

Towards an Experimental Turn in Filipino Philosophy: A New Way Forward

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Abstract: The primary objective of this paper is to find out whether there is any possibility of coming up with a philosophy that we can call Filipino. Inspired by the works of Leonardo Mercado, I suggest an exciting new area of philosophy that can get us to an answer: experimental philosophy. Secondly, I shall bridge the connection between experimental philosophy and the search for Filipino philosophy. More specifically, I shall provide an answer as to how experimental philosophy can be expected to lead to a Filipino philosophy. Then, I shall suggest a novel way in how to do experimental Filipino philosophy, that is, experimental philosophy in the service of discovering a Filipino philosophy, and it is by way of traditional empirical methods in anthropology, such as interviews and focus group discussions. Finally, I introduce the charge of limited applicability inspired by Roland Theuas Pada and respond to the objection. I conclude by inviting Filipino philosophers to integrate experimental philosophy in their search for a Filipino philosophy.

Keywords: Mercado, Pada, Filipino philosophy, experimental philosophy

Introduction

Do we need another discussion of Filipino philosophy? It seems that the time for debates has long been exhausted with no sign of being settled. While there are a few pioneers in the search for a genuine Filipino philosophy, many current Filipino philosophers seem content with just doing philosophy without the designation of “Filipino” before it. When asked whether he was trying to build a Filipino philosophy, Roque Ferriols, a prominent Filipino philosopher and metaphysician, answered a resolute no. He said:

No one can create a Filipino or anything else philosophy except by accident. Chuang Tzu did not try to develop a Chinese philosophy. He simply awoke to the Way within him and around him, tried to awake even more, knew that what he lived could not be put into words—when all that can be said has been said, the most important thing cannot be said—yet felt compelled to say all that he could say. Hundreds of years later what he said still lives and is called Chinese philosophy. He is surprised. It is the Way that matters to him, not the label.¹

That there cannot be a Filipino philosophy (except by accident) is an assumption that I suspect continues to pervade the minds of many Filipino philosophers. This assumption is not totally unwarranted. For one, the label of Filipino philosophy has a relativistic ring to it. If one is attempting to construct a grand metaphysics, it seems ill-advised to call it Filipino metaphysics as if it is a view of reality that can only apply to Filipinos. If one is trying to advance a view of reality that is rationally convincing, one must make sure that it is a view that should appeal to people from all walks of life, Filipinos or otherwise. Any discovery of a Filipino philosophy seems too narrow in scope and too restrictive to be universally appealing.

Thus, despite some attempts to uncover a Filipino philosophy, philosophy in the Philippines is largely done in a way that follows the typical standard, which is generally a Western one. While many Filipino philosophers may insist that they are simply doing philosophy, they cannot deny that much of the assumptions, questions, and arguments with which they interact in their thinking and works bear the influence of Western thinking. Of course, it should not be denied that Western philosophy has gifted us with concepts, principles, and arguments that can be expected to command universal assent insofar as one possesses reason.² However, should it be correctly assumed that it is mostly the West which can claim the authority to command what should count as philosophy? By contrast, is it not possible by design, not by accident, as Ferriols assumes, to uncover a truly genuine Filipino philosophy, regardless of whether it is universally

¹ Roque J. Ferriols, "A Memoir of Six Years," in *Philippine Studies*, 22 (1974), 339.

² An anonymous reviewer pointed out that the whole premise of philosophy is already Western to begin with and suggested different naming conventions in our intellectual discourse, much like what is done by the Indians and the Chinese. This suggestion is exactly what will make the use of experimental philosophy relevant and philosophically interesting (as will be argued shortly): the discovery of a new set of intuitions from the Filipino people may initiate novel naming conventions that are not totally held captive by Western ideas.

persuasive or not? In this paper, I plan to focus on the second question by attempting to answer it in the affirmative. It is inevitable, however, that whatever one answers in the second question will have ramifications in how one answers the first.

As I shall argue, a fruitful first step in this project is to make use of experimental philosophy. Sometimes called *x-phi*, experimental philosophy is a new movement in contemporary analytic philosophy that makes use of empirical methods, especially experimental methods in psychology, in order to illuminate philosophical questions. As Eugen Fischer and John Collins explain, “Experimental philosophers use empirical surveys and experiments to develop an understanding of philosophically relevant intuitions that helps us determine whether we should accept or reject them.”³ Two things are to be noted from this.

First is the element of empirical surveys and experiments. While many varying accounts have been advanced to delineate the meaning of experimental philosophy,⁴ experimental philosophers are united in the use of empirical methods in doing experimental philosophy. The methods commonly utilized are those of psychology, especially controlled experiments; although some have counted philosophically motivated ethnography as a method of experimental philosophy.⁵ This form of philosophy is sure to diverge from the common way of doing philosophy that is done from the armchair, that is, philosophy that makes use of *a priori* principles and intuitions in order to argue for or against a philosophical position. It is called armchair philosophy as such because it is done in the comfort of one’s armchair as it were with little need for a fieldwork or empirical grounding to one’s argumentation. This particular description of philosophy is not meant to be disparaging but is simply a statement of a dominant practice within the discipline. A well-known example of armchair philosophizing is the so-called analytic tradition in philosophy, especially as it is currently practiced in the Western philosophical arena.⁶ This tradition is known for making use of conceptual analysis, where a certain concept is

³ Eugen Fischer and John Collins, “Introduction,” in *Experimental Philosophy, Rationalism, and Naturalism: Rethinking Philosophical Method*, ed. by Eugen Fischer and John Collins (New York: Routledge, 2015), 4.

