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A Tribute to Romualdo Abulad, the Filipino Kantian

## Filipino Postmodernity: *Quo Vadis?*<sup>1</sup>

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**Romualdo E. Abulad†**

**Abstract:** In this paper, Romualdo Abulad initially presents variations of postmodernity as distinct historical breaks which feature paradigmatic shifts that lead us to a new beginning. Postmodernity, as Abulad shows, is characterized by a radical openness; this leads him to argue that postmodernity as an event occurred in different moments in the history of thought, from ancient to contemporary. In what seems to be a dialectical description of history, he maintains that an opportunity for a break occurs when the inherent limitations and deficiencies of the prevailing status quo emerge, and as a result, ignite the tensions between the preservation of the old and the welcoming of the new. Applying the same idea to understand the trajectory of the sociopolitical history of the Philippines, Abulad advises us to “keep in mind the wealth of possibilities that lie in the future but at the same time not lose our patience and rush precipitately the fulfillment of things.” For this very reason, Abulad maintains that postmodernity, as opposed to a distinct and isolated moment, is an ever-ongoing project that urges us to question the present state of affairs, challenging us to go *beyond the modern*—look *beyond* into the *present*, and usher in a *new beginning*.

**Keywords:** postmodernity, postmodern man, paradigm shift, the second beginning

The first part of the title suggests that the Filipino, like most of the world today, has already “crossed the border” and has learned to accept the fact of what Martin Heidegger calls “the second beginning”<sup>2</sup>—what here we refer to as postmodernity. The second part, however, by asking “*quo vadis?*”, indicates a certain state of uncertainty and crisis wondering where all this, namely postmodernity, is leading to. Maybe just to start us off on a note

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<sup>1</sup> Editor’s note: An early version of this piece was presented in the 1<sup>st</sup> Philosophy, Culture, and Communication Congress held in St. Paul Seminary, Silang, Cavite, 10-11 November 2017.

<sup>2</sup> See Preview of Martin Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy (From Enowning)*, trans. by Parvis Emad and Kenneth Maly (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999).

of optimism we may mention right at the start the name of the philosopher of science, Thomas Kuhn, who, in his famous work, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, makes crises even necessary for what has now become a household word: paradigm shift.<sup>3</sup>

Actually, postmodernity is itself a paradigm shift; nay, it is, if we are to take Heidegger seriously, *the* paradigm shift. We have already irreversibly moved into “the second beginning,” he says, bringing us back, by way of *anamnesis* or remembrance, to the first beginning which took place in Greece, the birthplace of philosophy as *philosophia*, love of wisdom.<sup>4</sup> We now refer to it as the ancient age, the age of the so-called Greek miracle which started us theorizing. *Theoria*, one might say, is a Greek invention, by which men began to think and speculate, an activity which makes us presumably like unto the image of God, *theos*. It was as if it freshly dawned on man what potentials there were in him as a being capable of thought, and he ventured to ask: *τι το ον*, what is it?—a question which eventually translates into “what is being?” *It is water*, Thales said.<sup>5</sup> Reputed to be the first philosopher, he might as well be the first of our kind to look intently at the things around us, ultimately declaring them to be other than what they seem. Things, Thales seemed to say, are not exactly as they appear to us; in fact, they are all water! That bold declaration, instead of putting the sense of awe and wonder to rest, triggered it even more. There followed a flood of other theories, with Anaximander refusing to identify *it* with anything definite, thus calling it *apeiron*, the Indefinite.<sup>6</sup> In contrast, Anaximenes equated *it*, the *ον*, with air<sup>7</sup> even as Empedocles was wrestling with the four elements: earth, water, air, and fire.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970).

<sup>4</sup> “We have uttered the word ‘philosophy’ often enough. If, however, we use the word ‘philosophy’ no longer like a worn out title, if, instead, we hear the word ‘philosophy’ coming from its source, then it sound thus: *philosophia*. Now the word ‘philosophy’ is speaking Greek. The word, as a Greek word, is a path ... The word *philosophia* tells us that philosophy is something which, first of all, determines the existence of the Greek world. Not only that—*philosophia* also determines the innermost basic feature of our Western-European history.” Martin Heidegger, *What is Philosophy?*, trans. by Jean T. Wilde and William Kluback (New Haven, Conn.: College & University Press, 1956), 29.

<sup>5</sup> “Most of the first philosophers thought that principles in the form of matter were the only principles of all things; for the original source of all existing things, that from which a thing first comes-into-being and into which it is finally destroyed, the substance persisting but changing in its qualities, this they declare is the element and first principle of existing things ... Thales, the founder of this type of philosophy, says that it is water ....” G.S. Kirk, J.E. Raven, and M. Schofield, *The Presocratic Philosophers: A Critical History with a Selection of Texts*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 89.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 105-108.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 144-148.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 286; 299.

A crucial moment in this theoretical preoccupation over the stuff (*Urstoff*) or element of the universe occurred when Democritus coined the word *atomos*,<sup>9</sup> the very same word the moderns, a millennium later, would use to designate what they, mistakenly it turned out, thought to be the minutest component of things. That the modern-day atoms proved susceptible to fusion, fission, and even explosion is proof supreme that they, the atoms, have parts, thus in no way the long sought-for ultimate stuff of the universe. Leibniz came to the rescue, it is true, by giving the name monads to the true atoms of nature,<sup>10</sup> but his purely rational proof for them could be easily rejected by any empirically inclined investigator. What all this proves, we repeat, is only that the line of inquiry started by the Greeks was picked up effectively about a millennium later by the moderns. The intervening millennium called the Medieval Age was, at first blush, a detour from the way of the ancients who dared to use sheer reason in the acquisition of knowledge, the same reason which sets men apart from the animals. Indeed, it is the ancients who defined man as a rational animal, with emphasis on *that rational part which enables us to know the truth and seek the good, signifying the two functions of reason as intellect and will*. One can see how this view of man inevitably makes knowledge and science a natural objective of the mind, which explains the primacy hitherto given to education or enlightenment. Although this culminates in the scientific advances of modernity and the technological efficiency we experience even in postmodernity, the fact is that the spirit of the Middle Ages was a product of the metaphysics of the ancients which, according to Aristotle, is the quest for the ultimate causes, reasons and principles of all things in the light of reason alone.<sup>11</sup>

Again, here, Heidegger is not far from right in pronouncing classical metaphysics as an *onto-theo-logy*.<sup>12</sup> The search for the *rerum natura* finds its highest achievement in the First Cause who is Uncaused, the First Mover who is Unmoved, to which, as observed correctly by St. Thomas Aquinas, we give the name God.<sup>13</sup> That God is not an original medieval concoction, though, one finds that already among the Greeks, most notably in Aristotle.<sup>14</sup> Thus, the

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<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 406-408.

