

THE FRAGMENTATION OF EDUCATION: RETRIEVING THE PERENNIAL RELEVANCE OF GENERAL EDUCATION (ETHICS) TO THE MORAL FORMATION OF FILIPINO LEARNERS

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This paper examines the continuing reduction of education to market-driven and utilitarian ends, most clearly exemplified by the current recommendation of the Second Congressional Commission on Education to remove Ethics as a core course from the General Education curriculum at the tertiary level. This proposal regards Filipino learners as products whose values are measured by their professional and specialized skills. Through its capitalist and neoliberal influences, education has become fragmented from its humanistic dimensions by putting the accent on the economic agenda rather than developing the learner's character, conscience, and compassion. This paper argues that the fragmentation of education depersonalizes learning, marginalizes the humanities, and weakens the moral consciousness of Filipinos. Hence, the aim of this endeavor is to reaffirm the perennial and indispensable relevance of Ethics as a course and a discipline of philosophy in higher education in nurturing intellectual virtues and social responsibility among learners. This study calls for the retrieval of the holistic, humanistic, and transformative vision of education by re-centering Ethics at the heart of Filipino moral formation.

Keywords: Ethics, fragmentation of education, general education, moral formation, Philippine educational reforms

INTRODUCTION

In the Philippines, the moral formation of Filipino learners has not been prioritized as an integral part of the learning process, even with the recent educational reforms, such as the implementation of the K-12 Program and the MATATAG Curriculum in Basic Education, and the institutionalization of Outcomes-Based Education and the Philippine Qualifications Framework in Higher Education. Also, in recent years, the place of Ethics as a course in the General Education (GE) curriculum has become increasingly precarious. Through its policy recommendations, the Second Congressional Commission on Education (EDCOM 2, 2025) has proposed the removal of Ethics, along with other foundational GE

courses, from all programs' curricula at the tertiary level. However, shifting the focus to global relevance and shortening the duration of academic programs without being attentive to what education is supposed to be has consequently marginalized these courses. Within this context, Ethics, a philosophical discipline that promotes moral formation through the cultivation of intellectual virtues, has been sidelined. Hence, I argue that removing these core courses, particularly philosophical Ethics, can disrupt the moral and philosophical foundation of Philippine education. To address this concern, this paper calls for the urgent need to maintain a dedicated Ethics course and reaffirm its relevance to learners' holistic formation and nation-building.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF MORAL FORMATION IN THE PHILIPPINE EDUCATIONAL LANDSCAPE

One of the core objectives of education is to nurture lifelong learners who are capable of discerning what is right and wrong and acting with moral integrity in a pluralistic and relativistic society. The report of the International Commission on Education to the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) acknowledges the essence of this lifelong learning, which includes the development of a more humane society in the face of a globalized world.

There is a need to rethink and broaden the notion of lifelong education. Not only must it adapt to changes in the nature of work, but it must also constitute a continuous process of forming whole human beings – their knowledge, aptitudes, as well as the critical faculty and the ability to act. It should enable people to develop awareness of themselves and their environment and encourage them to play their social role at work and in the community (Delors 1996, 19).

Education is lifelong learning and entails a holistic process of forming a human person, particularly the development of the rational faculty, essential to fulfilling one's social responsibility. In pursuit of this approach, Lourdes Quisumbing's (1988) *Values Education Framework* explains why every Filipino learner is a multi-dimensional being. As the center of the curriculum, learners embody physical, intellectual, moral, and spiritual dimensions. Among these, the moral dimension is a requisite, as it deals with the learners' rational faculty to inquire into the truth and do the good. "As moral, he is endowed with a free will which searches for the good and whose motive force is love. As moral (endowed with the faculty of freely choosing and loving), he must go out to others and in fact to all humanity in love" (Quisumbing 1988, 5-6). This moral faculty is indispensable for the commitment to truth and a responsibility that must be upheld by both society and school, "if our national life is to assume the lofty purpose of pursuing our developmental goals" (Bonoan 1984, 410). Hence, moral development remains one of the vital foundations of values education. Through forming a sense of morality, a learner is guided to grapple with complex moral dilemmas, which challenge their capacity for critical reflection (Quisumbing 1988, 10).

The 1987 Philippine Constitution, together with the 1982 Education Act, affirms the role of education in strengthening national cohesion through the formation of moral and spiritual values. As stated in the Constitution:

They (educational institutions) shall inculcate patriotism and nationalism, foster love of humanity, respect for human rights, appreciation of the role of national heroes in the historical development of the country, teach the rights and duties of citizenship, strengthen ethical and spiritual values, develop moral character and personal discipline, encourage critical and creative thinking, broaden scientific and technological knowledge, and promote vocational efficiency (Article XVI, Sec. 3).

