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## THIS ISSUE



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# Φιλοσοφια

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Starting with the January 2007 issue of this journal, references by any article to the logical term *proposition*, except in contextual historical citations, will be replaced by the term *constative*. Please see R. Gripaldo's "Meaning, proposition, and speech acts" in *Issues in contemporary Western philosophy,* Islam-West Philosophical Dialogue (2003). Edited by Ali Naqi Baqershahi and Roya Khoii. Supervised by Seyyed Mohammed Khamenei. Papers read during the World Congress on Mulla Sadra in May 1999. Vol. 6. Tehran: Sadra Islamic Research Institute. Also in 2001. *Φιλοσοφια: International Journal of Philosophy* 30 (1). See his paper, "The rejection of the proposition," read in 2008 during the 22nd World Congress of Philosophy, Seoul.



25 Capitol Homesite Subd., 99 Tandang Sora Ave.
Quezon City 1116, Philippines
E-mail address: drgrips@gmail.com

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# EDITOR'S NOTES

The May issue has six profound articles, a book review, and an interesting review article. We have one entry each for African philosophy, ethics and culture, philosophy of literature, philosophy of *karma*, philosophy of person, and postmodern governance.

Adeshina L. Afolayan in "Resignifying the universal: Critical commentary on postcolonial African identity and development," argues that postcolonial African identity and development can best be understood within the fabric of each particular ethnophilosophical culture. Such an approach avoids the uncritical submersion in the idea of philosophy as a universal enterprise.

In "Contextualizing Charles Taylor's communitarian ethics in Philippine culture," Mark Joseph T. Calano attempts to interpret within the Filipino cultural context Taylor's ethical philosophy. Since the community carries with it the idea of the good life and since the individual self is a socially-embedded self, then this communal self can find realization of the good life that is intelligible to him only within the given culture.

Lok Chong Hoe discusses in "Aristotle on character, women, and natural slaves," the idea of a "characterless tragedy" that tries to show the superiority of plot over character. The author supports the view that character is necessary in a tragic drama but should interpret Aristotle's passage of a tragedy without character to mean that the actors' characters are revealed not in what they say but in what they do. In the process of discussing the element of character, women and natural slaves also come into the picture.

People's lives are governed by the law of *karma*. Inspired by Laura Esquivel's novel, Leni de la Rosa Garcia presents some philosophical reflections on the law of love in the 23rd century where high-end technological gadgets may help in tracking one's spiritual growth. However, Garcia believes in "Of super-evos and non-evos: Imagining karmic law in the 23rd century" that in the long run these gadgets may hamper the true trajectory of the soul's evolution.

In "'Hidden keynote' in Giovanni Pico della Mirandola's understanding of human dignity and freedom," April Capili identifies the idea of creation as the "hidden keynote" in Pico's work *Oration.* Contrary to Jean-Paul Sartre's idea of freedom as the basis of human dignity, Pico's idea of freedom is conditioned and this has implications to his views of the human condition, of self-definition, and of one's moral worth. Pico's notion of creation enables us to understand him in his own terms.

Antonio P. Contreras asserts in "Governance in a postmodern world: Challenges for Philippine science and politics" that the gap between science and politics can be bridged if we abandon the attempt to deploy a homogenizing type of discourse in one language in favor of involvement in "communities of understanding" while remaining in "positions of difference." Through these communities both science and politics can be integrated in establishing a science-based governance in Philippine postmodern society.

Finally we have a book review and a review article. Roland Lorenzo M. Ruben says that he finds Eddie R. Babor's book, *Ethics: The philosophical discipline of action,* as a practical textbook that examines some important ethical questions like "Why must one be good?" "Does it pay to be good?" or "Can there be goodness without God?" Babor discusses the Western and Eastern ethical perspectives, general ethical concerns like values and human acts, and special concerns like human rights and obligations. The book is relatively comprehensive, but brief and substantial.

The term "review article" as used in this journal is not the same as a "literature review." It simply means a review of a book that uses other sources and contains parenthetical references and a reference list (or even notes in some cases). Patrick Filter's work on Siep Stuurman's *François Poullain de la Barre and the invention of modern equality* speaks of a *special* modern trait that has only been recently popular, the equality of gender. It is interesting to consider the premise, beginning from Rene Descartes's dichotomy between mind and matter, that the mind "has no sex."

The editor looks forward to an enjoyable reading by all the readers and hopes they will be provoked into thinking more reflectively and loving philosophy all the more.

Rolando M. Gripaldo

*Executive Governor*
*Philippine National Philosophical Research Society*
*Quezon City*

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# RESIGNIFYING THE UNIVERSAL: CRITICAL COMMENTARY ON POSTCOLONIAL AFRICAN IDENTITY AND DEVELOPMENT

**Adeshina L. Afolayan**
*University of Ibadan*
*Nigeria*

*The dimension of the debate on the relation between the universal and the particular in African philosophy has been skewed in favor of the universalists who argued that the condition for the possibility of an African conception of philosophy cannot be achieved outside the "universal" idea of the philosophical enterprise. In this sense, the ethnophilosophical project and its attempt to rescue the idea of an African past necessary for the reconstruction of an African postcolonial identity and development become futile. A recent commentator even argues that works concerning African identity are now totally irrelevant and misguided. In this essay, I will be arguing, on the contrary, that the universalists' argument, much like its critique of ethnophilosophical reason, mistakes the nature, significance, and necessity of such a "resistance (rather than original) identity" that the ethnophilosophical project promises. I will also argue that the fabrication of such an identity facilitates the avoidance of an uncritical submersion in the universal as well as a proper conception of an African development. This, furthermore, is the only avenue by which the imperialistic ontological space of universal humanism, in which most universalist claims are rooted, can be made more polygonal and mutually beneficial for alternative cultural particulars.*

*L'homme est né libre, et partout il est dans les fer*
(Man is born free but is everywhere in chains).

—Jean-Jacques Rousseau

> The work of the philosopher consists in assembling reminders for a particular purpose.
>
> —Ludwig Wittgenstein

## INTRODUCTION: ON THE UNIVERSAL AND THE PARTICULAR

Philosophers celebrate perennial problems. One such problem is that of universals and their relationship to particular concrete objects. From the specifically metaphysical altercations between the realists and the nominalists, we can abstract certain culturally specific problematics: How does the universal category of, say, the *human* appropriate particular experiences? Or, to use a Heideggerian terminology, what does it mean for human beings *to be*? How are we to theorize on the Africans' "being-in-the-world"? And what role does the African philosophical project play in such theorization?

The African philosophers' confrontation with these problems has been particularly mediated by the need to specify the conditions necessary for the possibility of an African philosophy and development. In other words, given the unique confrontation with Europe that gave rise to the body of literatures we refer to as "African philosophy," African scholars were faced with the problem of identifying certain cores of *African* experiences that will serve as the basis for deriving *philosophy* from a specific cultural environment. They saw the need to differentiate the African philosophical experience from specifically Western philosophical circumstances. And on the basis of this differentiation, to reconstruct an African identity that will serve as the fulcrum for determining a path for development after colonization.

The debate in African philosophy has been ably divided between the universalists and the culturalists (or, in strictly African philosophical terms, between the professional philosophers and the ethnophilosophers).[1] The universalists contend that the only justification for an "African" philosophy is as a particular instantiation of a universal philosophy originating in the West. On the other hand, the culturalists argue that all philosophies are particular phenomena that follow specific cultural evolutionary pathways.