⁴ Joshua Knobe and Shaun Nichols, “An Experimental Philosophy Manifesto,” in *Experimental Philosophy*, Vol. 1, ed. by Joshua Knobe and Shaun Nichols (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 3–14; David Rose and David Anks, “In Defense of a Broad Conception of Experimental Philosophy,” in *Metaphilosophy*, 44 (2013), 512–532; Joshua Alexander, *Experimental Philosophy: An Introduction* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2012).

⁵ Stephen Stich and Kevin P. Tobia, “Experimental Philosophy and the Philosophical Tradition,” in *A Companion to Experimental Philosophy*, ed. by Justin Sytsma and Wesley Buckwalter (Oxford: Blackwell, 2016), 5.

⁶ I thank one of the anonymous reviewers for asking me to provide this.

analyzed by identifying its necessary and sufficient conditions, and the conditions identified will then be applied to hypothetical scenarios to see whether they satisfy what is supposed to be the true meaning of the concept. Also, this tradition is known for making use of contemporary technical tools, such as symbolic logic and probability theory, especially as it is applied in rigorous argumentation.

Second important element is the role of intuition in philosophizing, and how experimental philosophy serves to examine the extent to which philosophical intuitions track truth. Before experimental philosophy, it is commonly assumed that intuitions in philosophy are good indicators of philosophical truths or at least a particular theory's overall (im)plausibility, especially if those of the philosopher's agree with those of the layman's. Stephen Stich and Kevin Tobia describes this process well:

A philosopher describes a situation, sometimes real but more often imaginary, and asks whether some of the people or objects or events in the situation described have some philosophically interesting property or relation When things go well, both the philosopher and her audience will agree on an answer, with little or no conscious reflection, and they will take the answer to be *obvious*. The answer will then be used as evidence for or against some philosophical thesis. The mental states that underlie episodes of this sort are paradigm cases of philosophical intuitions.⁷

The imaginary situation that is mentioned above refers to so-called thought-experiments in philosophy, which seeks to elicit the desired intuitions from others in order to argue for or against a particular philosophical view. This has been known as the "Method of Cases."⁸ The role of intuition is highlighted when one looks at the frequency by which thought experiments are used throughout the history of philosophy and among the various branches of philosophy.⁹ Stich and Tobia, for instance, have collected

⁷ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁸ Elizabeth O'Neill and Edouard Machery, "Experimental Philosophy: What is it Good For?" in *Current Controversies in Experimental Philosophy*, ed. by Edouard Machery (New York: Routledge, 2014), xiii; Max Deutsch, "Gettier's Method," in *Advances in Experimental Philosophy and Philosophical Methodology*, ed. by Jennifer Nado (New York: Bloomsbury, 2016), 69; Edouard Machery, "The Illusion of Expertise," in *Experimental Philosophy, Rationalism, and Naturalism: Rethinking Philosophical Method*, ed. by Eugen Fischer and John Collins (New York: Routledge, 2015), 189–193.

⁹ Michael T. Stuart, Yiftach Fehige, and James Robert Brown, *The Routledge Companion to Thought Experiments* (New York: Routledge, 2018).

an impressive, albeit brief, catalog of thought experiments in contemporary analytic philosophy.¹⁰

In order to delve deeply into how essential intuitions are in the project of experimental philosophy, it is necessary that we look into the two programs of experimental philosophy. The so-called *negative program* aims to explore how reliable intuitions are in tracking truth. For most of contemporary analytic philosophy, the assumption has been that the contents of philosophical intuitions are probably true. Connected to this is the assumption that the intuitions of professional philosophers are universally shared across different cultures and demographics. However, there are empirical evidences that seem to undermine both these assumptions. Experimental studies have shown that many of the commonly held intuitions that underwrite certain philosophical views are subject to influences that are irrelevant to their truth. A critic of experimental philosophy, Max Deutsch recognizes the alleged success of the negative program in discovering what he calls the “truth-irrelevant variability in philosophical intuitions.”¹¹ Related to that, intuitions have been found to vary when one factors in gender,¹² personality,¹³ and language.¹⁴ With the advent of these empirical discoveries, it is no longer obvious to claim that philosophical intuitions appealed to by philosophers are universally shared and are likely to be true. And if these empirical studies are indeed successful in showing that intuitions are based on irrelevant factors, experimental philosophy in the guise of its negative program poses a great challenge to the traditional way of doing philosophy that makes use of intuitions in determining the truth about philosophical issues and concepts.¹⁵

One might get the idea that x-phi aims to undermine the use of intuition *per se*, but this is a misunderstanding. Experimental philosophers do

¹⁰ Stich and Tobia, “Experimental Philosophy and the Philosophical Tradition,” 7.

¹¹ Max Deutsch, *The Myth of the Intuitive: Experimental Philosophy and Philosophical Method* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2015), 17.

¹² Wesley Buckwalter and Stephen Stich, “Gender and Philosophical Intuition,” in *Experimental Philosophy*, Vol. 2, ed. by Joshua Knobe and Shaun Nichols (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

¹³ Adam Feltz and Edward T. Cokely, “Do Judgments about Freedom and Responsibility Depend on Who You Are? Personality Differences in Intuitions about Compatibilism and Incompatibilism,” in *Consciousness and Cognition*, 18:1 (2009), 342–350.

