

## Introduction to the *Kritike* Special Issue on French Philosophy

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### French Philosophy in the University of Santo Tomas

European continental philosophy has been a significant research thrust of the Department of Philosophy of the University of Santo Tomas (UST) since its formal establishment as a university-wide department in 2010. Various members of the department demonstrate a common interest in contemporary French philosophy, as evidenced in the content of their writings and teachings. While this common interest is enough proof that the French tradition is well-appreciated, it is, nevertheless, still worthwhile to showcase the fact that, among other philosophical traditions (Greek, German, Italian, Filipino) and in addition to Scholasticism and Thomism, French philosophy has had a profound influence on the development of the intellectual climate of the UST Department of Philosophy. This is enough reason to revisit how the French brand of philosophical discourse had been brought to the University of Santo Tomas by scholars who brought home fresh ideas from the Francophone world. Three notable scholars who have lasting influences on the philosophical landscape of UST come to mind: Emerita Quito, Alfredo Co, and Leovino Ma. Garcia. Quito, who studied at Université de Fribourg (Switzerland), was the first Filipino to author a dissertation on the French metaphysician Louis Lavelle, *La Notion de la Liberté Participée dans la Philosophie de Louis Lavelle*.<sup>1</sup> Meanwhile, Co, who went to the Université de Paris III and IV (Sorbonne) and wrote a postdoctoral dissertation on Kong Zi and Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *La Notion de Yi chez Kong Zi et la Conception de la Liberte chez Jean-Jacques Rousseau: La Politique du Devoir*

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<sup>1</sup> See Emerita Quito, *La Notion de la Liberté Participée dans la Philosophie de Louis Lavelle* (Fribourg: Studia Friburgensia, 1969).

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*et la Politique du Droit*.<sup>2</sup> Garcia, for his part, attended the Université Catholique de Louvain (Belgium) and wrote a dissertation on the philosophical anthropology Paul Ricoeur, *Between Responsibility and Hope: The Meaning of Man in Paul Ricoeur's Philosophy of the Will and Social-Political Writings*.<sup>3</sup> Thomasians Quito and Co have had been very influential figures who shaped the philosophical culture in UST since the 1960s; while Garcia, despite the Ateneo de Manila University being his home institution, has been teaching in UST since the early 1980s and whose courses on Ricoeur, Emmanuel Levinas, and Jean-Luc Marion have been inspirational among young Thomasian students. Also in the late 1960s, the Dominican priest, Magin Borrajo, published *Moral Perspectives in Jean-Paul Sartre's Existentialism*<sup>4</sup> during a period when philosophical trends outside Scholasticism and the Salamantine Thomistic tradition were still regarded in disdain.

However, today, the Department of Philosophy can boast of a significant number of scholars who specialize and who are competent in French philosophy: Gian Carla Agbisit (Baudrillard and French contemporary aesthetics), Jove Jim Aguas (Marcel, French phenomenology and existentialism), Kriedge Chlaire Alba (Beauvoir), Fleurdeliz Altez-Albela (Levinas, French phenomenology and existentialism), Marc Aldous Baccay (Merleau-Ponty), Kyle Barte (Bourdieu and Mouffe), Paolo A. Bolaños (Deleuze and French post-Marxism), Jovito Cariño (Deleuze, French catholic philosophy and Thomism, such as, Maritain and Gilson), Co (Rousseau), Darlene Demandante (Lacan and Rancière), Zhea Katrina Estrada (Beauvoir), Paula Nicole Eugenio (Weil), Prince Airick Gapo (Rancière), Carl Hernandez (Camus), Jayson Jimenez (Lacan, Deleuze, and Guattari), Allison Ladero (Mouffe), Jessie Joshua Lino (Althusser, Rancière, and Serres), Marella Mancenido-Bolaños (Beauvoir and Sartre), Peter Emmanuel Mara† (Bergson), Roland Theuas Pada (Derrida and French poststructuralism), Anton Heinrich Rennesland (Lefebvre and Foucault), Raniel Reyes (Deleuze and Guattari), and Michael Anthony Vasco (Derrida and Foucault).