In the controversy concerning the proper methodology of doing this African philosophy and the means of achieving an African identity suitable for the proper conception of an African development, the universalists seem to have won an uneasy victory. I will be arguing that this triumph is actually pyrrhic in the sense that what

they seem to have gained both methodologically and substantively is at the of misunderstanding the issue of an African postcolonial identity. Specifically, my argument is that it is only an uncritical adoption of universalism in the shape of the human that will warrant such an inadequate critique of the ethnophilosophical project at the heart of the culturalists' contention. The strategy I will adopt is to examine a recent universalist claim that maligns the necessity of an African identitarian project as a veritable path towards a beneficial conception of African development.

The universalist position is ably represented by Paulin Hountondji, Kwasi Wiredu, and Kwame Anthony Appiah. According to Hountondji (1983, 33), "By 'African philosophy' I mean a set of texts, specifically the set of texts written by Africans themselves and described as philosophical by their authors themselves." This characterization stems from his contention that philosophy itself is a theoretical discipline—like physics, mathematics and linguistics—with a methodological orientation and some set of substantive issues with which practitioners are preoccupied. Philosophy, for Hountondji, begins when the discipline discursively starts to confront its own problematics. On this tradition of discursiveness, he (1983, 72, 83) further writes:

> ...philosophy never stops; its very existence lies in the to and fro of free discussion, without which there is no philosophy. It is not a closed system but a history, a debate that goes on from generation to generation, in which every thinker, every author, engages in total responsibility: I know I am responsible for what I say, for the theories I put forward....A philosophical...work...is intelligible only as a moment in a debate that sustains and transcends it. It always refers to antecedent positions, either to refute them or to confirm and enrich them. It takes on meaning only in relation to that history, in relation to the term of an ever-changing debate in which the sole stable element is the constant reference to one self-same object, to one sphere of experience, the characterization of which, incidentally, is itself part of the evolution.

Given this explanation, authentic philosophical cogitations become textual, while orature (fables, dynastic poems, epics, proverbs, myths, and so on) pales as only a *pre-text* of the tradition of discursivity peculiar to a universal philosophy. Hountondji's absolutism about the theoretical circumference of autonomous philosophy therefore excludes the ethnophilosophers' conception of philosophy as primarily a cultural field preoccupied with the analysis

of oral literature and other items of the preliterate culture. The theoretical move, by ethnologists, social scientists, and cultural anthropologists, from a descriptive analysis of human cultural ideas and institutions to the attempt to study "...*beliefs* and *values* and draws conclusions about the *mode of thought* that are imputed to their formulation and observance..." (Hallen 2002, 215) is, for Hountondji, an unjustifiable ethnophilosophical strategy.

Wiredu's universalist argument is also very simple. For him, the theoretical and critical nature of philosophy cannot afford the ethnophilosophical view of it as an uncritical *communal* undertaking. The adequacy of any philosophy has nothing to do with its origination but rather with its discursitivity: its ability to "generate theories that can illuminate the problems of the day" and thus provide "the context of ideas within which particular choices and preferences in the realm of action—whether economic, political, cultural, or scientific—can be made" (Oladipo 1996, 17).

In this sense, philosophy has a cogent relationship with science or rather with the habits of mind characteristic of science: "habits of exactness and rigour in thinking, the pursuit of systematic coherence and the experimental approach" (Wiredu 1980, 32). Although he is specifically clear on the culture-relativity of philosophy, he is insistent that philosophy can be universal (see Wiredu 1996). Such a universal philosophy, for instance, would be aided by what Wiredu (1993, 461) calls "the fundamental biological unity of the human species." This derives from the fact that "there is a *human* way of developing in which instinctual drives are in due course transformed into structured thought, discourse, and action." The basic essentials of this process proceed "in similar ways among all human beings."

Hountondji's and Wiredu's universalisms are marshaled against the culturalists' position summed up in Hountondji's pejorative term: Ethnophilosophy. The ethnophilosophical reason is represented fundamentally by what Hountondji sees as an attempt to postulate *unanimity* in philosophical beliefs among Africans, and hence to uncritically initiate a confrontation with the African traditional past. On this understanding, "critics of ethnophilosophy [therefore] argue that a focus on the past detracts from a critical posture that evaluates all practices in terms of what they contribute to the liberation of Africa...for African philosophy need not express a particular outlook for Africans" (see Lott and Pittman 2003, 153).

In "Humanistic cultural universalism," Oyeshile (2007, 43-44) provides a critical elaboration of this critique of ethnophilosophical reason, and particularly an argument for a cultural universalism that can motivate Africa's search for a paradigm of an authentic postcolonial development. Though not really directed at the

ethnophilosophical project in a way that Hountondji's and Wiredu's critiques were, his critical analysis also negates ethnophilosophy and especially its search for an African postcolonial identity. His basic argument in the essay is that "African development should only be sought in universalist terms which should involve certain humanistic values." For this reason, therefore, "most works concerning African identity are now irrelevant, and if they are not, they are misguided." The urgent task in Africa and of the African scholars is, in this regard, "human development in all its ramifications and not the assertion of the African personality (identity) which was more relevant at a particular period in our history."

Oyeshile's two claims are that (a) a humanistic cultural universalism provides a veritable starting point for launching the project of an African development; and (b) this universalism *excludes* a search for a cultural identity from the vantage point of the African. In his own admission, Oyeshile's argument draws largely from Appiah's universalist conception of African philosophy and his critique of African cultural nationalism (read: ethnophilosophy). Appiah's universalism is based on the contention that cultural nationalism in its pan-African guise is really a racial construct created by Europe as a subjugating strategy. As such, it assumes a cultural or racial unity of the African and African diasporic people. However, according to Appiah, since the biological and cultural arguments for races failed to establish their existence, then Pan Africanism fails also for that reason. Its vision of a completely different or a completely homogeneous Africa in dialectical opposition to the West is also false.

This is the fulcrum of Appiah's thesis. If it is correct, for him (1992, 26, 180) as well as for Hountondji, to argue that Africa really does not have a common traditional culture, a common language, a common religion, or even does not belong to a common race, then a case can be made for the alignment of Africa to the universe of humanity. The first part of this case is that Africa, apart from being a geographical entity accommodating diverse peoples and cultures, "shares too many problems and projects to be distracted by a bogus basis for solidarity." These problems include those that every modernizing region is facing in a rapidly globalizing world: common ecological problems; a situation of dependency; the problem of racism; the possibilities of the development of regional markets and local circuits of production; and so on. Thus, since we as Africans are now confronted with a new *self*—more individualistic and atomic than the self of the precapitalist societies—then its inescapability becomes something to celebrate. Within this modern society therefore, what exists is not the cult of difference or race but rather the solidarity of humanity.

The second part of the case is that Appiah, like every other universalists, also deploys arguments for an autonomous philosophy with a substantive concern for certain fundamental problems. These problems—causation, good and evil, mind-body, justice, illusion, reason, reality, truth, etc.—may really appear Western but are actually universal in scope. While these problems may be seen as constituting the core of the Western philosophical tradition, Appiah (1992, 86) contends that they can as well be seen "as growing out of a history of systematic reflection on widespread, prereflective beliefs about the nature of humankind, about the purposes, and about our knowledge of and place in the cosmos." Something therefore counts as philosophy if it confronts these issues critically with the required "traditional philosophical method." (We therefore arrive at the logic of Hountondji's definition of African philosophy.) For Appiah, it would be extremely difficult to conceive of a *human* culture where nothing like these fundamental issues is present or that does not have "*any* crucial organizing concepts."