The same vision is echoed in the *Philippine Moral Recovery Program*, proposed by Senator Leticia Shahani (1993), which calls on Filipinos to engage in nation-building by applying human values in every sector of society. As Shahani notes, this recovery intends to reawaken the power of human values in achieving nation-building and personal goals. “If nation-building has its political, economic, and cultural dimensions, it also has its moral and ethical imperative. This imperative is a most compelling dimension of nation-building” (Shahani 1993, 2). Acknowledging this, moral formation must be considered a prerequisite to achieving national progress.

In 2020, Republic Act 11476 systematized the implementation of Values Education (VE) and Good Manners and Right Conduct (GMRC) as core subjects, alongside English, Mathematics, and Science in Basic Education. VE is promoted as the process of providing the learners with the internalization and inculcation of values, creating learning experiences that usher valuing processes, positions, and judgment (GMRC and Value Education Act, 2020, Sec. 3, par. b). GMRC, on the other hand, guides learners toward universally accepted social values, norms, and behaviors that promote respect (Sec. 3, par. c). Hence, VE and GMRC help in the character formation of the learners by integrating conceptual bases such as Albert Bandura’s Social Learning Theory, David Kolb’s Experiential Learning, Constructivism, and Eli Ginzberg’s Theory of Career Development (Department of Education 2016, 3). In 2024, the Department of Education (DepEd) also initiated a renewed pathway to improve the quality of Basic Education in the Philippines. Adopting the National Learning Recovery Program, the DepEd (2023) articulates the essential reforms to the implementation of this K-12 program, now rebranded as the MATATAG curriculum. As outlined by the Bureau of Curriculum Development (2023, 2), these changes are part of the current administration’s strategic commitment to delivering an education that prepares learners for a globalized society.

As learners become more globally connected, they develop cultural awareness and global citizenship skills, but also face exposure to international crises, contributing to potential anxiety. In the face of these shifts and uncertainties, the necessity for lifelong learning, resilience, and mental strength becomes more pronounced.

The MATATAG curriculum addresses these demands by emphasizing 21st-century skills and global competencies among learners, preparing them to assume leadership roles on the

national and global scale. “The MATATAG K to 10 Curriculum addresses the need to complement knowledge and skills development of learners with values development – making the curriculum more holistic as it strikes a balance between competence and character” (Bureau of Curriculum Development 2023, 30-31). This MATATAG agenda reinforces moral formation through the strengthened integration of GMRC and VE so as “to produce Filipino youth who decide with responsibility and accountability, act with right conduct and the inclination to do good, and live their lives with love for God, people, environment, country and the world, habitually mindful of the common good” (Bureau of Curriculum Development 2023, 7).

In higher education, the late President Benigno Aquino (2012) signed Executive Order 83, known as the Institutionalization of the Philippine Qualifications Framework (PQF), with the core objectives of aligning the “international qualifications framework to support national and international mobility of workers through increased recognition of the value and comparability of Philippine qualifications” (Sec. 1). In support of this order, the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) promulgates the rationale of enhancing the quality assurance system of Philippine higher education by implementing learning competency and outcomes-based standards. As stated by CHED Memorandum Order No. 46 Series of 2012, “Philippine higher education is mandated to contribute to building a quality nation capable of transcending the social, political, economic, cultural and ethical issues that constrain the country’s human development, productivity, and global competitiveness” (Article 1, Sec. 1). This mandate includes producing graduates who are humanist-oriented, culturally rooted, analytical thinkers, morally responsible, and equipped with the ability for lifelong learning, “that will enable them to live meaningfully in a complex, rapidly changing and globalized world while engaging their community and the nation’s development issues and concerns” (Article 1, Sec. 2). These recent educational reforms at the tertiary level, particularly the focus on quality assurance and outcomes-based learning, reflect the country’s effort to meet international standards while maintaining local relevance. The strength of this reform addresses the widespread mismatch between the needs of the industry and graduate attributes (Asio et al. 2022, 67). Hence, the PQF’s outcomes-based structure aligns with educational goals by ensuring that graduates are employable and globally competent.

However, it is clear that contemporary educational reforms in the Philippines have been reconfigured to bridge the gap between what is taught in schools and what the industries require. The difficulty is not in executing these reforms, but in ensuring that education continues to nurture the humanistic aspect of the learning process.

