

# Confucianism and Filipino Culture: Two Cultures in Dialogue

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At first blush there could be no more unfair task than compare the cultures of China and the Philippines, one more than 3 millennia in the making and the other a very recent concoction, one might say, roughly 2 centuries old only if one reckons with Rizal as the first Filipino. That would be like running a race between the great athlete Achilles and the slow-footed tortoise, or waging a battle between the giant Goliath and the diminutive David. What could be more unfair?

But reckoning, too, that Zeno of Elea's Achilles never outdistanced the tortoise and the biblical David was even able to slay Goliath, we might not be faulted for being not too shy in bringing the two cultures into comparison. Especially not in our time we call postmodern which Thomas Friedman describes as flat<sup>1</sup> and in which the idea of a superpower sounds almost already an anachronism if it were not for the posturing of an America or a China, not to mention Russia and North Korea, and the ones the UK leader recently called 'monsters.'

The postmodern playing field is, thankfully, an open arena for all, big and small alike, although the requirements are, I agree, rather tough and stiff. The activity appropriate for a relationship like this is dialogue. It is more than a case of coincidence, I think, that the Vatican II documents already speak of dialogue in all its richness, "to describe our proper attitude toward and relationship with all people," as an "attitude of 'solidarity, respect, and love' (Gaudium et Spes 3) that is to permeate all our activities."<sup>2</sup> Dialogue is a word dear to my congregation, the Society of the Divine Word; we even expand that word to become 'prophetic dialogue' which is, for us, synonymous with doing mission, thus "not limited to intellectual exchanges" but inclusive of "the dialogue

<sup>1</sup>Thomas L. Friedman, *The World is Flat* (New York: Picador / Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007).

<sup>2</sup>"Documents of the XV General Chapter SVD 2000," in *In Dialogue with the Word*, Nr. 1 - September 2000 (Rome: SVD Publications, 2000), p. 31.

of life, dialogue of common action for justice and peace, and the dialogue of religious experience it finds in all aspects of our lives.”<sup>3</sup> “Dialogue is rooted in mutuality and so is the prophetic aspect of it. We do not enter dialogue arrogantly presenting ourselves as the only prophets. Instead, we give witness to our partners (and) they give witness to us...”<sup>4</sup>

I suppose an attitude like that is what we need also when we place two cultures like those of China and the Philippines on dialogical terms. On this plane they are equal, respecting each other not only in their similarities but also in their differences. Even where we differ, we need not be wrong on either side, so that it will not matter whether we are of varied cultures and races, genders and sexual preferences, life styles and life careers, and so forth. It doesn't even matter whether one is rich and the other poor, one learned and the other illiterate, one a believer and the other an atheist, and so on. We are seeking together for explanations and hoping to find probable ways to help each other fill up the vacuum which one finds on either side. Maybe it's in fact an advantage on the Filipino's part that he or she does not have a great tradition to be defensive about, such as the great ideas of China or India. I can imagine it's a bit difficult for a Chinese or an Indian not to be defensive of their own great cultures and traditions, something which ineluctably influences their way of thinking and doing things, whether warily or unwarily. That is an experience we do not go through precisely because we have no such great culture to be defensive about. When asked what the Filipino identity is, we normally come into a quandary and we sometimes in fact feel that we have none such to speak of. It is my considered opinion that, especially in our time, there's nothing essentially wrong with a situation like ours, for then we can very well start without much effort from zero, which was what Descartes and, before him, the Renaissance philosophers struggled to do at the dawn of modernity. (Remember Descartes' universal methodic doubt and, before him, the Renaissance philosophers like Nicholas of Cusa and Francis Bacon who struggled to replace the scholastic logic with some method they consider more capable of bringing us to indubitable

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 32.

