

Upholding Philosophy as Emerging from Culture: The Case of Filipino Philosophy

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Abstract. This article is intended to promote the role of culture in the conception of philosophy, upholding the notion that philosophy emerges from culture. In fact, this attempt goes with the contention that philosophy does not subsist in a vacuum; philosophy requires a culture of human beings, capable of thinking and reasoning - a requirement that is universal and universalizable. In this context, the writer is compelled to exemplify this role, and maintain the case that Filipino philosophy emerges from a Filipino culture. The Filipino is a human being with a capability that engenders one's Filipino identity. Hence, the recognition of this identity is indicative of the existence of a Filipino culture in which Filipino philosophy subsists.

Keywords: alienation, culture, dialogue, Filipino, philosophy, subsist, way of life.

INTRODUCTION

Philosophy and culture are interdependent entities. The latter is said to be the cradle of the former; the former analyzes, refines, and appreciates the latter. Culture in this view needs to cultivate and nurture philosophy; and philosophy functions as an evaluator and studies culture in order to further develop and enrich it.

In any culture, there can be many means through which human beings can refine their ways of thinking, talking, and acting. These ways may eventually reveal the identity of any individual.¹ In this perspective, discovering the Filipino identity entails searching for the philosophy of the Filipino within. It entails an enterprise of one's awareness and thought, one's personality and character, one's emotions and sense of value (Miranda, 1988). This enterprise leads to a realization of understanding the Filipino as capable of thinking and reasoning; hence capable of

¹ The *individual* here refers to any rational human being; a person who upholds one's cultural identity as a human being who can exercise correctly the faculty to think and reason: European, Asian, North or South American, *et cetera*.

philosophizing. The same outlook is true with another culture that is conscious of its capability to correctly think and reason; the same capability is also inherent in other existing cultures in the world.

The conception of Filipino philosophy is rooted in the notion that philosophy emerges from culture.² The writer agrees that, essentially and in fact, there can be no philosophy without culture. Since there is a Filipino culture, one has to look into that culture wherein its philosophy is embedded.³

THE ROLE OF CULTURE IN THE CONCEPTION OF PHILOSOPHY

In order to contextualize our understanding of culture as a prerequisite in the conception of philosophy, there is a need to delve into its etymological notion. Culture is a Middle English word that is derived from the Latin *cultura*. For some pedagogical purposes, Webster's lexical presentation is adopted here. Accordingly, culture refers to 1) cultivation of the soil; 2) production, development, or improvement of a particular plant, animal, commodity; 3) a) the growth of bacteria, microorganisms or other plant and animals cells in a specially prepared nourishing fluid or solid, b) a colony of microorganisms or cells thus grown; 4) a) development, improvement, or refinement of the intellect, emotions, interests, manners and taste; b) the result of this; refined ways of thinking, talking, and acting; 5) development, or improvement of physical qualities by special training or care; 6) a) the ideas, customs, skills, arts, of a people or group, that are transferred or communicated, or passed along as in or to succeeding generations; b) such ideas, customs, etc. of a particular people or group in a particular period.

In this lexical presentation of culture, it is clear that notions 1, 2, 3, and 5 above are not directly relevant to the conception of philosophy.

² See also Dr. R. Gripaldo's paper entitled 'Is there a Filipino Philosophy?' It was delivered during the XXIst World Congress of Philosophy on 10-17 August 2003 in Istanbul, Turkey (Theme: 'Philosophy Facing World Problems') under the subtheme, 'Philosophy in Asian and the Pacific: Contemporary Issues'. It was scheduled for publication in Φιλοσοφία: *International Journal of Philosophy*.

³ This thought originated from Dr. R. Gripaldo's paper entitled 'Philosophy and Culture: Embedded and disembedded'. It was read during the Roundtable Discussion on 'Philosophy Emerging from South and Southeast Asian Cultures'. July 30, 2008. B83-201, Seoul National University, Seoul, Korea. It was also scheduled for publication in Φιλοσοφία: *International Journal of Philosophy*.

Notions 4 and 6 may be deemed to influence our understanding of culture itself, and somehow they lay bare the embryonic *universality* and *universalizability* of philosophical thinking and reasoning. This may be seen from the perspective of a group of human beings with refined ways of thinking, talking, and acting that are transferred or communicated or passed along as in or to succeeding generations.

Culture generally involves a person or a group of persons, an idea, a thing, or an event; any of which is handed on from one generation to the next. Blackburn (2005) considers culture in the context of the people's way of life. Culture is the way of life of a people, including their attitudes, values, beliefs, arts, sciences, modes of perception, and habits of thought and activity (Blackburn, 2005).

