IN DEFENSE OF HIYA AS A VIRTUE

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Abstract
The Filipino concept of hiya has often received ambivalent or negative interpretations. I argue that it is not the fault of hiya per se but of the insufficiency of the interpretative framework, namely, thinking in terms of “Filipino values.” Values theory is not able to make the distinction between two kinds of hiya: 1) the hiya that is suffered (a passion) and 2) the hiya that is an active and sacrificial self-control (a virtue). In light of this conceptual confusion I would like to reexamine hiya through a completely different interpretative framework, that of Thomist virtue ethics. Virtue ethics not only provides the philosophical tools for a positive appraisal of hiya, it also leads to a new understanding of associated concepts such as amor propio, pakikisama and the infamous “crab mentality.” Defending hiya as a virtue is one step in an even wider philosophical project: shifting from a “Filipino value system” to a “Filipino virtue ethics.”

Keywords: Hiya, Filipino virtue ethics, Kapwa, Filipino values, Aquinas, philosophy

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In this article I intend to clear up some misunderstandings about the concept of hiya and save it from many negative criticisms. I will show that there is a strict conceptual difference between the hiya that is suffered (i.e. a passion, from the Latin pati, to suffer or undergo) and the hiya that is a virtue which prevents a person from making others suffer the passion of hiya. For the sake of brevity I will denote the first by hiya(p) and the second by hiya(v). The most common reason why people have given ambivalent or negative criticisms of hiya is because they were prone to talk of both senses of hiya at the same time without making any distinction between the two.

Hiya(p) is the hiya we encounter when we say that someone is napahiya (he suffered hiya from an external source) or uncontrollably nahihiya (suffering from a certain shyness or fear internally). Hiya(v) is what talk about when we reprimand someone by saying walang hiya ka! (he does not have the virtue of hiya which could have controlled his inconsiderate actions) or on the other hand when a tactful, considerate person begs off and says huwag na, nakakahiya (he has the virtue of hiya which keeps him from exploiting a generous offer).

A key to arriving at this distinction is Aquinas’ own distinction between shame (verecundia) and temperance (temperantia). The first is a passion (in modern parlance “passion” is closer to “emotion” but we will use “passion” here for its more precise philosophical sense). It is a species of fear. The second is a cardinal virtue, one of the four cardinal virtues which have a long tradition in the Western classical and medieval eras (the other three are prudence, justice, and courage). We often translate hiya as “shame” and this correctly refers to hiya(p) but unfortunately I have not yet seen anyone translate hiya as “temperance” or at least “self-control” which is the nature of hiya(v).

For Aquinas a virtue is an operative habit (habitus operativus) in a power of the soul (potentia animae) which produces good works (boni operativus). To translate this in simpler words: it is a good and persistent habit which regularly manifests in a person’s actions. It is the noble state of his character as displayed in his works. A man who is consistently fair in his business dealings and who consistently refuses a bribe may be said to have the virtue of justice. A man who knows how to restrain his appetites for food, drink and sex as well as other amusements for the sake of a greater goal may be said to have the virtue of temperance. Of course, if there are virtues there are also vices. A corrupt government official who frequently deals under the table and a pornography addict may be said to have the vices of injustice and intemperance respectively.

I claim that hiya(v) is a virtue. The subject of this virtue is the loób. The actions of this virtue is directed towards the kapwa. We will talk more about loób and kapwa below but suffice it to say for now that just as temperance is a virtue in Aquinas, so hiya(v) is a virtue in Filipino ethics. They are parallel; they both speak of a certain control or restraint. Temperance enables a person to control his natural desires (namely, food, drink, and sex) and subject them to the rule of right reason. Hiya(v) does something similar but this time within the social and relational sphere. Hiya(v) allows one to control or restrain his actions that would otherwise compromise another person, the most common instance making another person suffer hiya(p). Whereas temperance has an individual aspect to it (one can practice temperance as a solitary individual), hiya(v) is relational by definition and makes sense only with respect to other people.

It is actually hiya(p) that pioneering scholars kept on describing when they were doing their researches. The pioneer of Filipino values, Frank Lynch, called hiya “the uncomfortable feeling that accompanies awareness of being in a socially unacceptable position, or performing a socially unacceptable action” (Lynch 97). His close associate Jaime Bulatao called it “a painful
emotion… something like fear or a sense of inadequacy and anxiety in an uncontrolled and threatening situation” (Bulatao, Hiya 426). For the early scholars hiya was mainly an “uncomfortable feeling” or a “painful emotion.” In our discussion we call it a “passion.” It is no wonder then that the pioneering scholars were both ambivalent towards hiya and reluctant to call it a genuine Filipino value. It is difficult after all to extol a “painful emotion.” Let’s look at one of the more extreme scenarios of hiya(p) given by Bulatao:

Two men are drinking tuba in a sari-sari store. One of them jokingly pulls up the back of other one’s undershirt and rubs the back with his palm. The other pulls out a knife and kills him. Later, the lawyer in court justifies the killing by saying, “Napahahiyâ siya e.” (Bulatao, Hiya 424-425)

This example a case of hiya(p). The first man wanted to have fun at the second person’s expense and embarrassed him in public. The second person’s violent response was extreme, to be sure, but it also indicates how grave hiya(p) can be for some people. The violent response of the second person can be attributed to his amor propio, a retaliation after suffering hiya(p). We will talk about amor propio later on, but ideally it shouldn’t even have to come to amor propio. Even though we do not see hiya(v) in the scenario its absence is very obvious. If only the person had hiya(v) then he wouldn’t have made the second person suffer hiya(p) in the first place. He would still be alive. There was something he lacked which could have restrained him from making his fatal mistake. Unfortunately, he was walang hiya (without hiya). Even though Bulatao was talking only about hiya(p) we can already trace the faint outlines of hiya(v) through its conspicuous absence.

