

**ETHICS, INDIGENOUS ETHICS, AND THE CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGE:
ATTEMPT AT A REPORT ON ETHICS FOR THE FILIPINO TODAY¹**

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Classical ethics tells us is that we know through our reason acting as an intellect whether what we do is good or bad. By our nature, then, we can know what's ethically correct. That we do evil is not so much because we do not know it to be wrong; rather, we do wrong despite our knowledge. Thus, if MacIntyre is correct that the Enlightenment philosophers share merely "in the project of constructing valid arguments which will move from premises concerning human nature as they understand it to be to conclusions about the authority of moral rules and precepts," if the project is merely to translate one knowledge to another knowledge, that is, from the knowledge of human nature to the knowledge of moral rules and precepts, then we can very well agree that "any project of this form was bound to fail." Any such project is bound to fail, not only for the reason stated by MacIntyre, that these philosophers are inevitably going to come up with ineradicable discrepancies and divergences, but also because, even should such discrepancies and divergences not occur, the defect lies not so much in its being a matter of knowledge as in its being a matter of desire, that is, not in the intellect but in the will.

Keywords: *Ethics, History of Ethics, Indigenous Ethics, Contemporary Ethics, Filipino Ethics*

I am taking advantage of your invitation to make an attempt, even if only a preliminary one, to give a report on what I think is the state of ethics today, both globally as a philosophy and locally as an element of our culture.

Let me start by risking to bore you with something I presume you already know. On a conventional note, let me begin with what every teacher of ethics, I think, should take up seriously with our students ahead of the other themes and issues people consider particularly engaging, timely and relevant. So, boring though this might seem to you, let me start this lecture correctly by putting emphasis, first of all, on classical or traditional ethics, calling it frankly by name as the ethics mainly of Aristotle and St. Thomas Aquinas, thus Aristotelico-Thomistic ethics.²

To begin with, what is ethics? [2] Conventionally, we define ethics as the quest for the good. It thus belongs to the practical side of philosophy, the other side being theoretical or speculative. What does this mean? The difference between theoretical and practical is rooted in our conception of man as a rational animal, which is among the most influential teachings handed down to us by the

¹ A paper read at the 8th Social Ethics Society Conference held at Punta Isla Lake Resort, South Cotabato, on October 25-27, 2018.

² See primary sources, namely, Aristotle, *De Anima (On the Soul)*, trans. J.A. Smith, in *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, ed. Richard McKeon (New York: Random House, 1941), 535-603; and St. Thomas Aquinas, *Treatise on Man*, in *Summa Theologica*, Vol. 1, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (Westminster, Maryland: Christian Classics, 1981), 363-503.

Greeks. It is the Greeks from whom we learned that man is *animal rationale*, a rational animal. [3] As an animal, man has senses, which in turn presupposes that he has a body; an animal is thus a body equipped with the senses. Moreover, for these senses to work the body must be alive; such a living body is what we call an organism. So, man is an organism, a living body, which has senses. This has to be stressed because not all bodies are organisms, meaning to say that not all bodies are alive. Wood and rock are equally physical, that is, they are bodies, but neither one of them is endowed with life. Such an inorganic or non-living body is what is described in general as a mineral, made I suppose of chemical compounds whose combination does not yet suffice to produce life. When so able to generate life, then it is already deemed to be more than a mineral; it is now a plant. [4] This is the background to what Alasdair MacIntyre describes as Aristotle's ethics based on what he (MacIntyre) calls his (Aristotle's) metaphysical biology.³

Seen in this light, man is already a complex entity. First, he is a body, but a body which has life, and so is not merely a mineral but an organism. As an organism, he is a plant endowed with at least the minimum requirements of a living thing; we know a thing to be living if it is capable of self-movement, which neither rock nor wood can possibly do. At least from our common sensical point of view, we imagine anything that happens to a rock or wood to be externally impelled, so that it will not move if not induced by, say, a strong wind or a strong object outside of it, say the arms of Hercules. A plant, meanwhile, moves by itself, that is, it nourishes itself, grows or wilts by itself, and multiplies itself for survival, if it is not to become an endangered species. [5] An animal is an organism that has all that it takes to be a self-activating plant, but it has more: it is equipped with both external and internal senses. The external senses are five in all - we have eyes for seeing, ears for hearing, nose for smelling, tongue for tasting, and skin for touching. And the internal senses are likewise five in number - common sense, imagination, phantasy, sense-memory and estimative sense. With all or some of these senses, the animal is able to acquire knowledge, which we call sensitive cognition, following which is that kind of desire appropriate to an animal which we refer to as sensitive appetite or sensitive appetition. [6] Perhaps through evolution a certain animal, maybe an ape, is able to give rise to a higher faculty; this constitutes a radical shift which Darwin famously calls the "origin of species."⁴ Man is thus born in evolutionary time, and what makes him distinct from an animal is his power to think, his reason, the source of all our sciences from physics to metaphysics.

It is this human reason, the source of all the sciences, which is the source also of ethics and morality; the two words, incidentally, are in this paper taken practically synonymously. On the level of animals, we don't speak of morality, so that when havoc is made of a neighbor's garden by a dog which we happen to own, most likely to earn the blame is not the dog but we its owners. The devastation of Hiroshima and Nagasaki during the last world war, even when caused by the split of the bombs over the land, was nonetheless attributed to the hands that dropped them. Morality came only with the emergence of man, and that because of his intelligence, his rational nature. Reason is a faculty unique to man; none of the minerals, plants and animals has it, whether we view it in the light of classical cosmology or modernity's evolutionary biology. [7] It is for this reason that man is a rational animal, *animal rationale*, and with thought comes the desire to know and to act on the basis of that knowledge; in other words, intellect and will. Both intellect and will are the same human reason aimed at different targets, the first towards the truth and the latter towards the good; although a specific good must first be recognized before the will desires it, the fact is that we all

³ "Aristotle's ethics, expounded as he expounds it, presupposes his metaphysical biology." Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981), 139.