In any culture, there is a dynamic involvement of people or human beings, an idea, a thing, or an event. The dynamic involvement of human beings is of primary importance in our understanding of culture. Through this dynamism, human beings exhibit their capability of thinking and reasoning. In being human, this capability is a *sine qua non* requirement; philosophy cannot be without the ability to think and reason. Other beings (non-humans) in any given culture cannot philosophize because they do not possess this capability. Truly, in philosophizing, a human being must possess the *thinking and reasoning* capability. Without this capability, no human being can philosophize.

Undeniably, the early thinkers have implicitly paved the way to this kind of understanding (Frost, 1989). They have exemplified the human capacity to think and reason. This capacity is somehow exhibited in the Greek culture wherein philosophy is gradually unfolded by their wonderings, away from the theocentric or anthropomorphic view of the natural world. The Presocratics themselves have realized this, although they have not directly or consciously attributed this realization to philosophy in its strictest sense.

For more than 2000 years philosophy is often directly identified as purely of Western origin, particularly beginning with Greek philosophy. In ancient times, one realizes that philosophy is not directly the main focus. Thales is not aware of the idea of philosophizing. He happens to have initiated human beings to make use of thinking and reasoning, away from the influence of the gods or divinities during his time. This same view is true to the succeeding thinkers who tried to answer the fundamental philosophical questions of their time. In their own culture, one finds the

importance of thinking and reasoning, i.e., gradually in their act of philosophizing.

The recent developments in various philosophical circles worldwide have increasingly decentralized the conception of philosophy. There is recognition of the fact that any rational human being is capable of philosophizing. This indicates that an individual human being who can philosophize is necessarily capable of correct thinking and reasoning. Otherwise, one cannot properly philosophize.

The Greek culture has made a huge impact in the manner with which philosophy is being treated worldwide. It has become a window through which other civilizations have realized their own identity and purpose as rational human beings. It has exemplified how their philosophy has emerged necessarily from their culture. Had there been no established Greek culture, there would have been no Greek philosophy.

Nevertheless, this view strengthens the conviction that culture plays a very vital role in the conception of philosophy worldwide, even though the latter is not that appealing to most of the young generations of learners and scholars. But any learner or scholar must not ignore nor disregard the contribution that philosophy has made in human civilization. In this perspective, one realizes that philosophy does not subsist in a vacuum. In fact, with this foregoing realization, philosophy is truly embedded in a particular culture; and according to Grialdo, it is in praxis disembedded by a historian or a scholar of philosophy.

RETHINKING PHILOSOPHY AND CULTURE AS EMBEDDED AND DISEMBEDDED

There has been an ongoing movement that promotes the emergence of philosophy from culture. The movement enables us to rethink philosophy and culture, more particularly in the sense that philosophy is considered to be embedded in the cultural experiences of the people.⁴ This movement somehow goes beyond the ancient way of understanding philosophy, especially the ones who are thinking that philosophy is only Western philosophy. This new movement has unfolded many other possibilities for philosophy. As a discipline, philosophy subsists in a given culture, not necessarily the Greek culture that most of us initially know about.

⁴ Ibid.

In ancient times, reflective thinkers preoccupied themselves with addressing speculative or logical questions that arose from their cultural milieu regarding, among other philosophical themes, the nature and purpose of things, of life in the world, and so on.⁵ There are thinkers who, accordingly, have not bothered to leave any book or complete philosophical treatise; for instance, Confucius or Socrates. Apparently, there is no available single treatise of Confucius, but only sayings, accordingly, collected by his pupils in the *Lun Yu or Analects* (Blackburn, 2005). Likewise, Socrates has not left any written sayings or books. His most notable student, Plato, took the effort of writing most of his teachings. Other thinkers, of recent years, have left some writings about their ideas or thoughts. To be sure this body of writings, or written texts, is then studied and dissected by a historian or a scholar of philosophy, or anyone interested in philosophical studies, as to what kinds of content are embedded therein.⁶

In the process of studying these written texts, one can discover that there are indeed philosophical ideas, and that these are in fact culturally grounded (McLean, 1997, 2000, 2001a&b). These philosophical ideas are embedded in the works of thinkers who are likewise deeply rooted in their own culture. It is also in this sense, Gripaldo realizes, that philosophy, generally as a body of ideas, emerges from culture. One's conception of these philosophical ideas or philosophy in general is greatly affected by one's own culture, directly or indirectly. Furthermore, according to Gripaldo, the ideas are mediated by written texts and it is in this respect that philosophy should be identified and disembedded from the texts in order to analyze and appreciate it.