<sup>10</sup> "... these monads are the true atoms of nature, and, in a word, the elements of all things." Gottfried Wilhelm von Leibniz, *Monadology*, in *Leibniz Selections*, ed. by Philip P. Wiener (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1951), § 3.

<sup>11</sup> See Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, trans. by W.D. Ross in *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, ed. by Richard McKeon (New York: Random House, 1941), 980a22-988b23.

<sup>12</sup> See Martin Heidegger, "The Onto-theo-logical Nature of Metaphysics," in *Essays in Metaphysics: Identity and Difference*, trans. by Kurt F. Leidecker (New York: Philosophical Library, Inc., 1960), 33-67.

<sup>13</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Vol. 1, trans. by Fathers of the English Dominican Province (Westminster, Maryland: Christian Classics, 1981), Ia.2.3.

<sup>14</sup> "... if there is no first there is no cause at all." Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 994a18. "... the first mover is itself unmoved." *Metaphysics*, 1012b30. "We say therefore that God is a living being,

medieval experiment which lasted for a thousand years and extended even beyond that time until today is part of that progression which started among the ancients and which suffered relentless criticism only during the modern age, a critique which resulted in the destruction of the whole metaphysical edifice of what Heidegger calls “the first beginning.”<sup>15</sup>

The beginning of the end officially started with René Descartes’s universal doubt.<sup>16</sup> That was a sweeping move intended to wipe completely clean our mental slate, retaining only what even Husserl some two centuries later would pronounce as an inevitable residue, the pure consciousness or *cogito*.<sup>17</sup> It is this *cogito* which, one might say, constitutes the basic assumption of all modernity, which is why we describe this age as anthropocentric.<sup>18</sup> Husserl, in fact, dubbed his own philosophy as a neo-Cartesianism.<sup>19</sup> Why, then, did he have to *repeat* Descartes? Because between Descartes and Husserl there stood, first of all, the formidable German philosopher, Immanuel Kant, who, once and for all, tried to solve the dilemma left by the conflicting theories of the rationalists and the empiricists. The rationalism of Leibniz, a true heir of Cartesian idealism, was coming, as it were, from the pure consciousness or *cogito*, guided only by clear and distinct perceptions, not to mention the logical principle of non-contradiction; this led, however, all the way to the philosophy of Christian von Wolff whom Kant declared, positively

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eternal, most good, so that life and duration continuous and eternal belong to God; for this is God.” *Metaphysics*, 1072b28-29.

<sup>15</sup> See Preview to Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy*.

<sup>16</sup> “In order to examine into the truth, it is necessary at least once in one’s life to doubt of all things, so far as this is possible.” René Descartes, *Principles of Philosophy*, in *The Philosophical Works of Descartes*, trans. by Elizabeth S. Haldane and G.R.T. Ross (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), 219.

<sup>17</sup> “Consciousness in itself has a being of its own which in its absolute uniqueness of nature remains unaffected by the phenomenological disconnexion. It therefore remains over as a ‘phenomenological residuum,’ as a region of Being which is in principle unique, and can become in fact the field of a new science—the science of Phenomenology.” Edmund Husserl, *Ideas: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology*, trans. by W. R. Boyce Gibson (New York: Collier Books, 1962), 102.

<sup>18</sup> I heard this first said in her classes by Emerita Quito, e.g., “Descartes led Modern Man with his theory of Universal Doubt. Everything must be suspended in doubt so that the mind can begin with a clean slate. It was, however, impossible to cleanse the mind completely of all truths for there was one truth that was undeniable, and that was that ‘while I doubt, I think, and because I cannot think without existing, therefore, I exist.’ *I think, therefore, I exist* became the starting point of all philosophy.” *Lectures on Comparative Philosophy*, in *A Life of Philosophy: Festschrift in honor of Emerita S. Quito* (Manila: De La Salle University Press, 1990), 508.

<sup>19</sup> “... phenomenology might almost be called a new, a twentieth century, Cartesianism.” Edmund Husserl, *The Paris Lectures*, trans. by Peter Koestenbaum (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1964), 3. “Accordingly one might almost call transcendental phenomenology a neo-Cartesianism ....” *Cartesian Meditations: An Introduction to Phenomenology*, trans. by Dorion Cairns (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1973), 1.

if not approvingly, as the greatest dogmatist of his time.<sup>20</sup> On the opposite camp was the triumvirate of Locke, Berkeley, and Hume, the young nomads<sup>21</sup> who delivered, blow by blow, the final strokes in the progressive methodic doubt initiated, albeit unwarily left unfinished, by Descartes. It took Locke to demolish the innate ideas<sup>22</sup> whose most illustrious proponent was Plato, and it took Berkeley<sup>23</sup> and Hume<sup>24</sup> to explode the concepts of substance and causality, respectively, which were entrenched by Aristotle. No wonder Kant himself, despite the education he received from the Leibniz-Wolffian school, declared himself radically awakened from his dogmatic slumber by Hume.<sup>25</sup>

Thus, the final blow to classical philosophy was delivered by Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, the very title of which is reminiscent of Descartes's universal doubt, which can now finally be pronounced to have reached completion. This completion of the Cartesian doubt by way of Kant's critique of pure reason proved to be also the end of philosophy, leaving none of the architectonic of Greek philosophy standing. This is the true culmination of "the first beginning." From Descartes to Kant is a period of merciless critique, aimed paradoxically at certitude, which resulted in the collapse of all Western and Eurocentric thinking, the end of "the first beginning" and the dawn of "the second beginning." This is the crisis of philosophy, nay the crisis of all human history, which accounts for *the* paradigm shift. How shall one proceed from here? Kant, the all-destroyer, we say, has left nothing standing.<sup>26</sup> All knowledge is merely a phenomenon, according to him, the appearance of things and not the things themselves.<sup>27</sup> This is the true ground zero as

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<sup>20</sup> "... in a future system of metaphysics, we shall have to follow in the strict method of the celebrated Wolff, the greatest of all dogmatic philosophers ...." Immanuel Kant, Preface to the Second Edition of *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. by F. Max Müller (New York: Doubleday & Company Anchor Books, 1966), Bxxxvi-xxxvii, xlii.

<sup>21</sup> "... the sceptics, a kind of nomads, despising all settled culture of the land, broke up from time to time all civil society." Kant, Preface to the First Edition of *Critique of Pure Reason*, xxiii.

<sup>22</sup> See John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Vol. 1 (New York: Dover Publications, 1959), Book I.

<sup>23</sup> See the first dialogue of George Berkeley in *Three Dialogues Between Hylas and Philonous* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Educational Publishing, The Library of Liberal Arts, 1977).

