

# A Philosophical Reinterpretation of Philippine History in the Perspective of Friedrich Nietzsche

Glenn G. Pajares

---

## **Abstract**

*The study explained and interpreted Philippine history using the main themes of Friedrich Nietzsche's philosophy such as, Will to Power, the Uebermensch/superman, the Transvaluation of values, Master and Slave morality, Eternal recurrence, and tragedy. Further, this study employed qualitative interpretive analysis as method. Nietzsche's philosophy emphasizes the role of the Will over reason as the most fundamental principle of human existence. The Will which he refers to as Will to Power is the impetus behind the struggle for power, conquest, war, revolt, revolution and freedom. Similarly, the will to power gives the Filipinos the hope and courage to go through pain, suffering and despair. The assertion of Will to Power has produced the great men and women behind events of Philippine history. These supermen are responsible for the creation or the introduction of new values system, of reform and even of revolution (trans-valuation of values). The event of Philippine history follows a pattern of recurrence, the recurrence of colonization, war, independence, pain, and corruption. The study also found out that Philippine history in general is a tragedy; it is a struggle against suffering and despair.*

*Keywords: Philippine history, Philosophical Reinterpretation, Friedrich Nietzsche's philosophy*

---

## **1.0 Introduction**

Robin George Collingwood, an English philosopher of history said that history is a reconstruction of the past events in the mind of the historian (Collingwood, 1946, 215-217). This means that history is both objective and subjective. It is objective because the historian has to have evidences such as relics, artifacts, documents, and event testimonies to be able to factually narrate or tell history. The evidences serve as the raw materials or building blocks of reconstruction or reenactment of past event. In as much as the event is already bygone, the entire details of the event cannot be restored most

especially that the historians were not around when the event happened. Thus, the historian has to use his imagination to fill in the gaps or vacuums of history to be able to reconstruct it as a whole story. This is where subjectivism comes in. Since history is partly subjective, there is no absolute interpretation or version of history. History may vary from one historian to another depending on how the historian would reconstruct events using his imagination, creativity, as well as biases and preferences. Hence, history is selective.

The philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche himself said that that there is no truth, all are just interpretations (Will to Power, 2013). For him,

there is no absolute truth and no single approach, method or interpretation of reality and of history. In fact, Nietzsche proposed that one has to be a critique of history. It is in this spirit that this paper is composed.

The philosophy of history is actually another approach in studying past events. Instead of just the memorization and enumeration of dates, places, persons in history which is the conventional and traditional approach or method of teaching history and Philippine history in particular, the philosophy of history provides a philosophical interpretation, explanation and analysis of events. This is precisely the objective and goal of the paper.

This study is beneficial to students of philosophy and history for it gives them an idea on how philosophy is applied or related with history. It also provides the general readers the idea that, after all, the sciences, philosophies and the different disciplines of thought are actually interrelated. Studies like this one enables students and scholars of the contemporary time to take a valuable part and noble role to reinterpret Philippine history in a philosophical point of view which taps higher order thinking skills at the same time enables teachers/instructors to provoke critical thinking among students.

### Related Literature

George Wilhelm Hegel, a German thinker and idealist believes that history is the freedom of consciousness. This means that consciousness becomes more conscious of its freedom in the passing of time. This explains why in ancient Asian civilizations only one man was free and that is the emperor; in the Greek and Roman civilizations only few were aware of their freedom and they are the nobles, the elites, the patricians. Later in Prussia (Germany), all were free because all were conscious of their freedom. Prussia is the culmination of the

development and perfection of consciousness and its freedom (Pickard, 1995, 84-86).

Karl Marx, one of the fathers of communism, declares that history is explained by the struggle between two classes: the bourgeois and the proletariat. They are fighting over the factors and forces of production; in other words, economics/materialism is the motive behind world events. Furthermore, the goal of history is to achieve a communist society free from class distinction and discrimination which can only be achieved through a revolution by the proletariat (Dupre, 1983, 56-59).