⁴ Charles Darwin, *The Origin of Species: By Means of Natural Selection or the Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life* (New York: New American Library Mentor Book, 1958).

naturally desire a general good, a good as such, whose nature we might not initially know, which is the target of our lifelong appetite or desire. This is why Augustine could, at one time, say that his heart has remained restless and continuously searching for something whose nature it did not know until, he famously said, it finally rested in God.⁵ According to classical ethics, it is the presence of both knowledge and desire, the interplay of the intellect and the will, which accounts for the moral value of a human act. A human act is an intelligent act, which we perform out of our free option because, as Augustine and Paul say,⁶ even if we know the good, it could be the evil which we might tend to do. [8] It is thus the will which is free, not the intellect; the intellect is not free to distort the truth it sees, while the will has the option to do or not do what it recognizes to be good.

Thus far, the classical ethics of Aristotle and St. Thomas Aquinas. Though discussed rather too briefly, let's leave this ethics here for a while and see what went after Aristotle and the fall of Rome. Since the time was difficult, people became concerned with the meaning of life. [9] The quest for the good, especially the highest good or *summum bonum*, was understandably acute. What is life for? In these dark times, what could be more natural than to long for and strive after happiness?⁷ There were therefore the Hedonists who crudely desire physical pleasure, but there were also the Epicureans who had a more expanded view of happiness to include one's friends. Thus, to Epicureanism, friendship is the highest good; indeed, as the biblical psalmist famously said, "how good it is to live among friends."⁸ An even more subtle type of happiness, it will be recalled, has been bequeathed to us by Aristotle who, in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, defined it as "a state of the mind which is coupled with virtue,"⁹ citing virtue in light of that famous locus of it called the golden mean.¹⁰ This Aristotelian view of happiness was later adopted by Aquinas who, given his context in the age of

⁵ "... our hearts are restless until they can find peace in you." Saint Augustine, *The Confessions*, I.1, trans. Rex Warner (New York: Signet Classic, 2001), 1.

⁶ "... I became evil for nothing, with no reason for wrongdoing except the wrongdoing itself. The evil was foul, and I loved it; I loved destroying myself; I loved my sin – not the thing for which I had committed the sin, but the sin itself. How base a soul, falling back from your firmament to sheer destruction, not seeking some object by shameful means, but seeking shame for itself!" Augustine, *Confessions*, II.4; tr. Warner, 31.

⁷ A lucid and popular discussion of this period is found in the chapter on Hellenism of Jostein Gaarder, *Sophie's World: A Novel About the History of Philosophy*, trans. Paulette Møller (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 2007), 126-137. In part this chapter reads, "Having read about the natural philosophers and Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle, you are now familiar with the foundations of European philosophy . . . I shall now tell you about the long period from Aristotle near the end of the fourth century B.C. right up to the early Middle Ages around A.D. 400 . . . Hellenistic philosophy continued to work with the problems raised by Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle. Common to them all was their desire to discover how mankind should best live and die. They were concerned with *ethics*. In the new civilization, this became the central philosophical project. The main emphasis was on finding out what true happiness was and how it could be achieved." This was followed by a brief discussion on the cynics, the stoics, the epicureans and the neoplatonists.

⁸ Psalm 133

⁹ "Happiness (is) an activity of the soul in conformity with perfect goodness . . ." Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book I, Chapter 13, trans. J.A.K. Thomson (England: Penguin, 1965), 51.

¹⁰ Aristotle defines virtue as "a disposition of the soul in which, when it has to choose among actions and feelings, it observes the mean relative to us, this being determined by such a rule or principle as would take shape in the mind of a man of sense or practical wisdom. We call it a mean condition as lying between two forms of badness, one being excess and the other deficiency ..." *Ibid.*, Book II, Chapter 6, 66.

belief, objectified it even more to be equivalent at best to the state of spiritual bliss.¹¹ This same state is arguably analogical to the bliss of Spinoza, which is why his monumental project is appropriately titled *Ethics*.¹²

One can see how heteronomous is the concept of happiness, ranging from the most sensual to the most spiritual, between which is the secular conception of it by Aristotle, called eudaemonian ethics, and, in our time, the utilitarian ethics of, say, John Stuart Mill.¹³ Happiness, however, is only one major suggestion as to the nature of the *summum bonum* which Aristotle explained as follows: “Since every activity involving some acquired skill or some moral decision aims at some good, what do we take to be the end of politics – what is the supreme good attainable in our actions? Well, so far as the name goes there is pretty general agreement. ‘It is happiness,’ say both intellectuals and the unsophisticated, meaning by ‘happiness’ living well or faring well.”¹⁴ After Aristotle, during the difficult days of transition to the Middle Ages, there were, as we said, the Epicureans who found joy in the company of friends, the enduring type of which is the family and today's religious communities. However, happiness continues to be a kind of mixed bag of a whole range of options which cannot have pleased everybody and remained unchallenged. [10] The most serious challenge is posed, during the post-Aristotelian times, by the stoics, for whom the highest good is virtue. Stoicism enjoins everyone to live according to nature, which requires discipline since it entails the mastery of the passions of the body by the mind.¹⁵ This results in the image of a stoic man as one unnerved by reverses of fortunes, so that come good or bad winds one remains unmoved. *Apatheia* is thus the iconic model of stoicism, which literally means ‘without pathos or feeling.’ This is, of course, not exactly accurate because a person who has mastered himself and whose reason has managed to control the tendencies of the body need not be an unfeeling, uncaring person. Such a caricature of a

¹¹ Arguing with St. Augustine that “all men agree in desiring the last end, which is happiness” (St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Pt. I-II, Q. 1, Art. 6), Aquinas then explores whether man’s happiness consists in wealth, honors, glory, power, any bodily good, pleasure, some good of the soul, or any created good, and finds them all wanting (ST, Pt. I-II, Q. 2, Arts. 1-8). In the end, Aquinas concludes that “Final and perfect happiness can consist in nothing else than the vision of the Divine Essence” (ST, P.I-II, Q. 3, Art. 8).

¹² “It is therefore most profitable to us in life to make perfect the intellect or reason as far as possible, and in this one thing consists the highest happiness or blessedness of man; for blessedness is nothing but the peace of mind which springs from the intuitive knowledge of God, and to perfect the intellect is nothing but to understand God...” (Benedict de Spinoza, *Ethics*, Part IV, Appendix IV, trans. Amelia Hutchinson Stirling based on translation by William Hale White (New York: Hafner Publishing Company, 1949), 242.

¹³ “The creed which accepts as the foundation of morals, Utility, or the Greatest Happiness Principle, holds that actions are right in proportion as they tend to promote happiness, wrong as they tend to produce the reverse of happiness.” John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism*, Chapter II, ed. Mary Warnock (London: Fontana Library Collins, 1965), 257.