Essentially therefore, for Appiah (1992, 136, 155):

> We [Africans] will solve our problems if we see them as human problems arising out of a special situation, and we shall not solve them if we see them as African problems, generated by our being somehow unlike others... If there is a lesson in the broad shape of this circulation of cultures, it is surely that we are all already contaminated by each other, that there is no longer fully autochthonous *echt*-African culture awaiting salvage by our artists (just as there is, of course, no American culture without African roots).

Africans must, in other words, jettison the illusion of a unique African identity in a global world that is not only interdependent but also rapidly integrating. Furthermore, the project of an African development becomes realizable within this humanistic universalism that ensures cultural interrelationship rather than insularity.

It seems quite obvious how Oyeshile (2007, 48-49) could arrive at his argument of a humanistic universalism unburdened by the unnecessary encumbrances of cultural nationalism and its illusion of identity. Following Appiah, the two horns of his contention become clearer. On the one hand, the issue of African identity was relevant "as a rallying point for a people who wanted to have a belief in themselves, a people who wanted to be capable of determining their own destiny in the face of motley values." On the other hand, such a reason no longer applies because "the identity issue does not address the urgent problems confronting Africa. It lays more than

enough stress on the African personality rather than on the compelling problems of scientific development, hunger, religious emancipation, and political anarchy."

In a straightforward reflection of the overt optimism of Appiah's universalism, Oyeshile (2007, 57-58) also remarks that

> Of course, it is a truism that Africa is currently enmeshed in political and economic problems. Solutions to these problems would go a long way to engender development. However, the problems can only be solved if we as Africans see ourselves as an integral part of the world order. It is then that political rights and other political values will be respected by African political leaders. It is also then that the goal of economic emancipation can be pursued vigorously.

What I have done in this section of the essay is to lay down the case for universalism and the impossibility of an unnecessarily provincial burden of identity within its imperative. The most common denominator among the universalists is their trenchant critique of the (African) identity issue. This is followed, especially in Appiah and Oyeshile, by a simplistic, one-dimensional optimism in the efficacy of humanistic values and concern as the ultimate panacea for the resolution of human problems. Though Oyeshile does not seriously consider metaphilosophical issues in his critique, philosophy plays a pivotal role in the construal of their humanism. In the next section, I will critically examine how a supposedly universal construal of philosophy led to a "universal" humanism whose ethnocentric bent constricts the ontological space. It will be clear from this that most conceptions of the universal use it as a conceptual forum for a particular identity manifestation.

## PHILOSOPHY AND THE SHAPE OF THE HUMAN

The philosophical enterprise, as we noted above, is crucial to the universalists' conception of a viable universal humanism. It is equally significant for the specification of the conditions for an African philosophical project oriented towards a postcolonial African identity and development. The universalists divorce an authentic philosophical discourse from a purely provincial need. For them, philosophy must be autonomous of all identity issues since it promises a virile humanistic universalism. After all, philosophy, according to the argument, is the ultimate *human* achievement!

How does this idea of autonomous philosophy contribute to our formulation of the utility of African identity *contra* the

universalist's contention? As I will be showing, a critical interrogation of these concepts (i.e., the human, the philosophical) will lead to the *particularist* concepts, theories, canons, and identities which have been denied to individual cultures in the putative necessity of universal humanism.[2]

The foundation of modern philosophy is supposedly derived from Descartes's unique confrontation with the perennial problems of philosophy. Basically, the Cartesian *Weltanschauung* differentiates between the human and the animal domain and on this basis claims that the mental is different from the physical. In short, it demanded the predominance of epistemology in modern philosophy. Thus, from the presumption that philosophy is a uniquely human phenomenon, Cartesians postulate the absolute autonomy of philosophy. They presuppose that there is a distinct set of philosophical problems independent of culture, society, and history. For them, philosophy stands outside the various conventions on which people base their social practices and transcends the cultural heritage and political struggles of people (see West 2003, 8).

On this account, Hountondji, Wiredu, Appiah, and Oyeshile would be Cartesians. The point is not really a strange one given the scientific positivism consequent upon such a view of philosophy. It is in the Cartesian philosophical framework, that is, that we witness the unique coincidence of *epistemé* and *scientia*.

Yet, Descartes, a 17th century French philosopher, scientist and mathematician, was only responding to specific historical circumstances in relation to the medieval period; for example, the rise of science and the advent of the capitalist production. Cornel West explores the metaphilosophical insights in Heidegger's, Wittgenstein's and Dewey's metaphilosophical arguments against the ahistorical character of Cartesian autonomous philosophy. Through his critique of the historical hermeneutics of Heidegger, the cultural descriptions of Wittgenstein and the pragmatic orientation of Dewey, he (2003, 11) arrives at a definition of Afro-American philosophy as "...the interpretation of Afro-American history, highlighting the cultural heritage and political struggles, which provides desirable norms that should regulate responses to particular challenges presently confronting Afro-Americans."

It is a wonder that in spite of this particularist definition West goes on to explicate a humanistic view that can guide an understanding of Afro-American culture and politics. I will argue later why his humanism is more robust and critical than that of Oyeshile and the others. But for now, we need to interrogate what made the Cartesian conception of autonomous philosophy a unique ontological strategy for invading the space of the universal *anthropos*. I suspect that an

attempt to answer a similar question would have given Oyeshile and the universalist movement a critical outlook on "the universal."

In his discussion of the utility of social memory—of preservation, selection, elimination, and invention—in the process of identity formation, Mazrui (2000, 92) gives us an opening into the analysis of the Western appropriation of the ontological space of the *human*. This began with the arbitrary incorporation of ancient Greece into the ancestral lineage of Euro-American cultural heritage. This, for Mazrui, is a blatant case of false memory—inscribing into one's past what is originally not a part of it—as well as that of macro-plagiarism, "a massive borrowing by one civilization from another in a manner which deliberately obscures origins and denies acknowledgement and attribution."

Since philosophy as the ultimate rational enterprise is putatively the discovery of the Greeks, the archetypal *humans* (from whom Hegel's absolute spirit began its nonhistorical march towards substantive objectivity and "essential universality" culminating in Euro-American cultures), the Cartesian autonomous philosophy is thereby complemented by an ahistorical conception of humanism as "something essential, above and beyond the accidents of historical or national difference"[3] (Davies 1997, 19).

The history of the signification of the "human" is certainly one that bears out what a commentator has described as the Humpty Dumbtean conclusion that the meaning of humanism belongs to politics rather than to semantics. Politics speaks to the issue of which, among all the available meanings, it wants to be the master. According to Davies (1997, 6):

> For the meanings of a powerful and complex word are never a matter for lexicography alone. They are tied inescapably to the linguistic and cultural authority, real, absent or desired, of those who use it. The important question, over and above what the word *means* in a particular context, is why and how that meaning *matters*, and for whom.

A panoramic view of all perspectives on the concept—civic humanism, Protestant humanism, rationalistic humanism, romantic humanism, positivistic humanism, liberal humanism, Nazi humanism, Heidegger's antihumanist humanism, and the humanist antihumanism of Foucault and Althusser—reveals that these perspectives have been imperial, "they speak of the human in the accents and interests of a class, a sex, a 'race'. Their embrace suffocates those whom it does not ignore" (Davies 1997, 131).

