and assessing the merit of those policies, especially if the policies directly affect them. But if discourses on social media are any indication, it seems that the public discourse on both potential and actual public policies is laden with bad forms of reasoning, such as ad hominem fallacies and popular slogans that obfuscate whatever philosophical merit they have. What makes them even more problematic is that fallacious forms of reasoning and widespread sloganeering are, for some people, rhetorically effective; that is, they can convince certain groups of people. As Jonathan Wolff stated, "Whatever the power of one's arguments in intellectual terms, it must be accepted that public policy is not a sphere of pure reason. And even if it were, the challenge of convincing others would remain."[19]

This is a legitimate cause of concern for everyone. However, philosophers are in a unique position to proffer their technical training and skills to weed out the sense from the nonsense and largely focus on offering argumentative substance in discussing the philosophical merits of a certain policy. This can be done in the

[19] Jonathan Wolff, *Ethics and Public Policy: A Philosophical Inquiry* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 4.

context of a philosophy journal where the work is expected to be subject to the philosophical scrutiny of one's philosophical peers. In this way, if certain philosophers have reservations about another philosopher's view on a policy issue, the appropriate expectation would be that the former would argue in reasonable and rigorous ways to assess, question, and critically examine the latter's view, especially if they want their work to be published. But the philosophical treatment of a policy can also use social media as its direct medium of communication, where philosophers and non-philosophers are usually welcome to comment. While this lacks the virtues pertinent when a work undergoes blind peer review (as is done in a philosophy journal), this nevertheless contributes to creating a culture of serious intellectual discourse on policy issues, especially that the work is expected to be seen by a great number of people, most of which are non-philosophers. Such a lively discussion among philosophers, especially if it is open for many people in social media to see, illustrates to its audience that there are ways to seriously discuss policy issues without dumbing down the discourse to rhetorically effective fallacies and tired sloganeering.

But what if such discussion and debate among philosophers reach a philosophical stalemate where there does not appear to be a resolution? How will such a debate be settled?[20] It would, of course, be unrealistic (although not impossible) to expect philosophers to change their minds when confronted with opposing argumentation, especially when their position in that debate has been honed by years of thinking, reading, and writing about it. It's also unclear whether there is a person or a group of people who are in a perfect epistemic position to settle these philosophical debates, especially when the facts surrounding them are available to everyone. But the point of encouraging these debates and discussions is not so much to seek that ultimate point where a philosophical consensus is reached but to introduce the public to the ideas and arguments surrounding these debates so that their position on the issue ends up more nuanced and informed. Even if they end up having no strong position on the matter, witnessing or even participating in an intellectually rigorous debate might hopefully encourage them to support their claims with

[20] I thank an anonymous reviewer for raising this question.

verifiable facts and good reasoning, just as what the philosophers are expected to do.

One may object that my call for philosophers to engage in discussing public policy, to make philosophy more publicly relevant, is inevitably myopic since it highlights certain areas of philosophy, such as ethics and political philosophy, that have an inherently practical and policy-related bent while marginalizing others that are more theoretical and speculative, such as those that Stijn Conix, Olivier Lemeire and Pei-Shan Chi call LEMM: philosophy of language, epistemology, philosophy of mind and metaphysics.[21] Indeed, my argument necessitates the need to do more ethics and political philosophy, but this is not to say that philosophers should do less LEMM as a result. There are ways in which LEMM, despite being theoretically heavy fields, can engage in or at least be relevant to public policy. One is by tying up one's discussion of LEMM with issues in ethics and political philosophy, or it can also be that unique issues within LEMM can illuminate certain debates in ethics and political philosophy.

Consider, for instance, how discussion in the epistemology of fake news can provide insights into whether policies that prohibit fake news are any good. Or consider how discussion with regards the nature of mental illness, a large subject within the philosophy of mind, can provide philosophical insights into how society should treat those mentally ill, a moral and political issue. Secondly, even issues within LEMM can have some impact on certain public policies, regardless of whether they are related to ethical and political issues. Consider how the debate on the definition of a woman, an issue within metaphysics and philosophy of language, can inform certain public policies in their attempt to legally define a woman. Or consider how the debate on the nature of consciousness, a central issue in the philosophy of mind, can shape certain public policies in their attempt to legally define artificial intelligence.