<sup>4</sup>“Documents of the SVI General Chapter SVD 2006,” in *In Dialogue with the Word*, Nr. 6 – September 2006 (Rome: SVD Publications, 2006), p. 21.

knowledge, in the case of Cusanus replacing the syllogistic logic with what he calls *visio intellectualis* and in the case of Bacon with what became known as the method of induction or the scientific method.) Even as late as the twentieth century we find the likes of Edmund Husserl improving on the methodic doubt of Descartes, calling it *epoche*, in an effort to reduce the consciousness to a state of presuppositionlessness. (Actually, Husserl is explicit on his attempt to improve on the Cartesian doubt, agreeing with critics who identified the flaw in the method, and so he found it necessary to do a repeat of the *Meditations*.) The presence in the mind of presuppositions, prejudices or biases, what Francis Bacon calls idols, stands in the way of modernity's scientific ideal of a pure, objective and scientific consciousness. This is, roughly, a return to Aristotle's *tabula rasa* or to John Locke's white paper or empty cabinet, that is, to a *cogito* or, in Kant's term, a pure transcendental apperception devoid of all ideas, including the innate ones.

This presuppositionless consciousness is attitudinally imperative before dialogue can take place inasmuch as I shall lack the listening stance if burdened by a sense of either superiority or inferiority, dominance or enslavement, or if, as Patanjali would say, I have not mastered *citta vritti nirodha* or the cessation of the whirlpool of consciousness. (You can see that, at this point, I am trying to establish the basic requirement for a dialogue to take place, that any prejudices stand in the way of it, and that is why any consciousness of one's standing on the assumption of great ideas and traditions may actually stand in the way of dialogue. In this sense, I say, the Filipino is on an advantageous position precisely by having no such great heritage to stand on. In effect, I have no difficulty at all even admitting that, as to what I am, I am zero. In a sense, it is more productive to start from nothing, from scratch, since from that starting point everything becomes possible. As the contemporary existentialist would say, everything now depends on how we make of ourselves.) On the other hand, it doesn't bother me at all also that Gadamer later falsifies the possibility of a consciousness that is thoroughly cleansed of biases or prejudices. (Actually, Gadamer here is famously coming from Heidegger who speaks of interpretation as inevitably involving *Vorhabe*, *Vorsicht* and *Vorgriff*, that we cannot therefore possibly think without them.) Husserl and Gadamer are, to me, two sides of the same

proverbial coin, in the same vein that Heidegger sees Heraclitus and Parmenides to be ultimately saying the same thing. (In other words, to reach the Husserlian ideal of presuppositionlessness, one should have gone through what Gadamer calls *Bildung*, the kind of intellectual formation so broad and profound, so vast and thorough, that it sees the folly of clinging to any presupposition, any ideology or system of thought, no matter how great it might be.) One finds in both Eastern and Western traditions the desirability of 'learned ignorance' (*docta ignorantia*) as an initial personal and intellectual posture. Socrates is therefore not alone in being a wise man and knowing that he doesn't know. Whoever wrote *Tao Te Ching* knows that, too. And, at the end of the day, that's also what is signified by Kant's famous declaration that all we can know is the phenomenon, never the noumenon. That's a lesson hopefully learned, finally, once and for always after two thousand years of meticulously painful reflection by the West, although the same, as we try also to show, is not unknown in the East. To bring the whole two thousand years of reflection of the West to its closure, Heidegger calls for the destruction of the history of ontology, which amounts to a radical paradigm shift, the end of the first beginning. Good, then we can begin anew.