<sup>24</sup> See Sections IV (Skeptical Doubts Concerning the Operations of the Understanding) and V (Skeptical Solution of These Doubts) of David Hume in *An Inquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Liberal of Liberal Arts, 1965).

<sup>25</sup> "I openly confess that my remembering David Hume was the very thing which many years ago first interrupted my dogmatic slumber and gave my investigations in the field of speculative philosophy a quite new direction." Immanuel Kant, Preface to *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*, trans. by Paul Carus and rev. by James W. Ellington (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1977), 5.

<sup>26</sup> It was Moses Mendelssohn who spoke of "the all-crushing Kant." See Allan Arkush, *Moses Mendelssohn and the Enlightenment* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 69.

<sup>27</sup> "Even if we could see to the very bottom of a phenomenon, it would remain for ever altogether different from the knowledge of the thing by itself." Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*,

envisioned by Descartes. If all beings are substances, as classical metaphysics would have us believe, then Berkeley has adequately pointed out to us that such substances are pure mental concoctions, sheer bundles of impressions, and thus evanescent. Today's scientists have taken that lesson seriously, a stance which has miraculously produced the quantum theory of physics which in turn makes of indeterminacy and relativity gospel truths, if any such truth can ever be called gospel and if such a gospel can ever be considered true. Parallel to this, and even more amazing, is the philosophy of Buddhism whose principle of *anatta* is an expression of the unreality of substances as well as the unreality of the ego substance itself, the self or the *cogito*.<sup>28</sup> By the time Kant ends his *critique of pure reason*, all the revered concepts of metaphysics—God, freedom, and immortality—have not only suffered a severe blow, they are done and over with. In the language of today's mightiest deconstructivist, Jacques Derrida, there is left not a trace, not even the trace of a trace.<sup>29</sup>

The German idealists, of whom the greatest is G.W.F. Hegel, boldly undertook the reconstruction of philosophy on the ashes of "the first beginning." However, the transition to the new paradigm could not be the work of only one man, no matter how profoundly great. With the closure of his system, and with him the system of German idealism, the new philosophers—the likes of Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, Schleiermacher and Marx—found all the more reason to endlessly disagree, even ridicule Hegel's *Phenomenology of Mind*.<sup>30</sup> It took Husserl, with his own brand of pure phenomenology, to somewhat resurrect what could possibly be reconstructed out of Hegel's phenomenology, without bringing the devil of a closure to the system. Up to his very last published work, Husserl remains "a beginning philosopher."<sup>31</sup> Phenomenology thus established itself as the

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A44=B61, 37. "Its principles are principles for the exhibition of phenomena only; and the proud name of Ontology, which presumes to supply in a systematic form different kinds of synthetical knowledge a priori of things by themselves (for instance the principle of causality), must be replaced by the more modest name of a mere Analytic of the pure understanding." *Ibid.*, A247=B303, 193.

<sup>28</sup> "The doctrine of Dependent Origination is the central teaching of the Buddha.... To say that a thing arises depending on its cause is to admit that it is momentary .... The theory of No-ego, the theory that the individual ego is ultimately false, is also based on this doctrine. When everything is momentary, the ego is also momentary and therefore relative and false." Chandradhar Sharma, *Indian Philosophy: A Critical Survey* (U.S.A.: Barnes & Noble, 1962), 62-63.

<sup>29</sup> "... the play of the trace, or the *différance*, which has no meaning and is not .... Always differing and deferring, the trace is never as it is in the presentation of itself. It erases itself in presenting itself ...." Jacques Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. by Alan Bass (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1982), 22-23.

<sup>30</sup> G.W.F. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Mind*, trans. by J.B. Baillie (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1967).

<sup>31</sup> Considered his "great last work," Husserl's *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology* is still only "an introduction to phenomenological philosophy."

method appropriate for the new way of thinking, not however the phenomenology of Hegel alone nor the phenomenology of Husserl alone, but the phenomenology of both together. It is this phenomenology which Heidegger used in order to cross the borders of the “first beginning” into the “new beginning,” mistakenly taken by Husserl to be a betrayal of his method. With Heidegger the paradigm shift is done, and there is no more turning back.

It is this paradigm shift, this new beginning, which we mean by postmodernity. What does this entail? First, it presupposes a transformed human. Heidegger’s *Dasein* is not the same as Aristotle’s *animal rationale*,<sup>32</sup> in the same way that the Great Man, the man of *jen*, of Confucius should not be confused with the Petty Man.<sup>33</sup> The very mark of *Dasein* is authenticity, the

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Edmund Husserl, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology: An Introduction to Phenomenological Philosophy*, trans. by David Carr (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1978). Another major work of his late years, *Cartesian Meditations*, is similarly subtitled as “an introduction to phenomenology.”

<sup>32</sup> “This amounts to an essential transformation of the human from ‘rational animal’ (*animal rationale*) to *Da-sein*.” Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy*, 3.

<sup>33</sup> Confucius, *The Sayings of Confucius*, trans. by James R. Ware (New York: The New American Library Mentor Book, 1955). Sample sayings: “To remain unconcerned though others do not know of us—that is to be Great Man!” (I.1); “Great Man applies himself to the fundamentals, for once the fundamentals are there System comes into being. It is filial duty and fraternal duty that are fundamental to Manhood-at-its-best.” (I.2); “Great Man is no robot.” (II.12); “Great Man, being universal in his outlook, is impartial; Petty Man, being partial, is not universal in outlook.” (II.14); “There is nothing which Great Man will contest with others. Since it is obligatory, however, he will engage in the archery tournaments. After greeting and deferring to the others, he mounts to the range. After he has finished he comes back and plays his proper role in the drinking [the loser must drink; for the winner there is no compulsion]. In such a contest he is still Great Man.” (III.7); “Great Man’s attitude toward the world is such that he shows no preferences; but he is prejudiced in favor of justice.” (IV.10); “Great Man cherishes excellence; Petty Man, his own comfort. Great Man cherishes the rules and regulations; Petty Man, special favors.” (IV.11); “Great Man is conscious only of justice; Petty Man, only of self-interest.” (IV.16); “When substance overbalances refinement, crudeness results. When refinement overbalances substance, there is superficiality. When refinement and substance are balanced one has Great Man.” (VI.18); “Great Man is completely at ease; Petty Man is always on edge.” (VII.37); “He can be entrusted with the education of a young child; he can be entrusted with the rule of a state; in a moment of crisis he remains unshaken: is such a man Great Man? He is.” (VIII.6); “If Great Man is faultlessly respectful; if he is humble within the rites to his fellow men, then in the whole, wide world, all are his brothers. How can Great Man complain that he has no brothers?” (XII.5); “Great Man develops the virtues in others, not their vices. Petty Man does just the opposite.” (XII.16); “Great Man is accommodating, but he is not one of the crowd. Petty Man is one of the crowd, but he is also a source of discord.” (XIII.23); “Great Man is easy to serve but hard to please. Petty Man is hard to serve but easy to please.” (XIII.25); “Great Man is dignified but not proud. Petty Man is proud but not dignified.” (XIII.26); “A man like is Great Man, for he esteems Excellence.” (XIV.5); “Great Man reaches complete understanding of the main issues; Petty Man reaches complete understanding of the minute details.” (XIV.23); “He whose very substance is justice, whose actions are governed by the rites, whose participation in affairs is compliant, and whose crowning perfection is reliability — that man is Great Man.”