Oswald Spengler explains the rise and fall of the history of civilizations. Civilizations according to him are like living organisms. They have births and deaths. They rise so they also fall. No one can control this destiny; all will have to go through the same process of birth and death (Spengler, 1932, 1).

Arnold Toynbee explains that the rise and fall of civilizations is caused either by the people's capability to respond to the challenges of the time or by their failure to respond. If the people are up to the challenge then civilizations persist; if not then, civilizations crumble (Toynbee, 1948, 1).

Friedrich Nietzsche, in his work *The Use and Abuse of History*, speaks of the three important reasons of studying history. The first reason is for people to study the great achievements of the past for them to also do great things in the present and in the future. The second important reason of studying history is for people to study traditions, practices, and customs that are perpetuated through time and that these traditions will be preserved and valued by the people of the present time and the future. The last reason which Nietzsche considers to be the most important is for people to criticize past events in order to avoid the mistakes of the past and build a better future (Nietzsche, 1957, 12-21).

## 2.0 Results and Discussions

### The Main Themes of Nietzsche's Philosophy

Nietzsche claimed that life is the Will to Power. According to him, it is not reason but the will which is superior and is the cause of world events. Will to Power is basically the instinct to live and to survive. It is also the natural desire to possess and maintain power/authority, strength and even wealth. It is the inclination to overpower and dominate others. Will to power can also be considered as overcoming and transcendence, that is, going beyond oneself and one's present condition. Moreover it is defined as the positive attitude or view towards life (Nietzsche, 1968, 332-350).

Nietzsche speaks of the superman/superior man/overman (*Uebermensch/Ubermensch*) as the epitome of the will to power or the embodiment of the will to power. He is the person who asserts his will. He aims for strength, excellence, and abhors weakness and mediocrity. He is a man of courage and a person who goes beyond oneself and one's condition. He lives dangerously and affirms his fate in life (Nietzsche, 1968, 910-916).

Nietzsche never mentioned who exactly is and who will be the superman or the supermen. He simply described his characteristics and have few models like Dionysus, Prometheus, Wagner, Frederick the Great, Julius Caesar, Goethe, Bismarck, Napoleon Bonaparte among others (Nietzsche, 1968, 456-472).

The role of the superman is to create values. The creation of values is what Nietzsche calls as the transvaluation or revaluation of values. It refers to the change or abolition of the weaker value system by the value system of the strong. Transvaluation of values could mean setting new standard or the imposition of new value systems by the strong and the powerful to the weak. Hence, Nietzsche speaks of the master morality and the slave morality. The former is a set value which upholds strength and power, health and excellence. The latter is

anything that promotes weakness or decadence like timidity, cowardice, self-abasement, among others. Nietzsche endorses the master morality and condemns slave morality. It is the superman, the strong and powerful who actually set the standard of truth, morality, and law, and create and impose new value systems (McDaniel, 1965, 114-115).

Eternal Recurrence is another important theme of Nietzsche's philosophy. It means that events will come back again and again in an eternal cycle. The universe will repeat itself in the same vicious cycle (Nietzsche, 1968, 430). This idea supports the superman because the strong always desire to live life in eternity; living in the life of power again and again (Lagura, 2000, 16-17).

Nietzsche thinks of human life as tragedy. Tragedy is basically a Greek drama which is serious and depicts the suffering and conflicts of the tragic heroes like Oedipus, Prometheus, and Dionysus. This suffering and conflicts of the tragic heroes represents the basic human conditions of suffering and despair, which are meant to be overcome (Nietzsche, 1967, 73-75).

Nietzsche explains that life is basically a struggle against sufferings, conflicts and despair. And it takes a super manly character like that of Dionysus, Prometheus, and Oedipus to be able to transcend such a condition. Nietzsche is encouraging everyone to be a superman, that is, to have a life affirming attitude by accepting one's fate and overcome one's condition (Nietzsche, 1967, 56-57).