Why I hammer on this reduction to zero is because that's where postmodern humans like us necessarily have to start and, beyond that, ceaselessly dwell. (At the end of his monumental *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant understandably does not find himself in a position to articulate the architectonic of a new philosophy. All he manages is to list down the requirements of a future philosophy, a philosophy after we have undertaken the scientific analysis of the limits of our rational faculty, which includes discipline, the ceaseless application of the self checking itself, the critical dimension of thinking, of thinking which is always on guard lest any form of dogmatic inclination will creep surreptitiously into its proceedings. This is the source of the potency of today's deconstructionist tendency, thanks to the likes of Derrida.) Its forgetfulness spells the betrayal of the postmodern culture which now belongs to our very constitution as evolved humans, whether we still call ourselves Filipino or Chinese. Even these names (Filipino, Chinese) are labels only, which we should quietly drop and cast aside as we investigate into things, things such as the

philosophy of Confucius and the Filipino identity. The best way to read the text called *Lun yü* or *Analects* is to forget its author and simply allow what he says to come within our hearing, never mind if in the original Chinese or in English translation. With a pure consciousness, says Husserl, we should be ready to let the thing show itself to us just as it is. When that happens, we are no longer concerned with the language – Chinese or English – but with what that language conveys. The language is where Being dwells, says Heidegger, and it matters little whether it's script or alphabet; even here there should be no superiority or inferiority, no dominance or enslavement. We should begin from here, leaving no erasures, nor even traces of erasures, as Derrida would put it. You know now where I'm bringing you – to what is supposed to be your and my very own situation today, the situation of postmodernity, which is Nietzsche's 'beyond.' It is from here, from the situation of postmodernity, that we should view Confucianism and the Filipino culture because, as we have been wisely told, the appropriate starting point for us is precisely where we are, the *hic et nunc*.

From where we are, we encounter Confucius through his *Analects*, and purely by accident we have randomly chosen its 1861 translation by James Legge. That's about the time Rizal was born, more than two thousand years after the birth of Confucius in c.551 B.C. When Confucius was born, the Philippines was not even a dream yet, granting that the name Philippines came after a certain King Philip II who, at about the time some conquistadores were supposedly saying mass at Limasawa, was reigning in Spain. The name, then, was Medieval, but the 1861 translation of Legge was a fruit of the Enlightenment, when Karl Marx was doing work in the London library at age 43. There is no record to show that the two, Marx and Rizal, ever met, but they sure breathed the same free air of the enlightenment, generally regarded too as the age of geniuses. Among these enlightenment geniuses was Leibniz one of whose unfinished works was the decoding of the Chinese codes. It is the same Leibniz who intimated that every little entity mirrors the rest of the universe<sup>5</sup> which happens to be also one of the themes, it seems to me, of what Confucius calls the Great Learning. Listen to this:

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<sup>5</sup>Gottfried Wilhelm von Leibniz, "Monadology, 63" in *Leibniz Selections*, ed. Philip Wiener (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1951), p. 542.

*The ancients who wished to manifest their clear character to the world would first bring order to their states. Those who wished to bring order to their states would first regulate their families. Those who wished to regulate their families would first cultivate their personal lives.<sup>6</sup>*

One can see that Confucius' preoccupation is eventually to bring world order, similar to what Kant famously calls perpetual peace which prods him to design a blueprint for a league of nations or what we mean today by the United Nations, at least the idea of it. And one can see also that in the end the seed of it could be traced in the cultivation of personal lives or, roughly translated, the formation of the individual. How is this cultivation or formation of the person to be accomplished? Let us continue to listen.

*Those who wished to cultivate their personal lives would first rectify their minds. Those who wished to rectify their minds would first make their wills sincere. Those who wished to make their wills sincere would first extend their knowledge. The extension of knowledge consists in the investigation of things.<sup>7</sup>*

The formation of a person or the cultivation (which, incidentally, has philologically to do with the term culture) of personal lives is ultimately grounded on the extension of knowledge which consists in or which is the same as the investigation of things or, in other words, education.