This exclusionary as well as smothering element is what Symonds traced from the discovery of romantic humanism to the dawn of modernity in Europe. For him (1898, 2, 52),

> The essence of humanism consisted in a new and vital perception of the dignity of man as a rational being apart from theological determinations, and in the further perception that classic literature alone displayed human nature in the plenitude of intellectual and moral freedom...The study of Greek opened up philosophical horizons far beyond the dream-world of the churchmen and the monks; it stimulated the germs of science, suggested new astronomical hypotheses, and indirectly led to the discovery of America...

We seem to have, on Symonds's testimonies, imperial colonization flowing from a romantic conception of the human! We therefore arrive at the triumph of the Arnoldian "central, truly human point of view": essential, above and beyond historical or national differences.

We must wonder, as Davies does and most of the universalists do not, about the accent placed on "*central*," "*truly* human," and "*human*." The implication seems to be that every appeal to an abstract and essential humanism is an appropriation of, at worst, a suffocating and, at best, a discompassing perspective that perpetuates the domination of those who are perceived to be inauthentically human. Thus,

> Each of us lives our human-ness as a uniquely individual experience; but that experience, we are asked to feel, is part of a larger, all-embracing humanity, a "human condition," to which *the great poets of the European tradition, Homer and Dante and Chaucer and Shakespeare and Milton and Goethe, can give us the key.* (Davies 1997, 21-22; emphasis added)

However, given this protean adaptability of the term, it would only be logical to explore its nebulous boundaries and depths from a particular human perspective. Oyeshile, and I suspect others, too, does not show enough analytical caution in asking about the specific historical and local interests that may be at work within such a grand concept. This is necessary because universalism is meant to dissolve such particularities like race, sex, class, culture from which most people experience human-ness. According to Davies (1997, 25), "humanism" is an anachronism that is still deeply embedded in

contemporary consciousness and everyday common sense to the extent that it requires a conscious effort, every time someone appeals to "human nature" or "the human condition," to recall how recent such notions are; and how specific to a particular history and point of view, and how very odd it would seem, in cultures historically or ethnologically unlike our own, to separate out and privilege "Man" in this way.

This cultural appropriation of the *anthropos* is followed by a denial of an African influence not only on the Greek cultural heritage, but on world history as a whole. In other words, there is an ontological attempt to efface black, African identity from the template of a supposed universal culture. Gordon theorizes this as the ontological attempt at the phenomenological invisibility or disappearance of Africans and Afro-Americans. The existential-phenomenological approach of Gordon (1995a and 1995b) theorizes the interactive dynamics of the ontologies of white and black ego-genesis and the resultant "imperial battles for ontological space" (as a space of self-positing and its realization). These battles are imperial because Euro-Americans have defined the ontological space of white ego-genesis in such a way that makes it possible to evade the humanity of Africans (Henry 2003, 52).

In his account of bad faith, Gordon (1995b, 24) argues that since human beings generally deal inauthentically with the specific—political, economic, racial or, for Gordon and Sartre, ontological—hindrances between self-positing and self-realization, it implies that the self's project of being always falls short of its projected ideal. However, in bad faith, we pretend to a greater degree of self-integration than our ego has in fact achieved. This pretense must however be concealed through certain evasive or compensatory existential activity of exploitation. For the white, this manifests through an acute racial stereotyping, a "projective non-seeing" that performs "the phenomenological disappearance" of black humanity. This constitutive act of absence, invisibility, displacement, and anonymity is

> ...fundamentally phenomenological, that is an absence that is constituted as a meaning in the white consciousness. This spell of phenomenological invisibility is an important contribution of the European and Euro-American philosophical consciousness to the larger encompassing cloud of non-seeing conjured by European imperialism to veil the humanity of Africans. (Gordon 1995b, 24)

The result is that the formation of the white ego is simultaneously the deformation of the black ego. Paradoxically,

however, in denying "the forces of civilizational origins" and in the effacement of African humanity, it becomes quite obvious that the Euro-American cultural establishment unwittingly undermines its quest for the universal (cf. Mazrui 2000, 96).

Thus, if a people's humanity is seriously interrogated as the Africans' was in colonialism, then why should it not be logical to question the putative universal humanism? That is, if they have been ontologically effaced from the *anthropos*, what possible means could they have of participating in it? It must therefore become obvious why it is really awkward to claim, as Oyeshile does, that the issue of self-identity of the Africans was only useful at a point in their cultural development. On the contrary, a culture's dynamic relation with others is, *inter alia*, a constant reevaluation of its identity and esteem, "the act of self-definition forever remains open-ended, with no guarantee of triumph. Indeed, the process takes precedent over the result, since any static self-identity soon disintegrates the self" (West 2003, 25). And since the ontologically invisible Africans would always experience Europe and America as the questioning of their very existence, Oyeshile would definitely be wrong to claim that any attempt to reclaim that identity is irrelevant or misguided.

It becomes unimaginative to formulate the counter-thesis that it is the problem of identity rather than that of development that is primary to Africans. Without the former, the latter is meaningless. What then makes this reclamation possible?

## AFRICAN EXPERIENCE AND THE CONSTITUTION OF MODERNITY

Friedrich Nietzsche (see Davies 1997, 32-33; emphasis added), the ancestor for many dimensions of antihumanism, has argued, in *Human all too human*, that:

> All philosophers involuntarily think of "man" as an *aeterna veritas*, as something that remains constant in the midst of all flux, as a sure measure of things...*Lack of historical sense is the family failing of all philosophers*; many, without being aware of it, even take the most recent manifestation of man, such as has risen under the impress of certain religions, even certain political events, as the fixed form from which one has to start out...

What does a "historical sense" require in the attempt to ensure the phenomenological visibility of the Africans in the ontological struggles for relevance? Gordon argues that the question of existence is, in itself, an empty one; it is always a conjunctive affair. In other

words, the question must always be situated in the existential realities of theorizing blackness and the African. According to him (2003, 34):

> At the heart of existential thought are two questions; "What are we"? and "What shall we do?" These questions can be translated into questions of identity and normative action. They are questions, further, of ontological and teleological significance, for the former addresses being and the latter addresses what to become—in a word, "purpose."

Since the elements of African cultural identity have been undergoing significant changes in response to their confrontation with European imperialism and American racism, it would seem necessary to reformulate a new context for the confrontation with the questions of identity and normative action. I suspect that Oyeshile and most of the universalists mistook the need for such a "resistance identity" for the attempt to glorify a "*mystique* of pure coherence" that is usually associated with the ethnophilosophers' perception of the traditional African past.

In constructing such a resistance identity, some kind of reinvention would serve the Africans well. Many African scholars, including Appiah, see the need for such an *imagined* locus of solidarity. Like Appiah, Mazrui (2000, 92) argues that "Real Pan-Africanism must go beyond the twin stimuli of poetry and imperialism. Pan-Africanism is based on a positive false memory—that Africa was divided by colonialism and was previously one." This project of reclamation radically confronts the necessity of an ethnophilosophical examination of the African cultural past beyond any romantic idealization. Henry (2003, 56) gives two reasons for the necessity of a phenomenological analysis of African traditional heritage.

One, through a Shutzian (reference to Alfred Shutz, the phenomenologist) proprietary relationship, African philosophers have a significant tie with these cultural constructs as invaluable properties in a way such that "expectation, (particularly of continuity), obligations and constraints are imposed upon us. This legacy is our responsibility in ways that cannot be for non-African groups." We are therefore saddled with the responsibility of preserving and developing "this heritage by examining it ethnophilosophically, by reflecting on it in [our] own lived experience, or collectively with contemporaries and consociates." Two, Henry further contends that this proprietary relation with the symbols and discourses of traditional Africa is extended to a unique ego-genetic relation with the predecessors in such a way that the

relations "establish certain common cultural or mythopoetic elements in the formation of African, African-American, and African-Caribbean egos."[4] This formative role of the cultural elements will constitute them as common elements that will facilitate the self-reflection of African/a philosophers on their own ego-genetic processes, and on the cultural identity of an African/a philosophy.