### The Will to Power as the Impetus of Philippine History

The events of Philippine history are actually motivated or caused by the Will to Power. Prior to the coming of the Spaniards, the ancestors of the Filipino people already had their own culture and way of life. In their government system they already acknowledge the hierarchy of power

where the strong, the powerful, the healthy and the wealthy were chosen to be the leaders such as the *datus* or the *rajahs* and others were either merely members or slaves. (Corpus and Wy, 2008, 20-23). The existence of the hierarchy of power is an evidence of the will to power behind tribal government where the strong and the powerful always dominate others who are weak.

The early Filipinos also had wars and conflicts among themselves and among different tribes (Arcilla, 1998, 14-15). Thus each tribe has its own warrior class to protect itself from danger or to conquer other tribes. The act of war, conquest and protection are the expressions of the Will to Power; it is the desire either to dominate or to secure one's tribe from domination.

These tribes did not only wage war with one another, they also traded, intermarried, made alliances (De la Costa, 1992, 3-13). These are also motivated and necessitated by the Will to Power as the basic propensity of survival.

The Spaniards came to the Philippines for God, Gold and Glory. Their coming was not accidental but was motivated by the desire to compete or rival the other world powers at the time like Portugal. The Spaniards have to secure trade routes to preserve their economic power, claim new territories and propagate the Christian faith (Agoncillo, 1973, 31-44). This is an assertion of the Will to Power. Spain desired for power and wealth that she sent conquistadors to the Far East, and reached the Philippine islands, subjugated and colonized the people and expanded its territory

Spain's colonization of Philippines was not without resistance. The Filipinos fought against them that led to the battle of Mactan where Lapu-lapu killed Magellan (Agoncillo, 1969, 35-36), which later was followed by the revolts (Agoncillo, 1973, 102-113) and finally by the revolution (Agoncillo, 1956, 123-147). This Filipino resistance of the Spaniards is an expression of the will to power.

They do not want to be subjugated and dominated by others rather they want to be dominated by themselves.

Towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, America colonized the Philippines like the great nation before her. America was driven by the same Will to Power to advance her imperialist desire. In order to be recognized as the new world power she has to meddle with international affairs and challenge other rival states. She has to wage war with Spain hence the Hispanic-American War broke out. In the end, Spain was defeated and sold the Filipinos and the Philippines to the Americans. As a consequence, the Philippines became an American colony (Turot, 1998, 21-29).

The Americans also were not spared from the resistance of the Filipinos (Tan, 2002, 123-124). The Filipino-American War transpired because many Filipinos asserted again their Will to Power, this time, against the Americans. This war was said to be very bloody because there were more casualties in this war compared to those who died in the revolts and the revolution during the Spanish time.

After more than forty years of American occupation Japan came to conquer the Philippines (Zaide, 1979, 475-495). The empire of Japan headed by its emperor Hirohito and its militarist minded politicians asserted its Will to Power and challenged America and other western powers. Thus, the Second World War began in Asia. The Japanese' goal was to liberate Asia from her foreign colonizers eventually making Asia truly Asian. Japan despite her limited population and resources desired to wage war with America and her allies. At the early stages of the Second World War, she was able to defeat the defenses of the Americans and the allies thus was able to temporarily occupy and take control of Asia. However, Japan exhausted her resources and was not able to sustain her power. She was overpowered by America and the allies and was later forced to end the war when two of

its major cities were destroyed by atom bombs. Again, victors and vanquished are determined by the more powerful and stronger. Wars are won by overpowering the enemy, that is, asserting ones will to power.

After the liberation from Japanese occupation, the Philippines was given by America its independence, thus emerged the Republic of the Philippines. In the early days of the Philippine Republic, it experienced an insurgency problem with rebels who called themselves *Hukbalahap-Hukbo ng Bayan Laban sa Hapon*. This group was composed mostly of veteran guerrillas who fought against the Japanese during the Second World War. This group quarreled with the government concerning agrarian reform and poverty issues (Arcilla, 1998, 128-130). The leaders and members of *Hukbalahap* asserted their Will to Power and challenged the government as to the control of agricultural lands and the resources of the country.

