

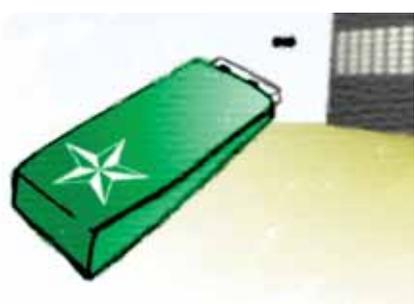


2401 (tweñ'tē for',ō, wun) is a landmark number along Taft Avenue. It is the location ID of De La Salle University-Manila, home to outstanding faculty and students, and birthplace of luminaries in business, public service, education, the arts, and science. And 2401 is the name of the official newsletter of DLSU-Manila, featuring developments and stories of interest about the University.

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## CCS MEMBERS ATTEND US CONFAB ON COMPUTING

*Four College of Computer Studies (CCS) faculty members participated in the Federated Computing Research Conference (FCRC) conducted by the Association of Computing Machinery (ACM) in San Diego, California from June 9 to 16.*

Attending the week-long FCRC were Charibeth Cheng of the Computer Technology Department and Shirley Chu, Ethel Ong, and Danny Cheng, all three of the Software Technology Department. They joined a series of related conferences and workshops that gathered researchers in different fields of computer science and engineering.

Among the topics tackled in the series were the History of Programming Languages, Programming Language Design and Implementation, Measurement and Modeling of Computer Systems, and Electronic Commerce. A workshop on Program Analysis for Software Tools and Engineering was also conducted.

The simultaneous conferences discussed completed and ongoing research projects from various universities and industries in the US such as Sun, IBM,

Microsoft, Google, Stanford University, UC Berkeley and Carnegie Mellon, and featured award-winning and popular programmers as lecturers.

Also featured in the gathering were a series of seminars on the future possibilities of computing, such as computer architecture, data-intensive super computing, and network designs. These were conducted by the Computing Research Association, which established the Computing Community Consortium to engage the computing research community in articulating and pursuing longer-term research visions.

The DLSU-Manila faculty members were able to participate in the FCRC through the ACM-FCRC Educator's Travel Grant, which covered their airfare, accommodation, and registration fees.

## LA SALLE RESEARCHERS WIN NAST AWARDS

*The National Academy of Science and Technology (NAST) recently recognized members of the DLSU-Manila faculty for their outstanding contributions in the field of S&T, also naming one professor as Academician.*

Dr. Allan Benedict Bernardo, University Fellow and full professor of the Counseling and Educational Psychology Department, was elected member of NAST. He joins a select group of outstanding members of the scientific community of the country. The late Br. Andrew Gonzalez once described election to the Academy as “achievement beyond the basic training of a scholar and researcher.”

NAST cited Bernardo for his works in the field of Cognitive Psychology. A multi-awarded researcher, his current interests include social and cultural dimensions of learning, achievement motivation, and cognitions about learning; mathematical learning and problem solving; language and learning; learning and problem solving in bilinguals; teacher cognitions and teacher development; and educational reform and policy. He serves as head or consultant of a number of organizations, including the Psychological Association of the Philippines and the ASEAN Regional Union of Psychological Societies, where he is both president.

Meanwhile, NAST named Chemical Engineering Department’s Dr. Joseph Auresenia as Outstanding Young Scientist. He was chosen for the quality and number of his scientific works and publications, which have contributed to the advances of science in the Philippines and to the well-being of the Philippine economy and culture.

Auresenia’s research paper was also one of the four research papers, authored or co-authored by DLSU-M faculty, which were recognized as Outstanding Scientific Papers. He co-authored the research titled, “Biodegradation of Polychlorinated Biphenyls using Acclimatized Biofilm in a Three-phase Fluidized Bed Aerobic Reactor,” with Donna Marie Taleon, who was teaching at the Chemical Engineering Department at the time of the study.

Another Outstanding Scientific Paper Award recipient was Chemistry Department’s Dr. Marissa Noel, who authored the “Triterpenes in the Callus Culture of *Vitex negundo* L.” together with Fabian Dayrit from the Ateneo De Manila University.