In contrast to Lynch and Bulatao, consider what Francis Senden says about hiya:

Then you [Filipinos] have the hiya, which is again very beautiful. The hiya means sensitivity. Every human being is sensitive, but there are degrees of sensitivity. And my experience is that the Filipinos are very sensitive. But this is not a defect – it is a virtue… You don’t insult people in public and you expect that nobody will insult you in public. If you call a Filipino to your office and you are alone with him, you may tell him everything; he will not resent it. But if you do it in public he cuts off relations with you. If you call somebody in public loko, he severs relations with you. But because he himself is so sensitive, he will avoid insulting others. He will, as a rule, not insult people in public. (Senden, The Filipino Family and Social Individualism 50)

Senden is clearly talking here about hiya(v) and he explicitly calls it a “virtue.” Instead of an “uncomfortable feeling” or “painful emotion” he calls it “sensitivity.” This sensitivity prevents one from insulting other people in public. This sensitivity is what was lacking in the man who got killed in previous example (in addition, you could say that the killer too was highly “sensitive” to indignity). Senden does not give us the whole story of hiya. There are other versions of hiya(v) besides not insulting or embarrassing other people in public. But he manages to put his finger on hiya(v) and not just hiya(p).

An example of hiya(v) which is not necessarily about embarrassing other people in public is what frequently happens with guests around a dining table. When there is one last piece of ulam on the serving plate, say a piece of fried chicken, hiya(v) dictates that you should not take that last piece of fried chicken even if you wanted to take it. This is because you have to think about others first. Taking that last piece of ulam on your own initiative means that you are thinking primarily of yourself and not the needs of those around you. Of course, if everyone around the table had hiya(v) then that last piece of ulam would probably stay there for good. But
the standstill is usually resolved when the host suggests to a certain guest to take the last piece, sometimes with the accompanying plea, “sige na, huwag ka nang mahiya” (“come on, don’t be shy”).

The lack of hiya(v) is called walang hiya (without hiya) and the expression is used as an invective in the Filipino language. According to Holnsteiner, “to call a Filipino walang hiyâ, or ‘shameless,’ is to wound him seriously” (Holnsteiner 75). It implies that he is deprived of something which could have made him a good person. According to Lynch:

One who has flagrantly violated socially approved norms of conduct, yet is known or presumed to have had this antecedent awareness, merits condemnation as “shameless,” or walang hiya: he did not possess that restraining feeling of shame that should have accompanied his social awareness.7

(Lynch 97)

Interestingly it is in talking about walang hiya that Lynch manages to touch on hiya(v). The “restraining feeling of shame” that he is now talking about here is ironically no longer hiya(p) but hiya(v). It is just that Lynch lacked the vocabulary to call it something other than a “feeling.” A feeling is passive, something that is experienced. But what is described here is something that can actively “restrain.” This pertains to a virtue and not just a “feeling.”

Someone is also walang hiya when he is prone to exploit other people’s kindness or generosity. In this sense it is synonymous with walang utang-na-loôb.8 The child who was raised with a comfortable life thanks to his hard-working parents but who ends up ignoring and neglecting them in their old age is walang hiya. He does not care to return his parents’ sacrifices for him. Someone who is shown hospitality and allowed to stay in a friend’s house but who ends up stealing from his friend is walang hiya. He repays hospitality with a crime. One can think of numerous similar examples. But the idea is putting one’s self first at the expense of other people. In these cases it is more aggravated because other people have taken the initiative to show kindness and deserved a return in kindness. Instead they were repaid with evil. Jocano gives a warning when he says that people who are walang hiya are “insensitive to the feelings of others… and cannot be trusted as friends” (Jocano, Filipino Value System 78).

These considerations leads us to a working definition of hiya(v): **The virtue of hiya is a good habit of one’s loób that makes him control or restrain his own individual desires for the welfare of his kapwa.** A natural effect is that it prevents one from making another person suffer hiya(p), but there are other situations which do not directly involve hiya(p) such as the dining table example. The point is to have active concern for others first before oneself.

On the whole I conceive of hiya(v) not as an isolated virtue but as one piece in the bigger puzzle of Filipino virtue ethics that includes other virtues such as kagandahang-loôb, utang-na-loôb, pakikiramdam, and lakas-ng-loôb/bahala na.9 I won’t be talking about the other virtues here since we are focusing specifically on hiya but something certainly needs to be said about the two fundamental principles or pillars of Filipino virtue ethics: loób and kapwa. These are the two pillars that sustain the whole edifice of Filipino virtue ethics.10

**LOÓB AND KAPWA: THE TWO PILLARS OF FILIPINO VIRTUE ETHICS**

The case for a Filipino virtue ethics can bolstered after a proper understanding of loób. Loób is the most obvious key term for Filipino virtue ethics because so many Filipino virtues have the form x-of-loób such as kagandahang-loôb, utang-na-loôb, and lakas-ng-loôb. The vices
too are descriptions of *loób*, such as *masamang-loób* or *mahinang-loób*. Though not a compound word of *loób* I also conceive of *hiya(v)* as a virtue of the *loób* just like these others.

*Loób* is simply the person’s will. This Tagalog usage is evident in the old *Vocabulario de la Lengua Tagala* where it is defined as *voluntad* or “will” (de Noceda and de Sanlucar 193). In recent times Leonardo de Castro, famous for his discussions on bioethics, also translated *loób* as “will” (de Castro). I prefer to nuance this translation as “relational will.” This is in order to distance it from the autonomous will of Kant. *Loób* is a will that is always in relation to others and answerable to others—to the *kapwa*. The modern conception of the will such as the one found in Kant is autonomous and self-legislating.\(^{11}\) It is answerable to one’s reason alone. If one is not careful one may conceive of the Filipino *loób* in terms of a modern Western conception of the will which is independent of the *kapwa*. This distorts the nature of *loób*.

Another modern confusion which has caught many Filipino scholars is the propensity to posit a corresponding *labas*.\(^{12}\) A *labas* is fine when it comes to the dimensions of physical objects such as a house or a pot but it is not the same thing when it comes to persons. Albert Alejo, in criticizing the *loób-labas* distinction introduced by Zeus Salazar when Salazar himself discussed *hiya*, points out the false analogy:

> If one studies *loób* it cannot be encased only in a simplistic division between *loób* and *labas*. *Kagandahang-loób*, for example, is not only beauty inside but goodness in relating with others; in short, it is itself outward.\(^{13}\)

To posit a corresponding *labas* in the personal and ethical sphere is superfluous. The virtues such as *hiya* and *kagandahang-loób* by their very nature already have a “target”, that is the *kapwa* (which we will discuss more below). The almost blind acceptance of a *labas* is due to the heavy influence of Western modernity’s dichotomy between subjectivity and objectivity, between an “inner” mind and an “outer” world. But there is a problem because *loób* is the product of the Philippines’ pre-modern traditions, namely the Southeast Asian tribal and animist tradition combined with the Spanish Catholic tradition.\(^{14}\) These two traditions do not have anything to do with the modern subjective turn of Descartes or Kant. To interpret *loób* as a kind of subjectivity in any Cartesian sense is a misguided anachronism. Leonardo Mercado, one of the pioneers of Filipino philosophy, got it right when he denied the inside-outside (and likewise subjective-objective) dichotomy.

