

**RELEVANCE PHILIPPINE STYLE**

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To judge from the traffic, you might think that Filipino social scientists had built a better mousetrap. For the good ones among them are currently besieged with requests for their services, on and off campus, far beyond their capacity to comply. Some of those requests seem routine and redundant--to teach this or that standard course, give a talk or a seminar for this group or that--while others are clearly out of the ordinary. But at first glance every such proposal is beguiling, sweetened as it with the real or illusory possibility that, if well done, it will contribute to the growth of a young Republic, this young Republic, the Philippines.

This constant consciousness, the awareness of one's nation-building role, is something that grows on you almost despite yourself. It is thrust on the social scientist (and on others, of course) at every step and turn of the daily way. And the feeling builds up within you that what you do, by God, will count, it will make a difference. Because if it ~~didn't~~ make a difference you ~~shouldn't~~ be doing it, because time is short, the hands are few, and the task enormous.

I write this way in hopes of conveying, however, poorly, the feeling of urgency that enlivens and impels the many good social scientists I know, men and women, for whom the Philippines is hearth and home and classroom and laboratory--an all-in-one, till-death-do-us-part arena for their scholarly life and labors. This is what it must be at this point in history, less a work place than a way of life, more a calling than a job. For the demands are great, the pay is not; and we are not yet helping the nation

as much as we might.

What then is asked of us? In particular, to speak of those who most often knock on our doors, what do students expect of us, and what do the nation's leaders hope that we can do? What part is ours in the growth of the nation? And how can we play that part better?

#### Ateneo college seniors

What other Filipino students may demand or desire, I can only conjecture. But I can say something about the college man at my own university, the Ateneo de Manila, and about the seniors in particular. These latter number some 230 in an undergraduate population of 1400. Like other Philippine college seniors, their modal age is 20 years. They are young. With few exceptions they are also Filipinos and Roman Catholics. Most of them were born in the Greater Manila area and speak Tagalog as a mother tongue. However, as is true of several colleges, public and private, in metropolitan Manila, great numbers come from other parts of Luzon, from the Visayas, and Mindanao, where they learned a variety of first languages. All of them speak, read, and write English, the language of instruction in all Philippine colleges.

In certain respects the Ateneo seniors are unlike their opposite numbers in all but a few other Philippine colleges. The main difference is the wealth and education of their parents. As is the case in a few other schools, the parents come from the nation's educational and economic elite. <sup>1</sup> Moreover, if this year's seniors follow in the steps of their predecessors of the past century or so, they will eventually find their way, in disproportionately high numbers, into the ranks of the nation's

<sup>2</sup>  
influentials. I dwell on this point, not for purposes of bragging--there are other schools who do equally well, perhaps better than we--but to make it clear that these students are in some ways unlike the majority of Filipino college seniors.

What they ask of social science, implicitly at least, we can judge from the interrelationships of two things we know of them: their perceptions of the nation's greatest problems, and their notions of relevance, the relevance of college studies in particular.

In a survey conducted in December 1969 and reported the following month, Ateneo college students and their faculty agreed that social injustice, graft and corruption, and lack of peace and order were high-ranking national problems--that is, within the first four of a list of 12.<sup>3</sup> The students' emphasis on moral issues might strike the reader as possibly the result of their attending a Jesuit school, but the fact is that the nation's local and national influentials take the same position the students do. On the other hand, perhaps as part of growing up in Philippine society, perhaps because of the school environment, more likely because of both, the average Ateneo student apparently undergoes a progressive refinement or sharpening of standards during the eight years between beginning high school and finishing college. For one can trace in the replies of students over these years a growing concern for basic problems (instead of symptoms) and for moral problems (instead of more exclusively technical ones). The final focus, achieved in senior year of college, is on the problem of social injustice (Lynch 1970a:26).

Consider this now in the light of what students mean by relevance. Asked to define it--they have used the term for several years in dialogue

and broadsides--they reply with such phrases as this: "applicable to the problems and real situations of the society the university serves," "connected with daily, ordinary life, and with what is personally important to you," "useful in the modern situation," "(yielding) standards applicable and useful in specific situations." Clearly the emphasis is on a perceptible connection between the classroom and the street, the lecture hall and life.