After immersing ourselves in historical thinking, a point of Nietzschean modesty is in order. This is because Nietzsche holds that the "virtue of modesty" is allied to the necessity of historical philosophizing. This takes many dimensions. The first is that after the ontological determination of the self-identity of Africans and African philosophy, African philosophers must go on to confront the socio-existential dimension of the African predicament that bears directly on the problems of African development. This is generally the problem of how African cultures can be *modern*. This, after all, is the basis for the universalism of Appiah, Hountondji, Wiredu, and lately, Oyeshile.

However, as the preceding arguments have revealed, modernity is originally and incredibly constituted as a Western—Euro-American—phenomenon together with its exclusionary ontology. West (2003, 13) rightly defines modernity as

> the descriptive notion that connotes the historical state of affairs characterized by an abundance of wealth resulting from the industrial and technological revolution and the ensuing cultural isolation and fragmentation due to a disintegration of closely-knit communities and the decline of religious systems.

The question of how Africa can become modern is only meaningful from the background of the rescue of African cultural visibility from the anonymity of Euro-American philosophical and cultural imperialism and humanism. A regained cultural distinctiveness provides a strong arsenal for meeting a modernity defined by science and technology. In other words, since the scientism of Euro-American modernity requires the "phenomenological disappearance" of myth, tradition, religion, and other supposedly extra-scientific discourses, and since these "extras" are crucial for the authentic formation of an African postcolonial identity or ego, then a dialectical relationship between the two will be significant for the constitution of an African modernity as an important dimension of the modernity project itself.

Africa's relationship with Euro-American modernity constitutes an ambivalent challenge: that of participating in its achievement without simultaneously surrendering to its ethnocentric underpinnings. Here, we achieve our second point of Nietzschean modesty through

Benhabib. In "Cultural complexity," she also confronts the question of ethnocentric discourse and global imperative: "Whence does the moral imperative to treat others with universal respect and according to egalitarian reciprocity derive?" She (1995, 252-53) replies:

> I think the only honest and sensible response...is that indeed these norms only make sense against the background of the hermeneutic horizon of modernity; but also to point out that modernity, although the most significant elements constituting it were first assembled in the West, is a worldwide process and phenomenon. From its very inception, the dynamic of modernity has set world-historical forces into motion which have in turn transformed it into a common human project, and not just a Western one. Once the ideas of universal equality, liberty, and brotherhood—and eventually sisterhood—were formulated through the political revolutions of modernity, there no longer was a historical option of going back to premodern conceptions.

Even in this context of a world-historical modernity, an African dimension of such a modernity—the challenge of nation-building, of evolving viable and appropriate democratic institutions; the problems of inculcating a political morality and eradicating rampant political corruption; the problems of traditional moral standards disintegrating vis-à-vis urbanization; and even the problems of AIDS and globalization—requires, still following Benhabib's concession (1995, 238), "the continuing identity of a society and culture" which is based upon "its capacity to deal with outside challenges and contingencies while also retaining the belief of its member in its normative systems and value structures."

We next turn to the implications of these ruminations for the constitution of a universal humanism not partial to one imperial perspective.

## IMPERATIVE OF RESIGNIFICATION

The fundamental argument I have been developing hitherto is that Oyeshile's humanist universalism is not only myopic about the formation, significance, and necessity of a postcolonial African identity that is resistant rather than a glorification of a mystique, his theoretical framework betrays a naïve understanding of the complex amalgam of issues that accompany the imperial conception of such universalism. In other words, he fails to analyze critically the concept of the universal in its particularity and ideality; for example, the paradox that *humanity is one and many*.

We cannot argue that since the supposed "human," the Cartesian subject, is really invented in the image of Euro-America—that is, this subject "is not a woman, not black, not a migrant, not marginal, etc."—then we should abandon the concept or its general rhetoric as "a hopelessly contaminated concept, to be thrown out with the bathwater of humanist delusion" (Davies 1997, 59). This, I suspect, would be the fundamental objection of the universalists. But I maintain that an awareness of this delusion strengthens the concept and guides one against any uncritical humanistic optimism, nothwithstanding Oyeshile and others. It is the humanist delusions, that is, that necessitates the imperative of resignification.

The first point in that project is to note that before the conscription of a humanist universalism to the processes of imperial power, conquest, and empire fed by the desire for the "*discovery* of the future," the early humanists—before "humanism"—were orientated on the excitement surrounding the "*recovery* of the past." This implicitly identitarian orientation was broadened by their peripatetic desires. I suppose that such nomadic contact beyond their own provincialities enlarged their humanistic sensibilities and sensitivities beyond the desire to dominate. Their physical and intellectual peregrination led to the development of inter-generational and inter-racial collaboration around the theme of friendship unmarred by ideological perceptions. Put in other words, just like Machiavelli who, through the pages of the recovered ancients' manuscripts, felt their generosity and kindness (*humanità*) in responding to his modern probing, the early humanists too were generous in their accommodation of those who do not share their peculiarities and cultural milieu—as long as they were humans. And this is in spite of being partial to their own linguistic idioms (see Davies 1997, 78-79).

In the early humanists, we have the form of an encompassing humanist universalism that is multivocal; a coherent vision of the human from its multidimensionality or concrete plurality rather than in a hollowed, ethnocentric singularity.[5] This leads to the second point in the project of resignification. Once again, let us return to Benhabib's struggle with "the problem of universalism and concrete ethical communities" or what she calls "the problem of the concrete universal." The concept of concrete universality has to do with the problem of *situating* or *concretizing* the universal. This concept, for her (2007, 23), recognizes the distinction between the "two visions of universalism": "one which considers the other as a generalized other, as a being entitled to the same rights and duties which we would grant ourselves, and the other which sees the human person as a 'concrete other' with specific histories, needs, and trajectories."[6]

Contrary to the essentialism of an imperial humanism, Benhabib (2007, 34) argues that

> my anti-essentialism is simply introducing this moment of narrative articulation [in the sense of an "account giving"] into the concept of culture and seeing how members of cultures identify themselves as members in creating narratives of belonging. These narratives of belonging, of history, of memory, always have references to other narratives, to other moments of identification. I'm interested in the interaction between the self and other, the "we" and the "they." And I think this is a universal aspect of all human communities. We are different from those over there, on the other side, insofar as we narratively identify ourselves with a group.

Such an anti-essentialist reading of culture and the universal is similar to West's idea of a humanist tradition of African-American thought and behavior. His basic argument (2003, 13) is that culture is more fundamental than politics in regard to Afro-American self-understanding, "it presupposes that Afro-American cultural perceptions provide a broader and richer framework for understanding the Afro-American experience than political perceptions." However, out of all the traditions that provide an explanatory matrix—the vitalist, the rationalist, the existentialist, and the humanist traditions—West favors the humanist conception of Afro-American history because it neither romanticizes nor reject Afro-American culture (as the vitalist and the rationalist traditions did). Rather, a humanist understanding

> accepts this culture for what it is, the expression of an oppressed human community imposing its distinctive form of order on an existential chaos, explaining its political predicament, preserving its self-respect, and projecting its own special hope for the future...the humanist tradition provides a cultural springboard useful in facing the ever-present issue of self-identity for Afro-Americans and join their political struggle to other progressive elements in American society. (West 2003, 24, 27)

## CONCLUSION

It seems that Benhabib's and West's portrayal of a humanistic universalism gives more hope for a culture's advancement than Oyeshile's. This is because it becomes a concept that allows one to gaze into one's humanity from the perspective of a cultural past. It has the fundamental task of enlarging the ontological and political spaces of existence for the self-definition and self-determination

of all particular cultures. It is exactly this significant cultural moorings that Oyeshile denies as being unnecessary for the understanding of African development. Without such a root or self-image, however, Africa's gaze into a developmental future would always be with perplexed eyes.

