

**THE EDSA REVOLUTION(S) AND FREEDOM: HEGELIAN
INTERPRETATION OF HISTORY**

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INTRODUCTION

Man by nature is free. He always seeks for freedom.¹ He cannot be contented being enslaved by any external forces. He needs to express himself according to his nature. Any violation to this right to freedom is a moment of struggle. In the history of mankind, there were several instances when man continuously fights for this very right to freedom. He allows no one to violate it. By any means he tries to sustain it. That man by nature free is a usual contention. In fact,

All men seem to be at least experientially aware of freedom in choice. The experience is so primary, in fact, that it is difficult to conceive oneself operating as if there were no freedom at all. Data from literature, history, and personal communication present manifold testimony not only to freedom, but to the ambiguity, the deliberation, the irrevocability, and even the terror of it. It has often been maintained that this universal experience of freedom provides the greatest proof for its own existence.²

Moreover, man as a rational being tends to organize himself together with other men. He cooperates and collaborates to others in order to organize themselves according to their given nature as free.³ Man therefore, seeks order, rules, laws, and principles that sustain freedom. In man's cooperation with others, he comes to realize the value and meaning of a community, society, or state.

Furthermore, man as rational and free is able to organize a state governed by laws and rules which are necessary principles to maintain man's freedom. They also sustain order and harmony among men as they strive to develop their potentialities.⁴ Thus, man's freedom is sustained through the state he himself tries to organize together with others. Freedom is expressed in a communitarian perspective. It is the concern of everyone.

It is from this context where this study departs. It analyzes one of the significant events in the Philippine history's fight for freedom. It tries to elucidate and expound the very reason behind the revolution of 1986 or the EDSA Revolution(s) in the light of

Hegel's philosophy of history. It is the claim of this study that EDSA revolution(s) is not a cultural structure of the Filipinos but an historical necessity on the Hegelian perspective.

HEGEL'S CONCEPT OF HISTORY

Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, one of the great German philosophers, provides a new understanding of history.

He contends: "philosophy of history is nothing else but the thinking, the reflecting upon history".⁵ It is true indeed that history always involves man himself. History for Hegel is always related to man's living experience. History reflects the rational development and progress of man. It speaks of how man is able to use his reason and freedom. Man as a thinking being is led into a state-of-affairs where he evolves in reason and in freedom. In fact, in *Philosophy of History*, Hegel speaks of Reason as the ruler of the world.

...but the only thought philosophy brings along is the very simple thought of reason, namely that reason rules the world and that things have happened reasonably (according to reason) in world history.⁶

He therefore, attributes the happenings in the world to reason's reasonable events. Hegel gives much emphasis on reason. He believes not in blind fate of the world in as much as reason exists. But there is also the need to understand that philosophy of history is not simply to know the events, deeds, and what is truer or simply what happened in the past but more of the reflection on these events and happenings.⁷ This would lead to a philosophical treatment of history.

Secondly, Hegel's concept of history involves truth, the truth of the Spirit that is continually unfolding. The truth of the spirit is the state of becoming in the continuous events of man. It involves a kind of process that would lead to something he considered as manifestation of the Absolute Spirit. This truth unfolds as history continues.

Thirdly, Hegel's concept of history has something to do with "purpose", "aim", and "goal".⁸ In fact, Hegel's concept of "philosophy of history has an eschatological design, or as one recent writer put it, as prophecy".⁹ Hegel in his philosophical reflection of history thinks of a certain end or finality, a kind of "telos" is set. All the events therefore in the world have purpose or end. Francis Fukuyama opines,

Both Hegel and Marx believed that the evolution of human societies was not open-ended, but would end when mankind had achieved a form of society that satisfied its deepest and most

fundamental longings. Both thinkers thus posited an ‘end of history’: for Hegel this was the liberal state, while for Marx it was a communist society. This did not mean that the natural cycle of birth, life, and death would end, that important events would no longer happen, or that newspapers reporting them would cease to be published. It meant, rather, that there would be no further progress in the development of underlying principles and institutions, because all of the really big questions had been settled”.¹⁰

The insight of Fukuyama would lead into the understanding that Hegel implies an end to history as long as there will be the liberal states. The contention of Hegel is implied in his discussion of the world history, where there are more or less developed states. It is possible therefore to attain the perfect state in the future, thus ending history.