THE FRAGMENTATION OF EDUCATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION

In recent decades, there has been a need to analyze educational processes through the measurement of ‘learning outcomes’. These outcomes are the knowledge and skills that the learners are expected to acquire at the completion of every teaching-learning process. Based on the framework of William Spady (1994, 1), Outcome-based Education (OBE) is a system of education that prioritizes “what is essential for all students to be able to do successfully at the end of their learning experience.” This approach focuses on what learners can do with the knowledge they gain rather than fostering specific values, beliefs,

or states of mind. As Spady (1994, 2) puts it, “outcomes are what learners can actually do with what they know and have learned – they are the tangible application of what has been learned.” In other words, outcomes are actual demonstrations rather than purely cognitive processes. As Gert Biesta (2015, 12) also notes, this prevailing culture of measurement within academic institutions has “a profound impact on educational practice, from the highest levels of educational policy at national and supranational level down to the practices of local schools and teachers.” While this shift has undeniably shaped educational policies, teaching principles, and school priorities, it often neglects the more essential aim of education.

The culture of measurement in education has normalized over-professionalization and over-specialization, resulting in a fragmentation of education. But what does fragmentation actually mean? Fragmentation signifies the disintegration of education’s formative vision, where the horizon of knowledge becomes instrumentalized and loses its associated humanistic ends. Education’s forgotten *telos* is to form the multi-dimensional person, including the intellectual, emotional, moral, and spiritual aspects of human existence. However, this purpose has been displaced with more emphasis on achieving technical mastery, reducing the learning process to acquiring competencies. Another feature of a fragmented form of education is the absence of ethical reasoning. Employability and efficiency become the hallmarks of success in academic institutions, where learners are trained to perform and demonstrate without being challenged whether what they do serves the common good. As a result, there is an evident marginalization of cross-disciplinary competencies. This effect limits the learner’s ability to synthesize diverse knowledge in various fields, which must be directed towards the truth, not only as a personal endeavor for success.

In *The Universality of Universality*, Jean-Luc Marion (2013) observes that contemporary education becomes focused on transferring measurable knowledge, including facts and skills, while disregarding the aspects of human existence that cannot be measured and comprehended. Paulo Freire (2005, 72) also refers to this idea as the banking approach, where “education thus becomes an act of depositing, in which the students are the depositories and the teacher is the depositor. Instead of communicating, the teacher issues communiqués and makes deposits which the students patiently receive, memorize, and repeat.” This approach sidelines the fundamental mission of education to form learners towards an awareness of who they are before the truth. As Marion (2013, 69) asserts,

It is therefore advisable to educate man for his well-being, for the good itself and for nothing else – for his own good and for that of others, instead of just teaching him information about what does not concern him directly, the things of the world, or objects of ambient unreality. Only in this way can one hope to escape from the sadness of the individual who knows everything except himself...

From this lens, fragmentation fractures the unity between knowledge and being, knowing and becoming. Instead of being formed as a whole person, the learner becomes a compartmentalized subject, whose identity is measured only through their effectiveness and productivity. This contemporary fragmentation stems from a gradual loss of the

collective desire to search for the truth of human existence. As D.C. Schindler (2013, 95) points out, “The problem is not failure of will in any individual or individuals: it is more radically an impoverishment of our sense of truth and the sequent crises of reason and fragmentation of the university.” This fragmentation signals a crisis – a decomposition of the desire to know the truth. For Marion (2013, 74), there can be no authentic education, “therefore no teaching or education without love of the truth, then none of these exist either without a science of love.” It is imperative, therefore, to recover the truth as the primary concern of various disciplines and fields of specialization to overcome the trap of failing to know one’s individuality.

Despite these current reforms, the Philippine educational landscape is experiencing a fragmentation that departs from its holistic dimensions. This fragmentation reflects what Martha Nussbaum (2010, 2) warns against: a system of education stripped of its humanistic dimension.

Radical changes are occurring in what democratic societies teach the young, and these changes have not been well thought through. Thirsty for national profit, nations and their systems of education are heedlessly discarding skills that are needed to keep democracies alive. If this trend continues, nations all over the world will soon be producing generations of useful machines, rather than complete citizens who can think for themselves, criticize tradition, and understand the significance of another person’s sufferings and achievements.

These alterations are taking place globally, where the humanities and the arts are systematically excluded from secondary and tertiary curricula. The acquisition of marketable skills blurs the transformative aims of learning, especially the development of moral character. As a result, education has suffered from depersonalization, driven by an over-glorification of competitive advantage, internationalization, and accreditations. In many academic institutions, professionalization and specialization are given more attention as these are considered the pathways toward producing highly skilled professionals and experts. However, it overlooks the greater body of knowledge beyond one’s field. Specialization and professionalization are important for the progress of society. However, this imbalance limits their ability to see reality from an interdisciplinary perspective. Therefore, the more specialized a student becomes in a particular field, the less time they dedicate to exploring other equally essential disciplines.

In this light, Marion, Freire, Schindler, and Nussbaum share a common call to bring back the ‘human’ in education. Through their parallel philosophical advocacies, they all remind us that the problem of a fragmented education is not an academic or curricular flaw, but a moral error that jeopardizes the fundamental meaning of the learning process. Education, in its truest form, is an encounter with the truth and a formation of the person-in-relation, not a subject of quantifiable results.