The Filipino does not think in either-or categories. His is both/and in his spirit of harmony. We said that since *loob* (and *buot*, as well as *nakem*) has a holistic concept of the body, there is no dichotomy between the inside and the outside of the person. (Mercado, The Filipino Mind 37)

Isn’t it curious that although we have all these virtue words such as *kagandahang-loób* and *utang-na-loób* that contain the word *loób* there are no compound ethical words that contain the word *labas*? To use a phrase from Wittgenstein, there are two different “language-games” present here.\(^{15}\) Just as in games the same piece might be used in two different games with different roles (the same piece in chess might also be used as a piece in checkers), so also there is *loób* when it comes to the physical objects and there is *loób* when it comes to persons. Since they are the same word one can easily confuse the two, but the opposite of the first is *labas*, the opposite of the second is *kapwa*. As Dionisio Miranda says, “*loob* needs *kapwa* even to be *loob*: its continued responding to *kapwa* is the condition for its own existence and authenticity as *loob*” (Miranda 84). Jose de Mesa acknowledges this inherently relational nature of *loób* when he says:
Loób apart from referring to the core of personhood, also states what kind of core that is in relationship. Loób, one may say, is a relational understanding of the person in the lowland Filipino context. (de Mesa, In Solidarity with the Culture: Studies in Theological Re-Rooting 46)

Loób and kapwa are two poles of a holistic dynamic in Filipino virtue ethics just like the two poles of a magnet. Now we turn to the other pole which is kapwa. Though the investigation of loób has been the joint work of many Filipino scholars, we can thank someone specific for the elevation of kapwa in scholarly circles: Virgilio Enriquez, the found of the Filipino psychology (Sikolohiyang Pilipino) movement. Enriquez describes kapwa in this way:

When asked for the closest English equivalent of kapwa, one word that comes to mind is the English word “others.” However, the Filipino word kapwa is very different from the English word “others” because kapwa is the unity of the “self” and “others”. The English “others” is actually used in opposition to the “self”, and implies the recognition of the self as a separate identity. In contrast, kapwa is a recognition of shared identity. (Enriquez, From Colonial to Liberation Psychology 52)

Later Enriquez also says:

The ako (ego) and the iba-sa-akin (others) are one and the same in kapwa psychology: Hindi ako iba sa aking kapwa (I am no different from others). Once ako starts thinking of himself as separate from kapwa, the Filipino “self” gets to be individuated in the Western sense and, in effect, denies the status of kapwa to the other. By the same token, the status of kapwa is also denied to the self. (Enriquez, From Colonial to Liberation Psychology 52)

Katrin de Guia, a prominent student of Enriquez, also writes:

The core of Filipino personhood is kapwa. This notion of a “shared Self” extends the I to include the Other. It bridges the deepest individual recess of a person with anyone outside him or herself, even total strangers. (de Guia 28)

What does this “shared identity” or “shared self” mean? Is it merely a matter of sentimentalism or subjective feeling? The problem with values theory is that it could imply simply that. Treating kapwa as a “core value” as Enriquez proposed might give off the impression that one should simply look at the kapwa as an object of value and importance. It may be true that the kapwa is valuable, but it should not end there. Value does not directly imply the set of actions and practices that are necessary towards the kapwa. A virtue ethics on the other hand speaks of those virtues which must be acted out and practiced towards the kapwa. Virtues cannot be all in the head (theoretical) or all in the heart (sentimental), they must also be in the hands, that is, actualized in the concrete practices of daily life.

Why is hiya(v) so important? Because it is part of this whole practice of treating another person as a kapwa. Hiya(v) is an active and operational concern for others particularly in being sensitive towards them and protecting their dignity, and more generally in making certain sacrifices for their welfare. It is one of several virtues that not only preserve but in fact constitute the “shared identity” and “shared self” that Filipino psychology talks about. It is hard to imagine there being kapwa without hiya(v). The virtues make the kapwa. Without the Filipino virtues it would not make sense to even talk about a kapwa.
The preoccupation with the kapwa runs contrary to a Western liberal individualism where the emphasis is on individual rights, self-assertion and self-fulfillment. The reason why Quito is able to accuse hiya of being a “morality of slaves” (Quito, The Ambivalence of Filipino Traits and Values 58) is because she uses Nietzsche as her standard of measure—but it is a bad measure. Nietzsche dwelt on concepts such as “the will to power” and the übermensch (“overman”) who is above the herd and beyond standards of good and evil. The übermensch severs all his ties of dependence on others; for him there is no such thing as kapwa. The irony here is that even if some philosophers might fantasize about the übermensch as the next step in human progress, Filipino virtue ethics only brushes him off as the supreme walang hiya. Filipino virtue ethics does not care about any man who is a self-styled übermensch.

We have to embrace the fact that kapwa is something “pre-modern” (we do not intend “pre-modern” here as a derogatory term). To understand why it is “pre-modern” is to understand why it is also naturally at odds with the conceptions of self from Western modernity and postmodernity. Kapwa is the historical result of two traditions: the Southeast Asian tribal and animist tradition on the one hand and the Spanish Catholic tradition on the other, which has mixed for more than three centuries and—despite our Americanization and globalization in the 20th century—is still a strong undercurrent in the Filipino lebenswelt (lifeworld) or weltanschauung (worldview). The first tradition was an emphasis on kinship and blood relations: the family, clan and tribe. This served as the base for the second tradition which hoped to expand that exclusive kinship attitude—thanks to the Gospel command to love thy neighbor—to encompass others beyond the tribe. The injunction was to treat those beyond family as though they were family, those beyond the tribe as though they were part of the tribe. This is at heart the simple dynamic of kapwa. George Guthrie observed this in the 1960’s when he wrote: “family relationships provide the model which many Filipinos follow in as many of their non-family encounters as possible” (Guthrie 57). And in another place he says:

The family pattern becomes, in many ways, the prototype of interpersonal patterns… The tranquility and unanimity cherished within the nuclear family is also cherished and idealized in nonfamily contacts. (Guthrie and Jacobs 194)

The acquisition of hiya(v) begins with the family, since concern for others is an unquestioned given within the family. There are no “reasons” for the parents to protect or nourish their children beyond the fact that they are their children. There are no “reasons” for the children to respect and obey their parents beyond the fact that they are their parents. The relations of family and blood stand as sufficient reasons in themselves. Hiya(v) is important because one is expected to instinctively look out for the well-being of the whole family, not just of oneself. Remember that when we talk about the traditional Filipino family we are talking not just about the nuclear family but about the extended family, with its wide circles of cousins and relatives, plus ritual kinship relations as well (ex. in-laws, godfathers and godmothers) (Jocano, Filipino Social Organization: Traditional Kinship and Family Organization). The traditional Filipino family provides a lot of practice for hiya(v) and the other Filipino virtues.

Though the Tagalog language admittedly lacks many logical or philosophical words, we do have an astounding slew of terms when it comes to human relationships: pagmamalasakit, pakikiramay, pakikisama, pakikisalamuha, pakikitungo, pakikipagkapwa, pagkalinga, pag-alaga, pag-aaruga, pakikisama, pakikialam, pakikibigay, etc. This is one of Filipino culture’s strongest points: relationship. The ethics of relationship is a unique inheritance from our mixture of traditions. Its value may be appreciated more when we compare it with past humanitarian crises
in the West. The disastrous political movements of World War II such as Nazism which called other races sub-human or communism which saw human beings as mere instruments of the state were all flagrant denials of the *kapwa*. The philosophies of Buber and Levinas after World War II can be interpreted as appeals to retrieve and restore a genuine relation with the Thou or the Other which has faded away in modern philosophy (it is no accident that both Buber and Levinas were Jews. The Jews experienced the most horrific denials of their humanity in the war). In contrast, human relationship is not something that Filipinos need to remember, it was always the starting point. The presence of *hiya* is a part of that starting point.

This concludes the whole background to *hiya*. It must be situated in between the two pillars of loób and *kapwa* and the larger scheme of Filipino virtue ethics. Now we can turn our attention to other virtues which are associated with *hiya* and which have in the past also been given ambivalent or negative interpretations. Let’s see if they can be redeemed as well.

**AMOR PROPIO, PAKIKISAMA, AND “CRAB MENTALITY”**

Having defined the virtue of *hiya* as a good habit of one’s loób that makes a person control or restrain his own individual desires for the welfare of his *kapwa*, we are now in a position to tackle some associated concepts which seem to exhibit similar features. If we imagine *hiya* as a “cardinal” virtue in Filipino ethics, we can use it as the standard to understand these other “non-cardinal” virtues. “Cardinal” comes from the Latin *cardo*, which means “hinge.” Other virtues are supposed to turn on the cardinal virtue as their hinge.20 These “virtues” we are about to discuss (though I do not consider all of them virtues properly speaking) turn on *hiya* as their hinge. The table is as follows:

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**A. Amor Propio**

We have already talked about *hiya* and about *walang hiya*. *Amor propio* is a person’s response to someone who is *walang hiya* who makes him suffer *hiya*. It is a “defense mechanism” so to speak. If only all persons possessed *hiya* then it would never need to come to amor propio. However if someone lacks *hiya* and deliberately offends or makes fun of you then what are you supposed to do? The natural response is to defend oneself in some way, and this is where amor propio comes in. As Miranda says, “Amor propio is a sense of personal dignity. It is the Filipino’s sense of self-esteem in his kaloob-looban, the need to be treated as a person and not as an object” (Miranda 94). The assumption is that we treat others as *kapwa* by practicing *hiya*, if this principle is violated then somehow the ideal must still be defended. Since amor propio is incited only at the lack of *hiya* I am reluctant to call it a virtue per se. It is at best a secondary virtue, or to speak metaphorically, it is like the shadow of *hiya*.

It may at first be wondered why amor propio, a Spanish term, easily became a natural part of our vocabulary and is now called distinctly Filipino. My guess is that it merely gave a
name to something which was already there in the culture before the Spanish arrived, but which perhaps didn’t have a name (or perhaps an older expression was replaced?). We know for example that early Filipinos were very zealous to guard the honor of their clan or tribe, a tendency that often led to long-lasting blood feuds and revenge killings. Such feuds still continued in the 20th century. It could be that the Spanish term *amor propio*—which was also invoked for duels of honor in Spain—fit something that the natives already had, though in their own collective and tribal way (it was more about group honor than personal honor). One recalls how Rizal, who was willing to bear any insults directly to his name, challenged Wenceslao Retana to a duel for making a humiliating remark about his family in the press (Zafra 192). The point is, we easily absorbed the expression *amor propio* not because we learned something new from the Spanish, but because it named something that was already there.

There are many cases when *hiya* and *amor propio* are confused and treated as synonyms. The person who resorts to *amor propio* is someone who has suffered *hiya(p)* from another party and so it is natural to compress those two concepts together—*amor propio* and the painful emotion of *hiya(p)*. But what passes unnoticed is that both *hiya(p)* and *amor propio* could have been prevented through a virtue, namely *hiya(v)*. Virtue ethics enables us to make these finer distinctions between *amor propio*, *hiya(p)*, and *hiya(v)* whereas values theory would only mash them all together into a single concept.

**B. Pakikisama**

Though this might count as an oversimplification, I’d like to suggest that *hiya(v)* concerns the relationships between individuals and *pakikisama* concerns the relationship between an individual and a group. Certainly there are also occasions when *hiya* concerns a group and *pakikisama* can be merely between individuals, but in general *pakikisama* has a stronger connotation of a group presence. Both Lynch and Jocano mention the weight of the “majority” when it comes to *pakikisama*. Lynch says *pakikisama* “refers especially to the lauded practice of yielding to the will of the leader or majority so as to make the group decision unanimous” (Lynch 90) and Jocano says “it is a willingness to subordinate one’s own interest in favor of others, in the spirit of harmony, friendship, cooperation, and deference to majority decision so that group goals can be easily achieved” (Jocano, Filipino Value System 66).