opposite of which is duplicity which we may equate, in biblical language, with what Jesus denounces as hypocrisy or, in Jaime Bulatao's happy turn of phrase, a split level religiosity. This is why Heidegger describes the *das Man* as *ambiguity* (*Zweideutigkeit*):<sup>34</sup> he is a fake. As such he does not exhibit the good will which, according to Kant, is "the only thing in the world or outside of it which can be considered good without qualification."<sup>35</sup> In this Kant is no doubt under the influence of Rousseau whose general will never errs; the general will is thus always good.<sup>36</sup> This is the source of Emmanuel Levinas's emphasis on ethics. Coming as he is from Heidegger's "destruction of the history of ontology,"<sup>37</sup> Levinas would like to think of ethics, not metaphysics, as the first philosophy.<sup>38</sup> For his part, and seemingly in opposition to Levinas, Heidegger spent all his long, productive years in the quest for Being, declaring all metaphysics hitherto to be still no more than physics. The being

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(XV.18); "Great Man's concern is that he may die without a good name." (XV.20); "Great Man demands it of himself; Petty Man, of others." (XV.21); "Great Man, out of a sense of pride, does not engage in strife; out of consideration for the group as a whole he does not join cliques." (XV.22); "Great Man avoids three things: sexual intercourse while still too young and before his pulse has settled down; fighting, once he has grown up and his pulse has become strong; further acquisition, once he has grown old and his pulse has weakened." (XVI.7); "There are three facets to Great Man. Looked at from a distance he seems stern; at close range he is pleasant; as we listen to his words they are clear-cut." (XIX.9); "He who is solely Manhood-at-its-best will know which men to like and which ones to hate." (IV.3); "He who concentrates upon the task and forgets about reward may be called Man-at-his-best." (VI.22); "The achieving of Manhood-at-its-best must come from you yourself; one does not acquire it from others!" (XII.1); "Remain sincere in purpose while studying widely, continue to think while posing frank and open questions. Therein lies Manhood-at-its-best." (XIX.6); "Asked about Manhood-at-its-best, he replied: 'When away from home act as respectfully as you would toward an important guest; handle the people as respectfully as you would the grand sacrifice. Do not do to others what you would not desire yourself.'" (XII.2)

<sup>34</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper Perennial Modern Thought, 2008), 217-219. The thematic analysis of the difference between Dasein and *das Man* is taken up in Chapter V, where Dasein is shown as *Geworfenheit*, *Verstehen* and *Rede*, while *das Man* is in contrast described as *Zweideutigkeit*, *Neugier* and *Gerede*.

<sup>35</sup> "It is impossible to conceive anything at all in the world, or even out of it, which can be taken as good without qualification, except a *good will*." Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. by H.J. Paton, in *The Moral Law* (London: Hutchinson's University Library, 1966), 61.

<sup>36</sup> "... the general will is always right and always tends to the public advantage; but it does not follow that the resolution of the people have always the same rectitude." Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, trans. by Henry J. Tozer, ed. by Lester G. Crocker (New York: Washington Square Press, Inc., 1967), 30.

<sup>37</sup> "The Task of Destroying the History of Ontology." Heidegger, Introduction to *Being and Time*, § 6, p. 41 ff.

<sup>38</sup> "The ethical, beyond vision and certitude, delineates the structure of exteriority as such. Morality is not a branch of philosophy, but first philosophy." Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. by Alphonso Lingis (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1979), 304.

of Aristotle is still only an entity, *das Seiende*, still only a substance or a thing. However, the being of genuine metaphysics is neither an entity, nor a substance, nor a thing: *Das Sein des Seienden ist nicht selbst ein Seiendes*.<sup>39</sup> With Heidegger, finally, we have arrived at the true metaphysics, the *ov* of the Greek *τι το ον*, the etymological root of the word 'ontology' which is usually taken to be identical with 'metaphysics,' which was still alive (says Heidegger) in Heraclitus and Parmenides but which started to dim and suffer forgetting in Plato and Aristotle; thereafter the road to the metaphysical oblivion, the forgetfulness of being, became decisive for all of human history which became dominated by the West.<sup>40</sup> On the positive side, this led to the multiplication of disciplines and the growth of the sciences which have brought about the theoretical and technological advances we are now witnessing globally, changes never yet known in history. The metaphysics of the first beginning, which Heidegger boldly denounced to be still a physics, has borne incredible fruit in terms of science and technology, creating endless possibilities not excluding unfortunately the march of humanity toward its own self-annihilation. To avoid this, there arises the need to go beyond the first beginning; that paradigm shift is a crucial moment, without which one gets stuck at best in modernity, at worse in a medieval consciousness steeped in that rationalism whose best shape is a type of intellectual erudition which does not necessarily equate with moral righteousness. Proof: one can be so smart and yet so corrupt. This cannot be the case with the truly postmodern human after it has gone through the explosion of all the categories and habits of thought, barriers which prevent one's coming face to face with the Other as an authentic ontological experience.

Postmodernity is the true goal of the ancients who have been deflected from their purpose by the ineluctable emphasis on reason which occupied humanity for at least the next two millennia. Having reached the limits of that preoccupation, we are finally able now to connect with the original thinking exemplified by Heraclitus and Parmenides and recover from the ensuing forgetfulness of being. Postmodernity is metaphysical and ontological in this original sense; we are now laying the foundation of the new beginning whose mark is authenticity, that is, fidelity to that which Kant rather formally refers to as the 'groundwork,' equivalent to Heidegger's thinking *vom Ereignis*.<sup>41</sup> It took more than two thousand years of earnest and ceaseless reflection before we arrived at this new beginning we now call postmodernity. The Catholic Church formally joined it when Pope John XXIII convoked the Second Vatican Council in 1962, and the Philippines followed

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<sup>39</sup> "The Being of entities 'is' not itself an entity." Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 26.