Gary Gutting once argued that there might not be a singular theme among the different philosophical traditions which sprouted in France, “[but]

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<sup>2</sup> See Alfredo Co, *La Notion de Yi chez Kong Zi et la Concepcion de la Liberte chez Jean-Jacques Rousseau: La Politique du Devoir et la Politique du Droit*, in *Across the Philosophical Silk Road: A Festschrift in Honor of Alfredo P. Co*, Volume III (Manila: University of Santo Tomas Publishing House, 2009).

<sup>3</sup> See Leovino Ma. Garcia, *Between Responsibility and Hope: The Meaning of Man in Paul Ricoeur's Philosophy of the Will and Social-Political Writings* (Louvain: Thèse de doctorat, Université Catholique de Louvain, 1981).

<sup>4</sup> See Magin Borrajo, *Moral Perspectives in Jean-Paul Sartre's Existentialism* (Manila: University of Santo Tomas Press, 1968).

it is hard to deny that French philosophers of the last hundred years have produced a remarkably broad and deep body of work on freedom.”<sup>5</sup> Indeed, we find in the French philosophical tradition a deep fidelity to the idea of liberty. France, by the way, was the first country to emancipate herself from the *ancien régime* through a revolution. Such deep fidelity to liberty underlies the varying iterations of French philosophy: a concretely lived reality (Sartre, Beauvoir, Camus), the experience of one’s human fragility (Marcel, Levinas, and Ricœur), a distinctly natural force of life (Bergson, Merleau-Ponty, and Deleuze), or an illusion of the subject (Althusser, Foucault, and Rancière). According to Gutting, this commitment to the idea of freedom is informed by the notion that philosophy reflects “concrete experience” and, as such, “led to strong connections between philosophy and literature.”<sup>6</sup> This connection is palpable in the manner of writing of French philosophers whose texts exude a more fluid and poetic style. Many of them—like Bergson, Sartre, and Camus—are among France’s literary giants, all three were awarded the Nobel Prize in literature. Both philosophy and literature share the same commitment to writing which paved the way for these disciplines to produce a consciousness or a style that is distinctly French. Perhaps, this might have been the same commitment we (as practitioners of philosophy in UST) share in our philosophical praxes. Following Co’s most important claim about the birthing of a philosophical consciousness:

Without a body of literary and philosophical writing, no culture could hold solid claim to a serious philosophy ... Great ideas are discoursed along the corridors of time, honed by great hermeneutics across ages, to give birth to a body of literature that forms the core of indigenous philosophy.<sup>7</sup>

A more detailed intellectual history of the influence of French philosophy on Filipino philosophy is yet to undertaken, let alone on the Thomasian philosophical landscape. Perhaps, it is too ambitious and too early to claim that Thomasian philosophy is a variant of French philosophy. What this special issue simply offers is an initiative to gather the sources we describe to be ‘interventions’<sup>8</sup> in the philosophical history of UST. Agreeing

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<sup>5</sup> Gary Gutting, *French Philosophy in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 380.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 381.

<sup>7</sup> Alfredo Co, “Introduction” to *Doing Philosophy in the Philippines: The Thomasian Collection (1951-1959), Volume II* (Manila: University of Santo Tomas Publishing House, 2022), xii.

<sup>8</sup> In *Being and Event*, Alain Badiou claims that an intervention is the proper name for an event, since it commits to the quasi-metaphysical nature definitive to events: interventions do

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with Co, we locate these interventions in the writings of *Filipinos doing French philosophy*.<sup>9</sup> These interventions reveal the deeply embedded seeds of French thought through contemporary philosophical *débuts* pioneered by Quito roughly around four decades ago.