¹⁴ Albert Costa, Alice Foucart, Sayuri Hayakawa, Melina Aparici, Jose Apestequia, Joy Heafner, and Boaz Keysar, “Your Morals Depend on Language,” in *PLoS ONE*, 9:4 (2014), e94842; Edouard Machery, Christopher Y. Olivola, and Molly De Blanc, “Linguistic and Metalinguistic Intuitions in the Philosophy of Language,” in *Analysis*, 69 (2009), 689–694.

¹⁵ There have been serious doubts, however, on how successful these empirical discoveries are in showing what they purport to show. See for example Kaija Mortensen and Jennifer Nagel, “Armchair-Friendly Experimental Philosophy,” in *A Companion to Experimental Philosophy*, ed. by Justin Sytsma and Wesley Buckwalter (Oxford: Blackwell, 2016), 58–60.

not intend on discarding intuition for good and replace it solely with controlled experiments and empirical surveys. Rather, one of their major aims in line with the negative program is the identification of philosophically insignificant differences that influence what intuitions will be appealed at on any given time. As experimental philosopher Jonathan Weinberg clarifies, it is a misconstrual to view the negative program of x-phi as an assault on intuitions, full stop. Rather, “the target of the negative program has always been an armchair-based intuitive methodology and not intuitions *tout court*.”¹⁶

What is commonly assumed in the discussion is that such factors as personality, gender, and language seem to endanger the truth-tracking capacity that philosophers have long attributed to intuition since these factors seem irrelevant to the truth of a philosophical view. In their manifesto, pioneering experimental philosophers Joshua Knobe and Shaun Nichols have this to say about such discovery: “If I find out that my philosophical intuitions are a product of my cultural upbringing, then, since it’s in some sense an accident that I had the cultural upbringing that I did, I am forced to wonder whether my intuitions are superior at tracking the nature of the world, the mind, and the good.”¹⁷ The same goes with gender or any other external factors: If I discover that my intuitive attractions to a particular moral theory are largely due to its “masculine” elements (and I am a male), then I have reason to suspend my belief that the theory is true.

While the negative program of x-phi is clear in its critical assessments of philosophical intuitions, especially in their supposed role of supporting philosophical views, x-phi also has its *positive program*. This side of x-phi aims to explore intuitions experimentally in order to improve conceptual analysis, which is a major defining project for contemporary analytic philosophy. A major goal of the positive program is to avoid philosophical echo-chambers in which professional philosophers rely on their and their colleagues’ intuitions that may have been rooted in theoretical commitments absent in the intuitions of non-philosophers. Thus, the folk intuitions of non-philosophers are taken into account in order to generate discoveries that may be relevant in illuminating philosophical issues and problems. An example is in order.¹⁸ In a recent study, an interdisciplinary team composed of two psychologists, a professional counselor, a philosopher, and a theologian investigated a number of Christians who have had cancer experience, and how they interpreted such experience as it relates to their belief in God. While

¹⁶ Jonathan M. Weinberg, “Going Positive by Going Negative: On Keeping X-Phi Relevant and Dangerous,” in *A Companion to Experimental Philosophy*, ed. by Justin Sytsma and Wesley Buckwalter (Oxford: Blackwell, 2016), 72.

¹⁷ Knobe and Nichols, “An Experimental Philosophy Manifesto,” 11.

¹⁸ I thank one of the anonymous reviewers for asking me to provide this.

there are a good number of interesting points from the study, one intriguing result came out, which is that the research participants intuit a position towards their experience of evil that is not well-known in the literature on theodicy, and it is the idea of trusting God in mystery.¹⁹ This idea is a ripe topic for further defense and study, and a discovery such as this is a fruit of the positive program of experimental philosophy.

With these two programs in mind, let us now turn to the project and intent of Leonardo Mercado in discovering Filipino philosophy and how such a project can be assisted by experimental philosophy as a worthwhile intellectual endeavor.

Experimental Philosophy in the Service of Filipino Philosophy

When Filipino philosopher Leonardo Mercado first came into the scene with his major work titled *Elements of Filipino Philosophy*, he recalled that it was “met with skepticism.”²⁰ This doubt has been re-echoed by many scholars who are familiar with Mercado’s work. While Emerita Quito commended Mercado for his pioneering attempt to establish a Filipino philosophy, she admitted that there was much opposition to his theories. As she said, “Scholars find his work to be merely linguistic.”²¹

How did Mercado approach his works that command this judgment? This is because Mercado was the first to form a pathway that made use of an approach—particularly of linguistics—that is not purely philosophical to unearth a Filipino philosophy. Since his method was focused generally on analyzing the intricacies of certain languages, it is hasty to claim that Mercado’s works utilized strictly empirical methods, ones that are used by professional anthropologists and psychologists when doing their fieldwork. But the point of Mercado’s initiative had been to use certain methodologies in science in order to discover a systematic form of Filipino philosophy. This atypical approach in philosophizing was expected to draw some negative impressions from Filipino philosophers who have learned to practice philosophy from the armchair, that is, discovering *a priori* principles and intuitions, and thereby using such intuitions to generate philosophical

¹⁹ Jason Silverman, Elizabeth Hall, Jamie Aten, Laura Shannonhouse, and Jason McMartin, “Christian Lay Theodicy and the Cancer Experience,” in *Journal of Analytic Theology*, 8 (2020), 359–61.

²⁰ Leonardo Mercado, “Reflections on the Status of Filipino Philosophy,” in *Kritike: An Online Journal of Philosophy*, 10:2 (2016), 21.