Because of this group prerogative, *pakikisama* has often been negatively equated with “peer pressure” or mindlessly following the crowd. A distinction must be made between an inferior form of *pakikisama* which is simply doing what everyone else wants, and a *pakikisama* that stays true to the virtue principle of *hiya*. If *hiya* is about sacrificing something for the welfare of the *kapwa*, *pakikisama* concerns the welfare of the larger group composed of many *kapwa*. Taking *hiya* as the starting point we can define *pakikisama* as the good habit of one’s *loób* that makes one control or restrain his own individual desires for the welfare of the group. Jocano phrased it well when he said it is the “willingness to subordinate one’s own interest in favor of others” (Jocano, Filipino Value System 66). However there is something positively “added” to *pakikisama* in that it does not only mean a negative control of one’s individual interests but also an effort to conform with the group norms (perhaps this is why it is confused with mere “peer pressure” though “peer pressure” properly refers only to this “added” aspect of *pakikisama*). *Pakikisama* presupposes *hiya*. One cannot have *pakikisama* without *hiya*, but one can have *hiya* without *pakikisama* (though ideally it should lead to *pakikisama*).
Pakikisama is an expansion of the primary virtue of hiya to deal not just with single individuals but with a larger group.

A positive and responsible pakikisama knows how to discern if something really is for the welfare of the group, and knows how to refuse if it leads to their disadvantage. Pakikisama means to get along “if it is necessary for the good of the group” (Jocano, Filipino Value System 66). Furthermore, one may argue for the superiority of an expansive view of pakikisama rather than a narrow view of pakikisama. For example, a lot of Philippine corruption is perpetrated in the name of a perverted form of pakikisama where a small group of conspirators and cronies benefit at the expense of the whole country. The flaw is in failing to perceive who the true “majority” is and what counts for their welfare. It is indeed a serious challenge to move from a more natural clan or tribe mentality towards a Western-style democracy. In the clan or tribe it is easy to perceive who the majority is, you can see them, you can know their names. Nationhood and democracy on the other hand requires what Benedict Anderson calls an “imagined community” (Anderson). These inconsistencies in our culture—the oscillating between clan/tribe and democracy—have led James Fallows in an infamous article to call the Filipino culture a “damaged culture” (Fallows). His main fault was in believing that we were supposed to become American carbon-copies after a century’s worth of tutoring. He forgets that the West had many centuries of trial and error, accompanied by many bloody revolutions, before coming up with democracy. He ignores the fact that there are other deeply embedded traditions in Filipino culture that have had centuries to take root and won’t easily go away: namely, the Southeast Asian tribal and animist tradition and the Spanish Catholic tradition.

This discussion could go on further, but it must be conceded that pakikisama thrives on the “personal” rather than the “imaginary.” It is easier to have pakikisama towards people of flesh and blood than the big, imaginary community we call a “nation.” How one should bridge the distance from clan or tribe mentality to genuine nationalism is something that Filipino philosophers should continue to discuss.

C. “Crab Mentality” / Group Amor Propio

Just as amor propio is a defensive response to the lack of hiya(v), there is also “crab mentality” for those who lack the correlate virtue of pakikisama. Crab mentality is named after the behavior of crabs in a basket where crabs try to climb out and in the process drag each other down so that none of them ever manage to get out. Notice that though hiya and pakikisama are native Tagalog words, both amor propio and “crab mentality” are of foreign coinage (even if you call it talangka mentality, indigenizing the animal does not make the expression indigenous). My guess is that the expression “crab mentality” was first coined by Americans to describe a particular Filipino social behavior which they witnessed and which they found objectionable—objectionable from a more individualistic American point of view. Somewhere along the lines it got stuck as a seal of colonial mentality, and nowadays Filipinos liberally accuse other Filipinos of it. One circumstantial evidence that this expression is not of Filipino origin is that other groups who have also been subject to the Americans are said to have “crab mentality.” George Hu’uu Sanford Kanahele for example complained about how Hawaiians were said to have the “Alamihi Syndrome”—an alamihi is a common black crab that lives in Hawaiian shores:

This analogy has been repeated so often that now it is a part of the standard lore about Hawaiians’ behavior to other Hawaiians. By now even Hawaiians themselves believe it. Incidentally, the
same analogy is used against the Maoris in New Zealand, against the coastal Indians in Canada and the United States, the Chamorros in Guam, and the natives of many another place. Invariably it is directed against the “natives” and rarely against the critical newcomers to any place. In any case, this crab mentality is said to be the cause of disunity among the “natives.” (Kanahele 450)

In addition, African Americans have also been described as a basket of crabs (Ellison 91). Similar to the Hawaiian predicament, the expression “crab mentality” was foreign to us but we have repeated it over and over to the point of accepting it as a truism for ourselves. The misnomer is complicated because there seems to be something there that the expression “crab mentality” refers to in Filipino culture, but perhaps the expression “crab mentality”—with all its negative connotations—is not the best one to use. Conceptually speaking, what we are talking about is the “shadow” of pakikisama. It is the natural response of the group to someone who does not have pakikisama. It is a natural familial or tribal response. When someone in the family or tribe ceases to care about the family or tribe, and perhaps even becomes a danger to the group, it is natural for the group—as a defense mechanism—to punish the wayward soul. It is likely that certain Americans, with their emphasis on individualism and personal freedom, did not like seeing this natural group response and coined the expression “crab mentality” to capture what they observed and what they simultaneously disdained. In order to refer to the same thing but minus the negative connotations, I opt to use the (admittedly clunky) phrase “group amor propio.” Just as the absence of hiya (walang hiya) leads to provoking someone’s amor propio, so a lack of pakikisama (walang pakisama) leads to a corresponding “group amor propio,” misleadingly called “crab mentality.”

A distinction must be made between the “crab mentality” that is simply envy—wanting to bring the other down because of unhappiness at another person’s success—and the “crab mentality” that is genuinely “group amor propio.” Admittedly there is a fine line between the two and it is indeed possible to have both at the same time. But the ethical difference is that though the first is clearly a negative trait which is not to be condoned in any circumstance, the second may have some justification when understood inside the wider context of loób and kapwa. This legitimate “group amor propio” is exemplified in sports where teamwork is of crucial importance. In a basketball team every player must play his part and must take his orders from the coach. The ball must be passed from one player to another according to the chosen strategy. But what happens if one player disregards both the team and the coach and chooses to hog the ball and keep taking shots on his own? Players will be reluctant to pass him the ball and the coach will likely call him back to the bench at the soonest opportunity and keep him there—the management may even sack him later. Such a player is not allowed in a cooperative game.