## NOTES

1. This characterization is really simplistic, but it mirrors the most important schism between the universalists and the particularists. This basic, unsophisticated distinction has been elaborated into four methodological approaches: the ethnophilosophical (or descriptive) school, the sagacious (or sage-ethnological) school, the nationalist (or nationalist-ideological-political) school, and the professional (or linguistic-analytic) school. In recent times, however, there had been other methodological schools: the hermeneutical (or phenomenological) approach, the narrative approach (or the narrative-hermeneutic approach), literary/artistic approach, and so on.

2. In formulating this strategy, I have simply appropriated Fashina's argument (1994, 901) against Appiah's critique of nativism. The argument reads thus:

> But I think Appiah dismisses the [cultural] nationalists too easily. What are we to say about a cultural nationalist who studies the concepts and theories of other cultures seriously not because she mistakes them for universals but because she believes that this would lead to the "particularist" concepts, theories, and canons which she asserts of her own cultural productions?

3. I owe my critical approach to Davies's historical excursion into the signification of the concept of humanism.

4. Henry makes use of Shutz in methodologically constructing ways of relating to the ego-activities of traditional African predecessors whose lived experiences do not overlap with ours. Shutz argues that we can reach the world of the predecessors through records, documents, artifacts, and other expressions of their subjectivity left behind; or through a living person who may have had a contact with them. Though this relation lacks the reciprocity of face-to-face contact, one can achieve such reciprocity through what Shutz calls the bequeathing of property (as cultural heritages) in which the predecessors continue to influence our lives.

5. Such a conception of a singular "Hu-*man*-ism" can be traced to a huge editorial and interpretive mistake around the quotation:

"What a piece of work is man." This can be referred to as the most distinguished of humanist mottos. Yet, this quotation appeared in Shakespeare's *Hamlet* (II, ii) as: "What a piece of work is *a* man!" The omission of the indefinite "a" shifts the burden of interpretation from plurality to singularity, a "generic inclusiveness of the human" limited by an ethnocentric *folie de grandeur*.

6. Seyla Benhabib, "Concrete universality and critical theory." An interview with Alfredo Gomez-Muller and Gabriel Rockhill on 16 June 2006. Interestingly, this interview appeared in the same volume of *Concordia* (2007) that featured Oyeshile's universalist rejection of African identity.

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# CONTEXTUALIZING CHARLES TAYLOR'S COMMUNITARIAN ETHICS IN PHILIPPINE CULTURE[1]

**Mark Joseph T. Calano**
*Ateneo de Manila University*
*Quezon City*

*Culture is a potent source of ethical theory. This is evident in the realization of one's socially-embedded self. One's communal self is always already in an ethical attempt to live a good life. The social beliefs and practices of communities carry with it their conceptions of the good, which in turn are made practical in one's never-ending negotiation about one's identity. The dialectics between the self and the community demands a more contextualized understanding of this struggle in an attempt to capture the good life in terms that are intelligible to us.*

Society is our experience of other people around us. This experience is practically with us from the moment we are born. It serves as the context of everything else we experience, including our experience of the natural world, and of ourselves...whether we are, still, children, or have grown up to be alleged adults, an overwhelming proportion of our thoughts, anxieties, hopes and projects revolve around other people, be they individuals or groups... Society is a lifelong experience, and it is also one of our most fundamental experiences; and it is these things long before we start reflecting about it in any deliberate way.

—Peter and Brigitte Berger, 1981
*Sociology: A biographical approach*

## INTRODUCTION

The human person is social, and co-existence takes many different forms. The term "co-existence" suggests that human

existence is *socius* existence. The *socius* is the group or person I encounter through my social function. The *socius* may be a faculty in the university, a sister in the convent, a nurse in the hospital, or a guard who checks my bag in a shopping mall. My relationship with them is primarily functional; and the role we play is important. The *socius* refers to my indirect relationship with others in the context of institutions and structures (Dy 1994). It summarizes my functional relationship with a concrete, particular, and historical society.

But, the human person is not only a *socius*. She is also communal. The communal is the meaningful way I encounter another as a person. This expresses the need to relate to others not merely as functions, but as persons. The relationship is more person-centered than role-centered. The communal indicates the presence of communities. In our society, the communal relationship "passes through the relationships of the *socius*, works out in the fringes of the *socius*, and rises against the *socius*" (Ricoeur 1965, 105-106). There appears to be a reciprocal relationship between the *socius* and the communal. And, it is from this mode of affiliation that communitarianism grounds itself.

Communitarianism is an emerging philosophy despite the emphasis in communal relationships in the Greek City states. The term is a contemporary invention. It proposes community values as a structure for an ethical system. Its purpose is to bring the welfare of the community into an ethical discourse by promoting communal values. Communitarians, like Alasdair MacIntyre, Roberto Unger, and Charles Taylor, think that a social conception of human life gives rise to a distinctive set of values, such as common good, social practices, shared meanings, and public spiritedness. They aim to locate the emergence of *Sittlichkeit* or ethical life by interpreting traditions, community values, and the meanings we share.

My paper aims to situate the emergence of Filipino ethical life in the Filipino social values and practices. It begins with an exposition of Charles Taylor's Communitarian Ethics and ends with a contextualization of such in the Philippine setting. Thus, this paper is an ethical analysis of Filipino social practices and the emergence of Filipino ethical life.

## SOCIALLY-EMBEDDED SELF

Human life is intrinsically social; it is communal in everything. By "everything," I mean all aspects of human existence where we can develop ourselves. If I speak of the "discovery" of the subject, then the name of "discoverer" is due to René Descartes. His "I

think, therefore I am" (1993, 65) has been the first impulse to subjectivism. "But, if we free ourselves from the hold of this prejudice, [subjectivism] seems a wildly implausible view about the development of human consciousness; we are aware of the world through a 'we' before we are [aware of it] through an 'I'" (Taylor 1985b, 40). Gabriel Marcel, reacting on Descartes, does not confront us with the "thinking," but with the "I" and "you" who think. For him (1960, 8), "I have no right to treat myself as prior to, or more indisputably real than others; I only exist within a certain fullness of experience, which is not private, but trans-subjective." Self-consciousness is in itself social. "One cannot be a self on one's own. I am a self only in relation to certain interlocutors...A self only exists within what I call 'webs of interlocution'" (Taylor 1989, 36). Thus, this situates our selves in a perpetual discourse with another.

In the Filipino understanding, a person begins to have a *kapwa* not so much because of a recognition given him by others but more so because of his awareness of shared identity. The *ako* and the *iba-sa-akin* are one and the same in this philosophy. Thus, I am no different from others. Once the *ako* starts thinking of herself as different from her *kapwa*, she, in effect, denies being a *kapwa* to another. It is within this discourse that *kapwa* realizes that she needs to continuously interpret herself in the midst of her social relations.