²¹ Emerita S. Quito, “The Filipino and the Japanese Experience,” in *Lectures on Comparative Philosophy* (Manila: De la Salle University, 1979), 34, as quoted in Emmanuel D. Batoon, “Tracing Mercado’s Anthropological Perspective (Second of Two Parts),” in *Kritike: An Online Journal of Philosophy*, 8:2 (December 2014), 2.

insights. This is known as the deductive approach, which according to Mercado, is exemplified by the Western mind.²²

Unlike the West, the Filipino mind thinks inductively and intuitively, a claim which Mercado tried to prove by analyzing the Filipino language through poetry, proverbs, and the *balagtasan*.²³ The use of proverbs and *balagtasan* as a form of debate are two ways that show that Filipinos think more inductively rather than deductively. For Mercado, Filipinos are poetic in their reasoning. According to Mercado, there is nothing wrong with this because poetry and the emphasis on the concrete can similarly reach the truth as much as abstract logic can. As Mercado said, “poetic symbols can serve as paradigms for intuition.”²⁴ The important thing to note here is the reliance on intuition as it is discovered in language and the belief that intuition categorically establishes what counts as basic and fundamental truths. He called his basic approach the metalinguistic approach, which “rests on the supposition that a language mirrors the thought and somehow determines the outlook of its native speakers.”²⁵

Mercado’s attempt to discover a Filipino philosophy had been tied to his goal of separating Filipino thought from the pervasive influence of Western thinking. His worry had been that for as long as Filipino thinkers are tied to the paradigm of Western thinking, the difficulty of having our own Filipino philosophy will always fall by the wayside. One might retort that Mercado’s methodology is also derived from Western theories, which makes his claim seem ironic.²⁶ This is true, and this objection underlies the fact that we cannot completely expunge our way of thinking from some form of Western influence. But this admittance does not entail that there cannot be forms of Filipino thinking that are unique and separable from Western influence, especially since what was appropriated by Mercado had been the methodology used, something that may be separated from the most basic intuitions of (Filipino) philosophical thinking.

But why should there be a need to discover a Filipino philosophy, if there is such a thing at all? Is it not enough to philosophize, as Ferriols suggested, and to let history decide whether the fruits of one’s philosophical labor are worthy of the name “Filipino philosophy”? Bear in mind that Mercado viewed philosophy not as “a huge shell game, a Brainiac sport played hard just for the fun and posturing of it,” as Damien Broderick would

²² Leonardo Mercado, *Elements of Filipino Philosophy* (Tacloban: Divine Word University Publications, 1974), 73–91.

²³ Leonardo Mercado, “Reasoning,” in *The Filipino Mind* (Washington, D.C.: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 1994), 41–54.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 51.

²⁵ Leonardo Mercado, “Filipino Thought,” in *Philippine Studies*, 20:2 (1972), 207.

²⁶ I thank an anonymous reviewer for raising this objection.

colorfully describe it.²⁷ As Mercado said, “The love of wisdom is not just a leisurely search for truth.”²⁸ Philosophy should be socially relevant, and Mercado viewed this relevance in terms of how philosophy can aid in erecting a strong foundation for Filipino identity, an identity that should be made separate from the contours of Western intellectual influence. By assisting to build a robust Filipino identity, philosophical thinking becomes a catalyst to nation-building and a healthy nationalism. In an interview with Emmanuel C. De Leon and Marvin Einstein S. Mejaro, Mercado was clear that his philosophy is “a form of nationalism.”²⁹ Many Filipino philosophers are resistant to his way of doing philosophy because according to Mercado many Filipino philosophers of today are still enamored by Western philosophical legacies. According to Mercado, the colonial mentality exhibited by this tendency will not do good for the country.³⁰

So, it should be clear by now why there is a need to discover a Filipino philosophy: it is because having a philosophy that we can consider Filipino is an essential tool towards intellectual nationalism. It is not only important to be a Filipino citizen whose country is now independent from colonizers, but to develop and appreciate the way(s) by which the Filipino *as Filipino* thinks, especially about perennial philosophical issues. While many are still skeptical that Mercado indeed uncovered elements of Filipino philosophy, I think that the works of Mercado have borne fruit in terms of revealing how certain elements in Filipino thinking may diverge from the paradigm of Western thinking. I have already mentioned how Mercado differentiated between Filipino and Western forms of reasoning by looking at some examples of Filipino poetry, proverbs, and debate. Mercado also examined Filipinos’ views about soul, beauty, and evil, among others—views that are embedded in different Philippine languages.³¹

What is more interesting about Mercado’s works is how they suggest that there may be Filipino intuitions that are distinct from those of the West. This is an exciting discovery and precisely because this may be strengthened by some of the pioneering discoveries of experimental philosophy. In the early days of experimental philosophy, one of the most staggering results is

²⁷ Damien Broderick, “Introduction II: Philosophy on the Inclined Plane,” in *Philosophy’s Future: The Problem of Philosophical Progress*, ed. by Russell Blackford and Damien Broderick (New York: Wiley-Blackwell, 2017), 13.

²⁸ Leonardo Mercado, “What is Philosophy?” in *Filipino Thought* (Manila: Logos Publications, Inc., 2000), 9.

²⁹ Emmanuel De Leon and Marvin Einstein Mejaro, “An Interview with Leonardo Nieva Mercado, SVD,” in *Kritike: An Online Journal of Philosophy*, 10:2 (December 2016), 4.