### **On French and Francophone Philosophy: À L'éloge de L'Inconfort**

On 11 to 12 September 2023, the UST Department of Philosophy held its first Continental Philosophy Symposium focused on French philosophy with the theme, “À L'éloge de L'Inconfort” (“The Praise of Discomfort”). The aim of this initiative is to organize a series of symposia on continental philosophy in order to showcase the works of the members of the department on specialized themes. The event was also held to commemorate both the 80<sup>th</sup> publication anniversary of Sartre's *L'Être et le Néant: Essai d'ontologie phénoménologique* (*Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology*)—a paradigmatic work that shaped the theoretical grandeur of contemporary French philosophy—and the 6<sup>th</sup> death anniversary of Quito, recognizing her important contribution to the development of the philosophical landscape of UST.

The praise of discomfort in the practice of contemporary French philosophy is not new. In the academe, we are often told that one must safeguard this sensitivity to being habituated. What this meant until recently points to a criticism initially directed to oneself before attempting to engage in a “ruthless critique of all things.” This fetish for principled consistency is reinforced by what is warranted for a mature form of philosophical praxis: first, treating all others with equal respect; and second, trying to avoid offending the safety within the spaces [for discourse] allowed by institutions that safeguard them. As a result of being misguided from a confused relativism of this attitude, the fact that people today find criticisms of their views offensive became sufficient enough for the paralysis and pacification of critique. We are reminded here by the events of May '68 in France, specifically those value systems rigidly tied to the institutions and the establishment, as manifest proofs for the very problem at hand.

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not enter within the immediate order of things. Thus, events *intervene* within the frame of order and causality, providing sense to what was considered without meaning at first in terms of priority. Badiou then extends his discussion in both politics and history, where interventions definitely involve a subjective process, “whereby a subject is created by getting hold of an event, a possibility of the situation that is present but not counted and accounted for by the dominating structures.” Alain Badiou, *Being and Event*, trans. by Oliver Feltham (London and New York: Continuum, 2007), 15.

<sup>9</sup> Co, *Doing Philosophy in the Philippines*, xv.

Philosophical resistance, however, remained possible during May '68, specifically *outside*: outside the classrooms, outside the factories, outside the institutions, outside one's comfort zones. Sartre once claimed that praxis in all forms should express our dispositional commitments, seeing decisions explicitly in terms of loyalty or betrayal. A true philosophical criticism should go *outside* and outside of *itself*—the institutions that pacify criticism including those creative and productive ones. Critique should never betray itself of its forceful attempts to measure being over thought, to audit praxis from theory, and to welcome contradictions in the face of the real. Criticism is and should always-already be a restless gesture of being-beyond (*à la* Levinas), an opportunity to transcend the situation (*à la* Sartre). Criticism, in order to be constructive, has to be both destructive and deconstructive. Being restless, we are reminded with the words of Foucault (echoing Merleau-Ponty) when he claimed an important philosophical task: "never to consent to being completely comfortable with one's own presuppositions. Never let them fall peacefully asleep ...."<sup>10</sup>

Meanwhile, the contemporary era seems largely defined by an overvalorization of positivity, convoluted enthusiasm, and a type of consensus blinded by disinforming affirmation. In this habitat, a critique informed by discomfort is perhaps the only proper orientation. While critique does not entirely dismiss the idea of comfort, what may have been lacking in us was a sufficient attention to its form: discomfort as a model of our comfort. Thus, the French *fidélité* does not simply mean a sustaining devotion to the status quo. We must learn that our commitments should require us some level of being separated from the status quo. It also signifies the refusal to accept the way things are, given the distortions seen when actual reality falls short in terms of form and prestige. Discomfort remains pivotal as a corrective refinement of a more genuine disposition for comfort, and to transform the manner in which we come to practice philosophy itself. Perhaps, we may learn from contemporary French philosophers that a critique tied to institutional and established bodies is doomed to remain complicit to the state of things, even at turbulent events of political and historical crises. We may also learn from them that one of the most profound ways of showing loyalty, respect, commitment and *fidélité* is to criticize and welcome the productive nature of discrimination, by not being afraid of giving offense virtuously in order to subject wrong arguments and disinformation to serious scrutiny—to remain always in discomfort. This, we presume, is an important insight and *leitmotif* to the practice of philosophy we must learn again from the French.