¹⁴ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book I, Chapter IV, 28-29.

¹⁵ “Zeno was the first writer who said, in his *On the Nature of Man*, that the chief good is life according to nature, which is life according to virtue . . . To live according to virtue is to live according to experience of what happens by nature . . . This is the virtue of the happy man and of smooth-flowing life, when everything is done in harmony with the genius of each individual according to the will of the universal governor and director. Diogenes says expressly that the chief good is to act in accordance with sound reason in selection of things according to nature.” Diogenes Laertius, “Life of Zeno,” in *Essential Works of Stoicism*, ed. Moses Hadas (New York: Bantam Books, 1961), 25-26.

stoic man does not exist; though hardened by time, he indeed has attained such a mental posture as to enable him to withstand the turmoils of life; nonetheless, he remains a man.

[11] All schools of ethics seem to be antinomically split between these two options of the *summum bonum*, namely, happiness and virtue. In their extreme form, they are what represent the popular classification of ethics into teleological and deontological ethics, the former being goal- or end-oriented while the latter putting such a goal or end either aside or at least in a secondary position. The iconic examples of these are utilitarianism and Kant's ethics respectively. The quarrel begins when they're set completely against each other, never mind if the utilitarians are struggling to re-conceptualize utility in terms of "what is in the interest of the greatest number" or if Kant is subtly qualifying his position by saying in no unambiguous terms that the highest good is a combination of happiness and virtue, where virtue stands for what makes one deserving of happiness. The recent emergence of what is called virtue theory arose out of the unease one rightly feels at crude pleasure construed as the principle of virtue, on the one hand, and the perceived moral rigidity of Kant's categorical imperative, on the other hand.¹⁶ MacIntyre's virtue ethics correctly aligns itself with Aristotle, but in doing so it actually sides with the teleological principle of happiness as sufficiently defined by the philosopher himself to be a state of a mean between two extremes, which is exactly what is meant by virtue or, in other words, what is good.¹⁷ My reading of the literature surrounding virtue ethics might not be comprehensive enough and so I acknowledge the need for me to read more of it, but I find its discussion so far lacking in that fundamental ground that could settle once and for all the meaning of virtue, otherwise also called the moral good. In Kant, at least, we are made to see the distinction between a practical or pragmatic good and a truly moral or virtuous good, the first emanating from what he technically describes as a hypothetical imperative and the latter from a categorical imperative.¹⁸ You will need to pardon these technicalities of Kant to be able to decipher the simplicity of what he wants to say, but the time, his time, demanded for no technical vocabulary for philosophy other than what he actually used; anything less than that would have been less effective than what we recognize now as the indispensable contribution to ethics of this formidable philosopher.

The Good Will

[12] So what's the problem? Why do we still find so much evil, moral evil that is, in the world? No day passes without any news of criminal and corrupt behavior. Why so? Do we lack a science of

¹⁶ "Some moral philosophers have become frustrated with the narrow, impersonal form of the hitherto dominant moral theories of utilitarianism and Kantianism and have revived the neglected tradition of 'virtue theory.'" Greg Pence, "Virtue Theory," in *A Companion To Ethics*, ed. Peter Singer (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), 249.

¹⁷ Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981).

¹⁸ "All imperatives command either *hypothetically* or *categorically*. Hypothetical imperatives declare a possible action to be practically necessary as a means to the attainment of something else that one wills (or that one may will). A categorical imperative would be one which represented an action as objectively necessary in itself apart from its relation to a further end." Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals*, trans. H.J. Paton, in *The Moral Law* (London: Hutchinson University Library, 1966), 78. See also Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, Pt. 1, Bk. 1, Ch. 1, 1 Remark, trans. Lewis White Beck (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Library of Liberal Arts, 1977), 18. Italics in original text.

ethics that would guarantee that we can discern the difference between good and evil? Alasdair MacIntyre famously opens his book with the following observation:

The most striking feature of contemporary moral utterance is that so much of it is used to express disagreements; and the most striking feature of the debates in which these disagreements are expressed is their interminable character. I do not mean by this just that such debates go on and on and on - although they do - but also that they apparently can find no terminus. There seems to be no rational way of securing moral agreement in our culture.¹⁹

That there seems to be no rational way of securing moral agreement in our culture, seems indisputable. I contend, however, that this is not because of any lack of knowledge, even conviction, about what is good. The classical principle of synderesis, "Do good and avoid evil," is hard to refute; indeed, all indications point to the fact that this is accepted by all.²⁰ Moreover, startling though this position might be, [13] I am hesitant to accept the contention that when anyone does an evil act the evil quality of the act is not known by the actor. Especially in this day and age we should have already perfected the intellectual mechanism whereby to judge whether our act or intended act is good or bad. My suspicion, nay my contention is that the matter has to do not with knowledge but with factors other than knowledge. The intellect, says classical philosophy, knows the truth and is not at liberty to distort it. Indeed, if the person does not know the truth, he or she cannot be faulted for an act done out of ignorance; thus, it is a question whether, from the practical point of view, there exists a truly invincible ignorance.²¹ I think that we now know that error in the case of an act is not due to the absence of knowledge. Everybody agrees, I think, that money is good, but everybody agrees likewise that stealing, especially if the victim is oneself, is a bad thing indeed. I know it when I get something from you wrongly, and so it is righteous that I am pricked in my conscience and feel remorse, whether or not I confess the guilt publicly. I cannot hide from myself the wrongness of an act I have performed, notwithstanding the fact that I do not feel the inclination to reveal openly my guilt. Knowledge is sure, but this has not prevented me from doing the crooked act anyway. Even as I offer endless rationalizations, I know in the depth of me, even with no explicitly formulated account, that I have done wrong or am bent to do it.

[14] What I am saying in effect is that there is no defect in our knowledge and that we know whether what we do or intend to do is good or bad. If this is correct, then the question should be raised about where comes the error, if at all. I hope this position of mine no longer startles anyone, that evil is a question not of the intellect whose business is knowledge or truth but of the will whose

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 6.

²⁰ In his discussion of the Natural Law, Aquinas has this to say: "Consequently the first principle in the practical reason is one founded on the notion of good, viz., that *good is that which all things seek after*. Hence this is the first precept of law, that *good is to be done and pursued, and evil is to be avoided*. All other precepts of the natural law are based upon this: so that whatever the practical reason naturally apprehends as man's good (or evil) belongs to the precepts of the natural law as something to be done or avoided." Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Vol. 2, Pt. 1-II, Q. 94, Art. 2; 1009. Italics in original text.