Civil Engineering Department’s Dr. Alexis Fillone also received an Outstanding Scientific Paper Award for his paper, “Logit Choice Models and Utility Ranking of Transport Models in Metro Manila with Urban Transport Policy Applications,” which he co-authored with Dr. Cresencio Montalbo Jr. and Dr. Noriel Christopher Tiglaog from the University of the Philippines-Diliman.

Fillone’s research was the same study that won in the recent Commission on Higher Education Republica Awards in the

regional level (NCR), in the Natural Sciences, Math, Engineering and Information Technology category.

Another Outstanding Scientific Paper Award was given to Dr. Leonila Abella and Dr. Susan Gallardo, both from the Chemical Engineering Department, for their paper, “Degradation of Polychlorinated Biphenyls in Water Matrix Using UV/H<sub>2</sub>O<sub>2</sub>: Effect of Oxidant Concentration and Ph,” which they co-authored with Dr. Carmela Centeno from the University of Santo Tomas.

In addition, the sustainable agriculture and natural resource management book titled, *Winning the Water War: Watersheds, Water Policies and Water Institutions* won the Outstanding Book Award for 2007. One of the authors is Dr. Antonio Contreras, dean of the College of Liberal Arts. The book was published by the Philippine Institute of Development Studies and the Philippine Council for Agriculture, Forestry and Natural Resources Research and Development in 2004.

The formal awarding of the winners will be held on July 12 at the Manila Hotel.





FIELD NOTES. What is going on in the world? We ask our faculty members to make sense of what we need to know, understand, and reflect upon. They agree to share insights and observations about their respective fields or special interests. Field Notes serves as a window to different worlds where we all belong.



# Philosophy in Comic Books



AS AN ECLECTIC READER of graphic novel classics, I often notice themes and ideas in these materials that coincide with what we discuss in class. I've been teaching philosophy for five years, but it's only recently that I started incorporating comic books in my lectures. The results are dramatic. Students who find philosophy too abstract or irrelevant to their concerns suddenly develop an affinity for philosophical thought. I surmised that this is because of the attraction of the visual. More importantly, there is the unrivaled capacity of narratives to illuminate even the most recalcitrant or unconvinced reader. Graphic novels unite these two important pedagogical tools—art and story—in conveying ideas, many of which are essentially philosophical.

I observe that the majority of students in a typical class, say Introduction to Philosophy or Philosophy of the Person, do not read. This is one of the disadvantages of the old text-centered transmissive pedagogy. No fruitful discussion will ensue without any active feedback or inquiry from the students; the teacher will be forced to deliver a straight lecture. In the University's new transformative paradigm, however, discussions are reader-centered. The instructor-facilitator must actively seek out ways of making the subject matter relevant to the learners, rather than simply assigning canonical readings they do not have any background on. This is where graphic novels as instructional tools become useful. They are not intended to replace the canonical texts but to supplement them, and perhaps even to stimulate the students' interest in the original philosophical works. Consider for example a discussion of the heroic death of the Sandman, in the eponymous series by Neil Gaiman. It's a useful way of concretizing Martin Heidegger's analysis of Dasein as a being-towards-death. This may give students a personal reason to attempt to read that ponderous classic, *Being and Time*. Or consider also a discussion of some Sisyphusian themes in Art Spiegelman's *Maus*, a memoir of his father's Holocaust experiences. This may prompt students to pick up Albert Camus' *The Myth of Sisyphus*.

Thus, in my current research, I'm trying to bring out the ways by which graphic novels may be useful in the teaching and discussion of philosophy. In so doing, I hope to challenge the chauvinistic view that comic books are trivial or childish. Also, in the course of identifying and evaluating the philosophical—and especially existentialist—themes from some selected works, I hope to enumerate, very preliminarily, some main features of a new hermeneutic phenomenology. This will be described a particular way of reading “sequential art” (McCloud 1993: 9) that discloses the main features of being human.

COMIC BOOKS HAVE LONG been stereotyped as disposable, “low-brow” entertainment, typically featuring superheroes or male pornographic fantasies. Otherwise, they are dismissed as reading materials for children and semi-illiterates. However, since the late American comic book creator Will Eisner published *A Contract with God* in 1978, a new genre of comics emerged (Gravett 2005: 9). Eisner's narratives deal with serious (one can even say, existential) themes, such as despair, alienation, and betrayal, all in the context of the blue collar life. Shortly after the commercial success of Eisner's “serious” comics, Alan Moore wrote *Watchmen*, a 12-issue series about neurotic superheroes set in alternative-history United States. While the latter still featured caped figures with fantastic powers, it also dealt with darker political issues. Moore will later mine this Orwellian theme in his classic *V for Vendetta*.