Another significant insight from Hegel’s philosophy of history is the concept of freedom. History is nothing else but a story of freedom, the freedom of man. Notice that even in his world history, he would underline that “world history is the progress in the consciousness of freedom, a progress which we must know and understand in its (inherent) necessity”.¹¹ From this significant insight, Hegel is not simply advocating freedom physically, but more on the consciousness or awareness of freedom. It is important therefore, to see history as events of man’s unfolding consciousness of freedom. Furthermore, he listed several periods and different cultural milieu to show that these progress and development of consciousness of freedom was really unfolding in history. The *Philosophy of Right* includes the world history.¹² He enumerated the different countries and continents with ample historical data. “In this part of the system, Hegel passes from the study of the developed State, the supreme self-objectivation of Spirit, to a study of the less developed States that lead up to it”.¹³

Lastly, another significant attempt of Hegel in his philosophy of history is the “philosophical restatement of the continuous memory of the past which is already part of the self-consciousness of those living in a particular political State: it merely deepens that self-consciousness by connecting it with a philosophical outlook”.¹⁴ From this point, history would bring an understanding of the different political events in a particular state where the “political man” is always in the state of self-consciousness.¹⁵ And this must be pursued until the perfection comes in a certain state.

THE EDSA REVOLUTIONS: MANIFESTATION OF THE *GEIST*

The **EDSA Revolution** is also referred to as the *People Power Revolution* and the *Philippine Revolution of 1986*.¹⁶ It was primarily considered a nonviolent mass demonstration in the Philippines. The four days of peaceful action by millions of

Filipinos in Metro Manila led to the downfall of the authoritarian regime of President Ferdinand E. Marcos and the installation of Corazon Aquino as President of the Republic. Some people have a problem with labelling this event a revolution; for many, a revolution is the violent overthrow of a reigning or existing government. However, the term “revolution” is generally accepted to mean replacing a prior regime through extraordinary means. The EDSA Revolution was, and remains extraordinary.¹⁷ It remains a historically significant moment of struggle for freedom of the Filipino people.

By comparing the status quo to the previously established governments, the Filipino people have come to realize what makes a government and for what purpose the government should be established. Obviously, in this scheme, the people tend to favor the one from which they will benefit more.¹⁸

In the years that followed, there have been several similar, largely nonviolent revolutions removing similarly unpopular regimes, (for example, the former East Germany, the Velvet Revolution in the former Czechoslovakia, and the Orange Revolution in Ukraine), so the EDSA Revolution may seem more “authentically” revolutionary now than it did at the time, and could even perhaps be cited as the event that led, at least in part, to subsequent peaceful revolts. “Revolution, which has been widely considered manifestation of people demanding for freedom and political equality in the medieval Europe, proved to be an effective way in arousing key persons in government to initiate change.”¹⁹ According to some observers, the EDSA Revolution was little more than a coup d’état by disgruntled military officials, who attempted to overthrow Marcos and install a military junta with Corazon Aquino as a figurehead president. Instead, the coup gained the support of a civilian populace disillusioned with Marcos’ regime, ultimately leading to his ouster.²⁰ This is a moment of truth. Filipinos are fed up with the corruption and greed of an authoritarian leader.

But what exactly the reason why EDSA revolution came about? People under the dictatorship of then President Ferdinand E. Marcos were upset with what was happening in the Philippines. There were unrest among people, discontentment, poverty, lack of peace, political instability, polarization of society, the rich were becoming richer while the poor remains buried under the shadow of hunger and dissatisfaction. Are these really the main reasons of overthrowing a strong government under a strong leader? There might be some greater reasons for this.

Looking at EDSA in Hegel’s perspective, the revolution has something to do with the manifestation of the *Geist*. It is the undying expression of the spirit that was imminently present since the beginning. The people’s desire for freedom was already imminently felt long before EDSA. “The Filipinos would always use ‘people power’ against evil and injustice in the government system. It may not be in the form of revolution but in any way that will manifest their sovereign power in the realms of

politics, society and economy.”²¹ It simply culminates on the event itself. The people were not simply discontented or dissatisfied, but the spirit manifest itself through the consciousness of freedom of the people. This is proven through the succeeding revolutions that followed the first EDSA event.

Fifteen years after the EDSA Revolution, in January 2001, EDSA II (EDSA *dos*) occurred. Thousands of citizens converged at the EDSA Shrine to protest against President Joseph Estrada, following his aborted impeachment trial at the Senate of the Philippines. Estrada was a former movie actor who was popular with the masses, but was reviled by the upper and elite classes for his alleged corruption. EDSA II resulted in the downfall of Estrada’s administration, the extreme polarization of Philippine society, and the dilution of the concept of ‘People Power’. Foreign commentators criticized Estrada’s ouster as ‘mob rule’ and a ‘defeat for due processes.’²²

The EDSA II proves that really the people are becoming more and more conscious of their freedom. The history of the Philippines is not simply a struggle against a dictator or a corrupt leader. It is really an evident sign of man’s consciousness to freedom. History continues to unfold. The *Geist* still manifest itself in history. In fact,

months after EDSA II, a desperate attempt to overthrow the government prompted an EDSA III (EDSA *tres*) that was staged by hundreds of thousands of Estrada’s supporters. This was not successful because Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo made decisions to prevent her ouster. By nightfall, she had declared all of the National Capital Region as being under a State of Rebellion.²³

Notice that these events seem unending. It gives a hint that people grow in the awareness of freedom. They wanted to obtain liberty from the hands of their oppressors. They wanted to be liberated from the clutches of imprisonment under a tyrant.

