Loób and Kapwa: An Introduction to a Filipino Virtue Ethics

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This is an introduction to a Filipino virtue ethics which is a relationship-oriented virtue ethics. The concepts to be discussed are the result of the unique history of the Philippines, namely a Southeast Asian tribal and animist tradition mixed with a Spanish Catholic tradition for over three-hundred years. Filipino virtue ethics is based on two foundational concepts in Filipino culture. The first is loób, which can easily be misunderstood when literally translated into English as “inside” but which is better translated as “relational will,” and the second is kapwa, which is literally translated as “other person” but is better understood as “together with the person.” These serve as pillars for a special collection of virtues (kagandahang-loób, utang-na-loóob, pakikiramdam, hiya, lakas-ng-loób/bahala na) which are not individualistic virtues in the same way as most of the cardinal virtues of the Western tradition (i.e., prudence, justice, temperance and fortitude) but are all directed towards the preservation and strengthening of human relationships. This introduction to a Filipino virtue ethics is articulated and organized through a dialogue with Aristotelian-Thomistic virtue ethics.

Keywords: Philippines, Filipino, Loób, Kapwa, Virtue Ethics, Aristotle, Aquinas

This is an introduction to a Filipino virtue ethics which is a thoroughly relationship-oriented virtue ethics. In contrast with the popular scheme of Filipino “values” inherited from 20th century American scholarship, this introduction presents a revised interpretation of those “values” through a dialogue with Aristotelian-Thomistic virtue ethics. Filipino virtue ethics is the result of the mixing of two traditions—the Southeast Asian tribal and animist tradition and the Spanish Catholic tradition—for over three-hundred years. It has two main concepts: loób and kapwa, which serve as pillars that support a special collection of virtues dedicated to strengthening and preserving human relationships.

1. Glossary of Terms

Since one can easily get overwhelmed by the foreign vocabulary when encountering ideas from another country or culture for the first time, perhaps it is best to begin with a short glossary of concepts so that one can survey the landscape. Later on we will discuss each concept in detail.

1. Loób – (Pronounced as two syllables with short o’s, lo-ob.) This word is literally translated into English as “inside”. It is used to describe the inside of physical objects such as a house or a jar. However, when it talks about a person, it talks about the person’s
“relational will”, i.e. his will towards his kapwa. This concept is fundamental because the Filipino virtues are mostly compound words which say something about the kind of loóób that a person has.

2. Kapwa – This word is literally translated as “other” or “other person” but it is in a way untranslatable into English. This is because it is embedded in an entirely different worldview and web of meanings unique to Philippine culture and history—namely, a Southeast Asian tribal and animist culture mixed with Spanish Catholicism. It is tribal and Christian at the same time. Kapwa has therefore been translated by local scholars as “shared self”, “shared identity”, or “self-in-the-other.” I use “together with the person.”

3. Kagandahang-Loób – This word is literally translated as “beauty-of-will.” The beauty of the will in this context is determined by one’s relationship towards the kapwa. Someone who has an affective concern for others and the willingness to help them in times of need is a person with kagandahang-loób. It is best understood through the paradigmatic example of a mother’s love and concern for her child, most especially during the child’s weakness in infancy.

4. Utang-na-Loób – This word is literally translated as “debt-of-will.” It is the natural response to kagandahang-loób. It is the self-imposed obligation to give back the same kind of kagandahang-loób to the person who has shown it to you. When utang-na-loób is returned “with interest”, i.e. more than what is due, it can bring about a circular dynamic between two persons where the one who previously showed kagandahang-loób is now the one with utang-na-loób, and then vice versa; it continues to alternate and strengthen the relationship in the process. This is where kapwa naturally develops into mutually sacrificial friendships.

5. Pakikiramdam – The closest translation might be “relational sensitivity” or “empathy.” It is about being skilled in reading the other person’s feelings and correctly guessing his inner state. It requires receptivity to many non-verbal cues, such as subtle facial expressions, tones of voice, and bodily gestures. This indirect communication, though it might seem tedious or frustrating to the foreigner, is a way of practicing a kind of “emotional intelligence”, a way of evaluating and deepening the relationship with the other person.

6. Hiya – Hiya has been variously translated as “embarrassment” or “shame.” It has often been negatively criticized when studied in isolation, especially for the Filipino tendency to be roundabout and not direct to the point. But it is a virtue when it controls and restrains selfish desires for the welfare of the other (kapwa). One of the most common manifestations is withholding a direct verbal confrontation that could embarrass the other, especially in public.

7. Lakas-ng-Loób/Bahala na – Lakas-ng-loób is literally translated as “courage”, bahala na is sometimes translated as “fatalism” or “resignation”, but it is translated more positively as “courage to face uncertainty.” Like hiya, these two can degenerate into negative concepts if separated from the principle of kapwa. The unique history of the Philippines
must also be taken into account in order to see that this is not just any kind of courage, but a courage for self-sacrifice for the kinship group. As we will see later, the Tagalog Pasyon (Passion of Christ) play is the key to understanding this virtue and the ideal Philippine hero (bayani).

This glossary is a survey of Filipino virtue ethics. Note that it is *a* Filipino virtue ethics, and not *the* Filipino virtue ethics, since the words introduced here are derived from Tagalog language and culture, primarily in the Northern island of Luzon and dominant in the capital of the country, Manila. But if any investigation of Filipino virtue ethics is to be undertaken, this would be the logical first step, not only because the national Filipino language is almost completely based on the Tagalog language, but also because the Tagalog culture has been the most thoroughly Hispanicized during the three-hundred years of Spanish occupation and therefore shows the most thorough synthesis of the two worlds. After a primary study of Tagalog virtue ethics, one can investigate the similarities with other regional groups in the Philippines. For example, Mercado has identified the counterparts of the Tagalog loób in other language in the Philippines, specifically the Ilokano nakem and the Bisayan buot (Mercado, 1976, p. 54).

It is only now that these concepts are being presented as a virtue ethics. Since the 1970’s local scholars have only been presenting these as “values.” This is because many of the pioneering anthropologists and psychologists embraced the value orientation theory of Clyde Kluckholn and were completely unfamiliar with virtue ethics as an interpretative option. For example, the American anthropologist Frank Lynch famously coined the term “smooth interpersonal relationships” to describe the greatest value of Filipino culture (Lynch, 1962, p. 89). The international revival of virtue ethics had to wait for Alasdair MacIntyre’s *After Virtue* published in 1981. The problem with “values” is that the concept is too broad, and is often simply conflated with the notion of something “good” or “important.” It also carries with it a very subjective understanding of what constitutes a “good.” To say that something like utang-na-loób is a Filipino value is to merely say that it is something that Filipinos find “good” or “important,” which is not really to say much, since Filipinos find a host of other things important, such as family or a college education. It does not give a clear definition of what something like utang-na-loób in fact is; it just says how we feel towards it.