²¹ Aquinas discusses the question, "Whether Ignorance Causes Involuntariness?" in ST, Pt. I-II, Q6, Art. 8, quoting Damascene the Philosopher saying, "... what is done through ignorance is involuntary." This is uncontested, so far as it goes; however, I'm posing a doubt as to the factual occurrence of a truly ignorant act in relation to its moral quality.

business is the good. This is the source of what emboldens Kant, in the beginning of the *Ground of the Metaphysics of Moral*, boldly to claim that [15] "there is nothing in the world or outside of it that can be considered good without qualification except the good will."²² In the same breath he is able to identify the factor that accounts for evil - a will that is not good or, if you wish, a bad will. The statement so elegantly formulated by Kant seems innocent enough, and yet it is actually an ethical bombshell. The statement is just as devastating ethically as the equally innocent statement "How are synthetic a priori judgments possible?" is devastating theoretically.²³ Anyway, Kant is not called the all-destroyer by his contemporary, Moses Mendelssohn, for nothing.²⁴ Let's get this clear.

All that classical ethics tells us is that we know through our reason acting as an intellect whether what we do is good or bad. By our nature, then, we can know what's ethically correct. That [16] we do evil is not so much because we do not know it to be wrong; rather, we do wrong despite our knowledge. Corrupt officials are, of course, among the most intelligent among us and know that plunder is a big betrayal of the people's trust, yet how come they plunder anyway? In fact, the likelihood is that they enter politics precisely as a business enterprise in order to get the economic benefit of it. There must have intervened another factor, say, the desire for wealth or power, which can prove stronger than the knowledge of what is good. The will that now weakens in the face of such a temptation of money or power now ceases to be pure; such a state of mind is what changes the quality of the will from good to bad. Such a bad will, even when the action looks externally good, makes the action downright bad. Similarly, any act, even if it appears bad, if coming from a good will, transforms it into an unequivocally good deed. "There is nothing in the world or outside of it which can be considered good without any qualification except the good will." [17] Anything at all, no matter how it appears to many people, if qualified by a good will, is in no uncertain terms good. And so the same act, if qualified by a bad will, is in equally certain terms evil.

Thus, if MacIntyre is correct that the Enlightenment philosophers share merely "in the project of constructing valid arguments which will move from premises concerning human nature as they

²² "It is impossible to conceive anything at all in the world, or even out of it, which can be taken as good without qualification, except a *good will*. Intelligence, wit, judgment, and any other *talents* of the mind we may care to name, or courage, resolution, and constancy of purpose, as qualities of *temperament*, are without doubt good and desirable in many respects; but they can also be extremely bad and hurtful when the will is not good which has to make use of these gifts of nature, and which for this reason has the term '*character*' applied to its peculiar quality. It is exactly the same with *gifts of fortune*. Power, wealth, honour, even health and that complete well-being and contentment with one's state which goes by the name of 'happiness', produce boldness, and as a consequence often over-boldness as well, unless a good will is present by which their influence on the mind – and so too the whole principle of action – may be corrected and adjusted to universal ends; not to mention that a rational and impartial spectator can never feel approval in contemplating the uninterrupted prosperity of a being graced by no touch of a pure and good will, and that consequently a good will seems to constitute the indispensable condition of our very worthiness to be happy." Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals*, 59; italics in original text.

²³ Immanuel Kant, see Introduction to the *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. F. Max Müller (New York: Doubleday & Company Anchor Books, 1966), 13.

²⁴ "While (Moses Mendelssohn) continued to adhere to the basic teachings of the Leibniz-Wolffian school, however, the intellectual climate in Germany underwent momentous changes. 'The reputation of this school,' as he himself put it in *Morning Hours* (1785), 'has since [the first half of the eighteenth century] greatly declined and, in the course of its demise, has brought the reputation of speculative philosophy in general down with it.' Partly responsible for the current, dismal situation were the most recent philosophical antagonists of traditional metaphysics, especially 'the all-crushing Kant.'" Allan Arkush, *Moses Mendelssohn and the Enlightenment* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1994), 69.

understand it to be to conclusions about the authority of moral rules and precepts,"²⁵ if the project is merely to translate one knowledge to another knowledge, that is, from the knowledge of human nature to the knowledge of moral rules and precepts, then we can very well agree that "any project of this form was bound to fail."²⁶ Any such project is bound to fail, not only for the reason stated by MacIntyre, that these philosophers are inevitably going to come up with ineradicable discrepancies and divergences, but also because, even should such discrepancies and divergences not occur, the defect lies not so much in its being a matter of knowledge as in its being a matter of desire, that is, not in the intellect but in the will.

[18] Thus, if the objective of virtue ethics is the formation of the will, then I should say that its moral stance is indeed navigating the correct trail. However, if the education it undertakes equates with the entrenchment of, say, specific principles, attitudes and values in the children's mind, then chances are that, like the previous generations of teachers, the proponents of virtue ethics shall also fail to develop that sort of upright citizens who are of authentic moral worth. To me, Kant has correctly identified the good will as the 'groundwork' of ethics, and so its formation should be the valid goal of ethics training. Nay, if Rousseau and Mencius are deemed to be correct, the good will is not so much to be formed as to be preserved.²⁷ What sort of education should we design in order to guarantee the preservation of the good will? In any case, is the good will a fact or a myth?