The same principle applies to “group amor propio.” The premise is that we are a cooperative team and that we need to work together to succeed. This is very manifest inside a family. It is still a common practice for the eldest son or daughter to postpone marriage and starting his own family so that he can support his younger siblings through college. It is only after he has taken care of his siblings’ education that he pursues his own plans. Recall what Guthrie said, that for Filipinos “the family pattern becomes, in many ways, the prototype of interpersonal patterns” (Guthrie and Jacobs 194). Other groups are also ideally treated as holistic units. We are supposed to think of what is best for the group that we belong in. Our group can be anything from a barkada, a sports team, a political party, a faculty department, to a business. It is only a natural response that when someone is succeeding at the expense of the group that he is brought down to his proper place. The only person I know so far who has defended “crab mentality” is Dionisio Miranda:
Even the so called “crab mentality” has its positive aspects. It is a mechanism not for cutting down a person for its own sake; it cuts a person down to size for his own good… It is directed only against those who have forgotten their roots in community and refuse their nature as social. (Miranda 204)

And further on he says:

[Crab mentality] is a negative mechanism, but like all social sanctions, has a positive rationale behind it, an intent that should not be missed. One who makes it in life is reminded that he is a product of a collective vision, a product of a collective exercise, and hence responsible to the collectivity for what he has achieved, since he could never have achieved it all alone. (Miranda 219)

There is certainly a tension between the Western values that promote individual competition and success and a Filipino ethics that advocates a constant concern for the kapwa and the group’s success. It is an invisible tug of war in our culture that is the cause of many frustrations. But one point to keep in mind is that “crab mentality” is “crab mentality” only when seen through the lens of Western values. The native peoples themselves never considered it “crab mentality” or imagined it as something negative. It was simply all about group survival and group flourishing. As MacIntyre says in his *Dependent Rational Animals*, “it is most often to others that we owe our survival, let alone our flourishing” (MacIntyre, Dependent Rational Animals 1). The idea behind “crab mentality” is that if we are to flourish we need to flourish as a group or not at all.

**“FILIPINO VIRTUE ETHICS” AND NOT A “FILIPINO VALUE SYSTEM”**

The entire preceding discussion has pointed out the advantages and gains in understanding *hiya* and its associated concepts such as *amor propio*, *paki* and “crab mentality” through using virtue ethics. This should hopefully push us to consider a shift from a “Filipino value system” to a “Filipino virtue ethics.” As I have repeatedly said, values theory is not able to make the distinction between *hiya(p)* and *hiya(v)*. This is not a matter of oversight on the part of the psychologists and anthropologists who have previously investigated *hiya*, it is a deficiency in the term “value” itself.

The first question that needs to be answered is “what is a value?” Frank Lynch and his colleagues in the 1960’s adopted the Values Orientation theory of Clyde Kluckhohn who said that a value is “a conception, explicit or implicit, distinctive of an individual or characteristic of a group, of the desirable which influences the selection from available modes, means and ends of action.” (Kluckhohn 395). The Filipino anthropologist F. Landa Jocano called this the “classic and universally accepted definition of value” (Jocano, Filipino Value System 17). But this “conception of the desirable”, what is it exactly? In simple terms it is something that a person or a group finds important or desirable. Florentino Timbreza describes the tremendous range of what Filipino values are in this way:

They are what the people desire, want to have, to own or possess, to do, to keep, to attain, or to become. Filipino values are the objects of the people’s interest, desire, preference, and aspiration. They are the things Filipinos consider good, important, proper, suitable, worthy, right, acceptable, and desirable in life. Whatever they actually like, prize, esteem, approve of, desire or enjoy
constitute the people’s values. And there are as many Filipino values as there are so many things valued. (Timbreza 13)

Jaime Bulatao says it more succinctly: “a value is the object of a positive attitude. It is that good to which a man tends... It is the thing that people want.” (Bulatao, The Manileño’s Mainsprings 93). So far so good. But imagine what happens when we start to use values theory for something like hiya (and the same thing happens when it is used for kagandahang-loób, utang-na-loób, etc.). If I ask, “what is hiya?”, and someone answers “it is a Filipino value,” all that it says is that it’s something that Filipinos find good, important, or valuable. How helpful is that? It’s like asking, “what is a family?” and receiving the same answer: “it’s something that Filipinos find good, important, or valuable.” But I’m not asking if Filipinos value it, I want to know what it in fact is. I want a definition, not an appraisal. For the family I would expect something like: “it is a social unit composed of a father and mother and their children.” At least from this starting definition we can discuss further, we can proceed to agree or disagree. “What if the husband and wife are not able to have children, is it still a family?” or “what if it is a same-sex marriage and they adopt a child?” But these are all inquiries that grow out from a primary definition of the thing. When we say that hiya is a value we only say that it is important or valuable. It hardly gives us space for further discussion. But when we say that hiya is a virtue we give it a definition: a good habit of one’s loób that makes one control or restrain his own individual desires for the welfare of the kapwa.

To be fair though, even Filipino scholars have been reluctant to call hiya a “value.” The more likely candidate for a “value” is utang-na-loób, but the same thing I’ve just mentioned applies. When scholars call utang-na-loób a value it does not really give us a definition of what it in fact is, it only says that Filipinos value it. On the other hand I consider utang-na-loób to be a Filipino virtue just like hiya, it is a particular good habit of the loób that leads to specific actions with its own dynamic, something which we can discuss elsewhere. Hiya has instead been relegated to a lower level as an “uncomfortable feeling” (Lynch 97) or a “painful emotion” (Bulatao, Hiya 426). For Jocano, hiya is definitely not a value: “hiya is the most popular and emotionally charged norm that is often mistaken for value” (Jocano, Filipino Value System 73). It is difficult after all to accept an “uncomfortable feeling” or “painful emotion” as a “value.” But if one clutches on to a values theory it would always stay that way and we would never be able to reveal the positive aspects of hiya—we would never be able to obtain the distinction between hiya(p) and hiya(v).