My argument is not in any way an attempt to discourage the purely theoretical aspects of debates within LEMM, even if we cannot currently see how those aspects and debates can eventually translate into public policy. This is because these theoretical aspects and

[21] Stijn Conix, Olivier Lemeire and Pei-Shan Chi, "The Public Relevance of Philosophy," in *Synthese* 200, no. 15 (2022): 3.

debates can provide the foundational groundwork for what may eventually become relevant to formulating a certain public policy. Moreover, while the focus of the paper is to strengthen philosophy's public relevance, this is not to categorically claim that this is the only form of relevance that philosophers should pursue. There is, of course, much intellectual value in pursuing certain kinds of philosophical truth, even if such pursuit does not result in a public policy (or an examination thereof) in the short term, just as it would be moot to justify the existence of physical cosmology along similar lines. However, it should be a constant concern for philosophers to produce works that the philosophically uninitiated but reasonably perceptive public will find valuable and worth discussing and learning about. This is where the notion of public philosophy comes in, which is the focus of the next section.

Philosophers and Public Philosophy

The other way that philosophy can become more publicly relevant is simply for philosophers to do more public philosophy. There is, of course, a debate on what constitutes public philosophy. In my view, public philosophy can be characterized through its medium of communication and what can be called a medium of expression. Philosophers who express their philosophical thoughts through publicly available means, such as social media, are doing public philosophy because their medium of communication is publicly accessible. Such media of communication can range from social media posts, blog posts, recorded videos, opinion columns, interviews, and podcasts, all of which should be united in making philosophy more accessible and relevant to the public. An apt example of someone doing public philosophy in this manner is Christopher Ryan Maboloc, a Filipino philosopher from Mindanao. Aside from a handful of research papers, Maboloc also has a personal blog where he posts his essays and video lectures, all available to the public.[22] He is also a regular columnist for the *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, for which he won the 2020 Public Intellectual Prize of the Philosophical Association of the Philippines.

[22] His personal blog is: www.ryanmaboloc.blogspot.com.

However, it should be noted that not all philosophies that use publicly available mediums of communication are public philosophy. After all, a philosopher may do a blog post on the logical technicalities involved in Pascal's Wager, but this would hardly be considered public philosophy. In contrast, if a journal article is written in an accessible way and the journal is open access, I think it is not a stretch to count that as public philosophy. What is essential for a work of that kind to be public philosophy is that it is primarily intended to increase the public's knowledge and appreciation of philosophy.

In line with the qualification above, the second characterization of public philosophy is therefore necessary: the medium of expression for public philosophy is that it should be expressed in ways that the public can generally understand. This means that public philosophy is written in ways that avoid most of the technical jargon one finds in academic philosophy journals. Of course, some jargon is inevitable, but a philosopher doing public philosophy makes it a point to explain those technical terms in ways that the philosophically uninitiated public can grasp. As Jeremy Barris rightly noted, "It is public philosophy's job…to express its themes in such a way that their sense is conveyed, but with most of the difficulty avoided."[23]

There are various ways to achieve this. One may, for instance, begin with what is already familiar to the public to introduce unfamiliar and novel concepts and arguments in philosophy. One way that this idea has been put into action is through the so-called popularization of philosophy through popular culture. Certain academic publishers such as Blackwell have published book titles such as *Spider-Man and Philosophy* and *Black Mirror and Philosophy*, where the goal as Blackwell Philosophy and Pop Culture series editor William Irwin states, is "to teach philosophy using the themes, characters, and ideas from your favorite TV shows, comic books, movies, music, games, and more."[24] This is something that has not yet been done in the Philippines. However, Filipino philosophers may at least look forward to a future where there are books entitled *Bob Ong and Philosophy, Panday and Philosophy*, and *Eraserheads and Philosophy*,

[23] Jeremy Barris, "The Nature and Possibility of Public Philosophy," in *Essays in Philosophy* 15 (2014): 5-18.