THE DEHUMANIZING EFFECT OF A COMMODIFIED EDUCATION

In many universities, as Bill Readings (1996, 27) argues, the concept of excellence has been reduced to “a purely internal unit of value that effectively brackets all questions of reference or functions, thus creating an internal market. Henceforth, the question of the University is only the question of relative value-for-money, the question posed to a student who is situated entirely as a *consumer*, rather than as someone who wants to think.” This kind of excellence is void of substantive humanistic value and reflects how the current goals of education have shifted towards the neoliberal and capitalist paradigms. According to David Harvey (2007, 22), neoliberalism is a framework that focuses on “a theory of political economic practices proposing that human well-being can best be advanced by the maximization of entrepreneurial freedoms within an institutional framework characterized by private property rights, individual liberty, unencumbered markets, and free trade.” These trends prioritize not the humanistic development of the learner but their economic utility, reducing students to products of transactional enterprise tailored for the market:

Neoliberalism, as purveyed in universities, serves as a reliable base for the growing commercialization of education. It has created a new generation of highly individualistic students, imbibing in them the belief that the knowledge that they acquired in schools was due to their capacity to pay and no thanks to society (Villegas 2007, 27).

As the neoliberal agenda dominates, education enables a consumerist, marketable, and individualistic mindset among learners who see their education as a personal investment. This shift commercializes learning and narrows its scope. “The arts, humanities, and social science courses are merged or phased out because these can foster creative and critical thinking or dissent against the status quo” (Reyes 2015, 150). For academic program evaluations, the potential market value of graduates is considered, even if it comes at the expense of other valuable academic fields. These parameters of productivity and profitability are integrated within institutional priorities and school culture. In return, these trends produce highly specialized graduates who are professionally competent but ethically ungrounded. This neoliberal orientation remodels education into an object of commercial enterprise that alienates learners from their human vocation. It privileges performative success over moral growth, productivity over reflection, and the logic of profit over the logic of the good. In the long run, this framework treats learners as economic agents rather than moral subjects. It molds a generation of learners whose self-value is associated with employability and market competitiveness. The problem with this system is that learning becomes privatized and individualistic. Consequently, once a space for critical reflection, human becoming, and the pursuit of truth, the university becomes an enterprise oriented toward measurable outputs and financial gain.

A commodified education has reshaped academic institutions into corporate entities by reducing students to consumers of knowledge and skills as commodities. “From previously being a site for social critique and emancipatory instruction, the university has dramatically metamorphosed into a subsector of the economy. Its structure is systematically permeated by the principle of capital, and services are conditioned by purely commodified causes” (Reyes 2015, 149). Many academic institutions have been restructured according to the principle of capital at the service of commodified purpose. When learning becomes commodified, it loses its emancipatory power. The

commodification leads to a forgetfulness of what education ought to be. The immoderate focus on measurable outcomes is a concrete sign that education is starting to disregard the truths about human existence. Blaise Ringor (2025, 62) elaborates on this kind of depersonalization occurring in many educational institutions, where “students are treated as customers, teachers as employees, and administrators as asset managers, thus commodifying the educational process. This trend contributes to the corruption of educational professionals, who begin to regard others solely as potential sources of profit rather than as ends in themselves.” This concern was also raised by Tongam Nababan (2014), who describes the existing system in higher education as dehumanizing. “It is characterized by the sharpening of scientific studies or excessive specialization in specific fields. Thus, the education system tends to only understand the man in one particular aspect, while other aspects are ignored” (Nababan 2014, 777). This reduction of learners to their instrumental value is a visible manifestation of educational fragmentation, corrupting education’s humanistic aims. However, education, in its true sense, cannot simultaneously be the driver of human flourishing and the enabler of humanity’s commodification.

AN ETHICS-LESS CURRICULUM ACROSS ALL ACADEMIC PROGRAMS

Due to the growing overemphasis on professionalization and specialization, the fragmentation in higher education threatens the integral liberality of the General Education (GE) curriculum. Several GE courses have been sidelined. Courses related to arts, philosophy, communication, and history are undervalued and often considered minor or preparatory. For instance, one of the significant developments in Philippine educational reforms is the proposal to reduce the number of GE courses in the higher education curriculum. The Second Congressional Commission on Education (EDCOM 2), created under Republic Act 11899, has proposed the removal of three GE courses - Ethics, Art Appreciation, and The Contemporary World. The commission argues, “Philippine college programs place too much emphasis on general education (GE) courses and fall short in offering internships and hands-on training...” (EDCOM 2, 2025). Supporting this recommendation, Karol Mark Yee, Executive Director of the EDCOM 2, presented the findings from the Philippine Institute for Development Studies (PIDS), which highlight the substantial differences in the curricular design of Philippine Higher education when compared to Southeast Asia, Europe, and Australia.