³⁰ Mercado, “What is Philosophy?” 9.

³¹ Leonardo Mercado, *The Filipino Mind* (Washington D.C., The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 1994).

how intuitions differ from culture to culture.³² What may be taken as an intuitive truth of Westerners may not be the case for East Asians, and this is similar to what Mercado's works implied since he first published his *Elements: Filipino philosophy*, or at least some of its elements, grounded in the intuitions of Filipinos may be distinct from Western philosophy insofar as the latter is grounded in intuitions of the West. What is more exciting is the fact that in the experimental studies regarding culture, what are referred to as East Asians are Chinese and Japanese and never Filipino. For instance, in a book about "how Asians and Westerners think differently and why," the author Richard E. Nisbett did not mention Filipinos even once.³³ This gap is also reflected in other experimental studies.³⁴ Once the implication of this lacuna is adequately recognized, it is astonishing how much vast the research terrain is available for Filipino philosophers to analyze and study. Thus, experimental philosophy can clarify to philosophers in search of Filipino philosophy some methodological pathways by which they can proceed and are likely to succeed. Indeed, Mercado has just opened up the floodgate into a rich, wide-ranging and underexplored territory that is Filipino philosophy.

Now, if there is indeed some promise with using experimental philosophy on our search for a Filipino philosophy as I have so far argued, then it is time that we proceed to laying out the details on how exactly Filipino philosophy is to be discovered through χ -phi. By the term itself, experimental philosophy is a method of philosophizing that makes use of controlled experiments and other quantitative methods in illuminating philosophical issues. There is nothing wrong with this but using this quantitative-experimental approach as the starting point may preempt what and how philosophical issues are considered by the participants, which in our case would be Filipinos, especially the non-philosophers. To address this concern, it is sometimes more appropriate to start with qualitative research methods, such as in-depth interviews and focus group discussions.

The point of qualitative research methods is to avoid for as much as possible the tendency of the interviewer to impose their preconceived notions

³² Jonathan Weinberg, Shaun Nichols, and Stephen Stich, "Normativity and Epistemic Intuitions," in *Philosophical Topics*, 29:1/2 (2001), 429–460; Edouard Machery, Ron Mallon, Shaun Nichols, and Stephen Stich, "Semantics, Cross-Cultural Style," in *Cognition*, 92:3 (2004), B1–B12; Linda Abarbanell and Marc D. Hauser, "Mayan Morality: An Exploration of Permissible Harms," *Cognition*, 115 (2010), 207–224; Henrick Ahlenius and Torbjörn Tännsjö, "Chinese and Westerners Respond Differently to the Trolley Dilemmas," in *Journal of Cognition and Culture*, 12:3–4 (2012), 195–201.

³³ Richard E. Nisbett, *The Geography of Thought: How Asians and Westerners Think Differently ... and Why* (New York: The Free Press, 2003).

³⁴ Joseph Henrich, Steven J. Heine, and Ara Norenzayan, "The Weirdest People in the World?" in *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, 33:2–3 (2010), 61–83; Machery, Mallon, Nichols, and Stich, "Semantics, Cross-Cultural Style," B1–B12; Hazel Markus and Shinobu Kitayama, "Culture and the Self," in *Psychological Review*, 98 (1991), 224–253.

on the topic under discussion. This is in direct contrast with quantitative research that makes use of statistics since the latter is utilized to confirm or refute a particular hypothesis. Of course, both methods are important but by starting our project with the use of qualitative methods, the imposition of our theoretical commitments is minimized and the discovery of novel ways of thinking from the participants themselves is encouraged.

How should this be actually done? We start with a philosophically rich concept that is already understandable to the participant. We need to bear in mind that the point of the interview is to explore the various ways by which the participant, *not the interviewer*, understands the concept. So what is suggested is a highly unstructured interview; it is structured only insofar as it starts with a certain philosophical concept but the trajectory of the interview should be as free-flowing as possible. The interviewer is there only to help the participant explore the concept according to the latter's understanding. It is important for the interviewer to avoid imposing her theoretical understanding on the matter and lead the interview to the direction to which she wants it to go. This advice of caution is essential if one wants to get the most out of the interview and by that I mean that there may be some insights that the participant has with regard a philosophical idea which may have been overlooked due to the ways in which the community of professional philosophers initially approached the topic. By letting the participant speak for himself, with little philosophical influence from the interviewer, the participant may come to express his view about the topic in directions that the interviewer may not expect. This is neither to say that philosophy is fully expunged from the discourse³⁵ nor to claim that the participant does not have any philosophical influences. It is simply to allow the possibility that the participant may have some philosophically interesting ideas that have not been entertained or fully elucidated by philosophers. The important thing to note here is that a qualitative interview involves open response answers. Unlike quantitative interviews that usually require a yes or no answer or answer that fits within a set of choices, questions in qualitative interviews "give participants the opportunity to provide an open response in their own terms."³⁶

Of course, this approach to the interview should not be viewed as an easy task. The interviewer, who is assumed as a philosopher by profession, has a set of related concepts, arguments and schools of thought in her intellectual toolkit. This arsenal of specialized knowledge is a natural strength of philosophers but this may impede certain interesting discoveries from an interview by way of leading the interview to issues that are unfamiliar to the

³⁵ I thank an anonymous reviewer for raising this concern.