[19] To Kant, the fact of the good will is inevitable, for it forms the basis, foundation or, as he puts it, the groundwork of a metaphysics of morals. We cannot repeat often enough the justly famous opening line of his *Groundwork*: "There is nothing in the world or outside of it which can be considered good without qualification except the good will." It would then be worth our effort to direct education in this manner such that it results not so much in the formation as in the preservation of the good will; this would exactly be the equivalent of Mencius' injunction that we return to nature.²⁸ Let's explain this further. MacIntyre's diagnosis of the Enlightenment project, that it had to fail,²⁹ is correct. There is only one way for Enlightenment to attain its *telos*, and that is by its going beyond itself, by realizing the futility of its own epistemological project, a predicament very similar to

²⁵ McIntyre, *After Virtue*, 50.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ One can very well substitute the term 'good' for 'free' in the justifiably famous opening sentence of the *Social Contract*: "Man was born free, and everywhere he is in chains." Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract and discourse on the Origin and Foundation of Inequality Among Mankind*, ed. Lester G. Crocker (New York: Washington Square Press, Inc., 1967), 7. Of particular interest for this paper, however, is Rousseau's *Émile*, trans. Barbara Foxley (London: Everyman's Library, 1976). In his Introduction to the book, P. D. Jimack remarks: "Although Rousseau usually referred to *Émile* as his 'Traité d'éducation', he tended always to play down the educational aspect of the book, which he saw primarily as a work of moral philosophy, based on his belief that man was naturally good." (ix) The comparison of Rousseau's battlecry, "Back to nature!" with the Chinese philosopher, Mencius, is inevitable. Illustrative of this is the famous story of the man from Sung: "You must not be like the man from Sung. There was a man from Sung who pulled at his rice plants because he was worried about their failure to grow. Having done so, he went on his home, not realizing what he had done. 'I am worn out today,' said he to his family. 'I have been helping the rice plants to grow.' His son rushed out to take a look and there the plants were, all shriveled up." *Mencius*, Book II, Part A, trans. D.C. Lau (England: Penguin Books, 1970), 78.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ McIntyre, *After Virtue*, see Chapter V, e.g. "All (Enlightenment philosophers) reject teleological view of human nature, any view of man as having an essence which defines his true end. But to understand this is to understand why their project of finding a basis for morality had to fail." (52)

the Hindu experience of *neti, neti* as it rationally tries to understand *Brahman*.³⁰ All such efforts to disclose the nature of *Brahman*, taken either singly or collectively, are bound to fail inasmuch as, using Bergson, they are all "too narrow, above all too rigid, for what we try to put into them."³¹ The best illustration of this remains to be Kant's all-devastating *Critique of Pure Reason*. [20] The very formulation of the critical project, "How are synthetic a priori judgments possible?,"³² actually amounts to the shaking of the foundations of all the sciences, nay of all knowledge. To me, Kant's critique of pure reason is the culmination and perfection of the Cartesian universal doubt whose first principle continues to reverberate: "In order to examine into the truth, it is necessary once in one's life to doubt of all things, so far as this is possible."³³ Without diminishing the importance of Descartes as the father of modernity, his universal doubt turns out to be anything but final and universal, for the succeeding triumvirate of empiricism - John Locke, George Berkeley and David Hume - have yet to continue the historical task of refining to perfection the Cartesian method of doubt. Descartes, it turns out, failed to doubt three key concepts: innatism, which Locke demolished in the first book of the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*; matter or substance, which Berkeley exploded in the *Three Dialogues Between Hylas and Philonous*; and causality, which Hume masterfully exposed in *An Inquiry Concerning Human Understanding*. It is Hume who famously woke up Kant from his dogmatic slumber,³⁴ without which one might surmise that the *Critique of Pure Reason* could not have been written.³⁵ The entire formidable first part, on the Elements of Transcendentalism, which constitute practically the entire first critique, is tantamount to a sweeping job of demolition of the entire classical architectonic, leaving nothing of it still standing. [21] With the *Critique of Pure Reason* the entire history of Western philosophy that started with the Greeks, which Martin Heidegger called the 'first beginning,'³⁶ has thoroughly collapsed.

³⁰ In reference to *Brahma-Sutras*, iii.ii.22, Shankara's commentary states: It is impossible that the phrase, 'Not so, not so!' should deny both [-material and immaterial forms], since that would imply the doctrine of a general Void. Whenever we deny something unreal, we do so with reference to something real; the unreal snake, e.g., is denied with reference to the real rope. . . The phrase that Brahman transcends all speed and thought does certainly not mean to say that Brahman does not exist. . ." *A Sourcebook in Indian Philosophy*, ed. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan and Charles A. Moore (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1973), 537.

³¹ "In vain we force the living into this or that one of our molds. All the molds crack. They are too narrow, above all too rigid, for what we try to put into them." Henri Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, trans. Arthur Mitchell (New York: The Modern Library, 1944), xx.

³² Kant, Introduction to *Critique of Pure Reason*, 22.

³³ René Descartes, Principle 1 of *Principles of Philosophy*, in *The Philosophical Works of Descartes*, Vol. 1, trans. Elizabeth S. Haldane and G.R.T. Ross (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), 219.

³⁴ "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 That Will Be Able To Come Forward As Science*, trans. Paul Carus, revised James W. Ellington (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1977), 5.

³⁵ Kant remarked that the Analytic of Concepts and the transcendental deduction of the categories gave him the greatest difficulty, and we could very well surmise that Hume's scrutiny of 'cause' provided the impetus for his discovery of the key to their disclosure, that is, the disclosure of the pure a priori concepts of the understanding or the categories.

³⁶ "*Contributions to Philosophy* enacts a questioning along a pathway which is first traced out by the crossing to the other beginning, into which Western thinking is now entering." Martin Heidegger, *Contributions to*

With Kant the radical threshold has been crossed and the transition to postmodernity, Heidegger's 'second beginning,'³⁷ takes its initial steps. The entire methodological endeavor from Descartes (1596-1650) to Kant (1724-1904), a stretch of some three centuries, which is called modernity, the Age of Enlightenment, is the crucial period of transition from the classical age to the post-classical, post-rational, post-Enlightenment age brought about by the great paradigm shift, Heidegger's 'second beginning'. As already mentioned, MacIntyre considered this as the total failure of the Enlightenment project. This, however, is only one attitude one may take of this historical event; Heidegger seems not to consider it as a total failure; on contrary, like Nietzsche, he welcomes it as the dawn of a new beginning, a prelude to the future.³⁸ The difference is exemplified by MacIntyre's return to Aristotle, indicating his failure to experience the radical step onto the new beginning, as did Heidegger. [22] This event entails a paradigm shift in all spheres of life, including ethics.