In every case, Philippine programs exceed general education requirements overseas, exceed AUS and EU professional/specialist course requirements (but not ASEAN requirements), while featuring smaller internship requirements. In other words, Philippine higher education curricula are nearly all GE-heavy, internship-light (Largoza and Fernandez 2025, 7).

This discussion paper proposes to make Philippine higher education more internationally comparable and shorter by focusing on the global market’s needs. Dr. Edizon Fermin, Chairperson of the Commission on Higher Education’s Technical Panel for Teacher

Education, also noted that all graduates from higher education institutions in the country are considered minors in General Education.

Alongside this development, the DepEd introduced its reform on the Senior High School (SHS) curriculum of Basic Education with the intent of ensuring that “learners acquire relevant skills and competencies aligned with the demands of higher education, middle skills development, employment, and entrepreneurship” (DepEd, 2025a). The Strengthened SHS Curriculum is designed to prepare learners for the workforce by requiring the teachers to design relevant lessons and differentiated assessments, “ensuring that the learners gain 21st-century skills including critical thinking and problem-solving abilities required for success in the real world” (DepEd, 2025b). However, one effect of this change is the demotion of *Introduction to the Philosophy of the Human Person*, a core subject in the SHS curriculum, to an elective subject. This implies that this subject is no longer mandatory for all senior high school learners.

Responding to the current recommendation of EDCOM 2 and the looming possibility of ethics-less curricula across all programs at the tertiary level, I argue in the succeeding part that Ethics, both as a course and a discipline of philosophy, remains an indispensable pillar in the moralization of Filipino learners. If the Philippines is to achieve nation-building and address societal concerns, Filipinos must begin with moral formation, and this can only be possible through the proper implementation of General Education (Ethics).

THE PERENNIAL RELEVANCE OF ETHICS IN THE MORAL FORMATION OF FILIPINOS

To substantiate the objective of this paper, it is necessary to retrieve the perennial relevance of Ethics as a philosophical endeavor, which can reconfigure the learners’ ability to adequately respond to the world. Ethics, as part of the GE curriculum, is designed to immerse learners in the ethical dimensions of human existence, viewed from the vantage point of society, culture, and environment. “What is ethics, how is it framed and practiced, and what is its value to society and the person are the major questions the course seeks to answer” (CHED 2013, 16). As a branch of philosophy, Ethics holds an irreplaceable role in refining human consciousness, particularly in reawakening social awareness and moral responsibility. More than ever, in a country beset by a culture of fake news, individualism, historical revisionism, corruption, injustice, and ideological manipulation, this philosophical discipline serves as a critical tool for truth-seeking and a form of counter-culture against oppressive systems.

Jove Jim Aguas (2023, 168) affirms that “it is not difficult to argue for the role of philosophy in shaping the mind and consciousness of people. Philosophical ideas inspire people to act, fight for their rights, uphold the truth, and promote justice.” Indeed, it is in the nature of philosophical discourses to ask deep and unsettling questions. I agree with Martin Heidegger (2000), who regards philosophy as a ‘burdening’ part of the historical *Dasein*, a process that compels us to ask the why-questions. This ‘burdening’ of philosophy is not to be avoided, but embraced, as it burdens the lovers of wisdom to return to the things themselves, guiding them to the path of truth. Philosophical inquiry invites us to avoid the surface and superficial aspects of human existence, seeking instead what lies on the ground.

“The why-question does not just skim the surface, but presses into the domains that lie at the ground, even pressing into the ultimate, to the limit; the question is turned away from all surface and shallowness, striving for depth; as the broadest, it is at the same time the deepest of the deep questions” (Heidegger 2000, 3-4). As Aguas (2023, 176) further notes, “The questions that philosophy asks always convey a message, and the message could have political, social, or cultural meaning or significance. By asking critical questions, philosophy can instigate, it can provoke, can criticize.” In other words, the why-questions that philosophy courageously attempts to answer are instrumental in illuminating the critical issues that a person confronts in society, religion, and morality.

As a reflective human endeavor, philosophy seeks to foster genuine human development amidst rapid societal changes. Philosophy is a critical process of self-interrogation that engages learners in social critique, with the purpose of broadening their horizons of thought and promoting values essential for coexistence in a globalized world. As Jeffrey Centeno (2013, 5) explains it, “Philosophy encourages, that is, it touches on the heart of the matter, the activity of self-criticism, which is philosophy’s essential virtue. For philosophy to be true to its critical calling, it must interrogate its own foundations and motives of radical questioning.” Grounded in cogent philosophical inquiry, education can become a powerful weapon that can confront dehumanizing operating systems. According to Anna Margaret Sharp (2018), for education to be truly transformational, learners must be liberated to be a community of inquirers. This empowerment involves more than cognitive development but requires the regulation of egoistic tendencies and the realization of how one’s existence is interrelated and interdependent with others, persons, animals, plants, and all of life. “Such a balanced self-concept is a by-product of a communal philosophical inquiry that cultivates habits and dispositions worthy of esteem” (Sharp 2018, 50). It is through this communal philosophical dialogue that societal transformation is possible, which can lead to “a new way of being in the world, one characterized by awareness, curiosity, cooperation, patience, absorption in the wonder of what it is to be in this world” (Sharp 2018, 50).