Two of the comic book series that I selected for analysis are part of this trend for a somber yet fantastical subject matter. In particular, Neil Gaiman's *The Sandman* combines all the species of human angst with mythological themes. He investigates the features of our existence (in Heideggerian terms, the existential structures of Dasein, or the human being) in light of lessons from classic fables and legends.

The title character, *Dream* (the Sandman), is of the Endless, a group of seven immortal siblings who are older than

gods and goddesses, older even than time itself. Each of them presides over a specific realm that corresponds to an important aspect of the human condition. They are, in descending order of age, *Destiny*, *Death*, *Dream*, *Destruction*, *Desire* and *Despair* (who are twins), and *Delirium*.

Being single-handedly the most popular and enduring graphic novel series, *The Sandman* has inspired many scholarly works. The most notable and focused of all is Stephen Rauch's Neil Gaiman's *The Sandman* and Joseph Campbell: *In Search of The Modern Myth* (2003). Here he expounds on *Dream*'s heroic journey, after Campbell's detailed analysis of the hero archetype. He also emphasizes the death of the Sandman as the culmination of his adventure. In this manner, Rauch's conclusions open many avenues for ontological considerations. As the philosopher Martin Heidegger (2005:310) wrote, a contemplation of death pushes Dasein toward individuality and authenticity.

“In this state-of-mind [anxiety], Dasein finds itself face-to-face with the ‘nothing’ of the possible impossibility of its existence.... Anticipation utterly individualizes Dasein, and allows it, in this individualization of itself, to become certain of the totality of its potentiality-for-Being.” This is but one of the many aspects of the series that I will show to be philosophically relevant.

Meanwhile, other scholarly treatments of *The Sandman* include a collection of articles edited by Joe Sanders, *The Sandman* **Philosophy... p6**

Let us explore  
a new way  
of teaching  
our courses  
through a  
traditionally  
undervalued  
medium.



### Philosophy, from p5

Papers (2006), as well as an undergraduate thesis written by one of our own former philosophy majors, Cecilia Cabangon, entitled “An Existential-Mythic Journey into Neil Gaiman’s *The Sandman*” (2002).

Apart from Gaiman’s work, my other selection from Western comics is Art Spiegelman’s *Maus*. Composed of two volumes, I. *My Father Bleeds History* and II. *And Here My Troubles Began*, this series is the first mainstream rendition of a biography or memoir in comics format. Spiegelman tells the story of his father, a German Jew who was a concentration camp survivor. As in all popular Holocaust literature, in *Maus* the problem of evil is juxtaposed with the human will to live. Confronted with the almost unimaginable suffering that the Jews experienced, conveyed starkly in Spiegelman’s black-and-white pages, we realize that we take so many things for granted. Among these are the minimum conditions of a livable life: Regular meals in a day, a bed to sleep in at night, clothes, paid work, the lives and health of loved ones. Take these away, and we marvel at some people’s capacity to survive, if only like animals. (Fittingly, the characters in *Maus* are depicted as animals, the kind depending on their nationality. The Jews are mice, and the Germans, as their predators, are cats. Americans are dogs, the French frogs, the Poles pigs, the English fish. These animal significations most certainly serve satirical or symbolic purposes.)