<sup>40</sup> "This question (of Being) has today been forgotten." *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>41</sup> Appropriately chosen are the titles of the books of Kant and Heidegger, namely: *Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals* and *Contributions to Philosophy (vom Ereignis)*.

suit in 1986 with the struggle and eventual victory of the People Power during the EDSA Revolution. In both instances, the work could not have been a purely rational work. No one could have conjectured that an aged, rather conservative pontiff would be God's instrument of a radical movement in the Church, nor could anyone have guessed that the outcome of the political turmoil over a raging 'social volcano' such as what observers were predicting for the Philippines would be a bloodless four-day uprising of the people spontaneously gathered along a major thoroughfare of Manila. Those were irreversible events, our entry into postmodernity, a step which we can no longer unmake, a point of no return.

And now you ask me—*Quo vadis?* Where are we going? The question smacks of anxious concern; it smells of uncertainty. Is postmodernity a mistake? Could history be wrong? Hegel speaks of the cunning of reason;<sup>42</sup> what reason is he talking about? He cannot have meant the reason of any one rational animal, does he? Surely there are historical individuals, but even they have to be sacrificed in the slaughter-bench of history;<sup>43</sup> they cannot possibly have lasted for ever. The cunning of reason survives them. Perhaps Pierre Teilhard de Chardin could somehow help us here. He speaks of a center in each individual thing, the "within" whose destiny is to reveal itself ever more clearly in the process of evolution.<sup>44</sup> It has taken eons to reach this far and we might say that we have already a glimmer of that center whose fullness, however, has not yet come. Could it be that Hegel's cunning of reason belongs to that center of which Teilhard speaks? It is tempting to do as Teilhard, the Jesuit priest, actually did—identify that center as the Christ in all of us, so that in the end we might all be gone but only to give way to the emergence of the Cosmic Christ.<sup>45</sup> Not everyone, however, will be ready to take that easy leap. To the Taoists, for instance, it could be the Uncarved Block, the nameless one.<sup>46</sup> Perhaps, after all, it is not all a shameful thing that, as Pope John Paul II said, the Buddhists are atheists; they have no God. We

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<sup>42</sup> "Reason governs the world, and has consequently governed its history." G.W.F. Hegel, *Philosophy of History*, trans. by J. Sibree (New York: Dover Publications, 1956), 25.

<sup>43</sup> "History (is) the slaughter-bench at which the happiness of peoples, the wisdom of States, and the virtue of individuals have been victimized ...." *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>44</sup> "... co-extensive with their Without, there is a Within to things." Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *The Phenomenon of Man*, trans. by Bernard Wall (New York: Harper & Row Perennial Library, 1975), 56.

<sup>45</sup> "Only one reality seems to survive and be capable of succeeding and spanning the infinitesimal and the immense: energy—that floating, universal entity from which all emerges and into which all falls back as into an ocean; energy, the new spirit; the new god. So, at the world's Omega, as at its Alpha, lies the Impersonal." *Ibid.*, 258.

<sup>46</sup> "The Tao (Way) that can be told of is not the eternal Tao; The name that can be named is not the eternal name. The Nameless is the origin of Heaven and earth ...." Lao Tzu, *Tao Te Ching*, in *a Source Book in Chinese Philosophy*, trans. by Wing-Tsit Chan (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1973), 1, p. 139.

are all familiar with how Nietzsche declared that God is dead, and that we have in fact killed him; we are his murderers.<sup>47</sup> It is good to recall that those who constitute the so-called God-is-Dead Movement are mostly theologians,<sup>48</sup> not atheists at all but men and women at a season that has come of age and who are able to take the step beyond—beyond the God of our childhood and, in moral terms, beyond our tables of good and evil.<sup>49</sup>

With the postmodern shift of paradigm comes the end of Western domination. The new beginning is an equalizer of cultures, both East and West. The rediscovery of the East has made everyone conscious of the great civilizations much more ancient than Greece, especially (in philosophy) India and China. Now we beg the indulgence of the great Martin Heidegger and correct him somehow, giving to the East the honor of the first beginning, to Greece the second beginning and to the postmodern synthesis of both East and West the third beginning. Today's catchwords include terms like global, integral, inclusive, interconnectivity, dialogue, borderless, linkage, and similar others. Concepts that used to stand opposed to each other melt in a synthesis for which oftentimes we find no ready tags available. It still amazes us how, for example, Heidegger could tell us that, if we listen attentively, Parmenides who says that "All is Being" and Heraclitus who says that "All is Becoming" are actually saying the same thing.<sup>50</sup> The *docta ignorantia* or learned ignorance of Nicholas of Cusa, reputedly the first modern thinker,<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> "God is dead!" is found in at least two works of Friedrich Nietzsche, Prologue to *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (England: Penguin Books, 1961), 41; and "The Madman," in *Joyful Wisdom*, trans. by Thomas Common (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing, 1960), 167-169.

<sup>48</sup> Some notable ones here picked at random are the following: Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, trans. by Reginald Fuller and rev. by Frank Clarke and others (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1967); Harvey Cox, *The Secular City* (England: Penguin Books, 1968); Leslie Dewart, *The Future of Belief: Theism in A World Come of Age* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1968); John A.T. Robinson, *Honest to God* (London: SCM Press, 1969); and Gabriel Vahanian, *The Death of God: The Culture of Our Post-Christian Era* (New York: George Braziller, 1967).

<sup>49</sup> See Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*, trans. by Walter Kaufmann (New York: Random House Vintage Books, 1966).

<sup>50</sup> "The first primordial thinker was named Anaximander. The two others, the only others besides Anaximander, were Parmenides and Heraclitus ... Subsequent generations become more and more alienated from the early the early thinking." Martin Heidegger, *Parmenides*, trans. by André Schuwer and Richard Rojcewicz (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), 2. "Anaximander, Parmenides, and Heraclitus are the only primordial thinkers ... They are primordial thinkers because they think the beginning. The beginning is what is thought in their thinking ... Plato and Aristotle and subsequent thinkers have thought far 'more,' have traversed more regions and strata of thinking, and have questioned out of a richer knowledge of things and man. And yet all these thinkers think 'less' than the primordial thinkers." *Ibid.*, 7-8.