A man or woman of such great learning is, like Leibniz himself, a universal man, the Renaissance ideal of *uomo universale*. Confucius is certainly putting a high premium on education as the key to self-cultivation and social harmony. That smacks of Plato in the Republic whose allegory of the cave is a vivid parable of the tedious and grinding process of leading the mind from ignorance to knowledge, Hegel's phenomenology of the spirit. That process is laborious and requires a spirit disposed to work and industry and not to idleness. That doesn't sound like the Filipino disposition. We remember in this connection Rizal trying

<sup>6</sup>Confucius, "The Great Learning," in *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy*, trans. Wing-Tsit Chan (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1973), p. 86.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

to justify the Filipino's indolence, as follows:

*We must confess that indolence actually and positively exists in this country . . . The predisposition (to indolence) exists. The warm climate requires quiet and rest for the individual, just as cold climate incites him to work and to action.*

*The Europeans themselves who accuse the natives in the colonies of indolence, how do they live in the tropical countries? Surrounded by many servants, never walking but riding, needing servants not only to remove their shoes but even to fan them!<sup>8</sup>*

But if there is any more eloquent way of disproving that the Filipino is by nature indolent, that would be Rizal himself – never an idle spirit, indeed the Great Malay, a true Enlightenment individual. He's what Leon Ma. Guerrero calls "the First Filipino."

*Rizal was the first Filipino. Before him there were the natives of Suluan who rowed out to Magellan's camp on "The Enchanted Island" of Humunu; Pigafetta found them "courteous and honest." They were olive-skinned, rather plump, their bodies oiled and tattooed . . . There was Humabon, the kinglet of Sugbu . . . And there was also Lapulapu, kinglet of Mactan, as bold and handsome and supple as the fish for which he was named . . . No one proclaimed himself a Filipino . . . It was Rizal, as we have seen, who taught his countrymen that they could be something else, Filipinos who were members of a Filipino Nation. He was the first who sought to "unite the whole archipelago" and envisioned a "compact and homogeneous" society of all the old tribal communities from Batanes to the Sulu Sea, based on common interests and "mutual protection" rather than on the Spanish friar's theory of double allegiance to Spain as Catholic and the Church as Spanish . . .<sup>9</sup>*

So you see what I now mean by Filipino culture. It would be difficult, nor impossible, for me to confine that culture to the pre-Spanish character of something which, even today, we can hardly put our hands on. That supposedly 'pure' Filipino of our own pre-historic times might not even be a Filipino. I have the suspicion that it could be Indonesian or Chinese, Buddhist or Muslim, and

<sup>8</sup>Jose Rizal, "The Indolence of the Filipinos," in Manolo O. Vaño, *Jose Rizal: Champion of the Nation's Redemption (His Mission, Martyrdom and Writings)* (Quezon City: Giraffe Books, 2001), p. 175.

<sup>9</sup>Leon Ma. Guerrero, *The First Filipino* (Manila: Guerrero Publishing, 2010), pp. 523-527.

therefore not yet one that could really pass for a Filipino. I tend to agree that Rizal or a compatriot of that time is, indeed, the first real Filipino, which means no longer indigenous Malay but already a mix of East and West, a product of the historical incidence of the domination in this land of, yes, at that time a superior culture, superior in the sense that those they dominated were scattered little groups very unlike the established great cultures of, say, China and India. If ever there were Chinese and Indians in these parts, they were isolated souls susceptible to conquest. It is the Spaniards who, for good or ill, brought those scattered groups together not simply on account of the Christianity imposed on them, which could hardly be expected to have covered all the islands, but because of their eventual representation of a regime posing as a common class of oppressors to these otherwise disparate groups. The growing sentiment against a common oppressor is a unifying factor that, I dare say, explained the emergence of a nation which came to be known as Las Islas Filipinas. I take it that 'Philippines' is an English term which betrays its own origin in those days of the other domination, that of the Americans.