Several years after, Ferdinand Marcos rose to power and became president (Zaide, 1994, 371-372). He is the president who declared martial law to maintain power, preserve his position, and put the nation under his control. This is another concrete example of assertion of the Will to Power because one has to have abundant power to dominate a nation for quite a period of time and to preserve one's authority.

The reign of President Marcos had its end; he was ousted through the People Power Revolution or EDSA Revolution (Agoncillo, 1973, 584-586). When Marcos was already sickly, many people who considered his presidency as dictatorial or despotic took advantage of his weakness and asserted their Will to Power by going against him. They rallied at EDSA and called for his renouncement from being president that is why the People Power Revolution came to being or the famous EDSA Revolution. This toppled down the Marcos regime. It was the Will to Power of the people that ended the said regime

because it took the people enough courage and might to face tanks and soldiers and be able to oust a "dictator."

If one examines contemporary Philippine history, one will observe that it is still the powerful, the wealthy and the strong that hold key government positions and control the nation's economy, politics, and even social life. To gain political position one has to have the fame, the power, the money, and the influence in other the words, it is the Will to Power that governs Philippine History.

### **The Supermen of Philippine history**

Some heroes of the Philippines like Lapulapu, the leaders of the revolts, Bonifacio, Rizal, Ferdinand Marcos, Ninoy Aquino can be likened with the superman of Nietzsche but it does not mean they are the only supermen of Philippine history. Whoever asserts his/her Will to Power is a superman.

Lapulapu is the native chieftain of the island of Mactan who killed Magellan and repulsed his men (Halili, 2010, 66). He is a superman because he fought the Spaniards with courage despite the superiority of the Spaniards in terms of weapons. He asserted his will by subjugating Ferdinand Magellan and his men.

Andres Bonifacio is the father of Philippine revolution. He organized the Katipunan-the organization of the Philippine revolution (Halili, 2010, 114). He is a superman because he led the Filipinos to revolution by challenging the Spanish authority and military in the Philippines.

Jose Rizal is a reformist and novelist (Arcilla, 1998, 84-86). He is a superman because he aimed for excellence, went beyond his limits by excelling in different fields, and became popular, and influenced people especially the revolution. Rizal's might was expressed by the pen through education, literature and reform projects and not

by the sword.

Ferdinand Marcos is the 10<sup>th</sup> president of the Philippines who declared martial law. He also is the president who has the longest term (Duka, 2008, 297-318). He is a superman because he asserted his will to power staying in power for more than twenty years.

Ninoy Aquino, a Filipino senator, and a critique of the Marcos administration (Corpus and Wy, 2008, 237-238) is superman because he endured the pains and torture when he was detained in the hands of authorities. He challenged and criticized the Marcos government openly. He even sacrificed his life for the sake of his interest and the interest of the Filipino people. It really takes a man of power to face another man of power.

The prime movers of Philippine history are supermen, men who are characterized by power, strength, intelligence, and influence. They make events happen and they inspire, influence and lead other people. To become a key and leading figure in history or Philippine history, one has to become a superman because only the strong, the powerful, the wealthy, the influential, the brave, and the famous are written and identified in the pages of history. History is for the victors and not for the vanquished. It is for the powerful and for the weak.

### **The Transvaluation of Values in Philippine History**

Even before the coming of the Spaniards, the early Filipinos already engaged in trade, intermarriage and alliances among other tribes and other nations like China and India and there are value systems that were assimilated by the early Filipinos from these great and powerful groups and nations (Duka, 2008, 35-37).

When Spain colonized the Philippines, the Spaniards introduced and imposed their value system to the Filipinos. The greatest evidence of

this is Christianity particularly Catholicism which is now the religion of most Filipinos. They introduced the *Encomienda* System, the banking industry, the adoption of Spanish surnames and terms, and many others (Duka, 2008, 64-73). The Filipinos had no choice but to abide by the standards of their conquerors who were more powerful than them.