Self-identity, then, is negotiated within an orderly field of meaning. But that this orderly field of meaning is at our disposal only through our relationship with others in a society, and within a culture. "The range of human desires, feelings, emotions, and, hence, meanings is bound up with the level and type of culture, which in turn is inseparable from the distinctions and categories marked by the language people speak" (Taylor 1985b, 25). Meaning is possible only *via* shared lived practices. Thus, self-interpretation is culture dependent, and this is true in the areas of thinking, feeling, working, playing, and praying.

We live in communities, and live our lives within the context of shared beliefs and practices, participate in institutions, and abide by common laws. The *fiesta*, for instance, expresses the Filipino communal nature. We do not go to a *fiesta* simply for the food, but for the sake of being together. In many occasions, like the *fiesta*, we rise above utilitarian considerations and parsimony in order to be with others. Communal life, therefore, is "guided by habitual patterns of support and deference, traditional prohibitions and obligations, and a fund of stories that model acceptable conduct" (Dally 1994, 243). This locally generated and particular normative system is the core of communitarian ethics. Our ethical life is a narrative set in a particular cultural group and scripted by a tradition.

## CHARLES TAYLOR'S COMMUNITARIAN ETHICS

"All moral reasoning is carried on within a community" (Taylor 1985b, 232). The community is the first ethical system. Taylor (1986, 53) argues that "every moral system has a conception of what we might call human dignity...of the quality of which, in man, compels us to treat [her/him] with respect, or...a conception which defines what it is to have respect for human being." He does not argue for moral relativism; he argues for cultural relativism. For him (1989, 27), "my identity is defined by the commitments and identifications which provide the frame or horizon within which I can try to determine from case to case what is good, or valuable, or what ought to be done, or what I endorse or oppose." It is not a question of "what I should do" but a question of "what I value." The *ethos* is the value peculiar to a specific culture. This is to say that ethics, as a set of norms and principles, is embodied in a tradition shared by members of a community. Communitarian ethics, then, argues that individual ethical life must be viewed as part of a system of attachments in families, neighborhoods, and communities.

Communitarian ethics is not about "I think"; it is about "we are"! It is my immediate direct relationship with another as a group. Taylor (1985b, 292) defines communitarian ethics as

> a social view of man...which holds that an essential constitutive condition of seeking the human good is bound up with being in society...man cannot even be a moral subject...[nor] a candidate for [the] realization of the human good, outside of a community of language and mutual discourse about the good and bad, just and unjust...what man derives from society is not some aid in realizing his good, but the very possibility of being an agent seeking that good.

It is an ethical inquiry that situates the development of individual moral consciousness within the context of a community. A person can never achieve the ethical life alone, but only as an integrated member of a community. Ethics, then, is a product of interactions with a community (Haan 1983). It is embedded in social practices. Thus, each Filipino social value is a potent source for the realization of the human good. But, we need to evaluate which Filipino social practices do create a better good.

## *PAKIKIPAGKAPWA* AS HELPFULNESS

"*Pakikipagkapwa,*" says Ibana (2002, 24), "permeates our linguistic utterances. We refer to our fellow human beings as *ka-*

*mag-anak, ka-ibigan, ka-patid, ka-babayan, ka-sama, ka-sundo, ka-klase, ka-tipan, ka-usap, ka-ulayaw, ka-laro, et cetera.* Even our enemies are referred to as our *ka-away, ka-laban, ka-talo, ka-bangga.*" This, however, is not just a difference of vocabulary, but of social reality. "The realities here are practices; and these cannot be identified in abstraction from the language we use to describe them, or invoke them, or carry them out" (Taylor 1985b, 33).

*Pakikipagkapwa* is interpreted as the value of "helping each other" in the Filipino family. Family members provide each other with material assistance in times of trouble, defend the reputation of relatives, and conduct a close observation of the group's welfare. Helping one another encourages mutual help in times of need or mutual sympathy in times of sorrow. Helpfulness is extended to outsiders as hospitality. This is the practice of making acquaintance or of making a stranger feel welcome in one's home. Being cooperative is symbolized by an open hand, giving whatever one has, or doing whatever one can. It attains universal status when seen in the light of fraternal relations among others. The Filipino who holds this attitude recognizes a relationship with other people, which is more than blood relations. She regards them as persons. The shared humanity ties them with common experiences. In this context, the Filipino recognizes herself in an alien other. She sees in the other an incarnation of her own project duplicated.

A particular aspect of *pakikipagkapwa* is the tendency to sympathize and support the less fortunate. The Filipino knows that some people are in a worse predicament than they are. *Pakikiramay* (sharing of sympathy) towards the loser is present both between economically unequals and between equals. According to Ibana (2002, 23):

> Sympathy is ultimately evident during our Holy Week celebrations that reach their climax on Good Friday, when tradition forbids us from even taking a bath or engaging in boisterous laughter, after three o'clock in the afternoon, because of the popular belief that God is still dead...Our expressions of religiosity, however, reveal a kind of personalistic piety mediated by acts of sympathy.

This is also evident in sports like cockfighting, boxing, or basketball where the *dehado* is regarded with pity and the *llamado* is acclaimed and celebrated. The Filipino does not feel she must add insult to injury by bringing the loser any amount lower. At times, the loser gains adherence out of sympathy. Loser support does not have much communal significance in the assessment of values as the emphasis lies on pity rather than on anything else. Thus, it can be tolerated.

*Utang na loob* (debt of goodwill/gratitude) and *pagpupuno sa kakulangan* (filling-up a lack or insufficiency) expand the meaning of *pakikipagkapwa*. Common to both is an obligation to return a service rendered. The Filipino feels obligated to return a favor received. Reciprocation is either contractual or quasi-contractual. The former presupposes a voluntary agreement between persons to behave in a specified way for a specified time. The latter comes in automatically in the absence of the former. The terms of contract are implicit in situations, which the culture recognizes as calling for these terms. This is exemplified by the *abuloy*. When someone in the family dies, it is customary for community members to contribute money to the bereaved family. The family keeps a record of the donors and their contributions. When someone in the donor's family dies, exactly the same amount is returned. Lending and borrowing money or household items is practiced in rural areas. Thus, a wife need not worry over rice shortage. There is always a neighbor willing to lend her some. Although there is no specified date of return, the wife understands that she has to do so at the earliest time possible. Otherwise, social censure is brought down on one who fails to do her obligation to reciprocate. She is called *walang hiya*. And to re-establish the goodwill, the offender must make up for her inadequacies by returning the favor with interest. This practice is called *pagpupuno sa kakulangan*. The Filipino puts importance on being in the good graces of others as she might need their help in the future.

A system of obligations is *pagtatanaw ng utang na loob*. Setting aside its operation in the family, *utang na loob* is more consciously in-group. It takes place between equals and unequals in a vicious circle. Between equals, the solicitor incurs an *utang na loob* and recognizes that full payment is necessary. Since the solicitor is not sure whether the *ganti* is commensurate with the service, she attempts a re-payment with interest. The creditor, on the other hand, is uncertain if she is paid in full or with interest. If she thinks she is paid with interest, then she automatically puts herself in the debtor's position. It goes on and on with the parties uncertain as to who owes what to whom. Between equals, a transfer of obligations characterizes the exchange of services. In the case of unequals, the solicitor acknowledges the impossibility of full payment. Thus, she is tied to an indefinite one-sided obligation. The reciprocal service she returns is always incomplete. Likewise, relationships in the family are governed by *utang na loob*. Here, the relationship is complementary rather than reciprocal. Only the children incur debts. The life and rearing of the child is the service rendered by the *magulang*. In this case, *utang na loob* is eternal and immeasurable. It can never be repaid in one's lifetime. The child can only show her debt by taking

care of her parents in old age and by respecting them. True to all Filipino practices of reciprocity, *pagpupuno sa kakulangan* and *pagtanaw ng utang na loob*, is a socially prescribed obligation to maintain the distribution of resources. An ethical conviction dictates that one's possession belongs rightfully to one, so that when it is rendered to another, it must be returned in a socially approved way. So far, the picture I have presented offers the uniquely personal manner by which Filipinos interact with society. In short, "*pakikisama* is about sameness, not about 'equality'" (Guevara 2005,15). Thus, accepting *pakikipagkapwa*, helpfulness appears to be the underlying principle of Filipino social ethical relationships. Meanwhile, other forms of social interaction judged to be negative on some occasions, need critical attention.