I beg your indulgence that I will now go back to the metaphysics of *Being and Time*.³⁹ In effect, what Heidegger is trying to say in this monumental work is that, while the Greeks were able to articulate the correct question, they were not able to answer it adequately, except for the truly primordial thinkers like Anaximander, Heraclitus and Parmenides.⁴⁰ Plato and Aristotle, in particular, are singled out as culprits in the eventual historical distraction that result in humanity's forgetfulness of Being.⁴¹ The rest of history is thus a history of forgetfulness, and what it calls metaphysics is really still only a physics. When, in the *Meta ta physika*, Aristotle states, after a lot of beating about the bush, that being is substance,⁴² what he actually effects is seal at least for the next two millennia the destiny of the West characterized now by the sophistication of technique through science and technology. This is all fine, for as long as we are willing to accept the required sacrifice of the original metaphysical or ontological project, which could have continued unceasingly if we did not experience

Philosophy (From Enowning), trans. Parvis Emad and Kenneth Maly (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 3 *passim*.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ Of particular interest to this paper is the subtitle of Friedrich Nietzsche's book, *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Random Vintage Books, 1966).

³⁹ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: HarperPerennial Modern Thought, 2008).

⁴⁰ "We will therefore henceforth call the primordial word of Anaximander, of Parmenides, and of Heraclitus the dictum of these thinkers . . . To think is to heed the essential . . . It concerns the being in its ground – it intends Being." Martin Heidegger, *Parmenides*, trans. André Schuwer and Richard Rojcewicz (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), 3.

⁴¹ "This question (of Being) has today been forgotten . . . Yet the question we are touching upon is not just any question. It is one which provided a stimulus for the researches of Plato and Aristotle, only to subside from then on *as a theme for actual investigation*. What these two men achieved was to persist through many alterations and 'retouchings' down to the 'logic' of Hegel. And what they wrested with the utmost intellectual effort from the phenomena, fragmentary and incipient though it was, has long since become trivialized." Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 21.

⁴² "And indeed the question which was raised of old and is raised now and always, and is always the subject of doubt, viz. what being is, is just the question, what is substance?" Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 1028b2-4, in *Basic Works of Aristotle*, ed. McKeon, 784-785.

the limits to growth and progress at the turn of the millennium. Despite the amazing advance in all the disciplines of science, poverty goes on unabated globally carrying with it altered forms of social slavery and injustice. It remains a question whether the calculus of human misery has actually tapered down, given the massive experience of need and want amidst progress and plenty. Add to this the monstrous natural disasters and global warming rather anticipated than controlled precisely as a consequence of the growth of technical sophistication, then we have the picture of an earth fearful of explosion and annihilation. Wars and rumors of wars are getting to be even more nervous on account of threats of chemical and nuclear weaponry. No wonder we continue to hanker after peace even as we try hard to reduce, seemingly hopelessly, all prevailing social inequalities.

[23] It is about time that we begin anew; indeed, says Heidegger, we have already taken the crucial step toward a new beginning, which is tantamount to a radical shift of paradigms.⁴³ If you allow me to translate what Heidegger is trying to tell us, I'd say that time is now ripe to already take a grip of that initial impulse of Being which was still so alive in Anaximander, Heraclitus and Parmenides. The new beginning is the authentic ontological age which should define the next millennia or two, marked by the emergence of the true metaphysics after two millennia of forgetfulness. But, you'd say, this is metaphysics all over again whereas the new age should be characterized by a climate described by Levinas as otherwise than being.⁴⁴ Despite his formulation of it, Levinasian ethics presupposes, in fact, Heidegger's ontology; they actually constitute the proverbial two faces of the same coin. [24] If, indeed, ours is a new beginning, it cannot anymore be like before, oblivious of Being, inauthentic. It thus presupposes a radically new human reality; call it, as Heidegger does, *Dasein*⁴⁵ or, as Nietzsche does, *Übermensch*,⁴⁶ or you may invent your own name for this new and higher species of humanity; to Confucius, for example, this is the man of *jen*, the Great Man.⁴⁷ This transformed human type is ontologically different from the outdated rational animal of old; for one, it is ethical in its very core, precisely because it is characterized by authenticity. *Dasein* as *Übermensch*, *Übermensch* as *Dasein* does not only *seem good*; he/she *is good* - this is the very essence of the newly evolved higher species of human reality, summed up by the word authenticity; if this is not what to be ethical means, I don't know what is.

[25] Now let us consider what this term, good, means. It certainly does not refer to mere compliance with norms, principles, injunctions, rules and other such general propositions scientifically induced and organized by certain philosophies, thought systems, faiths or ideologies. Such a practice would suit the period of modernity at the conclusion of the classical age, and so before the paradigm shift of the new beginning. This is what Lyotard means when, as a result of a commissioned work, he

⁴³ The term 'paradigm shift,' a popular reference to our time, is attributed to Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970).

⁴⁴ Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1981).

⁴⁵ "This entity which each of us is himself and which includes inquiring as one of the possibilities of its Being, we shall denote by the term '*Dasein*'." Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 27.

⁴⁶ "I teach you the Superman. Man is something that should be overcome." Friedrich Nietzsche, Prologue, 3 to *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (England: Penguin Books, 1966), 41.

⁴⁷ "Great Man applies himself to the fundamentals, for once the fundamentals are there System comes into being. It is filial duty and fraternal duty that are fundamental to Manhood-at-his-best." Confucius, *Sayings*, I.2 *et passim*, trans. James Ware (New York: New American Library Mentor Books, 1955), 21.

concluded that the age of postmodernity is basically against all metanarratives.⁴⁸ The postmodern age is also a post-ideological age, no matter whether the ideology is political, intellectual, social or religious; such an attitude of compliance makes for what MacIntyre calls a theatre of illusions.⁴⁹ All modes of thought are creatures of habit, including our concept of, say, human rights; it is therefore not true that only the civil society's version of it has the right to prevail.⁵⁰ Here is where Nietzsche got it right, that all tables of good and evil cannot be said to be permanently fixed, that it is in their very nature that, at certain times, these tables have to be turned and all values reevaluated.⁵¹ The actual locus of all these concepts and values is our collective intelligence, there historically and culturally evolved and deposited. Nothing, then, is sacrosanct. This fact of the transitoriness of all norms and standards, all concepts of right and wrong, of good and bad, should not be allowed to go into oblivion, otherwise we experience again and again the shackles that bind our acts, which make us slaves despite our natural state of freedom.⁵² [26] Once liberated from these conceptual and moral baggage, we start getting in touch again with our original state, what Kant calls our good will, which is what Rousseau refers to as the general will. It is this will which, Rousseau says, never errs, the only thing, says Kant, which is always good without qualification.⁵³ This is the groundwork, the fundamental principle of all morality. All tables of good and evil rely on it for their moral quality, so that an act which is otherwise good becomes downright bad when qualified by and grounded on a bad will.