Scholars on Filipino values, I suggest, will be better served if they switched to virtue ethics as their primary frame of interpretation. We are fortunate to witness the revival of virtue ethics in the 20th century thanks to the likes of G. E. M. Anscombe, Alasdair MacIntyre and Philippa Foot. MacIntyre in particular has shown how a tradition is able to develop its interpretation of its own virtues through time and how it is also possible to fuse two completely different traditions together (he has in mind the synthesis of the Greco-Roman tradition and the Judeo-Christian tradition in Thomas Aquinas). This historical example is a great remedy to what I think is the main cause of the Filipino “national identity” crisis, the refusal to undertake an inclusive synthesis of the three traditions we have in or history (The Southeast Asian tribal and animist tradition, the Spanish Catholic tradition, and the American tradition). Many scholars favor one at the expense of the others. Many scholars have committed themselves to a nativism or anti-colonialism to the point of being destructive towards our national identity altogether. Filipino identity is hybrid and it can only be established through the conscious
synthesis of the traditions of our past. Virtue ethics encourages this because the history of virtue ethics shows that synthesis can be done.

As for my use of Aquinas, I know that some Filipino philosophers are averse to Aquinas due to bad experiences with rigid Thomism. There are other avenues towards virtue ethics which go straight to Aristotle as a source. However there are numerous advantages to using Aquinas that should be highlighted, especially when it comes to a specifically Filipino virtue ethics. Whether we like it or not Thomism is part of the Spanish Catholic tradition and an integral part of Philippine history. We may not have an ancient canon like the Vedas of India or the Confucian or Taoist texts of China, but Aquinas, if anything, is our closest possible contender. Ever since the University of Santo Tomas was established in 1611 it was Thomism (along with Aristotle and Peter of Lombard) which was routinely taught in the Philippines for three-hundred years (Villarroel). One could even argue for the presence of a more “undiluted” form of Thomism in the Philippines than in Europe because it did not have to contend so much with the other movements of scholasticism (Scotism, Nominalism) or the revolutions of modern philosophy (Descartes, the French Revolution, the German Enlightenment, etc.). Though hardly known today, I consider the large 3-volume Estudio sobre la filosofía de Santo Tomas of Zeferino Gonzalez published in UST in 1864 to be the greatest philosophical work published in our country, and it warrants an English translation for the use of contemporary Filipino philosophers who are interested in our philosophical past.

The problem before, it is true, was that most Filipino philosophers were trapped in a strict-observance Thomism which was closed to any innovation. This explains the resentment and frustration of our older generation of Filipino philosophers. But the same is not the case now. Since Vatican II the doors were already opened wide for innovation and “inculturation” and people have been doing “creative retrievals” of Aquinas since then. We are entitled to both a “creative retrieval” and an “inculturation” of Aquinas. In terms of virtue ethics this seems to be a very wise choice. As R.E. Houser says, “Aquinas developed a virtue theory more elaborate in its details than anything found in the ancient authors or in earlier medieval authors” and Philippa Foot, an atheist, also admits: “It is my opinion that the Summa Theologica is one of the best sources we have for moral philosophy, and moreover that St. Thomas’s ethical writings are as useful to the atheist as to the Catholic or other Christian believer.” Why not exploit it for the benefit of fleshing out our own Filipino virtue ethics?

CONCLUSION

In this article I have shown the crucial distinction between hiya(p) and hiya(v), a distinction which can be made through the passion-virtue distinction of Aquinas. Afterwards I gave a definition of hiya(v): The virtue of hiya is a good habit of one’s loób that makes a person control or restrain his own individual desires for the welfare of his kapwa. Once this was set in place, we were able to forge a brand new understanding of the other associated concepts such as amor propio, pakikisama, and “crab mentality” (which we called “group amor propio”). We have shown how they can all turn on hiya(v) as their hinge. The discussion hopefully was able to redeem hiya and its associated concepts from the negative or ambivalent criticisms that have so far haunted them.

This concentrated attempt to clarify the aspects of a single Filipino virtue is part of a wider project of Filipino virtue ethics which has its two pillars in loób and kapwa. If one accepts
the philosophical gains from adopting a virtue ethics approach, then he or she may consider the shift from a “Filipino value system” to a “Filipino virtue ethics.” There are many more Filipino virtues other than hiya waiting to be reexamined in this light. There is a wide open space for scholarly progress in this area, something which I dare say, has a stake in our cultural and national identity.

Notes

1. The most notorious criticism is perhaps from Emerita Quito who says that hiya is “negative, because it arrests or inhibits one’s action. This trait reduces one to smallness or to what Nietzsche calls the ‘morality of slaves’, thus congealing the soul of the Filipino and emasculating him, making him timid, meek and weak” (Quito, The Ambivalence of Filipino Traits and Values 58). When she tries to determine the positive side of hiya she says it is positive because “it contributes to peace of mind and lack of stress by not even trying to achieve.” Even her “positive” assessment does not sound very positive.

   Another criticism leveled by foreigners is related by Jocano: “Some foreign observers view [hiya] as concealed dishonesty because Filipinos do not openly express their feelings in reacting to almost all kinds of encounters (until pushed too far)—that is, whether they agree or disagree with you. As one foreign executive of a multinational company has said in an interview: ‘Sometimes they (Filipinos) say ‘yes’ to whatever you say. Oftentimes, they do not tell you exactly what they think or how they feel. They just remain silent, and you have to read their true feelings in the way they smile’” (Jocano, Filipino Value System 73). In short, hiya is part of that frustrating experience of the Filipino unceasingly beating around the bush.

2. *Summa Theologiae* II-II, Q. 144, A. 1. This shame or fear that Aquinas talks about is on the part of the agent, and it prevents him from doing a shameful action. The shame or fear that we are talking about on the other hand is on the part of the recipient, who has the reprehensible action done unto him.

3. For a clear summary of the Western cardinal virtue tradition, see the introduction of R. E. Houser in *The Cardinal Virtues: Aquinas, Albert, and Philip the Chancellor* (Houser).


5. Aquinas quotes Aristotle: “Habit is a quality which is difficult to change.” *Summa Theologiae* I-II, Q. 49, A. 1.


7. Bulatao has almost the same definition, for him walang hiya “involves a crassness and insensibility to the feelings of others” (Bulatao, Hiya 429) and “it is a lack of anxious care for society’s acceptance” (Bulatao, Hiya 430).