But with the concept “virtue” derived from the Aristotelian-Thomistic tradition, one has recourse to something much more defined than “values.” For Aquinas, a virtue is the quality of a power (potentia) of the soul, (ex. the will). A virtue is also a habit (habitus) that makes the person disposed towards the performance of good works. As we shall see, Filipino virtues are similar in that they describe the quality of one’s relational will (loób) which acts towards others (kapwa). The Thomistic scheme provides a stable foundation for these concepts which were blurry when talked about as values. What has often been called a “value system” is better understood as a “virtue ethics.”

Now another thing needed before going into our discussion is a brief intellectual history of the Philippines. This is necessary in order to show the significant difference between the Filipino worldview and the Western worldview, and also, the difference between the Philippines and its closest Southeast Asian neighbours. This is due mainly to its unique mix of East and West.
2. A Brief Philippine History

Before the explorer Ferdinand Magellan arrived in the islands in 1521, and was killed by the tribal warrior Lapu-Lapu, the Philippines was composed of many different tribes and chiefdoms scattered across the archipelago. Based on the artifact called the Laguna Copperplate Inscription we know that Indian influences were already present in the islands since 900 A.D. and this is verified by the many Sanskrit based words found in the Tagalog language (Francisco, 1964). Manila was also at the heart of the trade network in the region, and had extensive trade dealings with the Chinese. In the 14th century Arab traders arrived in the Southern islands of the Philippines and spread Islam (Majul, 1999). One can imagine that if the Spanish had not arrived, the Philippines would have become like its Islamic neighbours Malaysia and Indonesia. However, in 1565 Miguel Lopez de Legazpi arrived following Magellan’s Pacific route. Miguel Lopez de Legazpi was appointed by King Philip II as the first governor-general of the Philippines (the islands were previously named Las Islas Filipinas by Ruy Lopez de Villalobos, in honor of Philip II). This began three-hundred thirty three years of Spanish colonization only to end in 1898 when the Philippine revolutionaries declared independence and when the Americans acquired the Philippines through the Treaty of Paris. After attempts at modernization and democratization, the Americans finally granted the Philippines its national independence in 1946.

A significant fact for us is that the words we are going to discuss (ex. loób and kapwa) were present in the Tagalog language before the Spanish arrived and were words used in a tribal and animist context. The basic structure of society was the barangay, a group of people ruled by one datu or chief (Scott, 1994), and the animist religion was led by a priestess class called babaylan who served as bridges to the spirit world and also as the prime culture bearers (Salazar, 1999). The word kapwa in this older context would have naturally referred to someone from the tribe. Someone outside the tribe would not have been considered kapwa. The idea of loób meanwhile was woven into a spiritual animist worldview. Benedict Anderson has described the concept of power in Javanese culture as an “intangible, mysterious, and divine energy which animates the universe” (Anderson, 1972, p. 7). Reynaldo Ileto has drawn parallels with this and the notion of loób (Ileto, 1979, p. 32).

But when the Spanish missionaries arrived, the concept kapwa was impregnated and enlarged by the Christian precept to “love your fellow man just like your own body.” Tribal boundaries were stretched outward towards humanity in general. Vicente Rafael describes how the Spanish chose to adopt a different strategy from what they implemented in South America (Rafael, 1993). Instead of forcing the native population to learn Spanish, they retained the native language and translated the Christian doctrine into those languages. Rafael contends that many Filipino words and concepts (ex. utang-na-loób) were exploited as mechanisms for control, and other meanings were simply lost in translation. This may be true to a certain degree; but on the other hand, it was advantageous for the concepts per se because they were preserved rather than discarded, and then they were conceptually enlarged.

The two traditions, Southeast Asian and Spanish, interacted, warred and mixed in various ways for more than three hundred years. And even until today one can still feel the impact and influence of these traditions in Philippine culture and society. The tribal datu was transformed into the principales or landed class during the Spanish occupation, and they have kept their status as powerful family dynasties in Philippine politics (McCoy, 1994). Roman Catholicism was heavily syncretized with native beliefs and practices producing in a distinct brand of folk
Catholicism (Bulatao, 1992). Filipino virtue ethics must also be seen as a synthesis of these two traditions as far as its matter and content goes. However, when it comes to theory and explanation, a third tradition, the American tradition, plays a significant role.

In order to achieve what President McKinley called the “benevolent assimilation” of the Philippines, the Americans taught Filipinos the English language and established the public school system including the University of the Philippines. Renato Constantino lamented this as the “mis-education” of the Filipino (Constantino 1970), but a distinction must be made between the Western values that the Americans tried to inculcate, and the educational system and resources that they set in place. Though values such as liberal individualism were inimical to older family values and the concept of kapwa, the educational training the Americans provided allowed Filipinos to eventually criticize certain Western ideas as being incongruent with Filipino culture. Frank Lynch, the first pioneer in Filipino values, was an American Jesuit. The Sikolohiyang Pilipino (Filipino Psychology) movement was born in the American-founded University of the Philippines, and leading Filipino scholars such as Virgilio Enríquez and F. Landa Jocano obtained their doctorates in the United States. Despite the prominent anti-colonial rhetoric, there is still a significant debt (utang-na-loób) to the American tradition. And so, though the matter of Filipino virtue ethics comes from the two older traditions, the capacity for theorization comes from the American tradition.

Before the Americans arrived however, the Philippines was largely insulated from the modern developments in the West. The ideas of Protestantism, Cartesian philosophy and the French Revolution reached the Philippines only towards the end of the 19th century. It entered in trickles through the ilustrado class (wealthy Filipinos who studied in Europe) and then in a flood through the American public school system. For the longest time, the only Western philosophical system in the Philippines was Thomism. The University of Santo Tomas was founded by the Dominicans in 1611 and is the oldest existing university in Asia. It was patterned after the University of Salamanca in Spain. The curriculum was pure scholasticism (i.e., Aristotle, Aquinas, Peter of Lombard), and most of the priests and clergy in the country were trained there (Villarroel 2012). One can make a case for a pure scholastic age in the Philippines lasting from the 17th century to the 19th century.