³⁶ James Andow, "Qualitative Tools and Experimental Philosophy," in *Philosophical Psychology*, 29:8 (2016), 1129.

participant. To address this, professional philosophers need careful advice, professional guidance, and experience in the field. The first two may be acquired through collaboration with other disciplines such as anthropology, psychology, and other social sciences, a step which is now a staple of many works in experimental philosophy. Experience in the field requires time, effort, and peer assessment in order to be fruitful, but a considerable time in the field is necessary in order to master the forms of interview that will best achieve the interviewer's goals. Since our focus here is interview, one may especially learn from anthropologists and psychologists who are experts in qualitative methodologies such as qualitative interviewing.

Aside from the interview, there is also a focus group discussion (FGD) as another common qualitative method of research. In the interview, the major goal is to explore the depths by which the participant understands and makes sense of the concept. The interviewer is present only to motivate the participant in exploring further the latter's general understanding of a concept; it should not be a venue for the interviewer to try to confirm whatever philosophical position she may have. So generally, the aim of the interview is to uncover reflective thinking of the participants. It is meant to identify the various reasoning processes involved in thinking about a philosophical topic. However, in an FGD, a participant is no longer alone with the interviewer but in the companion of people who may or may not agree with his point of view. This methodology, therefore, may be used to probe further a participant's reasoning processes. But again, one may also begin with an FGD with the experimental philosopher as the facilitator and then using the findings in the said group discussion as starting points when one eventually decides to proceed to the qualitative interview. A participant may have said something philosophically interesting in the FGDs that is not explored in further detail due to the nature of FGDs (where a number of participants are involved and majority likes to participate and speak). This is where the follow-up individual interview shows its strength. In any case, whether one begins with an FGD then an interview or vice versa, either way is methodologically viable.

Qualitative methodologies, such as interview and FGD, have transcripts as its main data. The average time for an individual interview is around 30 minutes to an hour depending on the competence of the interviewer; while it is around 2 to 3 hours for FGDs. Once transcribed, 10 interviews and even just one FGD can produce hundreds upon hundreds of transcript pages. Analysis of such a huge data requires technical competence that is expectedly unfamiliar to a philosopher with no experience in social science research. James Andow, the first philosopher to argue for the use of qualitative methodologies in experimental philosophy, has a lot to say about

the process of qualitative data analysis, and I refer the reader to his pioneering article for more details on the qualitative process.³⁷

The major point of using a qualitative approach in experimental philosophy is to uncover the reasoning process by which the participants make sense of the concept in question. What is important to discover is the conceptual structure of the participants involved in understanding a philosophical term. For instance, it is fascinating to hear many Filipino parents express that at some point they will no longer micromanage their children's behaviors since "they already know what's right and wrong." From the moral-psychological perspective, this assumption is intriguing. How do the parents know that their children are at that point in their lives where they already know the contents of morality? In what contexts does this utterance arise? A qualitative methodology can probe deeper into this familiar claim and by doing so, experimental philosophers may discover new insights into moral epistemology especially as it viewed by Filipino parents and even by their children. There may be a wellspring of related, even novel, moral concepts, arguments, and territories waiting to be explored within the vicinity of Filipino moral epistemology and Filipino moral psychology among many others. However, as intimated before, the interviewer should begin with a familiar concept, such as morality, and find way to incorporate such notion as moral epistemology (and a host of others) within the broader notion of morality in the course of the interview or focus group discussion. This defense of qualitative methods in x-phi is in line with Andow's view. According to him, the point of qualitative methods in experimental philosophy is to discover "the reflective aspects of ordinary thought about philosophically interesting things" since philosophers draw on them in their works.³⁸ Andow then lays out several ways by which the reflective thinking of the ordinary folk may be philosophically valuable, such as enriching or challenging the philosopher's evidence base.³⁹

Aside from unearthing the conceptual structure embedded in the participant's understanding of a term, qualitative methodologies may also be used to uncover the most fundamental intuitions that Filipinos have regarding philosophical concepts in question. This diverges from James Andow's defense of qualitative methods in experimental philosophy. For him, there is good reason to think that "qualitative methods are unsuitable for measuring the ordinary, subpersonal mechanisms underlying processes like moral judgment."⁴⁰ However, I do not agree with James Andow in his claim that if x-phi aims to study intuitions, then qualitative methods have

³⁷ Andow, "Qualitative Tools and Experimental Philosophy."

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 1134.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 1135–1136.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 1133.

little to contribute to it. While he is right in his view that qualitative methods seek to uncover reflective thinking, the role of intuitions in this form of thinking cannot be easily disregarded since they may be utilized to discover what intuitions serve as the primary backbone in the rationalization of one's position. How exactly can this be done?

If we will follow the common characterization of intuition suggested by Andow as "non-inferential judgements that are not a product of conscious reasoning, are fairly immediate, and not slowly or carefully reasoned,"⁴¹ then intuitions may emerge in an interview when the participants reach certain propositions of their reasoning process that they take to be simply properly basic. As such, intuitions here are construed as the basic blocks of a reasoning process which the participants take to be so obvious as not needing of further defense. Recognizing the point where the participants manifests their basic intuitions in the interview or FGD is a skill that the researcher needs to develop and be constantly mindful of. In fact, it would enhance the authenticity of the data if the researcher would note and include in her analysis detailed observations of the participants as the latter tries to justify what appears to them as commonsensical or even universally accepted proposition.