<sup>51</sup> "Cusanus the first modern thinker. His first step consists in asking not about God, but about the possibility of knowledge about God." Ernst Cassirer, *The Individual and the Cosmos in Renaissance Philosophy*, trans. by Mario Domandi (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1963), 10.

is a contradiction in terms and would not have made sense if we did not recall that, in fact, Socrates was dubbed by the oracle of Delphi as the wisest of men precisely because, of all men, it was only he who knew that he did not know.<sup>52</sup> The *Tao Te Ching* tells us that he who knows does not know, and he who thinks he does not know knows.<sup>53</sup> This is the Hindu *neti, neti* (not this, not that),<sup>54</sup> which receives a Western garb when Kant concludes his critique with the declaration that all our knowledge is only of phenomena or appearances, never of the noumenon or the thing in itself.<sup>55</sup>

The same Kant has exploded the myth of the separation of subject and object; there is, in fact, no objectivity without subjectivity and no subjectivity without objectivity, an epistemological condition which was sealed by Husserl's adoption of the scholastic theory of intentionality according to which consciousness is always a consciousness of something (*Bewusstsein von Etwas*).<sup>56</sup> "No matter how deeply we look into things," says Kant, "we can never intuit the thing in itself, only the thing as it appears to us."<sup>57</sup> That spells out the so-called Copernican revolution that makes all knowledge subject to the *a priori* forms. No matter how hard we try, there is no way we can know the thing in itself; the proud name of ontology, declares the magisterial Kant, has to go. Descartes's first principle is still correct: "In order to examine into the truth, it is necessary once in one's life to doubt of all things so far as possible."<sup>58</sup> Husserl himself confesses to being a child of

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<sup>52</sup> "I shall call as witness to my wisdom, such as it is, the god at Delphi." Plato, *Socrates' Defense (Apology)*, trans. by Hugh Tredennick, in *The Collected Dialogues of Plato*, ed. by Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1973), 20e. The oracle of Delphi is reputed to have said, "The wisest of you men is he who has realized, like Socrates, that in respect of wisdom he is really worthless" (*ibid.*, 23b).

<sup>53</sup> "To know that you do not know is the best." Lao Tzu, *Tao Te Ching*, 71, p. 172.

<sup>54</sup> "The empirical and negative description of the Absolute by means of *neti, neti* (not this, not this) or 'the neither-nor' necessarily presupposes the affirmation of the Absolute as all-Comprehensive and culminates in the transcendental Absolute which goes beyond both negation and affirmation. The *neti, neti* negates all descriptions about the Brahman, but not the Brahman itself." Sharma, *Indian Philosophy*, 17. Rather, the most preferred interpretation should be the most radical negation possible, possibly the one of Shankara. See also my "Links Between East and West in the Philosophies of Shankara and Kant" (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Santo Tomas, Manila, 1978).

<sup>55</sup> "Even if we could see to the very bottom of a phenomenon, it would remain for ever altogether different from the knowledge of the thing by itself." Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A44=B61. "Its principles are principles for the exhibition of phenomena only; and the proud name of Ontology, which presumes to supply in a systematic form different kinds of synthetical knowledge a priori of things by themselves (for instance the principle of causality), must be replaced by the more modest name of a mere Analytic of the pure understanding." *Ibid.*, A247=B303.

<sup>56</sup> "It belongs as a general feature to the essence of every actual *cogito* to be a consciousness of something." Husserl, *Ideas*, § 36.

<sup>57</sup> Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A44=B61.

<sup>58</sup> Descartes, *Principles of Philosophy*, 219.

Cartesianism, setting aside all prejudices in order to attain the presuppositionless cogito of Descartes.<sup>59</sup> On the surface, this would look like an intellectual stance ably contradicted by Heidegger who professes to be incapable of such presuppositionlessness; the *Verstehen*, he says, cannot possibly be presuppositionless, for no matter how hard we try we cannot completely cleanse our consciousness with its *Vorhabe*, *Vorgriff*, and *Vorsicht*.<sup>60</sup> This was then taken up by Hans-Georg Gadamer who confirmed Heidegger's stance against the myth of presuppositionlessness, saying instead that all is a matter not of doing away with presuppositions but of acquiring the right or correct prejudices<sup>61</sup> through *Bildung*, *sensus communis*, *judicium*, and taste, which he labeled as the four guiding concepts of humanism.<sup>62</sup> When you reach this far in our understanding of the nature of knowledge, the amazing thing is that Husserl's goal for advocating presuppositionlessness through the *epoche* is actually more realistically attained through hard, persistent study or *Bildung*, so that in effect what seems like a contradiction between Husserl and Heidegger, upon attentive listening, is actually one and the same. Similar identities of seeming opposites are found in the famous *yin* and *yang* of Taoism and the equally well-known Vedanta statement that Atman and Brahman are one. While the principle of contradiction remains the highest principle of analytic or tautological statements, this can no longer be the principle that governs truth-statements or synthetic propositions. Heidegger makes a lot of Kant's suggestion that, although there are two stems of knowledge, sensibility and understanding, there is possibly a common, unknown root which, says Heidegger, Kant himself identifies as the imagination.<sup>63</sup> Creativity becomes an even more powerful source of knowledge than logic, or perhaps something like what Gilles Deleuze refers to as the logic of sense,<sup>64</sup> the center and source of truth in us which Heidegger variously calls *poiesis*, *aletheia*, *Ereignis*.

Presupposed is a transformed human reality—Heidegger's *Dasein*, Nietzsche's *Übermensch*, Confucius' man of *jen*, the evolved humanity which

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<sup>59</sup> "... phenomenology might almost be called a new, a twentieth century, Cartesianism." Husserl, *The Paris Lectures*, 3. "Accordingly one might almost call transcendental phenomenology a neo-Cartesianism ...." *Cartesian Meditations*, 1.

<sup>60</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 191.

<sup>61</sup> "If we want to do justice to man's finite, historical mode of being, it is necessary to fundamentally rehabilitate the concept of prejudice and acknowledge the fact that there are legitimate prejudices." Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. by Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (New York: Continuum, 1998), 277.

<sup>62</sup> On the Guiding Concepts of Humanism, see *ibid.*, 9-42.

<sup>63</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, trans. by James S. Churchill (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1965), 41. Heidegger cites Kant in A15=B29 and A835=B863.

<sup>64</sup> See Gilles Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, trans. by Mark Lester (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990).

is more than just a rational animal, Plato's human type who has transcended the culture of the cave and explored the upperworld until he or she has seen the Sun which is the Good. Thus, he or she is a species of an ethical humanity, not patterned after Machiavelli's prince who is both a lion and a fox but one molded after Rousseau's general will, Kant's good will and Levinas's subjectivity that is in touch with Infinity rather than Totality, which is *otherwise than being*. This is the man or woman of postmodernity, beyond good and evil because gripped at all times by that source of authenticity in us which makes us truly free and creative like a genius, hero, or saint. Compassion is the heart of a postmodern man or woman, coming as he or she is from what Confucius calls the Great Learning after a long and tedious work of formation similar to that phenomenology traversed by Hegel's *Geist* or Plato's educated human, a mind so profoundly vast that it is an embodiment of what Pope Francis calls integral ecology.<sup>65</sup> Such a human type cannot be a source of terror, corruption or any form of violence, oppression and injustice, who does not only know the theory of good but also lives it. This is the solution to all our earthly woes, but for now it is still only an ideal type, a humanity already there but still in the making, like God's Kingdom which is already there but not yet.