There is justification in the use of Thomism in the exploration of Filipino virtue ethics because it is a historical “insider” so to speak. Thomism is a part of the Catholic tradition in the Philippines, and is not wholly incompatible with the earlier animist one (for example, both share an adherence to spiritual realities which are dismissed by modern materialism and secularism). As I will explain, grave errors can arise when loób is interpreted through modern post-Cartesian philosophy. There is a kind of anachronism in using the values orientation theory of Kluckholn or the phenomenology of Max Scheler—both of which subscribe to a subjective-objective dichotomy which is not present in the two earlier traditions. As one Filipino philosopher claims, such a dichotomy did not exist in the Filipino worldview (Mercado, 1994, p. 53). The advantage of using the virtue ethics of Aristotle or Aquinas as a main dialogue partner is that they have more similarities with Filipino concepts from a historical and intellectual point of view. And now that we have provided all the preliminaries for understanding Filipino virtue ethics, we can discuss each concept one by one.
3. Loób

The literal translation of the word *loób* is “inside.” The word *loób* can mean the inside of physical objects like houses or pots. But the literal translation can easily confuse when we talk about the *loób* of persons. It certainly does not mean the physical insides of persons, such as their bodily organs which are called *lamang-loób*, but the “will” of the person. The confusion starts when people latch on to this literal translation of *loób* as “inside” and use all sorts of 20th century Western philosophical and psychological theories to explain *loób*, with the subjective-objective dichotomy of Descartes or Kant looming in the background. This leads to a serious distortion of *loób* because as we have mentioned above, the concept of *loób* was born and developed in traditions which were basically pre-modern, insulated from the Western subjective turn in philosophy. In fact the discrepancy can be even more glaring when we realize that the tribal and animist tradition in the Philippines is not just pre-modern, it is in fact “pre-rational”, that is, more similar to the time of the Homeric epics before the birth of philosophy than any other period of Western history. Using modern theories to explain *loób* can therefore easily result in a gross caricature of it.

One of the dangerous tendencies is to introduce a “bifurcation” or “dichotomy” on *loób*, between the inner person and the outside world, between subjectivity and objectivity, a trap that several Filipino scholars have fallen into.8 Regarding this “dichotomizing” tendency, one of the pioneers of Filipino philosophy, Leonardo Mercado, comments:

But 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, 1994, p. 37)

*Loób* is not a disembodied, subjective view of the self such as in Descartes, but it is a will always directed towards something, especially towards other people. It not only presupposes an objectively real world (based on the two traditions it can only be classified as “realist”), it even presupposes a world dense with spiritual entities and spiritual connections. *Loób* is what it is only insofar as it is completely embedded and integrated inside this web of connectivity. Jose de Mesa recognized this relational nature of *loób* when he said: “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, 1987, p. 46). And Dionisio Miranda agrees when he 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, 1992, p. 84). The term *loób* should therefore not be investigated in isolation. An isolated and separated *loób*—something like a monad—is vacuous and has no meaning. Rather, *loób* must be understood in tandem with the concept of *kapwa* and the Filipino virtues that move in between them.

Leonardo de Castro has previously translated *loób* as “will” (De Castro, 1998). The older *Vocabulario de la Lengua Tagala* also translated it as *voluntad* or will (De Noceda & De Sanlucar, 1860, p. 193).9 This is accurate, but I would prefer to nuance the translation as “relational will” if only to emphasize its thoroughly relational character and to differentiate it from something like the autonomous will of Kant. This will is always in relationship to something, either to the world, to spiritual entities, or most of all to other people called *kapwa*.

We can account for how *loób* is connected to the word “inside” and yet is not the “inside” of modern subjectivity by resorting to the concept of *potentia* from Arisotelian-Thomistic
philosophy. A seed has the potency (potentia) to become a tree. When it finally becomes a tree this potency is actualized. A block of stone has the potency to become a statue of David, but it requires a sculptor to turn this into an actual statue. In a sense one can say that a tree is “inside” the seed, or a statue of David is “inside” the block of stone, but it has yet to be actualized. When it is finally actualized, this serves as conclusive proof that it was its hidden potentia all along. Potency manifests itself through act.

The will too, according to Aquinas, is a potentia of the soul (Summa Theologiae I, Q. 77). It is a “power” that operates in act. It is the same power as free choice (liberum arbitrium), the power to choose (Summa Theologiae I, Q. 83, A. 4). When we choose we bring this potency into act. The potency is always there, but it needs to manifest itself through choices and the concrete actions brought about by those choices. Aquinas also indicates that the virtues of this power of the will are the ones directed towards others (Disputed Questions on Virtue, Q.1, A. 5). Similarly we can also consider loób as a potentia or power rather than think of it in terms of spatial or subjective interiority. The virtues of the loób are also directed towards others (kapwa). For Aquinas there are several powers of the soul, such as reason, the will, and the sensitive powers, but for Filipino virtue ethics there is only one, the loób, because this is what concerns relationships and relationships are the most important thing in this ethics.

Loób as a potency that manifests itself through action makes sense in ordinary life. Loób is not so much known through reflection more than by living in relationship with others. How I treat others reveals who I am and what my loób is. And conversely, I know the other person most when I am on the receiving end of his own actions. As Wojtyla says: “Action reveals the person... Action gives us the best insight into the inherent essence of the person and allows us to understand the person most fully” (Wojtyla, 1979, p. 11). De Castro basically says the same thing about loób when he says:

It is part of the meaning of loob—of what lies within—that it must be ventilated. The kalooban lies inside but it must not be kept inside. In a way, it is “what-lies-within-that-lives-without.” It can only be manifested and perceived externally. (De Castro, 2000, p. 52)

In other words, the loób is known only through relationship and interaction. Even your own loób cannot be determined by yourself in isolation, instead it is determined by how you relate and act towards your kapwa.

4. Kapwa

We mentioned earlier that Frank Lynch proposed “smooth interpersonal relationship” as the highest value of Filipinos in the 1960’s. This inaugurated scholarly interest in Filipino “values” and provoked intense debate amongst Filipino scholars because of the apparent superficiality of SIR. Was the greatest Filipino value just about preserving harmony and getting along well? Surely, there must be something deeper involved. Eventually Virgilio Enriquez, the founder of the Sikolohiyang Pilipino (Filipino Psychology) movement, challenged SIR by identifying kapwa as the core value of Filipinos and describing it 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.” In Filipino, 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, an inner self shared with others. (Enriquez, 1992, p. 52)

And 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, 1992, p. 54)

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, 2005, p. 28)

The very title of de Guia’s book, Kapwa: The Self in the Other, also seems to be a succinct definition the concept. But what does “self in the other” mean? Is it a mere sentiment? Is it figurative imagination? As I have said, it translates to action within the a relationship. To say that one is your kapwa means to interact with him or her in a particular way, defined by the virtues which we will expound below.

My preferred translation of kapwa is “together with the person.”¹⁰ I prefer this over the definitions of Enriquez and De Guia which mention a “self.” They have the right idea, but their starting point is one where the self and other has already been opposed, it is the “modern” starting point so to speak, and they wish to retrieve kapwa from such conditions. The English word “self” is loaded; it has been sculpted by a long and complex history of ideas and upheavals in modern times as Charles Taylor has shown (Taylor 1989). It is closely bound to concepts such as subjectivity, autonomy and independence. But if you want to define kapwa on its own, there is no “self.” There is loób to be sure, but loób as we have already pointed out is a relational will. The starting point of kapwa is “together.” In fact if we could use only the word “together” as the translation that would be better, were there no need to indicate its specifically human context. It comes first before you break it apart into separate “selves.” The animist tradition hangs in the background, which is why De Guia is able to say that kapwa endorses “the deeper experiences of mankind, akin to an ancient animist connectedness of feeling one with all creation” (De Guia, 2005, p. 173). On the other hand the Christian tradition moves it towards a communio personarum, a communion of persons, which Filipinos call oneness or pagkakaisa—“the highest level of interpersonal interaction possible” and “the full realization” of a relationship with the kapwa (Enriquez, 1992, p. 64).