The Filipino is not a pure culture, and my thesis is to the effect that lack of purity is a matter not to regret about. Perhaps, in fact, there is no place anywhere in the world today where one can speak of a pure breed, not even perhaps among primitives and aborigenes, if there still remain such. When, not too long ago, someone dared to cultivate the pure breed and tried to eradicate the impure ones, the result was holocaust; that shouldn't happen again. The lack of that identity that shall define the Filipino once and for all is not a vicious state of affairs. It is a moment we should seize in order to freely evolve what we would want to be, from choices so numerous that there is no space to get ourselves trapped within narrow and rigid limits. Thus, we have no reason not to understand the Great Learning of Confucius. And we understand why we need such a teacher as Confucius who, like Socrates, knows that he does not know and therefore claims to be no more than a transmitter.<sup>10</sup>

What to transmit to the next generations will no doubt make

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<sup>10</sup>"A transmitter and not a maker, believing I and loving the ancients, I venture to compare myself with our old P'ang." Analects, VII.1, in *The Analects of Confucius with A Selection of the Sayings of Mencius and The Way and Its Power of Laozi*, trans. James Legge (Maryland: Signature Press, 2008), p. 46.

our hands full today and keep us busy. The knowledge which, within two millennia of Western domination, has borne fruit in today's scientific and technological culture has found its indelible niche in all of us and thus can be dispensed with only at our own expense. The capitalist economy can safely be said to have blended sometimes easily, sometimes uneasily with all the other cultures, whether friends or foes. Successful ideas, good or bad, have permeated the entire noosphere, creepily haunting our conscious and unconscious demeanors as we struggle to survive under trying circumstances.

Confucius is correct in deftly keeping a balance among all things, a balance which became history's axis that sometimes tilts on one extreme and sometimes on the other, and that even among the proponents of Confucianism itself. (It is thus a mistake to make Confucianism a rigid ideology with an unchanging interpretation. When you asked me to speak on Confucianism, you might not be very conscious of the vagueness of this term. I shall quote only one scholar by way of example, Charles O. Hucker, who tells us:

*Students of China have long been in the habit of labeling as Confucian all the traits, attitudes, practices, and institutions that have given to the Chinese people their distinctive Chineseness. We do this despite recognizing that each of these things is associated with its own separate ideological complex and that each of these ideological complexes – separate “Confucianisms,” so to speak – is in turn derived only in part from the teachings of Confucius and his immediate disciples. The problem of developing a system of terms that will clearly differentiate these Confucianisms from one another and from the Confucianism of Confucius himself has long perplexed us.<sup>11</sup>*

To illustrate, Hucker mentions that the Confucianism that is manifested in the so-called Confucian state of the Chin dynasty in 221 B.C., with its “centralized, non-feudal, bureaucratic, imperial governmental system,” should be taken as “necessarily a distorted reflection of the views on government that were held by Confucius, who lived in pre-imperial antiquity.”<sup>12</sup> )

In other words, there is no one Confucianism and Confucians vary from one extreme to the other. Who cannot be caught stuck

<sup>11</sup>Charles O. Hucker, “Confucianism and the Chinese Censorial System,” in *Confucianism and Chinese Civilization*, ed. Arthur F. Wright (California: Stanford University Press, 1975), p. 50.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid.

in either extreme is, I suggest, Confucius himself, who is a paragon of the Golden Middle in both realms of theory and practice. In the realm of theory, Confucius calls for the broadest learning, recalling what the poet says, that a little learning is a dangerous thing.<sup>13</sup> You will recall that Confucius is supposed to be giving us only a corner of what is true, and that he makes us feel despicable if we are unable to produce the other corners.<sup>14</sup> This reminds me of the last sentence of John's gospel, to the effect that not even all the books that fill the world can possibly exhaust what Christ is all about, what the truth who is Jesus Christ means.<sup>15</sup> One might perhaps say of Confucius, as one can definitely say of Jesus, that he is inexhaustible.