Why can't we yet experience the Kingdom of God? Because we have not yet been completely transformed. "Repent! The Kingdom of God is at hand!" goes the message of Jesus and John the Baptist.<sup>66</sup> The Kingdom is at hand, it is here amidst us, but if we have yet failed to experience it the reason is not far to seek—we have not yet repented, that is, we have not yet transfigured ourselves, our conversion has not taken place yet, we have not yet creatively evolved into that consummated species of the *élan vital* as intimated by Henri Bergson.<sup>67</sup> This ideal in the making is a concrete ideal, not an intellectual abstract; it requires a paradigm shift.

Postmodernity is that paradigm shift, that *metanoia* required before we are able to see the Kingdom; it is, as Nietzsche puts it, the meaning of the earth.<sup>68</sup> But postmodernity is not a ready-made product for the asking; rather, it continues to be a task, both the offshoot of hard work and, once undertaken, remains to be an ongoing task, always—like Husserl's phenomenology—a new beginning. What's wrong with it? Nothing, except that while it requires individual effort, the output is meant to be collective—social, cultural,

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<sup>65</sup> See Francis, *Laudato si'* (Vatican City: Vatican Press, 2015).

<sup>66</sup> "Repent, for the Kingdom of God is at hand!" (Mt. 3:2). "The Kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel!" (Mk. 1:15).

<sup>67</sup> Henri Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, trans. by Arthur Mitchell (New York: The Modern Library, 1944).

<sup>68</sup> "The Superman is the meaning of the earth. Let your will say: The Superman *shall be* the meaning of the earth!" Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 42.

historical. Postmodernity is global and is thus not confined to any nationality. Postmodernism is, as we've stressed in an earlier work, not an *ism* in the sense that empiricism, rationalism, communism, legalism, nationalism, Thomism and others are *isms*. Jean-François Lyotard's assessment of postmodernity as a rejection of metanarratives is a faithful description of our time.<sup>69</sup> Dionisio Miranda's glocalization, which takes local and global simultaneously, fits the bill. The era is one of dialogical inclusiveness, making the playing field open to all, big and small alike, albeit the qualifications are tough, and standards are high. Excellence is a badge to wear and mastery of the craft is presupposed. What are the chances that Filipinos will play well? No doubt they can and should. It helps if one is coming from a society one can justifiably be proud of, something I could not claim for myself when I first went to Europe about forty years ago. When I confessed publicly that "As a Filipino, I had nothing to be proud of," I was then jeered, only to be vindicated when most everybody started saying the same thing in increasingly growing voices during the Martial Law years. Our spirit got its boost when, as a man, Filipinos flooded EDSA on those fateful four days of February in 1986 when, standing tall as a civilized nation, we drove the tyrant bloodlessly away after we had been cheated at what otherwise would have been our last chance at a peaceful change of government through a democratic election.<sup>70</sup> The dictator did not know the meaning of fair play and shamelessly abused its authority. Worse, human rights violations were committed with impunity, with plunder to boot that left our coffers dry. No wonder that even until today we continue to be wary of any threat of Martial Law, even as its appropriate use is unequivocally enshrined in the Philippine Constitution. The success, so far, of its implementation in the case of Marawi will hopefully alter somehow our misappreciation of this executive privilege, while we keep ourselves vigilant against its possible abuse. What is clearly working in all this is the invisible hand of People Power, which I would like to equate with God's power since *vox populi, vox Dei*, the voice of the people is the voice of God. The victory at EDSA is the people's victory, which is simultaneously God's victory. No less than Hegel describes the history of the world as "the true *Theodicæa*, the justification of God in History. Only *this* insight can reconcile Spirit with the History of the World—viz., that what has happened, and is happening every day, is not only not 'without God,' but is essentially His Work."<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. by Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993).

<sup>70</sup> See Monina Allarey Mercado, ed., *People Power: The Greatest Democracy Ever Told, An Eyewitness History* (Manila: The James B. Reuter, S.J., Foundation, 1986). See also *Bayan Ko! Images of the Philippine Revolt* (Hong Kong: Project 28 Days, Ltd., 1986).

<sup>71</sup> "Our mode of treating the subject (of history) is a *Theodicæa*—a justification of the ways of God ...." Hegel, *Philosophy of History*, 15. "... the History of the World ... is the true



And what about the current president, Rodrigo Duterte? Chances are that the killings his enemies attribute to him might actually be morally justifiable. Almost overnight the concepts of good and bad might have transvalued themselves and what used to be the moral table of the “civil society” has already turned stale and outdated. The times, I think, demand that we keep our minds open and dare to rethink and review our revered values. Even though I myself did not vote for this president, there is something instructive in the fact that our people has unequivocally, perhaps even unerringly, given him an overwhelming mandate. I have been listening to him since his victory at the polls and I see no reason why I should join the chorus of those against him; in fact, the probability is high that he is precisely the man we need for our time, the one who could turn the tide of corruption, criminality and drug addiction in our country. He does seem to me to be honestly imbued with love of country and regard for the common good, especially the youth of the land and the next generation of Filipinos. I could, of course, be wrong, but I’m praying to God that my political perception is accurate so that there can be reason for optimism in the future of our country. Certainly it would be unfair to lay at his door all the blame for the predicament of our country today, including the prevalence of poverty, corruption, and criminality which has built up through administration after administration of corrupt and incompetent politicians whose *raison d’être* seems to be more sophistry than philosophic, typical of big business rather than public service.

No wonder Rodrigo “Digong” Duterte, armed only with the people’s support, is finding it an arduous task maneuvering over loads and loads of the social, political and economic problems we have inherited from our relatively short past, not to mention the damaged values left by centuries of colonization and misrule. Our only consolation, *consuelo de bobo* as it is called, is the fact that ours is a young country, given that the First Filipino is one represented by Dr. Jose Rizal (1861-1896).<sup>72</sup> That makes us just over a century old, born at a time when Europe was already way past modernity and giving way to the spirit of postmodernity through the likes of Marx and the young socialists. Before Rizal, during much of the colonial period, there were no Filipinos, only isolated inhabitants of scattered islands having little to do with each other. Indeed, the very name Filipino and the country this person occupied, now called the Philippines, smack of colonial influence, a heritage from the days of King Philip II of Spain. As Europe was then already reaping the fruit of the Enlightenment, our colonizers were making sure that these islands under their rule were going through the feudalism characteristic of

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*Theodicæa*—the justification of God in History—viz., that what has happened, and is happening every day, is not only not ‘without God,’ but is essentially His Work.” *Ibid.*, 457.