8. “The worst thing one can say about a person is that he or she is walang hiya, without shame, which is the same as to say that the person is walang utang na loob, without any sense of indebtedness” (Rafael 127). “Anybody without the sense of ‘debt of volition’ [utang-na-loob] is considered ‘shameless’ (walang hiya), an expression which most Filipinos resent” (Mercado, Elements of Filipino Philosophy 65).

9. I choose these virtues in particular because they serve as Filipino counterparts to the cardinal virtues (prudence, justice and fortitude) and at least one theological virtue (charity). Meaning one can organize the Filipino virtues parallel to the cardinal virtues in Aquinas. My first preliminary attempt at this was in Reyes (2013). Other articles are forthcoming.

10. Note that I am talking about a Filipino virtue ethics and not the one and only Filipino virtue ethics. The Filipino virtue ethics in question is obviously based on Tagalog culture and language, however, this opens the door for similar investigations into other Filipino languages and cultures.
One can for example take a cue from Mercado’s identification of the Ilokano nakem and the Bisayan buot as counterparts of the Tagalog loób (Mercado, Elements of Filipino Philosophy 54).

11. It is the third formulation of the categorical imperative called the “formula of autonomy”: “the Idea of the will of every rational being as a will which makes universal law” where “[the will] must be considered as also making the law for itself” (Paton 98-99). Even granting that the second formula of the categorical imperative of treating persons as ends-in-themselves is somewhat congruent with kapwa, the autonomous will in Kant is just too starkly different from loób.

12. Dionisio Miranda, despite his merits, falls into this trap (Miranda 68). The same goes for Prospero Covar (Covar 23) and Zeus Salazar (Salazar 292-293).


14. I use the word “tradition” in the sense that Alasdair MacIntyre uses it, as an “extended argument through time”, where concepts are intelligible only through the past generations of the same tradition (MacIntyre, Whose Justice? Which Rationality? 12).

15. Wittgenstein is famous for comparing different language activities with games in his Philosophical Investigations (Wittgenstein). In proposition 23: “Review the multiplicity of language-games in the following examples, and in others: Giving orders, and obeying them—Describing the appearance of an object, or giving its measurements—Constructing an object from a description (a drawing)—Reporting an event—Speculating about an event.” It is possible to use the same word in different language-games with correspondingly different uses and meanings.

16. “In the Philippine value system, kapwa is at the very foundation of human values. This core value then determines not only the person’s personality but more so his personhood or pagkatao.” (Enriquez, Kapwa: A Core Concept in Filipino Social Psychology 76)

17. For a comprehensive discussion of the factors that created modern identity, see Sources of the Self (Taylor).

18. Both these German terms have been used by Filipino scholars in analyzing the Philippine situation, the first for example by Ibaña (Lifeworld-Systems Analysis of People Power 2 and 3), and the second by Enriquez (Philippine World Views: The Filipino Weltanschauung in Languages, Literature, Popular Culture, Visual Arts, and Other Fields).

19. The Spanish Catholic tradition was able to impregnate the concept of kapwa through translation. Instead of adopting the same policy they had in South America where natives were forced to learn Spanish, the missionaries chose to simply translate Christian doctrine into our native language. Vicente Rafael views this a mechanism for oppression and colonial control, where meanings were also corrupted or lost in translation (Rafael). This is true to a certain extent, however the positive consequence is that older Tagalogs concepts were preserved rather than discarded, and then subsequently expanded.

20. David Orderberg states that the “Cardinality Thesis” means that the four virtues (prudence, justice, temperance, and fortitude) are the only cardinal virtues and no other. It is divided into three sub-theses, “the first being that the cardinal virtues are jointly necessary for the possession of every other virtue, the second that each of the virtues is a species of one of the four cardinals, and the third that many of the other virtues are also auxiliaries of one or more cardinals.”
I am suggesting that Filipino virtue ethics has its corresponding cardinal virtues and that *hiya* is a Filipino counterpart of temperance.

21. See for instance the article of Kiefer on the Tausug of Jolo and the follow-up article by Tan (Kiefer) (Tan).

22. For example, Jocano translated *hiya* as “‘self-esteem,’ *dignidad, amor propio,* and *dangag* (honor).” (Jocano, Growing Up in a Philippine Barrio 98).

23. Holnsteiner also sees *hiya* only as a means to reinforce *utang-na-loób.* “Hiyâ is not necessarily accompanied by utang na loób, but utang na loób is always reinforced by hiyâ” (Holnsteiner, 1973, p. 84). In this way *hiya* only plays a supporting role.


25. The one who comes closest to espousing a synthesis of all three traditions is Nick Joaquin (Culture and History). He spent most of his time vindicating the most unpopular tradition of the three, the Spanish Catholic tradition, but it was always to show how it has shaped and benefited the Southeast Asian tribal and animist tradition. Of course as perhaps the greatest Filipino writer in English in the 20th century, he also embraced the medium of the English language, heritage of the American tradition.

26. The older philosophy professors from De La Salle University are particularly resentful towards Thomism. Romualdo Abulad recounts his experience: “Thomism in this country became so indomitably stubborn that it started giving the impression that no truth could possibly lie outside of its pre-established framework. In my youth I saw very clearly how intellectual doggedness could prove fatal to an aging philosophy. The harder it refused to budge from its preferred supremacy, the more ludicrous the Thomism of the fifties and the sixties looked to us” (Abulad 3). Emerita Quito also criticized the Filipino Thomist school: “This school considers as gospel truth the writings of the Catholic saint. Hence, there is no originality in this school; no new ideas are forged; Catholic ideas of the Medieval Ages are repeated with more or less depth” (Quito, The State of Philosophy in the Philippines 38).

27. See the approaches for example of Rosalind Hursthouse and Martha Nussbaum.

28. Some Filipino scholars who have discussed the task of inculturation include Mercado (Inculturation and Filipino Theology), Bulatao (The Inculturation of Faith), and De Mesa (Tasks in the Inculturation of Theology: The Filipino Catholic Situation).


30. The famous moral theologian Servais Pinckaers also says: “L’étude des vertus que nous fournit la Secunda Secundae est un des grands modèles du genre et certainement le plus achevé que possède la théologie chrétienne” (Pinckaers 238). “The study of the virtues which the *Secunda Secundae* provides us is one of the great models of the genre and certainly the most complete possessed by Christian theology.”

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