And even granting that one can acquire all knowledge and fill one's puny mind with all possible truths, so what of it? What is knowledge if not extended to life? In Confucius there is no way to divorce them. One who divorces knowledge from life or life from knowledge is no Confucian child; he could be a monster or, at best, a remnant of the receding generations before the emergence of what we here call postmodernity. That is why my students in the seminary this semester were caught by surprise when they found the name of Confucius in my long list of postmodern philosophers. But postmodernism, I've always claimed, is not about an ism or any school of thought or ideology, and now I say it is not also a matter simply of the span of one's historical existence; postmodernity is a style of life and a type of consciousness that has characterized the greatest individuals of all ages and is now becoming owned by the entire human species itself. Confucius is a postmodern thinker before the emergence of this age we call postmodernity. His teachings cover both *li* and *yi* and extend to all things, which is what the Great Learning is all about. Whoever possesses that vast understanding is the Superior Man, the Man-at-his-Best, the man of *jen*. Isn't that, too, Nietzsche's *Übermensch* and Heidegger's *Dasein*, the man who has seen the Upperworld and is now back in Plato's cave living life dangerously while spreading the gospel around? Now you understand why Confucius did not

<sup>13</sup>Alexander Pope, "An Essay on Criticism," in *The Rape of the Lock* (London: Phoenix Paperbacks, 1996), p. 1.

<sup>14</sup>"When I have presented one corner of a subject to anyone, and he cannot from it learn the other three, I do not repeat my lesson." *Analects* VII.7, in James Legge (ed.), p. 47.

<sup>15</sup>"Now there are many other things that Jesus did. If they were all written down one by one, I suppose that the whole world could not hold the books that would be written." (Jn 21:25)

live an unqualifiedly successful earthly life; to him it is not exactly unworthy of one's humanity to turn one's back on wealth and position of power if that's what righteousness demands.

There is, of course, a good measure of idealism in this view of Confucianism. But woe would be the day when our youth would be completely bereft of the ideal. That would be worse than Heidegger bemoaning our forgetfulness of Being; then philosophers could vanish as a species not just endangered but lost. The ones most prone to divert our attention from the ideals are commerce and technology. This is why Heidegger heroically struggled to remind us about the essence of technology which, according to him, is not technological,<sup>16</sup> in much the same way that he insists that the Being of a being is not a being, *das Sein des Seienden ist nicht selbst ein Seiendes*.<sup>17</sup> That sort of puzzling reminder is something we need to hear time and again in order to wake us up, *a la Kant*, from our dogmatic slumber.<sup>18</sup>

Confucius is not only a man of knowledge; he is also a man of virtue.<sup>19</sup> Those who are without virtue cannot abide long either in a condition of poverty and hardship, or in a condition of enjoyment," he says, "The virtuous rest in virtue; the wise desire virtue." But what is this virtue which even contemporaries like John Rawls are crazy about? Rawls calls it justice, which reminds one of what Plato was after in the Republic more than 2000 years ago, about the same time that Confucius was formulating his famous Golden Rule. But that Golden Rule isn't exactly new; that can be found in the sayings of all the great founders of religion, including Christ,<sup>20</sup> and nobody thinks they copied from each other. Is this not probably good enough to indicate that there is an innate seed of goodness in all of us and that the Golden Rule, or something like it, is our way of making it explicit? (One cannot help recalling at this point a genuine Confucian we know as Mencius, for whom

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<sup>16</sup>"[T]he essence of technology is nothing technological." Martin Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology and other Essays*, trans. William Lovitt (New York: Harper Perennial, 1977), p. 35.

<sup>17</sup>Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 6, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper Perennial Modern Thought, 2008), p. 26.

<sup>18</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, *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*, Paul Carus translation revised by James W. Ellington (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1977), p. 4.

<sup>19</sup>*Analects*, IV.2, in Legge (trans.), p. 29.