It is indeed not long ago (February of 1986) when the Filipino people made history by making a stand. They boldly expressed their convictions against the tyranny of dictatorship, notwithstanding the danger facing them. They believed enough was enough. It was time to oust that oppressor who for so long had made a fool out of them.²⁴

All these events when seen in a wider perspective are part and parcel of human struggle for freedom, and this freedom in the people’s desire is the visible manifestation of the *Geist*.

In fact, in those moments in Philippine history there are significant persons whom the *Zeitgeist* (Geist-in-time) used in order to manifest itself. The very reason *Zeitgeist* need great men is that in the sphere of world history we see momentous collisions between established, acknowledged duties, laws, rights on the other hand and forces adverse to this fixed system on the other. These forces realize themselves in history. Fortunately, it is in great historical men or world figures where such principles are present. In fine, great men are special locus where the *Geist* manifest itself through their noble aims.

Concrete examples for this are in the persons of Fidel Ramos, Juan Ponce Enrile, and Gringo Honasan where the realization of their aims was “not an independently necessary feature in history of the Philippines.”²⁵ It was not only their private gains but an unconscious impulse occasioned the accomplishment of that which the time was ripe”.²⁶ They have “no consciousness of the general idea they were unfolding”²⁷ while maybe prosecuting their private gain. This is so because “world historical figures form purposes to satisfy themselves, not others”.²⁸ But not only those who fought for freedom instrumental, rather even those who were “unconsciously” acting even though it is for their personal gains such as Presidents Marcos and Estrada.

Ultimately, these movements and these men must be judged according to how they developed the progress of the Idea, the development of freedom/reason through history (even if they weren’t fully conscious of their philosophical actions themselves). Their violent standards are not moral in the usual sense, but are justified under Hegel’s ethics of history. These world-historical men are key motors of change and progress.

ANALYSIS

There are many things that can be said about the relation of Hegel’s concept of history and the EDSA revolution(s). However, this study will give only some significant insights drawn from the comparison.

First and foremost, from a Hegelian perspective, there will be more EDSA’s to come as long as development of consciousness of freedom is concerned. The *Geist* in man is never contented until it shows itself to its fulfillment and accomplishment. As long as man is not totally free, EDSA as an event continues to haunt us even in the future.

Secondly, EDSA as part of history is not a unique event; it is one of the many manifestations of man’s consciousness to freedom. EDSA could be paralleled with French revolution...only different in cultural context but has the same historical significance. This is so because the spirit in man is the same; it manifests in them; it manifests in “heroes”; it manifests in the ripe time. EDSA, the spirit of this revolution will only be authentic if its intention is the real freedom of man, if its demand for man’s freedom is accomplished.

Thirdly, EDSA is not merely a cultural structure of Filipino psyche; it is part of human passion or desire for freedom or liberty from dictatorship, slavery, and tyranny.

EDSA is only meaningful in relation to historical reason of freedom. Separated from the concept of freedom (developed consciousness) EDSA will just simply be an event or meaningless moment. EDSA is not simply meaningful for Filipinos who fought for it; it is meaningful for all the Filipinos because even those (oppressors) should realize the working of the *Geist* in history. They themselves should admit and acknowledge its significance. They should also grow in wisdom to understand the *Geist*.

Fourthly, EDSA should be considered a “natural phenomenon”; it is a spontaneous and necessary evil in a sense. It is something to be expected, for *Geist* manifests itself in a certain time and space. It is an historical necessity. Moreover, it is historically significant for humanity and this significance has a wider perspective than merely cultural or psychological.

Lastly, EDSA is a sign of hope for Filipinos and for humanity as a whole. It is a very important signpost for a better future, a better Philippines - free Philippines. The finality of EDSA could still be seen in the future, that is, if “liberal states emerge”, the *telos*.²⁹ It is also here when history ends. EDSA ends. Not because everything simply stops but because the very peak of the *Geist's* is reached - a complete freedom.

CONCLUSION

Both Hegel's concepts of history and EDSA revolutions are significant in their real impact on the Filipinos and the world at large. EDSA has its own place in history. Hegel's mind had been read by a lot of people and influenced greatly many philosophers. In Hegelian term, EDSA is man's sign of “consciousness of freedom”. It seeks for peace, prosperity, harmony, order, and unity among people. However, to be realistic, utopia is far from reachable. Neither EDSA would guarantee victory or eternal peace and eternal freedom. As long as man lives, it will not escape from the reality of his continuing struggle especially in terms of freedom. This is not pessimism, it is realism. Of course everybody wants a complete peace and freedom but it is not the present moment who judges, let only the author of everything judge its coming, if it will come at all. Let history decide.