Philosophy is not subordinated to any economic demands. This detachment from utilitarian ends is, indeed, fundamental to the nature of philosophy. As Josep Pieper (1998, 97) emphasizes “...true philosophy rests upon the belief that the real wealth of man lies not in the satisfaction of his necessities, nor, again, in becoming lords and masters of nature, but rather in being able to understand *what is* – the whole of what is.” Philosophy is a discipline that transcends the working world, as it “pertains to the very essence of the philosophical act *not* to belong to this world of uses and efficiencies, of needs, and satisfactions, this world of useful good (*bonum utile*), of the common utility, but is, rather, to be incommensurable to it in principle” (Pieper 1998, 85). In this sense, philosophy, according to Pieper, is the most liberal of the liberal arts because true philosophical inquiry is not for profit and productivity-driven but for understanding reality itself. This is the beauty of doing philosophy, that is, it “cannot allow itself to be used, it is not at the disposal of purposes beyond itself, for it is itself a goal” (Pieper 1998, 93). This is primarily why General Education can ensure the flourishing of the *artes liberales* (liberal arts) in every institution as opposed to *artes serviles* (servile arts). “The liberality or freedom of the liberal arts consists in their not being disposable for purpose, that they do not need to be legitimated by a social function, by being work” (Pieper 1998, 41). Philosophy, therefore, stands as the epitome of liberal education, an education that aims at forming individuals

with “a mind that is open and tolerant, ready and willing to face new situations, and to interpret in terms of knowledge as it relates to social welfare... a mind that includes a standard of ethics and a keen sense of responsibility” (University of the Philippines, Diliman 2016, 7).

In the Philippines, Ethics holds a central place in the General Education curriculum. It is not a prescriptive imposition of values and moral oughtness. As a philosophical inquiry, Ethics refines learners’ rational faculty to examine moral dilemmas and appraise societal issues, while upholding human dignity. More importantly, it cultivates wisdom that calls for a society rooted in truth, justice, and compassion – qualities indispensable in our time.

... ethics is more crucial in honing their critical inquiry at their age of maturity regarding ethical implications that may arise from different issues affecting humankind, such as artificial intelligence, technology, social media, fake news, human trafficking, and human rights, among others (Philosophy Society of Bukidnon, Inc. 2025).

Studying ethics enriches learners with a sense of moral responsibility by urging them to go beyond themselves and engage with the broader community of persons. As a philosophical act, Ethics empowers learners with a higher level of critical self-knowledge, allowing them to thrive in the ever-emerging ethical challenges that disrupt human situatedness. Using the perspective of Aristotle (2011), ethics is the science of human flourishing (*eudaimonia*). It is the pursuit of an individual, as a rational being, towards his or her proper ends (*telos*), through the cultivation of intellectual virtue. Linda Zagzebski (2009), in her work *On Epistemology*, argues that the primary concern of promoting intellectual virtues is the shift of concentration from what is known to the knower, from the belief to the believer, from the content of knowledge to the intellectual disposition of the knower. As Zagzebski affirms, those individuals who acquire intellectual virtues through philosophical inquiries, such as attentiveness, thoroughness, and carefulness, are most likely to arrive at the truth (Zagzebski 2009, 82). In this sense, Ethics is not about what is known but the intellectual and moral character of the one who seeks knowledge. Hence, Ethics as a philosophical discipline forms person who are capable of moral responsibility, truthfulness, and compassion. This idea aligns with Zagzebski’s argument that the focus of intellectual formation should move from knowledge to the knower, from the content of beliefs to the virtues of the believing subject.

In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle (2011) presents ethics as the cultivation of intellectual virtues, such as prudence (*phronesis*). He defines prudence as “a true characteristic that is bound up with action, accompanied by reason, and concerned with things good and bad for a human being” (VI.5, 1140b 5-8). Prudence is central to understanding Aristotle’s political and social philosophy. This intellectual virtue enables a person to choose the right action in a given circumstance and to act reasonably according to one’s *telos*. Aristotle explains that this virtue enables a person “to deliberate nobly about things good and advantageous for himself, not in a partial way - for example, the sorts of things conducive to health or to strength – but about the sorts of things conducive to living well in general” (VI.5, 1140a 26-29). Hence, it suffices to say that prudence is inseparable from one’s moral character. In order to achieve human flourishing, one must acquire the

intellectual virtue of prudence. Through the study of Ethics, learners can acquire these virtues and act as they ought to act.