<sup>20</sup>"Do for others just what you want them to do for you." Lk 6:31.

nature is by nature good. “What is common to all hearts?,” he asks, to which his reply is: “Reason and rightness. The sage is simply the man first to discover this common element in my heart.”<sup>21</sup> In Western philosophy, this would be equivalent to the Natural Law, the unwritten moral law that is inscribed in our conscience.) “What you do not want done to yourself, do not do unto others,”<sup>22</sup> says Confucius in at least three similarly formulated aphorisms. What could be a more simple statement of the formula of justice than that? Maybe a simpler one is that of Plato’s “minding one’s business,”<sup>23</sup> but it does take a while before one can see how this one of Plato is synonymous to that of Confucius.

Virtue, as everybody knows, comes from a Latin word, *vir*, which means man. To be virtuous is to be manly, to be authentically a man. That man, I dare say, is Confucius’ man of *jen*, mankind-at-its-best, which is therefore what man ought to be if he would rectify his name. That’s exactly what Heidegger refers to as *Dasein*, the authentic human person in whom the faculties of sense, imagination, understanding and reason are no longer at war with each other but are rather harmoniously in concert in a creative work we call life. Such a man or woman is therefore integral in that one finds no more split in his or her personality; doing and saying are non-distinct and, as theologians say of Christ, his words and deeds are one. (In the case of Christ, the content of his preaching is the same as the message of his, say, healing miracles, that “The Kingdom of God is at hand!”)

A man or woman like that whose characteristic is authenticity never errs, whatever he or she does. That’s the human ideal of Nietzsche who is, says he, ‘beyond good and evil.’ That connects us with another passionate and free spirit named Jean-Jacques Rousseau who boldly refers to what he calls the general will as the will that’s never wrong.<sup>24</sup> It’s from him where Kant derives the confidence to say that there is nothing in the world, or even outside of it, which can be called good without qualification except

<sup>21</sup>Mencius, Book VI, Part A, 7; trans. D.C. Lau (England: Penguin Books, 1970), p. 164.

<sup>22</sup>Analects, V.11; XII.2; XV.23. in Legge (trans.), pp. 36, 79, 109.

<sup>23</sup>Plato, *The Republic*, Book IV, 433b; in *The Collected Dialogues*, ed. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1973), p. 675.

<sup>24</sup>“It follows from what precedes that the general will is always right and always tends to the public advantage; but it does not follow that the resolutions of the people have always the same rectitude.” Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, Chapter III, ed. Lester G. Crocker (New York: Washington Square Press, 1967), p. 30.

the good will.<sup>25</sup> Kant's good will is Rousseau's general will, the will of Nietzsche's Übermensch and Heidegger's Dasein who are not bound by sheer custom and tradition precisely because they are now 'beyond' it; they have, as it were, overcome it, surpassed it, crossed over it. This is Confucius' Mankind-at-its-Best, the man of jen; you don't have him or her bound to the past; you let him or her to come randomly from where he or she is in order to carve out creatively what he or she wants things to be. That, I'd like to think, is, too, Hegel's historical individual, not confined to the past and seizing the moment to create what is to come.

Humor, having said that, let us not forget that Confucius, as himself a man of jen, never arrogates unto himself the image of an inventive iconoclast. Memorable are his words: "A transmitter and not a maker, believing in and loving the ancients, I venture to compare myself with our old P'ang."<sup>26</sup> Let us remember that there's nothing excessive in the Master and that the Golden Middle is at work in him at all times. This explains his being sometimes depicted as a conservative traditionalist devoted solely to the preservation of old ways; that, too, is too extreme to be truthful to the spirit of Confucius. You see, then, how difficult it is always to secure the Middle Way; it's like walking on a tightrope, always a dangerous wayfaring.

This is the status of Dasein which became Heidegger's lifetime advocacy, a kind of thinking which is coming not purely from reason but from what he calls Ereignis, from 'Enowning.' That's a different kind of thinking, governed by a logic not of mathematics but of poesis. How does one combine logic and poetry? That would be impossible if it were not that Heidegger means to direct us to the essence of logic which is not logical and to the essence of poetry which is not poetical, and both to a heightened degree of confusion which collapses contradictories into an unthinkable thought and, more marvelous yet, it works! Certainly that's beyond the Petty Man Confucius speaks about, or Heidegger's das Man.

