

In Praise of Autonomy

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Autonomy, the modern notion of human beings as ultimately responsible for their own actions, is a cross-cutting theme of the four essays in this volume.

In the first essay, André Cloots argues for the self-regulating power of humans over themselves as a consequence of the awareness of their responsibilities. He makes a distinction between rationality and reasonableness wherein the latter serves as the broader context that accommodates the plurality of rationalities that define the former. Being modern is then characterized by the admission of autonomous but reasonable ways of dealing with reality such as science, religion, ethics, politics, and art.

In the second essay, Takao Koga points out that Maruyama Masao, the champion of Japanese modernity at the advent of the Second World War, failed to extend the self-regulating notion of modernity to technology. Koga's account of the debates about "overcoming modernity" in Japan

remains relevant today within the context of the global struggle between the defenders of ultra-nationalism, on the one hand, and the onslaught of westernization, on the other hand. He suggests that “a democratic control of technologies” can address this difficult problem.

In the third essay, Anton Sevilla deepens Koga’s discussion by proposing that a “sublimated modernity” could tame the imperialist tendencies of excessive forms of nationalism. Elements of occidental culture may then be grafted at the local level by articulating “a dynamic but critical and localized modernization, not a refusal of modernization.” In an ironic twist that cites the *Kokutai*, the propaganda piece that defined the cardinal principles of Japanese identity, Sevilla astutely points out that modernity can be awakened from within the Japanese mind by enabling it “to relate with the international community with a sense of openness that is at the same time critical, and without merely going with the trends and whims of global powers”

Finally, Jovino Miroy’s Review Essay of Apolinario Mabini’s *La Revolucion Filipina* resonates with the “aesthetics of self-sacrifice” mentioned by Koga in the second essay. For Miroy, the most important discourse on freedom by a Filipino thinker belongs to Mabini when he wrote that “We will not obtain the freedom of our country without giving up our own first”. Such restraint from self-indulgence leads to an autonomous intellectual capacity for thinking deeply and responding effectively to socio-political questions. For

Mabini, “serious thinking is an act that characterizes a strong nation, an indispensable prerequisite for all enterprise, large and small.”

These citations reverberate André Cloots’ characterization of modernity as a self-regulating project. He alludes to the archipelagic nature of the Philippine islands as a metaphor for post-modern cultures and compares Philosophy to a vessel:

sailing from one island to the other The philosopher goes ashore at all the islands but can leave them as well, showing that and how each island is but an island.

The philosopher’s vessel, nevertheless, is not a safe haven. While passing by what appears to be floating land formations, it must come to terms with undulating waves of uncharted oceans and immensely receding horizons. The currents and cross-currents that must be traversed are indicative of the complex interrelations that must be taken into account in coming to terms with our post-modern condition.