No one can deny that most cultures have changed, and philosophizing also has evolved in the process. Philosophy has transformed itself into something that is already in *dialogue* with culture itself, not in opposition to or away from it. The individual's act of philosophizing enables one to achieve self-consciousness in order even to change one's consciousness and the world (Miroy, 2009). This is the case in the Philippine setting wherein, undeniably, Filipino culture has also evolved, and the conception of philosophy has changed. The Filipino philosopher is at the forefront of this Filipino cultural change (Miroy, 2009). And so, philosophy, as a principle or a body of ideas, is in *dialogue* with Filipino culture in that eventually Filipino philosophy has emerged.

THE FILIPINO AS THINKING

⁵ Ibid

⁶ Ibid.

AND REASONING HUMAN BEING

Many attempts have been made to promote and perpetuate the Filipino philosophy. But it seems that there is resistance to such a claim, which somehow questions the Filipino proponents, particularly the Filipino lovers, teachers and historians of philosophy. Even so, these proponents have introduced some philosophical elements or embryonic philosophical concepts (Mercado, 1974; Timbreza, 1982, 2008; Quito, 1990; Gripaldo, 2000). And these philosophical elements or embryonic philosophical concepts, such as *loob*, *diwa*, *ka*, *meron*, among others, are radically Filipino. Moreover, even though most of them are not discussed in this paper, these elements have some similar counterparts in other cultures: *chi* in China, *ki* in Japan, *sein* in Germany, *elán* in France, *et cetera*.

But, in order to understand Filipino philosophy, one must accept the truth that the Filipino is a human being who can think and reason as well. One must accept the Filipino identity as a fundamental fact, not a theory or myth. And one must also realize that this Filipino identity is embedded in the Filipino culture, from which the emergence of Filipino philosophy is actualized.

The conception of Filipino philosophy has encountered oppositions from individuals and academic circles in the country. Directly or indirectly, in this opposition alone, Filipino philosophy already experiences alienation.⁷ Many people would say that there is no such thing as Filipino philosophy. This may be the case if they do not recognize and accept the identity of a Filipino in the first place (Constantino, 1969). Non-acceptance of the Filipino identity is itself an articulation of alienation. But since the Filipino identity is not a myth but a fact, and since it is now the way of looking at a citizen of a country known to the world as the Philippines, and on certain occasions a foreigner is even naturalized in it, we assume such (identity) as a given. Hence, in this perspective, the contemporary Filipino is construed as the identity of a human individual who is a naturalized citizen or one who is born in the Philippines, one who pledges allegiance to the Philippine Republic and its Constitution and By-Laws.

The human inhabitants of the Philippine islands assume the Filipino identity, so that the world would know really that there exists a group of Filipinos. Filipinos are human beings who partake of the capacity to think and reason. They have a capacity to know and understand the self,

⁷ Taken from the author's yet to be published paper entitled 'Understanding Filipino Philosophy through the alienation framework'.

others and the world (Gianan, 2008c). They have their own human stories and experiences to tell. They also possess a dignity, which is equal to the dignity of other human beings worldwide. Non-Filipino human beings particularly belonging to the Western world do not monopolize this recognition of human dignity.

Furthermore, affirming the existence of Filipino philosophy requires breaking away from this alienation and its other forms. But with the contemporary way of understanding alienation and with the emergence of a new way of thinking about philosophy, Filipino culture clearly begets the essence of Filipino philosophy. The Filipino culture even divulges the task of a Filipino philosopher (Miroy, 2009).

This new way of thinking is realized, once again, in the acceptance of philosophy as emerging from culture; because philosophy reveals the experiences of human beings in their own culture.⁸

THE CASE OF FILIPINO PHILOSOPHY AS SUBSISTING IN FILIPINO CULTURE

Philosophy has often been conceived according to an individual's point of view, and sometimes it is backed up by the spirit of the people (Quito, 1990). But this point of view is dependent on one's cultural experiences and exposure to other cultures. Then again, it cannot be denied, therefore, that culture brings about one's philosophy. Filipino culture is typical in that one can find active traces of Filipino philosophy. In this perspective, Filipino philosophy is re-visioned in a manner that is significantly Filipino. This indicates that Filipino philosophy is seen from an insider's point of view, which is eventually related to an outsider's. Among the many possibilities of expressing this way of re-visioning, one can start with an understanding of Philippine history. The most recent key to this understanding is the EDSA Revolution itself. The event itself is to be viewed as the culmination of all our colonial history (Co and Quito, 1988).