On that note, it need not always be the case that we start with a qualitative, rather than a quantitative approach in experimental philosophy. While quantitative methods in the form of surveys are largely used to uncover intuitions and the psychological processes that underlie those intuitions, they may also be utilized to identify certain approaches to a philosophical topic or patterns of thinking underlying a position in a philosophical issue that call for deeper probing. Aside from just uncovering philosophical intuitions (as how experimental philosophers envision quantitative methods to be), they may suggest topics for further philosophical study that are initially elucidated using a qualitative approach.

Filipino Philosophy and the Charge of Limited Applicability

If the argument just laid out is successful, it provides an unambiguous way of discovering Filipino philosophy, which is by making use of the tools of experimental philosophy. However, by narrowing the contents of Filipino philosophy to the philosophical intuitions of Filipinos, this might invite the charge that Filipino philosophy as so far conceived here, is of limited applicability. After all, if Filipino philosophy is composed generally of ideas and arguments whose foundations are the philosophical intuitions of Filipinos—not American, German, or British—then, one may

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

easily conclude that such arguments will only appeal and persuade Filipinos. One of the representatives for this charge is Roland Theuas Pada in his not-so-recent article in this journal.⁴²

At the outset, Pada is to be commended for giving justice to the projects of Filipino philosophers, such as Leonardo Mercado and Florentino Timbreza, even if he generally disagrees with them. He has described their projects as “a quasi-ethnological attempt to construct a unified description of Filipino thought through various ethnic practices.”⁴³ However, what Pada wants to argue is that a variant of Filipino philosophy that is restricted to the ethnological descriptions of culture—such as that of Mercado and Timbreza—will fall short of the practice of philosophy as a discourse. As he remarks, “Isolating our idea of what a ‘grassroot’ philosophy is as an ethnic practice fails the implicit criteria of philosophy as a constantly continuing discourse, which I think is not only detrimental to the idea of what philosophy is, but is also against the idea of *philosophy* as a *discourse*.”⁴⁴ For Pada, when the criterion of discourse is applied in the practice of philosophy, the result is a new category: “the development of a discursive philosophy that originates from Filipino thinkers and engages with the tradition of philosophy as a whole.”⁴⁵ Pada sees then the projects that are “strictly limited to the national or cultural concerns of their own life-world” as needing expansion to produce “works that are read, not because of their national origin, but because of their effect to philosophy in general.”⁴⁶

Central to Pada’s view of philosophy is the idea of discourse. He does not deny that the approach of Mercado and Timbreza can generate philosophical interest in the local scene, which for him is helpful if we want to develop a strong grassroots tradition.⁴⁷ With this, he is not far from the nationalistic goal that Mercado envisions Filipino philosophy to achieve. Yet Pada finds such grassroots philosophy as Mercado’s inadequate in reaching academic legitimacy unless “it begins to participate in the long tradition of discourse in philosophy.”⁴⁸ Discourse for Pada means an active engagement of one’s ideas with other traditions in philosophy. He regards the work of Florentino Hornedo as an example of a discursive philosophy: Hornedo’s book titled *The Power to Be* is a treatise about freedom that interacts with scholastic, phenomenological, and existential traditions that have their own

⁴² Roland Theuas DS. Pada, “The Methodological Problems of Filipino Philosophy,” in *Kritike: An Online Journal of Philosophy*, 8:1 (2014), 24–44.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 27.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.* Emphasis in the original.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 28.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 36.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

distinctive view about the freedom and autonomy of persons.⁴⁹ Without a constant interaction with other schools of thoughts and philosophical traditions, the grassroots approach to Filipino philosophy seems for Pada philosophically inadequate and unlikely to bear much fruit.

Finally, Pada concludes by noting that “[t]he usefulness of philosophy as a tool for methodological understanding of culture is clear when it loses the character of simply establishing Filipino identity as a cultural edifice.”⁵⁰ This is in direct contrast to Mercado’s view of philosophy as a form of nationalism. In fact, Pada is explicit that the building of cultural identity is not a task for philosophers as Mercado assumed, since philosophy is a way of thinking that is enriched by constant intellectual interactions, both critical and constructive. Thus, attempting to merely describe how Filipinos actually think will always fall short of constituting an academically respectable philosophy. Pada ends by stressing that asking “whether philosophy is dead or is about to be born in our culture is irrelevant,” since what is needed is using these grassroots elements of Filipino philosophy, i.e., the data on how Filipinos actually think about certain philosophical topics, as starting point from which to build philosophical engagements with philosophical traditions so that eventually “our own discourse philosophy will prevail.”⁵¹ In this regard, Pada clearly echoes the sentiments of Ferriols in the beginning of this paper. Thus, for Pada, Mercado and Timbreza’s version of Filipino philosophy, while valuable, is of limited philosophical applicability.

Indeed, there is much to agree with Pada’s assessment of Mercado’s approach to Filipino philosophy. It is in my view correct that if Mercado’s version of Filipino philosophy is purely descriptive, that is, merely seeking to describe what particular Filipinos think about philosophically-laden topics, then it is not even clear why it should count as *philosophizing*. In fact, a difficulty confronting Mercado is how exactly different is his work, if he considers it a philosophical work, with that of the social scientist. Pada’s call for the need for discourse in philosophy thus moves the conversation forward: a work is philosophical if it moves beyond purely describing people’s thoughts (as what Mercado had done) towards serious engagement, critical or constructive, with other intellectual traditions in philosophy. However, this need not be taken as a complete refutation of Mercado’s project but a need for expansion. In terms of methodology, one will benefit not only from linguistic analysis initiated by Mercado but also by controlled experiments and qualitative interviews as methods in experimental philosophy. Will the results of these studies remain descriptive and thus

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 39.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 41.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 43. Emphasis in the original.

inadequate to be academically respectable philosophy? The answer will depend on how the results will be employed. But if the results have uncovered a set of Filipino intuitions that are non-existent in the present literature or different from the Western ones that are taken as orthodox, it is interesting what philosophical implications would such intuitions have when analyzed to their logical end. And it is safe to say that exploring such philosophical implications is itself a worthy philosophical project. An exploration of certain philosophical intuitions—usually expressed in terms of principles, axioms, or commonsensical presuppositions—requires knowing the present intellectual terrain where their application would be relevant, and this presupposes a need for discourse where longstanding traditions, commonly used approaches, and venerable schools of thought can be utilized for intellectual engagement.