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<sup>10</sup> Michel Foucault, "For an Ethic of Discomfort," in *Power: Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1984 (Volume III)*, ed. by J. D. Faubion (New York: The New Press, 2000), 448.

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With the exception of Alex Taek-Gwang Lee's featured article and the three book reviews included at the end, all articles in this special issue were chosen from the French Philosophy symposium. While Lee's paper, "French Theory and Cybernetics," was not presented in the symposium, he, nevertheless, read it in a separate lecture organized by the UST Department of Philosophy on 26 August 2023. It is included in this issue as a featured piece that aptly opens the discussion on French philosophy. The article may be read as an alternative to the thematic direction of humanism, allowing us to think of the other sources of French philosophy. Lee's argument goes even further by claiming that the origins of French high theory during the 1960s should not be isolated from the contributions made by cybernetics and information theory to the social sciences—specifically how they were deeply embedded in Levi-Strauss' structuralist framework. While there is much appreciation to the historiographical efforts of Gutting, Cousset, and Descombes in narrating the developments of French thought in the last hundred years, Lee finds in Geoghegan an interesting historical take on the concept of code, and how data-driven methods of the Second World War shaped the post-war reconstruction of French philosophy, identifying structuralism as its premiere philosophical representative.

Leovino Ma. Garcia's philosophical précis, "Ricœur's Ethical Philosophy: Becoming Oneself as Another," was originally delivered as the keynote speech in the symposium. Here, Garcia offers a brief yet insightful elucidation of the "little ethics" of Paul Ricœur. He argues that an understanding of the three-fold relation of ethics, morality, and practical wisdom on the one hand, and the three-fold relation of the self, the near Other, and the Third, on the other hand, allows us to have a better understanding of Ricœur's capable human being. The essay ends with a call for each individual human being to lay claim on our capacity to give, which Garcia identifies as the only way we could survive *humanely*. Garcia's humanism, which he develops from reading Ricœur and Levinas, is reflective of the style and theme that is predominant in the writings of Filipinos doing French philosophy.

The article "Writing as Praxis: Quito and Sartre on Literature as Philosophy," by Marella Ada Mancenido-Bolaños, revisits Quito's *Homage to Jean-Paul Sartre*. Mancenido-Bolaños takes inspiration from Quito's reading of Sartre, focusing on the inextricable relationship between philosophy and literature. Several writings of Sartre are explored in order to demonstrate this relationship and to argue that both philosophy and literature are committed to writing as praxis, that is, the writing of the material content of significant human experiences.

Meanwhile, Jovito Cariño's "Si Santo Tomas, Relihiyon, at Pilosopiyang Franses: Ilang Leksyon para sa Pamimilosopiyang Filipino" is



another important contribution to the development of Filipino philosophical consciousness, primarily exploring what interventions may be learned from Aquinas and French Catholic philosophy. Written in Filipino, Cariño's work deals with the discomfort of having to question the place of Filipino philosophy, especially Filipino philosophy in UST. Cariño details Etienne Gilson's claim regarding the importance of the philosophy of Thomas Aquinas in French philosophy and how we can draw parallelisms between this debate and the question on Filipino philosophy.

The next article by Jove Jim Aguas, "The Body and Marcel's Notion of Embodied Subjectivity," offers a historical exposition of the idea of the body from different philosophical views, but with special emphasis on Gabriel Marcel's notion of the embodied subject. Aguas elucidates the uniqueness of Marcel's view on the body that goes against the idea that the body is only secondary to the mind. According to Aguas, Marcel stresses the importance of the body as an integral part of our identity, giving us the presence necessary for our participation in the world.