Actually, this event repositions the Filipino in the world. The Filipino becomes a new entity with a new identity. This new identity is the overcoming of one's alienated history. Positively, the late and former President Ferdinand Marcos has epitomized this new identity. He is

⁸ Op. cit. Gripaldo's paper entitled "Philosophy and Culture: Embedded and disembedded."

recognized as the epitome – the breaking point – of our colonial past (Co and Quito, 1988).

In Abulad's writings, one can find an expression of a Filipino mind that has recognized the alienated state of the Filipino culture. This alienated state is demonstrated when Marcos fled to another country and the rest of the Filipinos gained recognition worldwide. In his *Options for a Filipino Philosophy*, Abulad (1984) particularly unravelled the Filipino philosophy's alienation, as seen from the context of Philippine history. Moreover, for Abulad (1984), the era of non-history should end with Marcos and his flight to the United States should mark the beginning of a new age; and that from here on, we should already be writing the actual history of the Filipino people; before that was only the history of our colonial masters (Co and Quito, 1988; Abulad, 1984).

Filipino philosophy is one intellectual expression that truly deserves attention. It is no longer to be treated as a mere idea of an ordinary individual. It is no longer to be written in water or printed on the sand. Abulad rightly presents a contemporary way of looking at Filipino philosophy. He has articulated the many silent Filipino minds by saying:

The fact remains that the Filipino philosopher has to continue the word in accordance with his gifts. Happily, it can now be said that the days when we used to ask whether there is such a thing as Filipino Philosophy is now largely over. I submit that we are now entering the second phase in the indigenization process of philosophy. (Co and Quito, 1988)

'Entering the second phase in the indigenization process of philosophy' is also indicative of the prior alienation of Filipino philosophy. But, more importantly, this is a realization that is indicative of liberating the Filipino mind's grappling with issues impeding the conception of Filipino philosophy itself. Herein lies the significance not only of experience, but also of critical self-reflection about how Filipinos think and reason. With critical self-reflection, Filipino philosophy lives on. Filipino philosophy only dies with the death of reflection, and reflection suffocates where matter so thickens that the spirit is unable to liberate itself sufficiently (Co and Quito, 1988).

With this realization, no one can deny that the Filipino can think and reason. No one can deny the realization that in philosophizing it is always necessary to use not only the faculty of thinking, but also of correct reasoning. Perhaps there is no need to say this, but the fact is that the

emergence of this realization somehow verifies the existence of Filipino philosophy. Frankly, Abulad is right in saying that there has been and there always will be a Filipino philosophy (Co and Quito, 1988).

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The emergence of philosophy from culture may be said to be one of the expressions of thought that advocates of the International Society for Philosophers (ISFP) wanted to promote. Specifically, the Society espouses the idea that philosophy is for everyone; this is so because every rational human being is capable of correct thinking and reasoning.

The philosophy of a Filipino individual is made manifest in one's everyday experience and critical self-reflection. The Filipino individual is an alienated human being in that one's conception of philosophy is greatly affected by one's own alienated culture, including the influence of other cultures.

The case of re-visioning Filipino philosophy resides in the Filipinos themselves. But, for Abulad, the non-philosophical preoccupations of the Filipinos have made them lose sight of their real calling; instead of starting to break ground upon which to construct their spiritual monuments, they need to continue their evasive meanderings (Co and Quito, 1988; Mercado, 1994, 2005). Abulad further asserts that the Spirit remains in the dark, and with it, philosophy and culture. Even so, the Filipino within takes on the responsibility of cultivating and nurturing one's thinking and reasoning, a natural faculty that makes one capable of philosophizing.⁹ Nonetheless, it is prudent to think that Filipino philosophy is gradually upheld when the Filipino or anyone has truly acknowledged the fact of its inherent existence, i.e., the Filipino philosophy's rootedness in Filipino culture.

It can be said that without culture, there is no philosophy; more specifically, it can be said that without Filipino culture, there is no Filipino philosophy. Undeniably, however, there is a Filipino culture that generates a Filipino mindset, and philosophy, which is embedded in it. This becomes the state of affairs because of the fact that philosophy does not subsist in a vacuum. In this case, after all and truly, Filipino philosophy subsists in the Filipino culture as seen in the context of the reality that philosophy necessarily emerges from culture.

⁹ This speaks of any other *individual* cognizant of one's own cultural identity as a rational human being. This is also an appreciation of respecting the co-existing philosophies inherent in other cultures.

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