During the American occupation, a new value system was superimposed to the Filipinos. They were made to accept a democratic and republican system of government; Filipinos wore American clothes, listened to American music, dined with American food, watched American movies, adopted the public school system and spoke the American language, and liked whatever is American (Garcia, 2010, 140-151). The strong and powerful indeed imposed their standards to the weak.

By the time the Japanese took control of the Philippines they also introduced their value system. They taught their language, virtues, culture, ideas and ideologies to the Filipinos through propaganda campaign (Garcia, 2010, 189-190). Again, this is a proof that the strong and powerful set the standard of history and give it direction.

### **Eternal Recurrence: the Pattern of Philippine History.**

Philippine history is a cycle of colonization and liberation. When the Spaniards came, the Filipinos were colonized after which they proclaimed their independence from Spain only to be colonized by the Americans. After the Americans came, the Japanese who took control of the country for few years and then were defeated by the Americans and their allies. Then the Filipinos were given independence by America and later came under the dictatorial control of Ferdinand Marcos and was freed again during the EDSA revolution. In contemporary times, the Philippines is again facing the slavery of poverty and corruption waiting for

liberation.

The Philippines is not only a cycle of colonization and freedom but also a cycle of war and peace.

War and peace are consequences of the assertion of the Will to Power. Because others want to dominate and overpower others, war occurs. Peace is explained by the same will to power because of the people's desire to preserve lives and to survive; they have to assert their will to power to wage war in order to attain peace. War and peace are the two sides of the Will to Power.

It takes a superman to attain war and peace. In fact war and peace is a kind of transvaluation of values. In order to change or create new value system, wars have to be fought.

Before the coming of the Spaniards, the early Filipinos fought among each other through tribal wars and made alliances to protect themselves. When the Spaniards came, war had to be waged thus resistance from Lapu-lapu, the revolts and the revolution resulted. After the Spanish colonization there was relatively a short interlude of peace which later on was replaced by war as the Filipino-American war occurred. After that there was another relatively peaceful interlude before the Japanese invasion of the Philippines. Then the Second World War transpired. After the liberation of the Philippines from Japan, came another temporary intermission of peace, yet, this was to be broken by insurgencies of the *Hukbalahap* and other rebel groups. Then came a short peaceful years during the time of Ramon Magsaysay. When Marcos reigned and declared martial law, the country again was put to conflict as government troops and activists as well rebels went into clash. This period of violence and violation of human rights was put to end by the EDSA revolution. Then came a relatively peaceful interruption, which was followed by several coup d' etats and conflicts

regarding corruption.

### **Philippine History as Tragedy**

The early Filipinos had to build rice terraces; they have to sail, fish, plant and domesticate animals to overcome hunger and famine. They had to invent simple tools to overcome the difficulty of work. They had to make weapons, train soldiers and make alliances to overcome the danger of death and conquest. They had to study medicinal plants to overcome illness. They had to build houses, develop clothes to overcome heat and coldness and to protect them from the climate and the weather like storms and typhoons.

During the Spanish colonization the Filipinos had to organize the revolts and the revolution to overcome the pains of slavery under the polo and encomienda systems.

Many Filipinos suffered lot of casualties during the Filipino-American War just to be freed from slavery and colonization.

A number of Filipinos had to become rebels like the *Hukbalahap* and other rebel groups to overcome agrarian problems and problems concerning social justice.

A lot of Filipinos had to become activists and rebels to rally in the streets in order to oust a dictator and fought against human rights violations during martial law and the rest of the Marcos regime.

Long time ago until the present, the vast majority of the Filipinos struggle very much from poverty corruption, social injustice, illnesses, and the like. The challenge of every Filipino is to transcend these conditions. In short, Philippine history is a struggle against sufferings and despair.

### **3.0 Conclusion**

The main themes of Friedrich Nietzsche's philosophy such as will to power, superman, transvaluation of values, eternal recurrence

and tragedy are very closely intertwined with Philippines history. If one scrutinizes the nature and pattern of Philippine history one will realize that the dominant circumstances found within such pattern are political and economic bondage. These are manifested persistently in Philippine society in terms of social injustice, poverty, corruption, exploitation and domination.