That, perhaps, is why God became flesh and dwelt among us, to show us that the impossible could become possible, and how.

<sup>25</sup>Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals*, 1, trans. H.J. Paton, in *The Moral Law* (London: Hutchinson University Library, 1966), p. 59.

<sup>26</sup>Analects, VII.1; in Legge (trans.), p. 46.

But some of you might not like to hear the word God anymore, sick and tired of its established connotations. Then, what's wrong with dropping the word, for 'God' too is but a word which hides more than reveals what it means. You should then welcome Heidegger, as much as you should welcome Nietzsche, for having deconstructed all gods, including the Last God. James Legge's translation of the Analects has just one aphorism which explicitly mentions God, in Book XX, 1.3:

*I, the child Li, presume to use a dark-coloured victim, and presume to announce to Thee, O most great and sovereign God, that the sinner I dare not pardon, and thy ministers, O God, I do not keep in obscurity. The examination of them is by thy mind, O God. If, in my person, I commit offences, they are not to be attributed to you, the people of the myriad regions. If you in the myriad regions commit offences, these offences must rest on my person.*

That, and nowhere else is there a mention of God in the Analects. (There is, however, one instance where Confucius mentions prayer:

*The Master being very sick, Tsze-lu asked leave to prayer for him. He said, "May such a thing be done?" Tsze-lu replied, "It may. In the Eulogies it is said, 'Prayer has been made for thee to the spirits of the upper and lower worlds.'" The Master said, "My praying has been for a long time."<sup>27</sup>*

David Hinton's translation is clearer, although I may not have the authority to say whether it is more accurate: "My life has been my prayer."<sup>28</sup> To Hinton, Confucius, the most influential sage in human history, "had taken as his task the creation of a society in which everyone's life is a prayer."<sup>29</sup>)

What one finds more frequently in the Analects is another word, T'ien, translated as Heaven or Sky. According to Confucius, "Without recognizing the ordinances of Heaven, it is impossible to be a Superior Man."<sup>30</sup> T'ien as Heaven or Sky sounds more clear, loose and relax than even the Last God Heidegger is speaking of.

<sup>27</sup>Analects, VII.34.

<sup>28</sup>The Analects, 7.35, trans. David Hinton (Washington, D.C.: Counterpoint, 1998), p.

76.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid.

<sup>30</sup>Analects, XX, III.1, in Legge (trans.), p. 139.

That Last God is, say, the Catholic God we Filipinos still know, the source of the church hierarchy which, if we go by the documents of Vatican II, should now gradually give way to the People of God. Suppose we cross out also T'ien, Heaven or Sky? Sometimes, indeed, some words are better left unsaid. God is certainly better left unsaid publicly if for a show by a powerful man after having stolen millions of people's money, better left unsaid if by a celebrity after acts criminal, abusive or oppressive. Jesus says of the Pharisees, that

*They don't practice what they preach. They tie onto people's backs loads that are heavy ad hard to carry, yet they aren't willing even to lift a finger to help them carry those loads. They do everything so that people will see them. Look at the straps with scripture verses on them which they wear on their foreheads and arms, and notice how large they are! Notice also how long are the tassels on their cloaks! They love the best places at feast and the reserved seats in the synagogues ... (Mt 23:3-6)*

The god of postmodernity is beyond the last of the last gods, beyond even T'ien, Sky or Heaven, beyond anything we can utter or identify with words, in other words beyond any idols, and yet one living and alive, endlessly engendering new forms of life and lifestyles as envisioned by such great souls as Confucius, Socrates and Christ, to name only three. Add to that list Rizal, for the good news, is that the Filipino, as I have implicated this culture, is ready for the challenge and up to it.

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