THE WHAT, HOW AND WHY OF PHILIPPINE HISTORY

Dr. Vivencio “Ven” Ballano
WHAT IS HISTORY?
THERE ARE AS MANY DEFINITIONS AS THERE ARE THEORIES ON HISTORY

WHAT IS COMMON OF THE VARIOUS DEFINITIONS: HISTORY IS A SYSTEMATIC STUDY OF THE PAST.
SOME DEFINITIONS/DESCRIPTIONS OF HISTORY

• HISTORY is “a science whose business is to study events not accessible to our observation, and to study these events inferentially, arguing to them from something else which is accessible to our observation, and which the historian calls ‘evidence for the events in which he is interested” (Philippine Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences 1993: 1).

• HISTORY is not merely the record of past events: it is “the record of what one age finds worthy of note in another”.

• HISTORY is the study of past events and their causes and consequences.
AMBETH OCAMPO’S DEFINITION OF HISTORY

HISTORY is kasaysayan or history as narrative (which be written, visual, oral or a combination of all these) about past events that has meaning to a certain group of people in a given time and place.

TWO COMPONENTS of kasaysayan—salaysay and saysay are inseparable. Without both, one cannot have true history.

HISTORY or kasaysayan is not just a narrative or salaysay—it MUST have saysay or meaning. If one finds meaning in history, he said, it will gain power to change people’s lives (Ocampo 2001: x).
PROBLEMS OF OBJECTIVITY IN HISTORICAL WRITING

Whatever definition or description one has on history, the fact remains that the process of writing history is problematic and subject to different interpretation.

Postmodernists have long challenged the assumption that the mind can attain an objective description of reality: there is no such thing as objectivity but only shared subjectivity, that is, there is no fixed norm of what is objective but only a consensus of people in a community on what is considered objective.
When one describes and writes an event, the writer can only capture a portion of what s/he has seen using his/her sense of sight, other data which can be attained through the other senses such as the smell, the sound, touch, and taste are obviously missed out. Words cannot capture the totality of even for just one event or action. Moreover, historian as a writer can only choose one perspective or point of view on how to describe the event.
ARE THERE HISTORICAL FACTS?

Even though there is diversity of opinion and interpretation of historians to historical events, there are certain things which many historians agree as “historical facts” which cannot be subjected to debate.

Thus, some historical figures, dates and places are generally considered as historical facts by historians. These conventions of particular history which practitioners recognized as given or assumed to be true.
According to Carr (1970), history is a study of human achievement. The past is intelligent to us only in the light of the present and the present can be fully understood only in the light of the past. To enable us to understand society of the past and to increase our mastery over the society of the present is the dual function of history (Carr 1970: 102)

we cannot fully understand the present situation in Philippine society unless we have a firm grasp of the past.
Says Ocampo: “The point to remember is that history does not repeat itself. We repeat history” (Ocampo 2001:xviii). Thus, to avoid repeating the same mistakes and errors in the past that plague the nation, it is imperative that young people, especially students who are future leaders of this country, must study history and learn from its lessons.