But what kind of connection? Do the seniors seek deeper understanding, or practical advice? Both, as a matter of fact, but when forced to choose, they show a slight preference for the former (Table 1a). Further, when asked which is most relevant, a course about "myself," about the Philippines and Filipinos, or about the world and mankind, three out of five (58 per cent) choose the course about "me" (Table 1b). Some light is thrown on these preferences by the answers to a third question, namely, "In your college career, which subjects did you find most relevant?" In view of their definitions of relevance, reported earlier, it may seem surprising that almost seven out of 10 (69 per cent) give first place to philosophy, its nearest competitor being economics, with less than one fifth the number of votes (13 per cent). All other social sciences combined account for only nine per cent; theology, for less than one per cent (Table 2). What makes philosophy so relevant for most?

An answer is suggested by a further study of the seniors' norms for relevance, crossclassified (as in Table 1) by the subject they thought most relevant of all those taken during four years of college. What this second look reveals is that philosophy fans, appreciably more than others, consider understanding more relevant than practical solutions; further, more than others, they find the greatest relevance in courses about

themselves, not as Filipinos, but as human individuals.

Even without the statistical nod<sup>s</sup> of assurance we get from Table 1, we suggest that, from the viewpoint of relevance, this year's seniors are at least two quite distinct populations. One of them (the philosophy fans) represents a clear majority. Members of this grouping seek above all a special kind of self-understanding, self-knowledge not of the involunt<sup>ar</sup><sup>y</sup>, navel-gazing sort, but of the kind that must (to be relevant) reveal the individual as such and in relation to contemporary Philippine society. The minority also wants to know about themselves, but they are even more interested in the Philippines and the world, in Filipinos and all mankind. Further, they think that understanding is less relevant than finding ways to meet and solve important practical problems.

To summarize, the seniors see the nation's greatest problems as moral in nature, traceable in the final analysis to post-juvenile delinquents of their parents' generation. Perhaps because of this, or because it is their time to do so, about 70 per cent of them are apparently trying to work out their personal syntheses of norms and realities, to find their changing place in a changing society. In this quest, philosophy has played a major role. The behavioral sciences have helped little; theology, even less. For the minority, however, non-philosophy courses have proved relevant to their desire especially for practical knowledge about the Philippines and its problems, and a better understanding of mankind. We have not failed completely.

#### Influentials

What Filipino leaders ask of the social sciences the working social scientist well knows. For they come to him continually for help in

understanding and in solving the problems that the country faces. The gravest problems, they are agreed, lie in the economic and moral spheres: lack of peace and order, deficiencies in the national economic institution, graft and corruption, and social injustice. Ranked fifth by national-level influentials and sixth by locals in a category of problems we label "moral, cultural, and religious deficiencies in the general populace" (Lynch 1970a:18).

The possible role of social science in meeting these problems will be clarified if we display the contents of this last category, as well as of that called "deficiencies in the national economic institution." The general moral, cultural, and religious deficiencies are said to include the following: citizen complacency, general indifference, failure to exercise democratic rights, lack of national discipline, bahala na, lack of civic consciousness; conflict between the Filipino family system and modernization; breakdown of traditional values; lack of faith, low proportion of men to women attending church services; lack of public opinion (Lynch 1970b:2). The nation's economic deficiencies have been described in these terms; economic instability, economic dependence, underproduction, economic insufficiency, lack of sound economic planning, lack of long-range plans, lack of money, low buying power, low dollar reserves, lack of foreign exchange, unfavorable balance of payment, lack of organization (ibid.).

As these problems and others like them are recited and recalled, litany-like, by any competent social scientist who knows the Philippines, he will see again and again the contribution his discipline might make to the solution of each, or at least to many of them. Knowing his trade and

the Philippines, he will also recognize that while he will not be asked to cut any corners professionally to make that contribution--on the contrary-- contributors relative to problems are in short supply, and his decision to be involved is fast becoming about as free ~~to~~<sup>as</sup> that of a fireman at a four-alarm fire. The question is not whether or not, but how best, to be involved.

#### Discussion

Students and responsible citizens ask two things of us, that we furnish frameworks for understanding and help them solve their problems. In what follows I put aside the question of how we might improve research and the strategies that guide it. I say nothing of the need we have to write more often and more clearly, spelling out in simple terms the practical consequences of our research finding, thus accomplishing in some measure at last the worthy ambition of making a little more sense to a few people. My concern here is rather with a contribution that social scientists, and anthropologists in particular, might make to those undergraduates who, like most of the Ateneo seniors, are actively interested and engaged in constructing their personal world views.

To begin with, we do know something about the individual's relation to society and vice versa. But students are typically impatient with those treatments of the subject that are too basic, so far removed from concrete reality that their relevance can scarcely be perceived or appreciated. Basic information is always acceptable and desirable, but it must be, and be seen as, applicable to real-life problems and interests, a perception often enhanced by demonstration.