Of course, the translation is not as important as being aware of the traditions where kapwa was born, and how at variance those traditions are with the Western modern tradition. If one keeps this in mind one can just import the word kapwa into English without a translation.

At first glance one may see similarities between the concept of kapwa and the Other (L’autre) of Levinas, or the I and Thou (Ich und Du) of Martin Buber. An interesting trend in 20th century was that philosophers tried to bring back the relational aspect to an intellectual climate which has forgotten it. This was after the complete negation of the other experienced in the Holocaust of World War II (Levinas and Buber were both Jews). However for Levinas the
Other is completely different from the Self, like the concept of infinity (Levinas, 1961). And for Levinas there is no hope for anything like oneness in the same sense as the Filipino *pagkakaisa*. Jaime Guevara has made a preliminary comparison between *kapwa* and the philosophy of Levinas:

For Levinas, the other is infinitely irreducible. This is why the relationship between the two is not about a unity of similarities. Rather, Levinas describes the relationship as one of asymmetry. Since, there is no essential similarity, but only an essential difference between the self and the other, the other cannot be said to be like the self and vice versa. The other is merely different… For Levinas, there is nothing “shared” between the self and the other. The notion of “shared identity” does not fit in his philosophy. Yet, Filipinos do experience “shared identity.” (Guevara, 2005, p. 13)

There is here an insurmountable gulf between the self and the other. The same is the case, in a milder way, for Martin Buber. This can be explained by the philosophical traditions that they inhabited. But for *kapwa*, relationship is the given, it is taken for granted. It is the starting point, not something to be retrieved.

More similar is the Thomist Personalism of Norris Clarke and Karol Wojtyla, which at least talks about the *communio personarum*. A philosophical basis is provided by Norris Clarke’s explanation of Thomistic philosophy as *substance-in-relation*. Unlike the “self-enclosed substance of Descartes” or the “inert, unknowable substance of Locke”, to be a substance in the universe is to be *ipso facto* in relation with a host of other things through the act of being and through secondary acts (Clarke, 1994). Everything is caught up in this dynamic web of activity, with God as its source, both as pure act (*actus purus*) and pure existence (*ipsum esse subsistens*). This has clear affinities with the animist world view, which sees the world dense and alive with spiritual connections. But Clarke goes a step further and applies this concept specifically to the sphere of persons:

To be an authentic person, in a word, is to be a *lover*, to live a life of *inter*-personal self-giving and receiving. Person is essentially a “we” term. Person exists in its fullness only in the plural. (Clarke, 1993, p. 218)

This orientation is congruent with *kapwa*. Karol Wojtyla also comes close when he talks about “participation” (Wojtyla, 1993) and Norris Clarke acknowledges his debt to Wojtyla (Clarke, 2009). However, Wojtyla has a stronger emphasis on the subjective “I” than what would be naturally found in *kapwa*, and it is not surprising because he acknowledges his debt to the phenomenology of Max Scheler and to the ethics of Immanuel Kant (Wojtyla, 1979, p. 302). But the end goal for him is still the same, that is, a unity and oneness between acting persons.

Now that we have explained both *loób* and *kapwa*, it is time to take a look at the virtues which bring this whole dynamic to life, the virtues which must be practiced within a relationship. Otherwise everything would only remain as mere theory.

5. The Filipino Virtues

What we aim to do—beside expounding the Filipino virtues themselves—is to roughly compare the Filipino virtues with the Western cardinal virtues (prudence, justice, temperance, and
fortitude) and at least one theological virtue (charity). This immediately provides us a structure and order for the virtues which offers improvements over the arbitrary schemes proposed by some Filipino scholars.\(^{11}\)

Aquinas mentions only two virtues in his system which are properly in the will: charity and justice (Disputed Questions on Virtue, Q.1, A. 5). These virtues are properly directed towards another, either towards God or towards other people. He conceives of the other virtues as being properly individual. These are prudence in the reason, and temperance and fortitude in the sensitive appetites. Now when it comes to the Filipino virtues, they are all in the will, in the \textit{loób}, because that is the only part of the soul that Filipino virtue ethics is concerned with.\(^{12}\)

Perhaps one can say that the Filipino idea of the soul is still compact and holistic, in that the faculty of reason has not yet been extracted or separated. It is in this sense “pre-rational”.

However, there is a compatibility because insofar as all the Filipino virtues are found in the \textit{loób}, they are also all relational and directed towards others (\textit{kapwa}), which Aquinas would hold for virtues whose subject is the will. In addition, Aquinas introduces the idea of potential virtues, that is, virtues which are somehow connected to the cardinal virtues but directed to “secondary” matters, and which fall short of the whole power of the cardinal virtue (Summa Theologiae II-II, Q. 48 & Q. 80; Disputed Questions on Virtue, Q. 5, A. 1, ad. 12). There is therefore room to annex these Filipino virtues to the cardinal virtues of Aquinas while fully respecting their difference.

We now begin with the Filipino virtues which are counterparts to those two virtues properly in the will according to Aquinas (charity and justice): \textit{kagandahang-loób} and \textit{utang-na-loób}. The dynamic of these two virtues presents us with the “beating heart” of the Filipino system.

\textbf{5.1. Kagandahang-loób}

\textit{Kagandahang-loób} is literally translated as “beauty-of-will” and is synonymous with another term \textit{kabutihang-loób} or “goodness-of-will”. According to Virgilio Enriquez:

\begin{quote}
The concept [kagandahang-loób] is manifested through an act of generosity or \textit{kabutihan}. Thus, one sees kagandahang-loób in the act of lending utensils to neighbors or graciously accommodating a guest. But to qualify as kagandahang-loób, such acts of generosity must spring spontaneously from the person’s goodness of heart or \textit{kabaitan}. A display of kagandahang-loób must have no motive save that of kindness and inherent graciousness. (Enriquez, 1992, p. 57)
\end{quote}

Consider the act of giving money to someone because her father is in the hospital and they can’t pay the bills. The act of buying a take-out meal and giving it to a beggar sleeping on a sidewalk. The act of taking an extra effort to help an unemployed friend find a job in the company you’re working in. These are all examples of \textit{kagandahang-loób}, but it is not only the act that counts, but also the motivation. The act of kindness must not be guided by an ulterior motive to be paid back. As De Castro explains:

\begin{quote}
An act can be considered to convey \textit{kagandahang loób} only if it is done out of \textit{kusang loób} (roughly, free will); and can only be considered to have been done out of \textit{kusang loób} if the agent (1) is not acting under external compulsion, (2) is motivated by positive feelings (e.g. charity, love or sympathy) towards the beneficiary, and (3) is not motivated by the anticipation of reward.
\end{quote}
These conditions entail debt-of-good-will relationships where the benefactor has no right to demand reciprocity but the beneficiary has a “self-imposed” obligation to repay *kagandahang loób* with *kagandahang loób*. (De Castro, 1998)