The good will may be likened to the Cartesian *cogito* as the residue that remains after the universal doubt.⁵⁴ However, it should be kept in mind that this residue has already undergone no

⁴⁸ "Simplifying to the extreme, I define *postmodern* as incredulity toward metanarratives." Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), xxiv.

⁴⁹ MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 74.

⁵⁰ It is always good to keep in mind how the meaning of 'right' evolves historically, see G.W.F. Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*, trans. T.M. Knox (London: Oxford University Press, 1967). Same remark as above can be said of the meaning of human right as understood by the Communist front.

⁵¹ "This inversion of values (which includes using the word "poor" as synonymous with "holy" and "friend") constitutes the significance of the Jewish people: they mark the beginning of the slave rebellion in morals." Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 195; trans. Kaufmann, 108.

⁵² "There are *master morality* and *slave morality* . . . The noble human being separates from himself those in whom the opposite of such exalted, proud states finds expression: he despises them." Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 260; trans. Kaufmann, 204.

⁵³ ". . . the general will is always right and always tends to the public advantage . . ." Rousseau, *Social Contract*, Chapter III: Whether the General Will Can Err, 30-31. It is generally surmised that Kant's good will has been influenced by Rousseau. "It is impossible to conceive anything at all in the world, or even out of it, which can be taken as good without qualification, except a *good will*." Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals*, trans. Paton, 59.

⁵⁴ Husserl refers to the *cogito* or the "transcendental consciousness" as the "phenomenological residuum" after undertaking the *epoche* or "what remains over when the whole world is bracketed, including ourselves and all our thinking". Edmund Husserl, *Ideas: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology*, Chapter 4, 33, trans. W.R. Boyce Gibson (New York: Collier Books, 1962), 101. Husserl himself confesses to his being a neo-Cartesian. "France's greatest thinker, René Descartes, gave transcendental phenomenology new impulses through his *Meditations* . . . Accordingly one might almost call transcendental phenomenology a neo-Cartesianism . . ." Edmund Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations: An Introduction to Phenomenology*, trans. Dorion Cairns (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1973), 1.

small historical refinement, so that by the time it was received by Husserl this pure consciousness is no longer solitarily floating in mid-air but ceaselessly aware that it is always consciousness-of-something, the better for Heidegger to bring it to a new niveau where it is no mere pure consciousness but already Dasein, a being-in-the-world. [27] What is construed as the triumph of subjectivity must now be taken to mean the emergence or, as Darwin would have it, the origin of a newly evolved and higher species which, for now, we'll call Dasein. Its appearance marks, too, the dawn of the new morality, described by Nietzsche as one appropriate of masters rather than slaves. You will pardon the rather dramatic turn of his phrase, which however makes perfect sense in so far as we are experiencing just yet the beginning of an epoch, perhaps the beginning of at least the next three millennia.

What is this new morality? If I were to review our existing moral theories, I would consider Alasdair MacIntyre's virtue ethics as the most recently articulated theory,⁵⁵ preceded only by the deontological ethics of Kant⁵⁶ and the teleological ethics of utilitarianism, say of John Stuart Mill.⁵⁷ Others not to be missed should include Joseph Fletcher's situation ethics⁵⁸ and Max Scheler's phenomenologically considered value ethics.⁵⁹ To me, the theory of justice of John Rawls⁶⁰ and the social ethics underlying the thought of Amartya Sen⁶¹ make a lot of profound impression. The antinomian perspective one gets by taking a broad view of Epicureanism⁶² and Stoicism⁶³ cannot be taken for granted. And, in all likelihood, all these and others not explicitly mentioned here redound,

⁵⁵ Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981). Normally mentioned with MacIntyre is Elizabeth Anscombe; a host of followers then came espousing virtue ethics.

⁵⁶ Landmark works of Kant are *Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals*, trans. H.J. Paton, in *The Moral Law* (London: Hutchinson University Library, 1966) and *Critique of Practical Reason*, trans. Lewis White Beck (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Library of Liberal Arts, 1977).

⁵⁷ Jeremy Bentham's *Principles of Morals and Legislation* and John Stuart Mill's *On Liberty* and *Utilitarianism* are collected in one volume, *The Utilitarians* (New York: Doubleday Dolphin Books, 1961).

⁵⁸ Joseph Fletcher, *Situation Ethics: The New Morality* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1966).

⁵⁹ Max Scheler, *Formalism in Ethics and Non-Formal Ethics of Values*, trans. Manfred S. Frings and Roger L. Funk (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973).

⁶⁰ John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999).

⁶¹ Amartya Sen, *Development as Freedom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

⁶² See excerpt from Epicurus' "Letter to Herodotus" in *Varieties of Unbelief: From Epicurus to Sartre*, ed. J.C.A. Gaskin (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1989), 20-26. The root of his pleasure principle is rooted in what Gaskin calls 'classical materialism.' This is true also of Charvaka, the only materialistic school of Hinduism.

⁶³ Moses Hadas, ed., *Essential Works of Stoicism* (New York: Bantam Books, 1961).

at bottom, to the great divide between Plato⁶⁴ and Aristotle.⁶⁵ There could be many other thinkers and schools of thinkers on a pupil's note pad, and they all probably make distinctive sense in their own peculiar way, so we shall reject none of them and allow them all to fall in line, in the manner of Bacon's theatrical celebrities. But, also like Bacon, we shall try to rid ourselves of all of them so as to be able to see things as they are; nay, we shall not ruthlessly rid ourselves of them, whose possibility is in question, but merely suspend them in the manner of Husserl's *epoche* or, better yet, as appropriated by a truly hermeneutic consciousness, as suggested by Gadamer.⁶⁶

The popular Steve Jobs and Warren Buffett recently made Yahoo news by declaring that whoever is eyeing success needs to focus, and such a focus requires not so much a 'yes, yes, yes' but a 'no, no, no'!⁶⁷ That sounds very much like Jiddu Krishnamurti's formula for radical freedom, except that there lurks a danger that our 'no' might be selectively designed to aim at the survival of a specific position, which is not what we are meaning to say here. [28] Our 'no, no' is closer to the Vedantist *neti, neti* or Kant's all-devastating critique of pure reason, as well as today's radical deconstruction and rejection of all types of metanarratives. In fact, MacIntyre's virtue ethics narrowly misses this ideal or radical nihilism by inevitably choosing to take up the cause for Aristotle. This is similar to the case of Joseph Maréchal whose transcendental Thomism fails by a hairbreadth to take the complete turn from classical to postmodern theology, giving then the honor of the crucial move to Karl Rahner.⁶⁸