Not surprisingly, something like Pada's charge against Mercado has been a staple objection to experimental philosophy. After all, are experimental studies not merely describing what certain people think about a certain subject? And even if it happens that the intuitions of Filipino non-philosophers are contrary to that of the Filipino philosopher, is that supposed to change or sway the position of the Filipino philosopher who has expectedly spent a larger amount of time thinking and learning about the subject? Of course not, and experimental philosophers concur.⁵² But this does not mean that the experimental results have no philosophical insights to offer. As Joshua Knobe and Shaun Nichols remarked:

The mere fact that a certain percentage of subjects hold a particular view cannot on its own have a significant impact on our philosophical work. Instead, it must be that the statistical information is somehow helping us to gain access to some other fact and that this other fact—whatever it turns out to be—is what is really playing a role in philosophical inquiry.⁵³

Indeed, the possible differences of intuitions that may be unearthed are revelatory of whatever intellectual frameworks are at work between these two groups, and exploring the further implications of such frameworks are a philosophical task in itself. This is not so different from exploring the implications of worldviews that are opposed to each other, such as in the case of theism and atheism. For the most part theists and atheists disagree about the degree by which certain intuitions can persuade but these core

⁵² Knobe and Nichols, "An Experimental Philosophy Manifesto," 6.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

disagreements need not prevent either of them to sift through what these intuitions may result to when applied to their logical conclusions. Consider for instance the project of atheist philosopher Erik Wielenberg when he explored the moral implications of an atheistic worldview or “a Godless universe” according to his book’s title.⁵⁴ One need not hold the same atheistic assumptions as Wielenberg to appreciate the value of his project: it can be a good way for theists to have a taste of the implications of a contrary worldview so they can weigh those considerations when assessing the overall reasonableness of their own. On the theist’s side, there is Christian philosopher Alvin Plantinga who, in his “Advice to Christian Philosophers,” has called for more wholeness and integrality within the Christian philosophical community. By this he means that a Christian philosopher, by virtue of being Christian, “has a perfect right to the point of view and pre-philosophical assumptions he brings to philosophic work; the fact that these are not widely shared outside the Christian or theistic community is interesting but fundamentally irrelevant.”⁵⁵ Bringing Plantinga’s advice, Christian philosophers ever since have traversed territories not typically explored by other philosophers solely because they constitute the core assumptions of the Christian faith: issues such as the Incarnation, the Trinity, Atonement and even the Eucharist. This means that bringing one’s philosophical skills to bear on topics that are rooted in fundamental, albeit not universally held, intuitions, is in itself a fruitful philosophical endeavor.

Can we benefit from Wielenberg’s project or Plantinga’s advice in terms of our search for a Filipino philosophy? I think we can, but unlike the Christian or the atheist worldview, the core assumptions embedded in the Filipino culture are still yet to be deeply explored. The good news is that we have good reason to believe that there are core assumptions in the Filipino philosophical mind that are vastly different or remain unknown to the Western one, as the pioneering works in experimental philosophy and Mercado’s own works have suggested. Thus, to say that the designation of “Filipino” in Filipino philosophy is just a matter of aesthetics⁵⁶ does not hold water at least from the perspective of experimental philosophy. This is because the categorization of “Filipino” is crucial to the kind of philosophy being argued for: it is philosophizing using the intuitions of Filipinos, especially those of the non-philosophers, as the building blocks of one’s argument or philosophical analysis.

⁵⁴ Erik Wielenberg, *Value and Virtue in a Godless Universe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

⁵⁵ Alvin Plantinga, “Advice to Christian Philosophers,” in *Faith and Philosophy*, 1:3 (July 1984), 256.

⁵⁶ I thank an anonymous reviewer for suggesting this.

By laying out the importance even the necessity of experimental philosophy as it relates to discovering forms of Filipino philosophy is of course not to imply that armchair philosophizing is already obsolete or unnecessary; on the contrary, experimental philosophy can supplement in various ways the results of our own intuition-based philosophizing. This is also not to say that a tradition of critical discourse would be lacking. What is simply novel in this approach is the openness to foundational intuitions as revealed by Filipino participants in future studies of experimental philosophy. These intuitions may then be used to provide the framework to engage in critical discourse with other schools of thought or pertinent philosophical debates. Finally, the enterprise is not redundant since even though the methodologies to be used are those of the empirical sciences, they are to be used in answering, clarifying, and addressing traditional philosophical questions, something that has not been thought possible before.⁵⁷

Thus, with the exciting discovery that Filipino intuitions are worth looking at for their possible wide-ranging differences from Western ones, then it may already be the right time for Filipino philosophers to roll up their experimental sleeves and get to work.

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⁵⁷ I thank an anonymous reviewer for raising the last two concerns.

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