*Kagandahang-loób* might seem just like any act of kindness or altruism. But this is where the importance of the two background traditions comes into play. There is a tribal and familial element involved. We help members of the tribe or clan for the sake of the survival of the tribe or clan. When it comes to family we hardly question at all why we need to help someone in the family—you do it simply because he or she is a blood-relation, that is enough reason in itself. *Kagandahang-loób* towards the *kapwa* is about treating him or her as part of your “primal group”, that is, your family, clan or tribe. It is urgently manifested when the *kapwa* is weak or in need. The greatest paradigm is the mother’s love for her weak and needy child. The mother loves, protects and nourishes her child without asking for anything in return. It is, especially in the earliest stages, a unilateral giving. As Dionisio Miranda says:

Maternal love is unconditional, or gratuitous. The mother loves her child as her creature. It has not done anything to merit this love; in fact, there is nothing that the child can do to obtain this love. All that it can “do” is to be, to be her child. (Miranda, 1987, p. 72)

The new-born infant needs his mother simply to survive. Likewise, the purest form of *kagandahang-loób* is shown when the *kapwa* is in desperate weakness and need. Disasters, illness, and extreme poverty provoke the need and the occasion for showing *kagandahang-loób*. Of course, even when the child is already grown up and is less dependent on his mother, he is still the recipient of generous acts of love and kindness, though it is no longer a matter of life and death. And so *kagandahang-loób* manifests itself in various other minor gifts and services, like those mentioned by Enriquez.

Presumably you are able to show *kagandahang-loób* to someone because you already experienced *kagandahang-loób* yourself. The natural place to learn *kagandahang-loób* is within the family—from the parents, especially the mother, and then practiced towards siblings, and then towards cousins and relatives. As Miranda says: “Maternal love means to insure that the child’s love also becomes “maternal.”… It means to develop the love of the child so that it becomes itself a source of life” (Miranda, 1987, p. 72). One common practice of *kagandahang-loób* within the family is for the eldest sibling to postpone marriage and starting his or her own family in order to financially support the younger siblings until they have finished college. Another contemporary manifestation is the Overseas Filipino Worker (OFW), usually a parent, but sometimes one of the children, who faces uncertain prospects to get a job abroad in order to support the family back home.

In the past generations Filipino families usually had more than seven children, with a wide circle of cousins and relatives, plus ritual kinship relations as well (ex. godfathers and godmothers) (Jocano, 1998). This would certainly have provided a lot of practice, forging one’s behaviour before he or she interacts with the society at large. As Guthrie 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 & Jacobs, 1966, p. 194).

Like we said, the Christian tradition is what was supposed to widen this exclusive family instinct towards those who are not blood-related, and so religion obviously plays an important role. As Modesto de Castro (1938) says in *Urbana at Feliza*: “the love for the *kapwa* is the fruit
of a love for God, so those who love God know how to be *kapwa*” (De Castro, 1938, p. 3). But nevertheless the natural starting point is the devotion and loyalty given towards family, clan, or tribe.

Because of the “maternal” element, it is not surprising that Leonardo de Castro has called *kagandahang-loób* a “feminine” concept and identified similarities with the feminist ethics of care of Nel Noddings (De Castro, 2000). But he also warns that one should not reduce *kagandahang-loób* to a mere subclass of feminist thought, and this is important because as we have stressed, this ethics was born in a unique cultural and historical context and is properly understood only through that context.

Is *kagandahang-loób* the same as the theological virtue of *charitas*? *Charitas* according to Aquinas is foremost towards God and then loving the neighbor for God’s sake (*Summa Theologiae* II-II, Q. 25, A. 1). And as we have said, *kagandahang-loób* certainly has a Christian element. However, *kagandahang-loób* is usually shown to someone in need. God is to be loved by us but not with *kagandahang-loób*. Rather, God shows *kagandahang-loób* to us. *Kagandahang-loób* comes from someone in better condition to help someone who is in an inferior condition. In this sense it is more like a certain aspect of charity called benevolence (*benevolentia*) and its exterior act of beneficence (*beneficentia*) since it involves a movement from the superior to the inferior, like in the giving of gifts (*Summa Theologiae* II-II, Q. 31, A. 1). However, Aquinas adds that among men, he who is superior in one respect may be inferior in another, and so two people may still end up showing *kagandahang-loób* to each other. Since a human being can be better off compared to other human beings (but not to God), then *kagandahang-loób* can be seen as a very human virtue in terms of its application.

5.2. Utang-na-loób

*Kagandahang-loób* inspires the reverse current of this dynamic which is called *utang-na-loób*. *Utang* means “debt”, and so *utang-na-loób* means a “debt of will (*loób*).” It can be understood once more by the parent-child relationship, most especially the relationship with the mother. The mother has given the child his very existence, carried him in her womb for nine months, and nourished and protected him into adulthood. The child should acknowledge this and be grateful, and must strive to repay her back somehow.

Children are expected to be everlastingly grateful to their parents not only for all the latter have done for them in the process of raising them but more fundamentally for giving them life itself. The children should recognize, in particular, that their mother risked her life to enable each child to exist. Thus, a child’s *utang na loób* to its parents is immeasurable and eternal. Nothing he can do during his lifetime can make up for what they have done for him. (Holnsteiner, 1973, pp. 75-76)

Therefore in Filipino society it is common for children to take care of their parents when they are old and infirm. To send them to a “home for the elderly” is considered a kind of negligence, and besides it is financially costly and not an option for many households.

As an example of *utang-na-loób* outside the family context, say I lack money to pay my tuition for a semester in college. A friend hears about my situation and insists that he lend me money rather than I postpone my studies. I gratefully accept his offer. After the semester I save enough money to repay him back. However I do not consider my *utang-na-loób* finished, but I
am still open to help him should the opportunity arise. Years later, as professionals, it does come. He loses his job and has difficulties finding another one to support his large family. Being a manager in my own company, I go the extra mile to secure him a good position, pulling some strings along the way. He ends up with a better job than the one he lost. My utang-na-loób has translated into a significant kagandahang-loób for him, such that now—given the gravity of his situation—he is the one with an utang-na-loób towards me.

This example is one where there is a cyclical or alternating dynamic between kagandahang-loób and utang-na-loób. It is a kind of repayment with interest, a kind of “one-upmanship”, as Holnsteiner would say (1973, p. 73). Our exchange could continue even further, and I could end up once more having a greater utang-na-loób to my friend.