In existentialist texts, first-hand experiences of the Holocaust disclose the perennial debate between the meaningfulness of life, on one hand, and the un-deniability of the Absurd, on the other hand. Viktor Frankl’s *Man’s Search for Meaning* (1959) leans toward the first position. In many ways it is similar to *Maus*, except it’s not a comic book, and Frankl adopts a more analytic stance toward the subject matter. He identifies the different psychological stages undergone by a concentration camp prisoner, and concludes that—

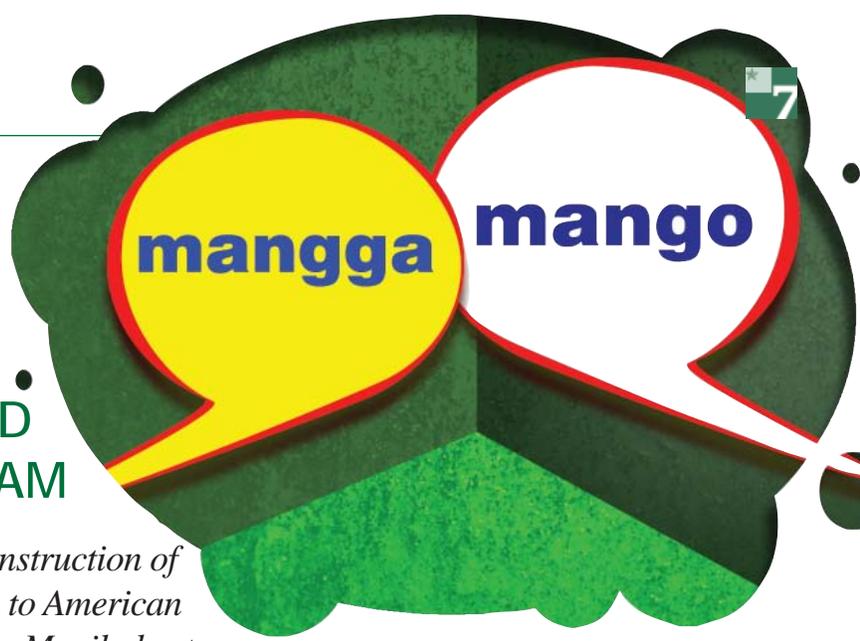
based on empirical evidence—there is something in the human spirit that aspires for transcendence. He writes, “... human life, under any circumstances, never ceases to have a meaning, and that this infinite meaning of life includes suffering and dying, privation and death” (Frankl 1984: 90).

In class, I use Frankl’s text as a riposte to Albert Camus’s philosophy of the Absurd, as laid down in the latter’s essay *The Myth of Sisyphus* (1955). For Camus, to live authentically is to preserve the relationship between consciousness and the reality of the Absurd—i.e. the rationally repugnant truth that life has no inherent or essential meaning. This view runs through the philosophies of the atheistic existentialists, and narratives such as Frankl’s and Spiegelman’s help contextualize the debate.

On a side note, another graphic novel, rendered with a journalistic eye, presents an intriguing counterpoint to *Maus*. I’m referring to Joe Sacco’s *Palestine*, whose two volumes were first published together in 2001. It is about his experiences in the Gaza Strip and West Bank, where he comes face-to-face with the injustice and oppression suffered by the Palestinian people, mostly at the hands of the American-supported Jewish settlers in Israel. All these comic books thus reveal the vicious cycle of cross-cultural oppression, and the ways that a philosophy of dialogue (cf. Martin Buber, *I and Thou*) can help alleviate the self-perpetuating violence.

Finally, outside the West, the art of comics storytelling has also flourished in Japan, due largely to Osamu Tezuka (1928-1989). The creator of the *Astro Boy* series, he is considered to be the grandfather of manga and anime. Among his many ponderous works is his eight-volume *Buddha* series, a lavishly illustrated collection of Siddharta Gautama’s adventures.

Some of the main tenets of Buddhism include the Four Noble Truths



## DLSU-M HOLDS ADVANCED FILIPINO ABROAD PROGRAM

*Aiming to provide intensive and specialized instruction of the Filipino language and Philippine Studies to American teachers and students, De La Salle University-Manila hosts the 2007 Advanced Filipino Abroad Program (AFAP) from June 16 to August 4.*

AFAP immerses its participants to both structured and unstructured learning environments to effectively let students achieve higher proficiency in the language. Every morning, for about four hours, students are given lectures, while task-based activities are given during the afternoons.

Launched in 2002, AFAP has yielded extremely positive feedback from participants prompting its organizers to continue this immersion program. More than just acquiring competence in the use of the Filipino language, students also become aware and sensitive of the Filipino culture.

The seven-week program tackles Philippine Culture, Economy, History, Religion, Visual Arts, Music, Performance

Art, Literature, Politics, and Government. DLSU-M professors Dr. Isagani Cruz and Dr. Antonio Contreras conduct lecture-seminars for the program. Dr. Teresita Fortunato serves as the in-country director of AFAP.