Too often, perhaps, we are tempted to present the basic information, bait a Socratic hook with some teasing hints at further implications, and wait for the bite. The problem is that the ordinary student has other things to nibble on, most of them much more appetizing than the generalities that disintegrate untasted at the end of our lines. Similarly, a school of thought would say that in a college offering courses in the arts and sciences, philosophy and theology included, the role of the faculty stops at presentation of the constituent subjects--the individual must make the synthesis.

This may be one of the reasons why over the years the most constant complaint of Ateneo alumni has been the gap between what they learned of life in school and what they later experienced--the rules and norms we learned are beautiful, they say, but they can't be applied in the real world. There are other norms, other rules, by which the real game is played.

It seems quite clear that only the exceptional student will make the desirable integration on his own. Most of them need help. I do not suggest they should be presented with an integration, ready-made and pre-tuned. Rather, they need help in putting the parts together. And the help that is needed will vary with the student, as it does with builders of radios, model airplanes, cars, and ships. I recall how when I started making model airplanes I had to read the assembly instructions step by step, but when I had become accustomed to their construction, experienced in the art of assembly, I ignored the instructions: I had developed my own style, my own approach to the integration of balsa wood, celluloid, rubber, metal, paper and paint into a flying model airplane. And they flew--or so I recall at

this remove.

A student needs similar help when he tries to integrate such heady concepts and understandings as the I-thou relationship, cultural pressures, values, societal goals, social injustice, graft and corruption, and the Supreme Being. He has all the parts in his kit but, until he develops his own style of putting things together, as he must, he will need some examples of how others have done it before him. He will need to read or observe--not instructions, precisely--but precedents. He will need to be shown some of the alternative ways in which the parts can be fitted together into a workable integration--one that will fly.

Can anthropology do this? Is anthropology the super-science to integrate the others? I certainly do not see it as a latter-day queen of the sciences, replacing philosophy and theology in their traditional capstone roles. But perhaps because it is so broadly comparative, anthropology can furnish the searching student the examples he needs, the precedents of putting together, out of knowledge, beliefs, values, norms, goals, and desires, a personally meaningful and more or less integrated way of life that will, with repairs en route of course, take a man from here to there.

This approach seems especially appropriate, in fact, for students who apparently make these integrations most meaningful when they feel under no pressure from the Establishment, be it the Church or their own traditional culture, to follow a particular pattern. By displaying the integrating, world-view-constructing behavior of many kinds of people in many kinds of society, and by showing how these integrations were effected, we shall have done as much as we can do. The contents, the what, will be the student's private task. <sup>1</sup>et ~~by~~ doing our part in the process we shall have helped a

man, a fraction of a growing nation, find himself and, knowing this, may sleep more soundly for it.

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> As of 1965, less than three per cent of Filipino families reported annual incomes of P10,000 or more. The median annual family income for Ateneo college parents is P23,6000; for the parents of seniors the median category is P30-39,000. According to the 1960 Census 3.5 per cent of Philippine residents 25 years of age and over were college graduates; for Ateneo college parents the corresponding figure is 65 per cent (Lynch 1970a:22).

The Ateneo de Manila is a small Jesuit university (about 2700 college and graduate students) founded in 1859 and since 1953 located on a 113- hectare campus in Quezon City, Philippines. It is coeducational at the graduate level, accepts women undergraduates as cross-registrants.

The faculty (numbering 200, most of them employed full time) may be characterized in average terms as male, single, Roman Catholic, and about 36 years of age. They tend to be Filipinos and laymen, but about 40 per cent are priests or religious; 33 per cent, non-Filipinos. Almost four out of five have the masters or doctorate degree (32 per cent have the Ph.D.). Two out of three earned their degree abroad, generally in the United States (Lynch 1970a:14 and Table 30).

<sup>2</sup> Since January 1969 the Institute of Philippine Culture, the Ateneo's social science research group, has been identifying and interviewing Filipino influentials at the national and local levels. These leaders tend to be graduates of a relatively small number of schools, the Ateneo de Manila included.

By an influential is meant one whose activities measurably affect public policy or opinion at either the national or local level. Names are arrived at by a combination of reputational and behavioral approaches, with panelists and nominees interviewed in Greater Manila and eight other cities (see Lynch 1970b:3). The study is sponsored by the Philippine Accrediting Association of Schools, Colleges, and Universities, with funds furnished mostly by the Faura Research Center, Inc.