To guide learners in developing intellectual virtues, GE Ethics employs unique and purposeful pedagogical and evaluative methodologies. Rather than simply imparting their minds with theories, GE Ethics operationalizes real learning experiences to achieve the desired learning outcomes. These comprise: (1) the ability to implement normative ethical theories, including consequentialism, deontology, and virtue ethics to contemporary societal issues; (2) the application of argument-mapping competence that allows learners to dissect and analyze moral reasoning patterns, detect fallacies, and construct cogent ethical argumentation; and (3) the practice of intellectual virtues as dispositions through reflective cases analysis, where learners deliberate on the morally appropriate actions. Hence, GE Ethics is not just conformity to what is socially acceptable (as what GMRC-VE does) but allows learners to act justly in complex human situations.

THE ESSENTIALITY OF A DEDICATED ETHICS COURSE AT THE TERTIARY LEVEL

The recent educational reforms in the country, such as the MATATAG Curriculum and the GMRC and Values Education Act, are concrete efforts to make education more human-centered. These initiatives intensify the implementation of a holistic approach to learning. However, despite this progress, GMRC-VE is insufficient and cannot replace Ethics at the tertiary level. A dedicated Ethics course focuses on a systematic and structured engagement with various moral frameworks, their historical foundations, principles of reasoning, and modes of ethical justification. Within higher education, this course forms the evaluative backbone of critical thinking, teaching learners to apply logical thinking and prudent judgment in professional contexts. Without Ethics in the curriculum, education becomes indifferent to the suffering and plight of others. Hence, an ethics-less curriculum can enable a culture of apathy. As Jesse Bazzul (2023, 76) points out, education already suffers from being too useful to systems that wield power. As a result, education may possibly contribute to the uncaring generation of people. This contemporary civilization is afflicted by the unbearable silence on issues of injustice, corruption, and human dignity. Hence, as Gergen (2020, 15) argues, academic institutions still hold the power to engender a responsible moral consciousness. To achieve this, education must be reimagined as a communal search for better ways of being in the world (Bazzul 2023, 77).

Educational institutions have shifted their focus to meeting the utilitarian needs of society, where the vision of guiding learners to become more human has been obscured, and the sense of the common good has been forgotten. In this context, Ethics remains an indispensable pillar of moral formation among Filipinos. As we face our present milieu marked by moral ambiguity, there is an urgent call for all educational institutions to undertake rigorous and methodical ethical endeavors. Professionalization and specialization are important, but must be complemented by a sound moral foundation. As the University of the Philippines, Diliman (2016, 6) reiterates:

But while the university must hone experts in various fields of specialization, it must also ensure that these experts, individually and as a

group, will have a holistic appreciation of increasingly complex problems such as climate change and natural disasters; new diseases and threats to health and public safety; economic exploitation and poverty; and social conflicts, war, and international terrorism.

All these societal problems are ethical in nature. Hence, society needs morally discerning citizens who can address the ongoing ethical confusion and act with collective accountability. As Early Sol Gadong (2025) rightly points out, “GE should not be looked at as a decay to specialization. If anything, they are the very courses that allow us to develop individuals who can interrogate systems, build communities, and imagine better futures, especially for the most vulnerable. Therefore, our GE courses must be further enriched rather than discarded.”

The GMRC-VE program can instill proper manners and behaviors, which are important for social harmony. However, the GMRC-VE framework remains prescriptive and practical. Hence, its approaches focus primarily on the question, ‘what is to be done’ and not on ‘why one ought to do it.’ On the one hand, philosophical ethics immerses learners in critical reflection about the nature of good, justice, and human flourishing. In essence, it is not about ‘how to act rightly’ but ‘what constitutes rightness,’ which allows learners to reassess the grounds of their moral judgment. In this sense, GMRC-VE and Ethics are complementary but not substitutable (nor reducible to each other). GMRC-VE can offer a formative starting point for ethical behavior, while Ethics fortifies learners’ rational faculty to enable them to internalize fundamental moral principles, acting with informed will and conscience.

Reducing Ethics as a subcomponent of GMRC-VE weakens the role of higher education as a fresh space for social critique and moral discernment. Ethics is not about value inculcation but a disciplined practice of an individual's rational faculty that refrains from being relatively imposing on one’s notion of truth. Moral formation grapples with what it means and how to be a human being. Through the study of Ethics, learners are immersed in various philosophical traditions, including but not limited to Aristotle’s eudaimonia and virtue-ethics, Kantian deontology, Millian utilitarianism, theories on distributive justice, Christian morality, and Natural Law, and other foundational approaches to morality. Ethics, as a discipline of philosophy, does not teach learners to obey moral rules. In its purest form, Ethics guides learners to interrogate operating systems in the light of human reason and human dignity.