[24] Quoted in John Huss, "Popular Culture and Philosophy: Rules of Engagement," in *Essays in Philosophy* 15 (2014): 20.

among possibly countless others. Filipino philosophers need to discuss not only fictional shows but also historical events and other social upheavals through the lens of philosophy. For instance, there are several philosophical issues behind such politically pivotal events as the EDSA Revolution or Martial Law that moral and political philosophers can fruitfully discuss. Since many members of the public are familiar with certain TV shows, movies, music games, and real-life political and cultural events, introducing philosophy in this way bolsters the image of philosophy as a universally relatable form of human inquiry. Philosophy is not only the province of the academician but a natural, albeit mostly hampered, condition of the human mind. As Jeremy Barris states, "[P]hilosophy deals with matters of concern to all human beings and, further, that it is the expression of a level of thought that, in one way or another, is present in all human lives."[25]

One may object that doing public philosophy, especially in this 'popular' way, tends to make philosophy simplistic when philosophy is supposed to be an inherently difficult enterprise. Philosophy, the objection goes, is dumbed down to what little substance is left to engage the popular audience. Popular philosophy, the objection concludes, is not real philosophy. But this objection is too quick. Philosophers throughout history have used stories, imageries, and fictional characters as starting points in discussing their philosophy. Plato introduced his allegory of the cave to discuss his theory of knowledge. Albert Camus takes the mythical case of Sisyphus as a starting point in discussing his view about the meaning of life. Robert Nozick is famous for his idea of an experience machine in refuting hedonism. Of course, there are highly technical and inherently difficult aspects to the philosophical views of philosophers, aspects that cannot be adequately captured in a story or simple imagery. But this supports the need to do public philosophy since its aim is not to provide definitive answers to philosophical questions but to show that philosophical concepts and arguments can be understood in familiar terms, such that it encourages the public to engage more in philosophy.

Another way in which philosophers can do public philosophy is by running for and serving in public office.[26] This might not be an enticing, and perhaps even a realistic option for many philosophers

[25] Jeremy Barris, "The Nature and Possibility of Public Philosophy," 9.
[26] I thank an anonymous reviewer for making this suggestion.

who are comfortably housed in their universities while being paid to teach subjects they love and do research on their academic interests. However, as history has shown, this is not necessarily an impossible undertaking and it can even yield philosophical fruits. Consider, for instance, John Stuart Mill, an English philosopher in the 19th century, well-known for his defense of utilitarianism and free speech. A lesser-known fact about him was that he was approached many times to run for Parliament as a representative from Westminster. He eventually agreed to be a candidate, but only on the following terms:

> He would not contribute financially to his campaign; he would severely restrict the financial contributions of others; he would not canvas or electioneer; he would give no pledges; he would not be a spokesperson for local interests; and he intended to use his position not only to serve as the conscience of his society but also to support women's suffrage.[27]

It is easy to see that Mill's candidacy alone is already motivated, among others, by his philosophical convictions in the area of political philosophy, which culminated in his *Considerations on Representative Government.*[28] His primary goal in running is, in his words, to form "a really advanced liberal party, which, I have long been convinced, cannot be done except in the House of Commons."[29] One of these liberal policies is women's suffrage, a radical notion at that time, and this policy is motivated by Mill's view that there should be perfect legal equality between men and women. Eventually, he won the election, and this attempt to extend the right to vote to women is, as Mill described it, "perhaps the only really important public service I performed in the capacity of a Member of Parliament."[30] It is important to note that Mill's attempt to extend suffrage to women is not only radical and eventually realized to be correct, but it was also

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[27] Nicholas Capaldi, *John Stuart Mill: A Biography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 321.

[28] John Stuart Mill, *Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*, Vol. XIX, eds. J. M. Robson and others (Toronto and London: University of Toronto Press), 374-577.

[29] John Stuart Mill, *Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*, Vol. XVI, eds. J. M. Robson and others (Toronto and London: University of Toronto Press), 1197.

[30] John Stuart Mill, *Autobiography of John Stuart Mill* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1924), 213.

heavily supported by philosophical argumentation, as laid out in *The Subjection of Women*.[31] John Stuart Mill is not only a living proof that philosophy can be a valuable aid in forming public policy, but he is also a testament that, in rare circumstances, philosophy and public service can successfully merge.