<sup>72</sup> Leon Ma. Guerrero, *The First Filipino* (Manila: Guerrero Publishing, 2010).

the Medieval, so-called Dark Ages. The bright note, if at all there was such a bright note, consisted in these otherwise disconnected islands having been united by common *conquistadores* which accounted for the unity that was much needed in the struggle against a common enemy. That unity is the source of the emergence of our nation, the Filipino nation, which was not even a dream before Magellan landed on our shore presumably in 1521. When, after more than three centuries of colonial rule, the Spaniards left us, we were already a nation; we already called ourselves Filipinos when the Americans occupied us at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. When, finally, we gained our political independence from all foreign domination, we were nonetheless certified “little Brown Americans,” albeit denied of legitimate American citizenship.

“Better to be run like hell by Filipinos than to be run like heaven by the Americans,” President Quezon is reputed to have once said of our country. One might now wonder whether that was not meant to be a prophecy, for indeed what could be said of the long years of local leadership that tied us more and more tightly to the U.S. while creating a damaged culture that culminated in the plunder of the Marcos years, entrenching the mafia of elitism and corruption from which we are still struggling to liberate ourselves today? Poverty is endemic for which a semblance of wealth and urban culture provides the proverbial icing on the cake. The supposedly welcome gospel of economic progress achieved by President Benigno “Noynoy” Aquino’s administration failed to trickle down to the masses who remained mercilessly poor, in fact the brunt of the drug industry as it has turned out today. We continue to tirelessly complain of the worsening traffic situation in our cities, another concern that seems only a miracle could solve. No wonder you ask, “Filipino postmodernity: *Quo vadis?*”

In fact, postmodernity has come by way of a historical remedy to our otherwise hopeless global condition. We need a paradigm shift, a new beginning, after we have reached and seen the limits of the first beginning which took place in Greece. Presuming man to be a rational animal, its goal has been the perfection of reason, which became translated into knowledge and science as the ground for technological innovation. The whole two millennia of this classical paradigm that resulted in science and technology has assuredly changed the face of the earth, a product of intellectual thinking. Kant’s critique of pure reason sums up the relentless reflection that has produced, on the one hand, the theology of the Church and, on the other hand, the conceptual foundations of all the disciplines, scientific as well as humanistic. We came to recognize their limits when, speculatively, we found ourselves inevitably embroiled in what Kant describes as “the arena of

endless controversies.”<sup>73</sup> This crisis in our theoretical paradigm is most possibly the source too of many of the problems we are facing in our daily life. As observed by Santiago Sia, “a certain mindset has indeed influenced the outlook of those who have been responsible for the dire global situation.”<sup>74</sup> The growing evidence of low ethical standards and values, he says, have had devastating consequences.<sup>75</sup> Heidegger read this human predicament as a long history of the forgetfulness of being, the original object of the intellectual quest, a forgetfulness which has produced a series of metaphysical ideas, all of which needs to be destroyed. This end of metaphysics is, so far as Heidegger is concerned, in the service of the recovery of the real metaphysics, a new ontological groundwork that should underlie all our future thought, that thinking which he describes as coming not so much from reason as *vom Ereignis*. Levinas, coming from the same source, explodes all metaphysics and replaces it with ethics as the first philosophy. These two, metaphysics and ethics, used to be two separate disciplines in the classical paradigm, itself the cause of the split between being and doing, between knowledge and life, between theory and practice. Such artifice has seen its limits, for example, in the Machiavellian formula of “the end justifies the means.”

For there is such a difference between the way men live and the way they ought to live, that anybody who abandons what is for what ought to be will learn something will ruin rather than preserve him, because anyone who determines to act in all circumstances the part of a good man must come to ruin among so many who are not good. Hence, if a prince wishes to maintain himself, he must learn how to be not good, and to use that ability or not as is required.<sup>76</sup>

Such duplicity is characteristic, biblically, of hypocrisy and, existentially, of inauthenticity, possible in the length and breadth of the first beginning but no longer applicable in postmodernity. The new paradigm, which Heidegger describes as thinking *vom Ereignis*, defies the traditional split between thought and action, between the intellect and the will, and in effect fuses them, metaphysics and ethics, such that what one knows and how one lives

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<sup>73</sup> Kant, Preface to the First Edition of *Critique of Pure Reason*, Aviii.

<sup>74</sup> Santiago Sia, *Society in its Challenges: Philosophical Considerations of Living in Society* (UK: Cambridge Scholars, 2015), 194.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 191.

<sup>76</sup> Niccolo Machiavelli, *The Prince*, trans. by Allan H. Gilbert (U.S.A.: Hendricks House Inc., 1964), Chapter 15, p. 141.

are able to be a perfect mirror of each other and there emerges a complete conjunction of body and mind, of *yin* and *yang*.

We have just crossed the border, emerged from the transition age, and entered postmodernity. It is good at this point to listen to Hegel:

... our epoch is a birth-time, and a period of transition. The spirit of man has broken with the old order of things hitherto prevailing, and with the old ways of thinking, and is in the mind to let them all sink into the depths of the past and to set about its own transformation. It is indeed never at rest, but carried along the stream of progress ever onward. But it is here as in the case of the birth of a child; after a long period of nutrition in silence, the continuity of the gradual growth in size, of quantitative change, is suddenly cut short by the first breath drawn—there is a break in the process, a qualitative change—and the child is born.<sup>77</sup>

But, Hegel continues, it is important to bear in mind that the birth of the child is just the beginning of the person's life story. "A building is not finished when its foundation is laid," he says, "When we want to see an oak with all its vigour of trunk, its spreading branches, and mass of foliage, we are not satisfied to be shown an acorn instead."<sup>78</sup> In other words, having just taken the leap into postmodernity, we should keep in mind the wealth of possibilities that lie in the future but at the same time not lose our patience and rush precipitately the fulfillment of things.

The story of the man from Sung in *Mencius* carries a relevant message for us in this regard. Let us listen to this story by way of conclusion:

There was a man from Sung who pulled at his rice plants because he was worried about their failure to grow. Having done so, he went on his way home, not realizing what he had done. "I am worn out today," said he to his family, "I have been helping the rice plants to grow." His son rushed out to take a look and there the plants were, all shriveled up.<sup>79</sup>

Hence, the advice of Mencius: "You must not be like the man from Sung."

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<sup>77</sup> Hegel, *Philosophy of History*, 75.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>79</sup> Mencius, *The Book of Mencius*, trans. by D.C. Lau (England: Penguin Books, 1970), Book II, Part A, 78.

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