Hence, if education is to recover its humanistic and transformative dimensions, it must return to the foundational importance of philosophy, where every discipline from the sciences to the humanities owes its origin. Philosophy through ethical inquiry is a discipline that strengthens the habits of thinking, reasoning, and discerning. This provides intellectual architecture upon which 21st-century skills rest. Critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and communication are but fruits of a long philosophical tradition that values rational reflection. In this light, philosophy ensures that the technological and economic ambitions of the contemporary world remain grounded in the why-questions of human existence. As such, the re-centering of philosophy from the basic to higher education reclaims the true *telos* of learning, that is, to form minds that think rightly and hearts that choose the good.

CONCLUSION

Education is not a transactional factory where the sole intention is to manufacture human capital. It cannot reduce learners to commodities of production that will serve the interests of capitalist and neoliberal society. At its core, education is the formation of the mind, heart, and soul. As Immanuel Kant (2007) affirms in his educational philosophy, every human person, being the only rational being, must be educated. “By education we mean specifically care (maintenance, support), discipline (training), and instruction, together with formation” (Kant 2007, 437). Education extends beyond the transmission of knowledge and encompasses the development of skills. Proper education integrates the laws of humanity through moral formation.

Filipino learners must not only be formed as skilled laborers. But more so, “to be trained as critical thinkers so as to be open, sensitive, and understanding of the beliefs and values of others as well as not to be enslaved by their respective belief and value systems” (Marquez 2017, 272). The university cannot simply produce graduates who are unaware of the connection between their fields of specialization and other aspects of life. In other words, acquired knowledge and skills must not only serve the self-preserving interest but also be directed toward serving the people (Nemenzo 2000, 39). In conclusion, this paper does not argue against the professionalization and specialization of the field. Instead, it critiques education’s detachment from the truth. When education becomes fragmented, it loses sight of its capacity to form a multi-dimensional subject – the human person. When learning becomes commodified, the pursuit becomes utilitarian and self-referential. This trend in education is alarming because higher institutions might be producing graduates equipped with the necessary skills the economy needs, but not equipped with a desire for transformation and the will to change the world.

Moral degradation still persists in today’s individualistic and pluralistic society, and a duty towards others has been neglected. The upsurge of unnecessary human violence, ecological crisis, corruption, violence, and other societal problems presents a disturbing manifestation of moral confusion and apathy among many Filipinos. As recent educational policy suggests, with the reclassification of Ethics as non-essential, these developments indicate that the weakening of ethical and philosophical education may contribute to learners’ diminished sense of moral responsibility. In response to this moral dilemma, restoring the perennial relevance of Ethics in Filipino learners’ moral formation becomes a renewed pathway toward nation-building. In addition to concerns about mathematics, science, literacy, and reading comprehension skills, the Philippine education landscape faces an evident decline in critical thinking, civic responsibility, and moral consciousness. “Ethics addresses these deficits directly” (University of the Philippines Diliman, Department of Philosophy 2025). If the Department of Education and the Commission on Higher Education are serious about forming morally responsible citizens, then ethics should be prioritized as a non-negotiable part of the educational process. What we are removing is a course responsible for refining the critical faculty by which a conscious agent apprehends the good. Education requires a systematic approach to cultivating intellectual virtues in the classroom, fostering responsible and morally discerning citizens, rather than merely functional machines for market preferences.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Several recommendations are proposed in light of all the arguments raised in this paper. First, the Good Moral and Right Conduct – Values Education program must be evaluated to ensure its integration into the Strengthened Senior High School curriculum. The law mandates that GMRC-VE must be integrated into the senior high school curriculum (GMRC and Value Education Act, 2020, Sec. 4, par. b and c). Second, given that the subject, *Introduction to the Philosophy of the Human Person*, has been demoted to an elective subject in the SHS curriculum, there is a need to institutionalize a bridging framework between GMRC-VE and Ethics to ensure the continuous progression of the learner's moral formation from basic to higher education. Third, the General Education (Ethics) curriculum should be revisited, with the intention of reappropriating the issues of Feminism, Care for Creation, solidarity with non-humans, and Artificial Intelligence. Lastly, higher education institutions are encouraged to develop humanities-infused professional curricula that incorporate moral philosophy into their pedagogical instruction. Ethics may be scaffolded across program offerings and linked to field-specific issues. To put this into practice, academic institutions must invest in interdisciplinary training and ethical education. This strategy requires educators to become co-developers in crafting course competencies that align moral frameworks with specialized skills. This proposal includes establishing institution-based ethics centers and philosophical forums that host relevant roundtable discussions, lectures, and symposia.

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