It is Plato who first argued that "until political power and philosophy entirely coincide," that is, until philosophers become political leaders or political leaders become philosophers, "cities will have no rest from evils nor…will the human race" (473d).[32] This is because, for Plato, philosophers are lovers of wisdom and knowledge, and they "must be without falsehood—they must refuse to accept what is false, hate it, and have a love for the truth" (485c). A political leader who embodies that philosophical attitude and translates it into public policy is, just like John Stuart Mill, without a doubt, a public philosopher.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I would like to mention an element that is needed to increase the number of publicly relevant philosophies. Since doing philosophy is now, for the most part, a profession, there is inevitably an institutional element to whether philosophers can achieve their aims within the discipline. So, how can academic institutions and philosophical organizations assist in encouraging philosophers to do more philosophy in connection with public policy or to do more public philosophy? One answer is simply for such institutions to provide various financial support to such engagement. The financial aspect concerning the growth of philosophy has already been emphasized by several philosophers.[33] In practice, it is gratifying to note that the Philosophical Association of the Philippines (PAP) incentivizes Filipino philosophers to do public philosophy through its

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[31] John Stuart Mill, *Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*, Vol. XXI, eds. J. M. Robson and others (Toronto and London: University of Toronto Press), 261-340.

[32] I thank an anonymous reviewer for suggesting the idea of Plato's philosopher-kings as public philosophers.

[33] Massimo Pigliucci, and Leonard Finkelman, "The Value of Public Philosophy to Philosophers," in *Essays in Philosophy* 15 (2014): 100; Stijn Conix, Olivier Lemeire and Pei-Shan Chi, "The Public Relevance of Philosophy," in *Synthese* 200, no. 15 (2022): 22-23.

PAP Public Intellectual Prize, which is now awarded every year. However, such an incentive is lacking in philosophers' engagement with public policy. One solution is obvious: for philosophical organizations to give financial incentives to such an engagement. Organizations like PAP can utilize their funds to financially support philosophical research that engages in discussing public policies. Conferences in philosophy can focus their theme on both potential and actual public policies and the philosophical issues that arise in them. Finally, this work is a modest attempt to encourage more Filipino philosophers to produce publicly relevant philosophy.

The need to do publicly relevant philosophy cannot be emphasized enough. The current lifeblood of philosophy is academic institutions, such that if these institutions or the state that funds state universities no longer see value in philosophy (perhaps because of the low number of enrollees in philosophy programs), then philosophy as a discipline becomes severely crippled, which might result and have even resulted in philosophy programs being closed. It would be difficult for its practitioners to make philosophy publicly relevant if there is little to no institutional support for the discipline. This is not a peripheral matter. Philosophers need to see the urgency in making their discipline not only professionally satisfying (which is not a surprise to many philosophers) but also relevant to their academic institutions and the wider public in general. There are a few philosophers who can do philosophy as an independent scholar, not affiliated with academic institutions.[34] This is the exception rather than the rule.

Being housed in an academic institution provides academics with unique privileges that are unlikely to be expected if one is just an independent scholar, such as paid time to do research in one's discipline, research grants, sabbatical leaves, and constant intellectual discussions with one's colleagues. It is, therefore, no surprise that the professionalization of philosophy has led to the overwhelming increase of works in philosophy in recent years, and it is not a stretch to suggest that all these academic privileges played a large role in achieving that increase. However, if academic institutions, whether privately or publicly funded, abrogate philosophy and treat it as a useless enterprise, this is likely to lead to further marginalization of

[34] Nigel Warburton is one example.

philosophy, and the quality of philosophizing is bound to deteriorate as a result. And if philosophy is continually marginalized, it will be hard for the public to see how it is relevant. By contrast, if philosophy is an intellectual necessity, especially in the face of the proliferation of fallacious reasoning, empty slogans, weak argumentation, and deliberate misinformation, then the practice of philosophy needs to be institutionally buttressed so that its public relevance can be more intimately felt. There is an urgency for philosophers to see the necessity of support from academic institutions as every philosopher's serious concern. And if philosophers are taking the steps to produce publicly relevant philosophy, then by consequence, it would not be difficult for academic institutions to support the work of philosophers.

The discipline flourishes when philosophers use most of their intellectual resources to understand, analyze, and solve socially relevant philosophical issues and problems. Philosophy as an academic discipline flourishes even more when the wider public is made aware of how philosophy can impact their lives. Publicly relevant philosophy is necessary because philosophy is necessary. The sooner philosophers realize and act in accordance with this, the sooner it is for philosophy to achieve its most notable and noble ends.

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