Paula Nicole Eugenio's "Simone Weil on Living in an Afflicted World" discusses Weil's take on the discomfiting predicament of affliction, and how attention serves to extend our existential concerns for the other. According to Eugenio, Weil's notion of attention, being "the rarest and purest form of generosity," does not simply distract us from our personal afflictions and preoccupations, it also brings our presence to a state of a moral awakening, voluntarily attending to the other in need through empathy. Through Weil, Eugenio hopes to challenge the myopic and blinding individualism of the modern world.

The article, "Structural Violence in the Philippines and Freedom and Responsibility in Simone de Beauvoir's Moral Philosophy," written by Zhea Katrina Estrada discusses Simone de Beauvoir's moral philosophy developed in her work *The Ethics of Ambiguity*. Estrada uses de Beauvoir in delineating freedom and responsibility as guiding concepts in understanding the political context of the Philippines under the administration of former President Rodrigo Duterte. Providing a comprehensive report on the structural violence present in the Duterte Administration's war on drugs and the extrajudicial killings that happened, Estrada sought to locate in de Beauvoir a remedy to the prevailing systemic oppression: an ethical orientation directed towards a more responsible way of coexistence where we determine the conditions for the mutual realization of freedom.

In Paolo A. Bolaños' "Figurations of French Critical Theory," he traces the historical conditions and institutional factors that led to the development of the French tradition of critical theory, represented by intellectual figures from post-structuralists and from "postmodernist" thought (e.g., Foucault, Deleuze, Derrida, etc.). Bolaños is convinced that the

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insights we gather from Hegel, Marx, and Nietzsche provide the strong theoretical similarities between the German tradition of critical theory—represented by the Frankfurt School—and the French tradition of critical theory. Both traditions, according to Bolaños, share in common the normative assumptions originally formulated by Max Horkheimer.

Meanwhile, Raniel Reyes poses the question: How can one “befriend, and breathe within, chaos?” In “Chaosophy: Chaos, Chaosmosis, and Precarious Ethics,” Reyes makes use of Berardi’s precarious or apocalyptic ethics to give more depth and nuance to Deleuze and Guattari’s theorization of chaos and chaosmosis. Furthermore, Reyes contends that Berardi’s ethics, informed by the creative and productive dimension of the Deleuzo-Guattarian chaos, helps in the discovery of new forms of engagement deemed proper if we are to survive the precarious situation of the contemporary era.

The last article in this special issue is written by Fleurdeliz Altez-Albela. “What is Levinasian in Sustainability? Sustainability in the Economy of Being through Levinas’ *Le Tiers*” provides an interesting Levinasian reading of the United Nation’s “Sustainable Development Goals” (SDGs), through which we can re-think our idea of sustainability vis-a-vis the notion of individual responsibility as extended from the immediate Other in humans towards the nonhuman Other. Altez-Albela claims that while Levinas’ *Le Tiers* (literally, the Third) maintains asymmetry in ethical proximity, it could still accommodate the collective reciprocity of the good—such as when we uphold the importance of sustainability and participate with the UN’s implementation of the SDGs. As such, we indirectly become responsible for the call of the Other, and thus transcending beyond “otherwise than being.”

Included in this special issue are three books reviews: Franz Yoshiy II’s review of Roland Theuas Pada’s *The Context of Logocentrism in Derrida’s Thought* (2023), Bryan Garcia’s review of Jacques Rancière’s *Uncertain Times* (2024), and Jessie Joshua Lino’s review of Michel Serres’ final work, *Religion: Rereading What is Bound Together* (2022).

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We dedicate this special issue to a dear colleague and friend,

*En hommage respectueux à*

Peter Emmanuel A. Mara<sup>†</sup>

(13 July 1986–18 August 2023)



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