Contemporary Challenge: The Philippine Case

All theoretical positions, including those of ethics, invite dissent and thus sustain the state of war which, for Hobbes, constitutes the nature of man.⁶⁹ [29] The original state of innocence and freedom is a pre-ethical state which we can only imagine but not empirically prove. Such original goodness of man stimulates our poetic inclination and produces the mythological spirit seemingly present in the pre-history of every group of people. Heidegger invites us to penetrate that *Ursprung* which, in his second landmark work after *Sein und Zeit*, he calls *Ereignis*.⁷⁰ Ereignis is a new consciousness, evolved through at least three millennia of earnest thinking by the West which

⁶⁴ Plato's ethical discussions are scattered in his dialogues, but one may not skip the presentation of justice in the *Republic*, trans. Allan Bloom (USA: Basic Books of The Perseus Books Group, 1968).

⁶⁵ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. J.A.K. Thomson (England: Penguin, 1965).

⁶⁶ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (New York: Continuum, 1988).

⁶⁷ Zameena Mejia, "Steve Jobs: Here's what most people get wrong about focus," CNBC, Yahoo, October 3, 2018.

⁶⁸ Joseph Maréchal, *A Maréchal Reader*, trans. Joseph Donceel (New York: Herder and Herder, 1970). Karl Rahner, *A Rahner Reader*, ed. Gerald A. McCool (New York: The Seabury Press Crossroad Book, 1975).

⁶⁹ "Hereby it is manifest, that during the time men live without a common Power to keep them all in awe, they are in that condition which is called Warre; and such a warre, as is of every man, against every man." Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Part I, Chapter 13 [62], (England: Penguin Books, 1980), 185.

⁷⁰ Martin Heidegger, *Beiträge zur Philosophie (vom Ereignis)*, trans. *Contributions to Philosophy (From Enowning)* by Parvis Emad and Kenneth Maly (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999).

brought forth this amazing age of science and technology, now on the way to its Fourth Industrial Revolution. Either that, where the machine designed by man develops through countless human strategies and innovations into a new species in its own right, in which case the robot becomes an ultra-robot with a supermind of its own better than any man can ever have; or, man himself will be a newly evolved species, no longer simply a rational animal, thus no longer merely a man, but a superman (*Übermensch*, Nietzsche calls it⁷¹) which Heidegger calls Dasein.⁷² Dasein is thus a radically new species in the hierarchy of beings; it is, Nietzsche says, "the meaning of the earth."⁷³ The Dasein is no mere theoretical construct on the part of the great philosopher; if it were, it should also have to be dropped and rejected as just one of the many other theoretical positions that parade on Bacon's stage, one of those theoretical standpoints that need to be abstained from and bracketed through Husserl's phenomenology, one more name or form which the Hindu sage will have to say 'no' to. Never mind the name, because the point is to experience it, referred to and given various labels by men of all times and climes, such as *nirvana* by the Buddha, *nirguna Brahman* by the Vedantist, the cloud of unknowing by the unknown mystical writer, the sage in Socrates which knows that he does not know, the radical *via negativa* one encounters in all great philosophies and theologies, what Levinas calls Infinity, that which Kant refers to as the "unknown root" of all knowledge, here given by Heidegger the name of *Ereignis*. [30] So long as these are not turned into theoretical constructs, then they point to that ground zero of all ethics, called by Kant the 'good will.' Even the most savage of all human creatures are equipped with this pure and noble will, yes, even when one is impelled by one's culture or social circumstances to pick up a weapon and kill.⁷⁴

This is where I would like to connect with the contemporary events in our country's history. It is really on condition that he is coming from the good will, here better cited as the general will, that one can justify even the cases of EJK purportedly committed by President Rodrigo "Digong" Duterte. Indeed, all seemingly incomprehensible acts and decisions of the current administration cannot make sense except on this assumption. The other option is to keep to the old vocabularies and meanings of terms such as human right, presidential statesmanship, diplomacy, and others; in short, the classical meaning of right and wrong, good and evil. Personally, I wouldn't go for this other option because we have already been here for an incalculably long period of time, and aren't we already sick and tired of it? When it comes to such matters as current to us, I can only take my stance without claiming complete knowledge of how things really stand; this is where a lot of prayer is needed, for we are left with only a whiff of hope and trust to keep ourselves going.

There are a lot more to say, and I do not expect to have satisfied all of your curious questions and queries. You might, however, be asking about the place of indigenous ethics in all this. Before I accepted the invitation of Mr. Aldrin Quintero and Mr. Wrendolf Juntilla, I frankly confessed to him that I have the least expertise when it comes to our minority brothers and sisters; in the end, after our online conversation, I agreed, albeit meekly and not unreservedly, to his request. I feel for that noble savage which is also alive in my inmost self, and in no case should that be violated by anyone. [31] In the last three millennia of existence of the rational animal, we have been besieged by all sorts of

⁷¹ "I teach you the Superman. Man is something that should be overcome." Friedrich Nietzsche, Prologue, 3 to *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (England: Penguin Books, 1966), 41.

⁷² "Dasein is ontico-ontologically prior . . . Ontically, of course, Dasein is notly close to us – even that which is closes: we *are* it, each of us, we ourselves . . ." Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 36.

⁷³ "The Superman is the meaning of the earth." Nietzsche, Prologue 3 to *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 42.

⁷⁴ "We are Cain's children . . . Man is a predator whose natural instinct is to kill with a weapon." Robert Ardrey, *African Genesis* (London: Collins Fontana Books, 1968), 353.

principles, rules and theories which have become instruments of various forms of degradation and dehumanization. All that should now go, for it is now time to evolve that new consciousness that transcends all prescribed limits. We have coined varied names for it - compassion, love, justice, benevolence, charity, generosity, authenticity - equipped, says Pascal, with the heart that contains a reason which reason itself does not know. Once called to life, not as a theoretical construct, an ideological imperative or a religious dogma but as a living reality that essentially defines us, there shall be no more moral or ethical problem left to haunt us and the dream of eternal peace shall already have become secure.

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