<sup>3</sup> The faculty-student survey on national problems (funded by the Faura Research Center, Inc.) was conducted by Perla Q. Makil and Horacio Barronero, Jr., both of the IPC. Faculty opinions, like those of influentials (Note 2), were given in reply to an open-ended question. Students ranked 12 problems presented to them for that purpose. These problems were derived, in turn, from a tabulation of replies from influentials.

\* This survey on relevance was done the last week of January, 1970. Respondents are about 170, or three fourths, of the 230 students in senior year. I am grateful to colleagues Bovenmars, Ferriols, Gorospe, Green, O'Hare, Reyes, and Torralba for the part they played in administering the questionnaire to their class sections.

References

Lynch, Frank  
1970a

Socioeconomic status of Ateneo students and selected inventories of Philippine national problems. Report submitted January 15, 1970, to the President's Committee on University Development, Ateneo de Manila. Quezon City, Institute of Philippine Culture. Pp. 135. Mimeo.

1970b

These are the problems we face daw. Quezon City, Institute of Philippine Culture. Pp. 16. Mimeo

Table 1. Ateneo de Manila college seniors classified by their reported norms for academic relevance, crossclassified by the subject they think most relevant (January 1970)

Norms for academic relevance	Most relevant subject taken			Signif.
	Philosophy	Other	Total	
<b>a. Subjects</b>				
Helps me to understand something important	59%	41%	54%	0.05*
Helps me to meet and solve important but practical problems	41	58	46	
TOTAL N	115	53	168	
<b>b. Courses</b>				
About myself	68%	38%	58%	0.01*
About the Philippines and Filipinos	11	24	15	
About the world and mankind	21	38	26	
TOTAL N	115	53	168	

\* The chi-square test of significance we used.

Table 2. Ateneo de Manila college seniors classified by the "most relevant subject" they had taken, crossclassified by the norms they report for subjects (see Table 1a) and for courses (see Table 1b) (January 1970)

Most relevant subject taken	Understanding				Practical			
	Self	Phil.	World	Total	Self	Phil.	World	Total
Philosophy	45	6	18	69	32	7	7	46
Economics	3	2	4	9	1	3	9	13
Business	0	0	0	0	5	3	0	8
Other social sci.*	3	1	4	8	2	3	2	7
Math., and Phys. sci.	3	1	0	4	2	0	0	2
Theology	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
English	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>91</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>77</b>

\*Includes "behavioral sciences" (an undergraduate sequence in anthropology, linguistics, psychology, and sociology), communications, and political sciences. Undergraduates do not take anthropology as such, though the M.A. in anthropology is offered.

Table 3. Weighted ranks (in order of "relevance") given by Ateneo de Manila college seniors to subjects they had in college, classified by subject, crossclassified by their present philosophy section (January 1970)

Average rank order*	Subject	103 A	103B	104B	104C	104 D	104E	104F	104P	4-ME	Range of ranks
1.	Philosophy	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	1	1	1
2	Economics	3	3	3.5	2	5	5	3	2	2	2-3
3	Business	4	10.5	5.5	3.5	4	15	1	4	6	14
4	Humanities	2	17.5	11	19	2	9.5	11	3	5	17
5	Psychology	9	4	9	13	11.5	3	19	5	4	16
6.5	Sociology	13	5	7.5	3.5	10	2	10	6	9	11
6.5	Behavioral sciences	16	6	12	7	6	4	6	7	8	12
8	Mathematics	8	16	10	9	3	13	7.5	13	3	13
9.5	Theology	5	8.5	2	5	7	11	4	12	12	10
9.5	English	6.5	7	7.5	6	11.5	7	5	10	10	6.5
11.5	Political Science	14	17.5	16	10	0	9.5	9	8	0	9.5
11.5	Physics	19	10.5	18	17	16	16	16.5	19	13	8.5
13	History	12	8.5	5.5	8	14	6	7.5	9	11	6.5
14	Communications	6.5	2	13	16	8.5	12	13.5	11	0	14
15	Anthropology	10.5	12.5	17	18	13	8	12	16	7	11
16	Biology	15	12.5	15	11	17	14	16.5	18	14	7
17.5	Chemistry	17	14	3.5	14	15	17	18	17	15	14.5
17.5	Filipino	10.5	19	14	17	8.5	19	13.5	15	16	10.5
19	Language/Linguistics	18	15	19	15	18	18	15	14	17	5
Number of students ranking		14	18	14	21	27	13	17	22	31	

\* Agreement on ranks is very close among all class sections (0.001 level using the Kendall coefficient of concordance W).