Since they constitute one dynamic, utang-na-loób is expected to possess many of the same characteristics as kagandahang-loób, namely 1) its personal and sympathetic character and 2) its being free from external compulsion. As De Castro says “the obligation to pay the debt is a self-imposed one” (1998) and Miranda also concurs that it is “self-binding” (1987, p. 37). One does not have utang-na-loób because it is required by the other person (though they could hope for it), but rather it should come from one’s self. To have utang-na-loób means that one values kapwa relationships and seeks to prolong and strengthen these relationships. For Filipino virtue ethics, the existence of healthy kapwa relationships are ends in themselves and sources of happiness.

As scholars have pointed out, utang-na-loób should not be equated with mere commercial transaction (Kaut, 1961, p. 260). It can perhaps involve some kind of monetary contract (in the above example I knew just how much I needed to pay back to my friend for the tuition), but the situation of need makes it much more than that (Holnsteiner, 1973, p. 79). My friend is not an official “money lender”, but he is just someone who saw my need and offered to help me. And therefore it is not the money but rather the person behind the money—and my relationship with him—that is the primary focus. In this way it is different from the commutative justice that Aquinas speaks of. For Aquinas, commutative justice is only about the “arithmetical mean” between individuals (Summa Theologiae II-II, Q. 61, A. 2). If two people have 5, and one of them gives 1 to the other so that the other now has 6 and the other 4, justice will be done if the one who has 6 gives 1 to the one who has 4, so that the mean is restored. In terms of goods and services it is a bit like “I scratch your back and you scratch mine.” Utang-na-loób may also involve a “mean”, but ideally it is not only about restoring the mean but also cycling the debt, in order to strengthen the relationship and inter-dependence.

Some scholars have compared utang-na-loób with Marcel Mauss’ thoughts on gift-exchange in tribal societies, where gift-giving serves as a kind of cohesive process for relationships within the tribe.15 This is probably true, but one should not conclude that the utang-na-loób now is exactly the same as its tribal version, given the three-hundred year influence of Christianity. The tribal gift-giving, as Mauss describes it, requires a return. But the dynamic of kagandahang-loób and utang-na-loób has something “altruistic” about it, in that the return is hoped for, but cannot be and should not be demanded.

Finally, one of the worst things to be called in Filipino society is to be called “walang utang-na-loób”, that is, having no utang-na-loób. This is when someone has been shown significant kagandahang-loób but does not acknowledge or repay it. A child who has been brought up in comfortable circumstances by his parents but who ends up neglecting them in their old age is walang utang-na-loób. Someone who has been given a job when he needed it, but who
ends up stealing from their company is *walang utang-na-loób*. It is related to another derogative expression called *walang hiya* (without *hiya*) which we will mention later.

5.3. Pakikiramdam

*Pakikiramdam* is the closest counterpart to “prudence” in Filipino virtue ethics. In the Aristotelian-Thomistic system, prudence is the virtue that enables one to find the “mean” or “middle way” according to right reason (*Summa Theologiae* II-II, Q. 46, A. 7). The prudent person should be able to find “a mean between two vices, one of excess and one of deficiency” ([Nicomachean Ethics II.7, 1107a](https://www.aletheia-institute.org/ethics/nicomachean-ethics-ii-1107a.html)). *Pakikiramdam* also looks for a kind of “mean”, but it is a mean within the relationship. The most literal translation would be simply “feeling”, but perhaps it is better to call it “relational sensitivity” or “empathy” towards the *kapwa*. Prudence in Aristotle and Aquinas is based on the faculty of reason, but since reason is not a segregated faculty from the *loób*, then it makes sense that “*pakikiramdam* is not so much cognitive but affective” ([Mataragnon, 1987, p. 479](https://journals.uap.edu.ph/index.php/jpva/article/view/1679/1562)). Nevertheless it seems to require the most “cognition” (still tied with feeling) than the other Filipino virtues. Rita Mataragnon was the first to do a pioneering study of the concept:

In Filipino social interaction, a concern for feelings and preference for indirect expression gives rise to the phenomenon of *pakikiramdam*, a covert individual process by which a person tries to feel and understand the feelings and intentions of another. ([Mataragnon, 1987, p. 479](https://journals.uap.edu.ph/index.php/jpva/article/view/1679/1562))

For example, in the dynamic between *kagandahang-loób* and *utang-na-loób*, what should I do or how much should I give back in order to fulfill my *utang-na-loób*? Sometimes there is no way of quantifying or calculating my *utang-na-loób*. I need to *feel* or *guess* if I have repaid my debt to the other person, and this is accomplished by knowing him and being sensitive to his behavior and to the wider context. This “feeling” or “groping” around is part of *pakikiramdam*.

As Masunkhani says, “*pakikiramdam* is good training for emotional intelligence” ([Mansukhani, 2005, p. 200](https://books.google.com/books?id=Q7vC3AEG5WcC)). Or perhaps it itself constitutes emotional intelligence. Another related concept for it is “empathy”. Edith Stein would define empathy as “how human beings comprehend the psychic life of their fellows” ([Stein, 1989, p. 11](https://archive.org/details/edithstein1989)). It is the capacity of decentering yourself and being able to replace it with the inner state of another, in this case, the *kapwa*.

*Pakikiramdam* [is] a way of reconstructing another person’s feeling state or state of being. Apart from being a mere sensitivity to nonverbal cues, *pakikiramdam* is also the active attempt to reconstruct the speaker’s internal state. The sensitivity to cues, therefore, has as its goal the appreciation for, and the understanding of, the other person’s state of being. It is an act akin to empathy. What is constructed in *pakikiramdam*, however, cannot be put into words. ([Mansukhani, 2005, pp. 187-188](https://books.google.com/books?id=Q7vC3AEG5WcC))

Someone tries to read the other person’s inner state without the help of words or direct communication. Perhaps one of the easiest ways to understand *pakikiramdam* is through jokes. Not all jokes are funny to all people. The same joke may be funny for some, dull or obscure for others, and even offensive for some. It depends on a lot of things. I could deliver a joke about former Philippine President Erap Estrada, the action star who became president and who is
described as being dull, but I should know a little bit about my audience—do they know about Erap? Are they willing to have fun at his expense? Would they consider such jokes too “cheap”?

The person telling a joke must know enough about his audience or else the joke could fail. As Ted Cohen says, executing a joke requires a certain “intimacy” between speaker and audience—a knowledge of the audiences’ backgrounds and inner states—to make them laugh (Cohen, 1999). And when the joke is successful, it strengthens that intimacy because it confirms a shared background. They understand each other beyond the level of indicative statements to a level that allows them to manifest humor and laugh together. The more obscure the joke, the greater the intimacy involved. But you know that something has gone awry when the speaker ends up having to “explain” the joke to his audience.