ENDNOTES

¹ Florentino H. Hornedo, *The Power To Be: A Phenomenology of Freedom*, (Manila: UST Publishing House, 2000), 62-63. See also Robert A. O'Donnell, *Hooked on Philosophy: Thomas Aquinas Made Easy*, (New York, St. Pauls, 1997), 60-61.

² Manuel Dy, *Philosophy of Man: Selected Readings*, (Manila: Goodwill Trading Company, 1986), 157. See also Hornedo, *The Power To Be*, 4.

³ O'Donnell, *Hooked on Philosophy*, 65-76.

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- ⁴ Cf. Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, (Boston, Beacon Press, 1964), xxi.
- ⁵ Carl J. Friedrich, *The Philosophy of Hegel*, (New York: Random House, 1953), 3
- ⁶ Friedrich, *The Philosophy of Hegel*, 4.
- ⁷ Ibid. 35-36. From the article "Of the Different Kinds of Writing". Hegel would give three ways of looking at history: the original, the reflective and the philosophical one. This study is more concern on the third way.
- ⁸ In the Aristotelian perspective, this is "teleological" (*Telos* in Greek).
- ⁹ Friedrich, *The Philosophy of Hegel*, liii.
- ¹⁰ Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man*, (London: Penguin, 1992), 2.
- ¹¹ Friedrich, *The Philosophy*, 12. See also G.W.F Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Mind*, Trans. J.B. Baillie, (New York: Dover Publications, 2003), 6-7.
- ¹² Cf. T.M. Know, *Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1942), 216-223.
- ¹³ J.N. Finday, *Hegel: A Reexamination*, (USA: Collier Book, 1958), 332.
- ¹⁴ Finday, *Hegel*, 333-334.
- ¹⁵ See also O'Donnell, *Hooked on Philosophy*, 65. St. Thomas quoted Aristotle in the use of the word "political" in reference to man; the man is a "political animal".
- ¹⁶ EDSA stands for *Epifanio de los Santos Avenue*, a main highway in Metro Manila and the main site of the demonstrations (not only in 1986 but also other mass demonstrations in the Philippines history).
- ¹⁷ "EDSA Revolution," [Article on-line]; available from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/EDSA_Revolution; 15 February 2007; See also "The Edsa Revolution - The downfall of Marcos," [Article on-line]; available from http://philippinepics.com/The_EDSA_revolution.html; 21 June 2009.
- ¹⁸ Rene Calandria, "The Edsa Revolution: Re-interpreting the Filipino Psyche," [Article on-line]; available from http://www.allacademic.com/meta/p_mla_apa_research_citation/2/0/4/5/4/pages204546/p204546-1.php; 21 June 2009. "According to Constantino, the Filipino people have had the misfortune of being liberated four times during their entire history. The first among these was through the Spaniards who liberated them from the "enslavement of the devil" and of course, from primitivism. Accordingly, Filipinos before the coming of the conqueror had lived in the primitive state of nature developed later on by the formation of barangay system. Nonetheless, the period during before that is somewhat primeval. They lived life based on the basic needs of their being part of the nature. Those who were capable managed to co-exist with his environment." Ibid.
- ¹⁹ Ibid.
- ²⁰ "EDSA Revolution," [Article on-line].
- ²¹ Calandria, "The Edsa Revolution," [Article on-line].

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid. There are some people who considered the EDSA III as simply nuisance. It was allegedly staged by the supporters of Pres. Estrada in order to get the sympathy of the majority. However, it was not successful. Fr. Dexter Prudenciano made a study on this on behalf of the Church. He contends that majority of those who participated in this event were poor. Though it mind not have the same impact like the first tow EDSA, the government and the Church supposed to see the deeper reasons why they did such act. Dexter Prudenciano, "Catholic Social Doctrine on the Church of the Poor: Implications on EDSA III," Master's Thesis: Don Bosco Center of Studies, 2005.

²⁴ "23rd Anniversary EDSA REVOLUTION," [Article on-line]; available from <http://coldsouljeff.blogspot.com/2009/02/23rd-anniversary-edsa-revolution.html>; 21 June 2009.

²⁵ Other significant figures would be Cardinal Sin, Corazon C. Aquino, and many other personalities who really helped in the realization of the revolutions.

²⁶ Antonio Diluvio, Notes on Hegel, *Political Interpretation of History*, (USC, 2006).

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Fukuyama, *End of History*, 2.

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