Nietzsche's thematic philosophical perspective on Philippine history implies that there is a need to break the seemingly repeated vicious cycle embodied in the same pattern of eternal recurrence. This can only be realized if each Filipino will assert his or her will to power and become a superman and finally break the dominant forces and circumstances of political and economic bondage that continuously and persistently beset the Philippine society. Otherwise, the same set of dominant forces and circumstances could still be at work behind the future of Philippine history.

#### 4.0 Recommendation

The author recommends that Philippine history should also be explained using other philosophers' point of view like that of Hegel, Marx, among others in order for scholars to have a broader interpretation and understanding of Philippine history in the perspective of the philosophy of history.

#### References

##### Books

- Agoncillo, Teodoro. *Short History of the Philippines*. New York: New York Publishing House, Inc., 1969.
- Agoncillo, Teodoro. *History of the Filipino People*. Manila: Garotech Publication, 1973.
- Agoncillo, Teodoro. *The Revolt of the Masses: The Story of Bonifacio and the Katipunan*. Manila: Garotech Publications, 1956.
- Arcilla, Jose.S. S.J. *An Introduction to Philippine History*. Manila: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1998.
- Collingwood, Robin George. *The Idea of History*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1946.
- Corpus, Ronal M. and Lorna V. Wy. *Time Travel: a Glimpse to Philippine History*. Manila: Mindshapers Co., Inc., 2008.
- De la Costa, Horacio SJ. *Readings in Philippine History*. Makati: Bookmark, Inc., 1992.
- Duka, Cecilio D. *The Struggle for Freedom: Textbook in Philippine History*. Manila: Rex Bookstore, 2008.
- Dupre, Louis. *Marx Social Critique of Culture*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983.
- Garcia, Carlito D. *Philippine History and Government for College Students*. Mandaluyong City: Books atbp, Publishing Corp., 2010.
- Halili, Maria Christine N. *Philippine History*. Quezon City: Rex Book Store, Inc., 2010.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich. *The Will to Power: (Trans. Walter Kaufmann)* New York: Vintage Books, 1968.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Use and Abuse of History*. (Trans. Adrian Collins) New York: Bobbs-Merill Co., Inc., 1957.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich. *The Birth of Tragedy. (Trans Walter Kaufmann)* New York: Random House, 1967.
- McDaniel, Stanley.V. *The Major Works of Nietzsche*. New York: Monarch Press, Inc, 1965.
- Pickard, Hugh Rayment. *Philosophy of History: From Enlightenment to Post Modernity*. New York: Cornell University Press, 1995.



Tan, Samuel K. *The Filipino-American War: (1899-1913)*. Manila: University of the Philippines Press, 2002.

Turot, Henri et al. *Emilio Aguinaldo and the Filipino Martyrs*. Manila: Trademark Publishing Corporation, 1998.

Wilcox, John. *Truth and Value in Nietzsche*. New York: University of Michigan Press, 1974.

Zaide, Sonia. *The Philippines: A Unique Nation*. Quezon City: All Nations Publishing Co., Inc, 1994.

Zaide, Gregorio. *The Pageant of Philippine History*. Manila, 1979.

#### **Unpublished Material**

Lagura, Florencio SVD. "Dynamic Metaphysics of Nietzsche" Cebu: University of San. Carlos, 2000.

#### **Internet Source**

Nietzsche, Friedrich. "Belief in the Ego" *Will to Power* Book III. Retrieved on Nov. 6, 2013 available at <Nietzsche.holtof.com>

Spengler, Oswald. "Decline of the West" Trans. Arthur Helps. Retrieved on October 14, 2011 available at <<http://www.duke.edu/~aparks/Spengler.html>>

Toynbee, Arnold. *Christianity and Civilization*. Retrieved on October 14, 2011 available<<http://www.myriobiblos.gr/texts/english/toynbee.html>>

Similarity Index: <1%

Paper ID: 374734473