Jokes are filled with other communication cues: tones of voice, facial expressions, gestures, and the perfect timing to deliver the punchline. Some jokes, as good as they are, will flop when delivered in monotone or in an uncertain voice. This whole experience of jokes is a good introduction to pakikiramdam. Jokes, laughing and teasing are a huge part of Filipino culture, especially around the dining table or during feasts and celebrations.

We mention jokes because it is something that is universal, but there are other forms of behaviour that are more unique to Filipino culture. Lambing is showing exaggerated forms of affection (which to an outsider might look nauseous) to either test or reconfirm the relationship. Tampo is the reverse of that, it is a show of sulkiness when someone close has disappointed your expectations. However, one usually does not tell the other directly, but expects him to discover and understand it on his own (because figuring it out shows that he’s sensitive and aware to your inner own state). Both forms are often reserved for very close relationships such as family and romantic relationships. But for both forms to work requires a culture that is familiar with, and maybe even encourages, both lambing and tampo. The phenomenon of pakikiramdam thrives because of certain inarticulate elements in the culture itself. As Maggay says:

The meaning of our movements and actions are imbedded in the culture and are not indicated in an orderly, succinct, and written explanation. Its definition and grammar is learned through unconscious observation as we grow and are shaped by the culture.¹⁶ (Maggay, 2002, p. 135)

Pakikiramdam, like the other Filipino virtues, is supposed to be learned within the family through the years. It is a virtue in a culture that values sensitivity that goes beyond direct and spoken communication. Perhaps one can trace this to the native tradition which also thrived on metaphors (talinhaga) and riddles (bugtong) (Lumbera 2001). As Ted Cohen proposed, metaphors too, just like jokes, can be thought of in terms of a “cultivation of intimacy” (Cohen, 1978). Under Spanish colonization, where Filipinos where not encouraged to voice out their sentiments and opinions, this tradition of receptivity to indirect communication could have continued. In any case, pakikiramdam also features prominently in our next virtue called hiya which involves, among other things, making sure you do not hurt the feelings of others.

5.4. Hiya

Hiya is often translated as “shame” or “embarrassment”, but this translation does not make a distinction between the hiya that is suffered (let’s call this the “passion” of hiya, from the Latin pati, to have something done unto you), and the hiya that is a virtue. The virtue of hiya is a kind of “self-control” that prevents someone from making another person suffer the passion of hiya. Let’s use one of the more extreme examples of 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 [He suffered hiya].” (Bulatao, 1964, pp. 424-425)

The first person wanted to have a laugh at the second person’s expense. This led to the other person suffering hiya (embarrassment) in public. But if the first person only had the virtue of hiya it would have kept him in check, and he would not have made the other person suffer the passion of hiya. It would have also saved his life. The passion of hiya is negative. Bulatao identifies this when he says that “hiyâ is a painful emotion. It is something like fear or a sense of inadequacy and anxiety in an uncontrolled and threatening situation” (Bulatao, 1964, p. 426). This corresponds to what Aquinas would call verecundia (shame), which is not a virtue but a passion. According to him it is a species of “fear” (Summa Theologiae II-II, Q. 144, A. 1). But the virtue of hiya is something like temperance. For Aquinas temperance enables one to control the natural desires (especially food, drink and sex) and make it subject to the rule of reason. The virtue of hiya also involves a certain restraint, only that it restrains the person from selfish impulses that would embarrass others or make them feel uncomfortable. As Francis Senden, a Belgian priest, comments:

You 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, 1974, p. 50)

Certain complications arise when the Filipino is “overly” cautious or tactful, which can confuse the Western foreigner who values direct communication and being straight to the point. Jocano recounts the frustration of one foreign executive who told him: “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, 1997, p. 73). In general saying “no” directly is avoided as it might offend another, and it causes the Filipino to “beat around the bush.”

Hiya goes beyond verbal situations. In general the virtue of hiya is a quality of one’s loób that makes him control or sacrifice an individual desire for the sake of the kapwa’s welfare. Consider another very common expression of hiya. Imagine a dinner gathering where a last piece of fried chicken is left on the serving plate on the table. Even though one wants to eat that last piece of chicken, hiya dictates that you should leave that for others. Someone else might want it. To get that last piece of chicken reveals to the people around you that you are thinking primarily of yourself. Of course if everyone had hiya then the last piece of chicken might remain there for good. The standstill is usually resolved when the host insists that a particular guest take the last piece and finish the food—“huwag ka nang mahiya (come on don’t be shy).”

To be called walang hiya (without hiya) means that you are only thinking of yourself, of how to satisfy your impulses and desires, even at the cost of your kapwa. It can be when you
don’t control your tongue and bluntly say what you feel, or when you try to always squeeze in order to be first in line. You are willing to ignore others, or worse, take advantage of them when it suits you. It is a violation of the spirit of kapwa. A person without hiya is “one who has flagrantly violated socially approved norms of conduct” (Lynch, 1962, p. 97) through an action that “involves a crassness and insensibility to the feelings of others” (Bulatao, 1964, p. 429). But the one who has hiya sacrifices himself for others, and this is also the same spirit that informs the next virtue.

5.5. Lakas-ng-loób / Bahala na

A debate began when Lynn Bostrom equated the Filipino phrase bahala na with American fatalism (1968). Her initial article was countered to by Alfred Lagmay who argued that bahala na was instead “a functionally positive response to uncertainty” (1993, p. 35). Michael Tan agrees with Lagmay when he says that: “[Bahala na] isn’t automatic resignation but a way to embolden oneself, almost like ‘I’m going to do what I can’” (2013). Miranda also says something similar:

When the Filipino says “Bahala na”, several things are implied: (a) he does not know at that point how things will turn out, (b) he assumes responsibility nonetheless to try and do something to influence events, (c) he assumes such responsibility knowing well that the case looks hopeless, (d) he hopes that luck will help when other things fail. (Miranda, 1992, p. 218)

Bahala na, taken in its own right, is quite simply a positive confrontation of uncertainty. But it has been given a negative reputation because it can also be said in cases of indifference or irresponsibility. It can become similar to the English expressions “whatever” or “who cares.” But its virtuous element is revealed when it is not taken in isolation but is put in its proper place within Filipino virtue ethics. It plays a very strong role in the virtue of lakas-ng-loób.

Lakas-ng-loób is literally “strength of will” and corresponds to the cardinal virtue of courage or fortitude. But to say that it is simply “courage” might be misleading. Again, a knowledge of the older traditions helps here. The tribal tradition considered courage primarily in the form of the tribal warrior hero, such as those found in the epics. The epics depict a heroic age similar to the time of Homer, and as MacIntyre says, in this heroic age “courage is important, not simply as a quality of individuals, but as the quality necessary to sustain a household and a community” (MacIntyre, 1999, p. 122). In other words courage was about the survival of the tribe, or about those exploits which would benefit the tribe and the community as a whole.