AFAP is funded by the United States Department of Education under the Fulbright-Hays Group Projects Abroad Program and administered by University of Hawaii Center for Southeast Asian Studies. A consortium of six universities supports this program—Cornell University, University of Hawaii, University of Michigan, University of Wisconsin at Madison, University of California at Berkeley, and University of Washington.

### Philosophy, from p6

(regarding the reality of suffering), the Eight-Fold Path, samsara and nirvana, karma, change or impermanence, anatta or the wisdom of the non-self, and lovingkindness toward all sentient beings. All of these ideas are incorporated in Tezuka’s work, which features the historical Buddha and his disciples, loves, friends, and enemies. The text is useful in illustrating the seamless relationship between religion and philosophy from the perspective of the eastern mind. In contrast, westerners view these two discourses as traditionally distinct, or sometimes even antithetical. For example, in ancient Greece—which is the birthplace of science and philosophy in the west—logical or rational thought is presented as a revolutionary paradigm, replacing the old mythological explanations for natural phenomena. In Tezuka’s Buddha series,

however, the magical thinking of the primitives is revealed to be the source of an older, more primordial wisdom.

Aside from the above-mentioned, others works that are also rich in philosophical insights include Will Eisner’s Contract with God trilogy, Alan Moore’s V for Vendetta, Craig Thompson’s Blankets, Garth Ennis’ Preacher, and even Bill Watterson’s Calvin and Hobbes. Worthy of a separate mention is a local treasure entitled The Mythology Class by Arnold Arre.

In conclusion, let us explore a new way of teaching our courses through a traditionally undervalued medium. You might be pleasantly surprised at the gems you might find in comics, and thereby discover a new level of geekery. At least it’s something your students can surely relate with.

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## QUEBENGCO TALKS ABOUT LASALLIAN EDUCATION IN FRENCH-SPONSORED FORUM

*Noting the French-origin of the Lasallian education, DLSU-M Chancellor Dr. Carmelita Quebengco discussed the foundation of the De La Salle College and the growth of the Lasallian schools in the country, now collectively known as De La Salle Philippines, in the Symposium on Philippine-France Historical Relations at the Ateneo De Manila University last June 26.*

The symposium, which was in celebration of six decades of diplomatic relations between the Philippines and France, was organized by the National Commission for Culture and the Arts together with the French Embassy. It was aimed to re-educate Filipinos of the long-standing relationship that the Philippines has maintained with France and how the cultures of both countries intertwined over the past few decades.

In her talk, Quebengco described how De La Salle Philippines started through the efforts of Christian Brothers who came to the country in 1911, in the hopes of continuing the Catholic education that St. John Baptist De La Salle started in France.

She added that over the years, there came the need to dissolve the De La Salle System—composed of only eight

schools—and to pave the way for De La Salle Philippines, which now encompasses all the Lasallian schools in the country. De La Salle Philippines, also known as One La Salle, was established last year.

“Why are we undertaking all these changes? We embrace change to rediscover the roots of our existence and reason-for-being as Lasallian schools,” Quebengco said.

Quebengco also noted that with a strong relationship with France, DLSU-M has created linkages with French universities to boost the University’s internationalization program.

“Through our International Studies Program and the European Documentation and Research Center, we hope to revive (French-related) activities to enhance our students’ learning,” she said. “As we strive to meet the challenges of globalization, we at DLSU-Manila underscore the need

to establish and strengthen academic linkages, such as the one we have with the French people.”

Also discussed in the symposium were other religious institutions in the country with French origins such as Assumption College and St. Paul Chartres. Sr. Maria Josefina Matias, mother provincial of Assumption College, and Sr. Antoinette Bengzon, SPC, a lecturer on Religious Life in St. Paul Chartres, gave historical insights about their respective institutions.

Other topics in the symposium were about French settlers in the Philippines, Filipino families with French ancestry, expatriate Filipinos in France, and France in Philippine Culture. The event was graced by French Ambassador to the Philippines Gérard Chesnel and Ateneo De Manila University President Rev. Fr. Bienvenido Nebres, SJ.



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