This tribal form of courage was eventually transformed by the Pasyon (Passion of Christ) play. The first Tagalog Pasyon play was written in 1703 by Gaspar Aquino de Belen. A newer version in 1814, called the Pasyon Pilapil, became the most popular version of the play. In a population with very low literacy this play was a tremendous influence, and in fact, as Reynaldo Ileto has pointed out, the Pasyon is was what shaped the sentiments of the masses who joined the Philippine revolution (in contrast with the ilustrado or “enlightened” class who studied in Europe) (Ileto, 1979). The suffering Christ became the new tribal hero. But instead of killing and pillaging he won through suffering and self-sacrifice. Nevertheless it was a sacrifice for the collective, this time represented by Mother Country (Inang Bayan).

In the pantheon of Filipino national heroes Jose Rizal and Ninoy Aquino are given a privileged place because they both closely fulfill the criteria for a Christ-like hero; they both
possessed a bahala na attitude which led to their martyrdom. They both knew that their return to the Philippines could cost them their lives, but their courage (lakas-ng-loób) was for the sake of nation. Both were killed, Rizal by the Spanish authorities in 1896, and Aquino by the orders of the dictator Marcos in 1983. But their deaths were not in vain. Rizal’s death provoked the Philippine Revolution and Aquino’s death led to the famous EDSA People Power of 1986. Similarly, the Overseas Filipino Workers (OFW) are often hailed as Filipino “heroes” because they also possess this bahala na for others, many of them leaving for abroad with uncertain prospects in order to provide for their family back home. It is the same pattern, though on a smaller scale.

Lakas-ng-loób and bahala na should therefore be understood in the context of a complete Filipino virtue ethics which values the sacrifice of self for the kapwa. Lakas-ng-loób is not merely courage and bahala na is not merely fatalism. Their ideal manifestations are kapwa-oriented. As De Mesa says: “Bahala na without active concern for others is a superficial kind of risk-taking, but with malasakit [concern for the other] it becomes a Christian risk-taking after the example of Jesus himself. We find this in Jesus when he dares to risk his person out of concern for another” (De Mesa, 1987, p. 168).

6. Conclusion

We have now finished an introductory overview of a Filipino virtue ethics based on loób and kapwa. To summarize, the defining feature of this virtue ethics is that it seeks to preserve and strengthen human relationships. It is a unique blend of East and West, the result of two different traditions which have mixed together for more than three hundred years. The use of Aristotelian-Thomistic philosophy (which is an “insider” in one of the traditions) helps us to more properly understand these concepts. First, it provides us the resources to explain loób as a potentia of the soul, namely the “will”, and then the virtues as qualities of this loób. Second, it allows us to organize the Filipino virtues in rough comparison with the cardinal virtues of the West so that we can note their similarities and differences. This approach is a significant improvement over the previous interpretation of “values” which was philosophically vague. The dialogue with Aristotelian-Thomistic philosophy provides a good starting point from where other philosophical approaches—which we certainly do not discourage—can build upon.

One can identify the goal or telos of this virtue ethics as “oneness” or in Filipino, pagkakaisa. As Enriquez says, “Pagkakaisa is also the highest level of interpersonal interaction possible. It can be said that being one with another is a full realization of pakikipagkapwa” (Enriquez, 1992, p. 64) Such a oneness is not theoretical but practical, played out in daily life from within the most intimate setting of the family, outward towards the kapwa—and then towards the greater body called the bayan (country). One of the ideal manifestations of this pagkakaisa is what happened during the events of the 1986 EDSA Revolution, when millions of Filipino People came together to peacefully overthrow the dictator Marcos.

How is this Filipino virtue ethics relevant for the global ethical conversation? In a world that is becoming increasingly individualist, where people are still looking for ethical options that emphasize human relationships, Filipino virtue ethics presents a unique and interesting viewpoint. And though this viewpoint is one which was fashioned by a specific culture and particular historical and geographical circumstances, there are elements here which can go beyond those confines and speak to what is universally human. Just as Enriquez envisioned
Filipino psychology contributing to a universal psychology (Pe-Pua & Protacio-Marcelino, 2000, p. 50), we also envision Filipino virtue ethics contributing to the wider conversation on ethics.

Notes


[2] Kluckhohn defines value as: “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” (“Values and Value-Orientations in the Theory of Action,” p. 395). Filipino anthropologist F. Landa Jocano called this the “classic and universally accepted definition of value” (Jocano, 1951, p. 17).

[3] According to Bulatao (1973): “The concept of “value” is one of those which, being very primitive and extremely fundamental to human life, are hard to define. Just as with the concept of “time” which, said St. Augustine, we also know but find difficult to analyze, so with the concept of value” (p. 93).


[6] 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, 1988, p. 12).

[7] Manuel Dy uses the phenomenology of Scheler to discuss Philippine values in Values in Philippine Culture and Education (1994). Several phenomenological approaches can also be seen in Filipino Cultural Traits (Gripaldo, 2005).

[8] Dionisio Miranda, despite his many merits as a pioneer, falls into this trap (1992, p. 68). The same goes for Prospero Covar (1998, p. 23). They both use the idea of an “outside” (labas) in opposition to loób.

[9] A related word kaloóban is also translated as “will” or “desire”. Another related word kaloób means “gift.”

[10] Compare my translation with the old Vocabulario de la Lengua Tagala where capoua means “Ambos á dos igualmente” [both two equally] and capoua co tauo means “hombre como yo” [man like me] (De Noceda and de Sanlucar). See also the extensive usage of the word kapwa in Urbana at Feliza, originally published in 1864, where the word is often combined with other words, capuoua tauo (fellow man), capoua bata (fellow child), capoua babaye (fellow woman), capoua escuela (classmate), etc. (De Castro, Pag Susulatan nang Dalauang Binibini na si Urbana at ni Feliza na Nagtuturo ng Mabuting Kaugalian).

Admittedly Filipino scholars are trying to change this, cf. Miranda’s identification of a more cognitive part of loób such as isip and malay (1989, p. 29). But this is a contemporary introduction which has still to be developed.


Jose De Mesa tries to develop this further as an indigenous theology in In Solidarity with the Culture (1987).

Both Kaut (1961) and Holnsteiner (1973) refer to Marcel Mauss in their articles.

“Ang kabuluhan ng ating mga kilos at galaw ay nakaukit sa kultura at hindi nakatalaga sa isang maayos, payak, at nakasulat na paliwanag. Ang saysay at balarila nito ay natututuhan sa walang malay na pagmamasid habang tayo’y lumalaki at hinuhubog ng kultura.” My translation.

This shame or fear that Aquinas talks about is on the part of the agent, and it prevents him from doing a base action. The shame or fear that we are talking about however is on the part of the recipient, who has the base action done unto him.

For a representative collection see Philippine Folk Literature: The Epics (2001) compiled by Damiana Eugenio.

References