## *PAKIKISAMA* AS CONCESSION

The other side of relating is concession, or the tendency of Filipinos to behave as a group. Conformity makes matters easier for the group. Without it, uniform decision is impossible and the group faces the danger of disunity. Pressures are exerted on the principles of *pakikisama* to discipline the members to adhere to norms. Leoncini (2005, 160) speaks of the etymology of the term *pakikisama* as thus:

> The term *pakisama* is derived from two Tagalog words: the root word "sama, accompany, go along with" (Lynch 1963: 10) or come along with and the prefix *paki*, please or kindly. Its etymological definition and literal meaning is, therefore, "kindly or please accompany or come along with or go along with." Its literal meaning derived from its etymology is clear. It actually implies the concept of companion or companionship.

Thus, persistent deviation throws one out of the group. The socialization of the Filipino is of interdependence rather than of independence. The individual does not develop attitudes of autonomy and reliance on her own reason. Group-centeredness runs very high and the appeal to *pakikisama* is a test to one's loyalty. Affirmation means giving in. The practices of clannishness, *pagbabarkada*, *pagtatakip*, and *pakiusap* shed concrete and particular understanding on the dynamics of *pakikisama* as concession.

Clannishness is the term given to the tendency of Filipinos to group together and to form enclaves of either family or peer groups. Regionalism and factionalism result from this attitude. Clannishness begins in the family. The close family kinship system evolves values, norms, and attitudes that guide the behavioral patterns of Filipinos.

The alliance between parents and siblings, and extended to relatives and non-kins solidifies and strengthens the family. The formation creates norms for the individual to conform with. Socialization is limited to the group but inapplicable to a higher system. The lasting effect to the Filipino individual is identification and adherence to my family, my group, my town, and my region to the expulsion of groups that do not belong and are different. A good example of clannishness is *pagbabarkada*. Ideally, the *barkada* serves to foster familiarity and goodwill among its members. Lately, *barkada* is identified with juvenile delinquency. The moment a gang includes *kursunada* in its vocabulary, it sets the stage for trouble against other groups.

A short cut from disgrace to acceptance is via *pagtatakip*. Within the group and within the family, indiscriminate use of *pagtitinginan* may lead an individual to identify it with *pagtatakip*. The Filipino is used to assume that a set of situations can be changed through *pakiusap*. The value of *pakikisama* is unconsciously appealed to adjust matters to one's advantage. In my experience, *pakiusap* strengthens the courting of a favor along with appeals to *utang na loob*. The underlying defect of *pakiusap* is the insistent refusal to face situations as they are and the use of recognition as launching pads to long-term solutions. The Filipino mind works according to a culturally ingrained belief that there is nothing that cannot be remedied by *pakiusap*. Another negative aspect of *pakiusap* is the presence of the element of begging on the part of the *nakikiusap*, and a feeling *paimportante* on the part of the *pinakikiusapan*.

## *PAKIKIPAGKAPWA* AND *PAKIKISAMA*

*Pakikipagkapwa* and *pakikisama* are conflicts of attitudes. Helpfulness and concession simultaneously sanction the behavior of the Filipino in her society. On the one hand, hospitality and *pakikipagkapwa* are pursued in the spirit of fraternity and sharing. On the other, clannishness and *pagtatakip* is held in the spirit of conformity and exclusivism. The Filipinos are "always in a situation of conflict between moral demands, which seem to be irreducible, but at the same time uncombinable. If this conflict is not felt, it is because our sympathies or horizons are too narrow, or we have been too easily satisfied with pseudo-solutions" (Taylor 1994, 213). While *pakikisama* broadens the Filipino's awareness of her community, it centers her loyalty to her primary group. The duality of themes directs behaviors to both integration and diffusion. The point in lived social experience is that concession overrules helpfulness. It is wrong to suggest that helpfulness is abstract and concession is concrete. It is better to view the latter as more socially binding than the former.

The interdependent character of the Filipino motivates her behavior along conventional lines and patterns of group thinking.

Researches on Philippine values point three "evil" characters in Philippine interpersonal relations. These are (1) the *walang pakikisama* (one inept at the level of adjustment); (2) the *walang hiya* (one who lacks a sense of propriety); and (3) the walang *utang na loob* (one who lacks adeptness in reciprocating by way of gratitude). Lynch (1964) proposes the construct of "smooth interpersonal relations" as acquired and perceived through *pakikisama*, euphemism, and the use of go-between. He was successful in penetrating and teaching the highest level of interpersonal relations in the *ibang-tao* category, thus making him believe that *pakikisama* is a value. Leoncini (2005, 176), while understanding the two sides of *pakikisama*, intelligently asserts that

> Whether it is a value or not, *pakikisama* is of value and it holds so much worth for the Filipino. It is culturally enforced starting within the environment of the family. In the case of Filipinos, it is difficult to imagine interpersonal relationships that do not include either the concept or trait of *pakikisama*. It is a trait worth having for the Filipino. Filipinos take its concept seriously and a degree of excellence is attached to the trait. As Andres says, *pakikisama* makes the Filipino basically good. As a concept and a trait, it invites us to do good by responding to the call of the others so that we may practice one's ability that all relationships depend on—the ability to be a good and nice companion.

However, Enriquez (1977) observes that Lynch, unlike Leoncini, did not take cognizance of the importance of other levels of interpersonal relations beyond *pakikisama* thus making his observation valid to a point but definitely inadequate. The attention given to *pakikisama* has been interpreted as consistent with the mis-education of the Filipino. Enriquez (1977, 29) goes on:

> In *Dissent and counter-consciousness*, Constantino argued how academicians as recipient of miseducation can very well be the Philippine society's mis-educators instead of professing the new consciousness. Social scientists who unwittingly yank out the concept of *pakikisama* from *pakikitungo, pakikibagay, pakikisalamuha, pakikipagpalagayang-loob,* and *pakikiisa,* and then elevate it to a status of value are at the same time reinforcing (intentionally or unintentionally) skills and talent...sold to the highest bidder—usually the elite and

> vested-interest groups. Without questions, they reward docility, conformity, and western orientation. The logical consequence is that they are negative on social protest.... "More accurately it is not *pakikisama* as a value which is important but *pakikipagkapwa* as a Filipino *paninindigan*. Take the supposed social value of *pakikisama*. It is not even clear if one should accept and identify *pakikisama* as a Filipino value. If it is truly a value, how do we explain the fact that many insist on their *pagkatao* (dignity) and *karapatan* (rights) and say outright *ayaw kong makisama* (I don't want to conform). Supposing one does not want to have a part of corruption he is identified as *hindi marunong makisama*. If he does not care for docility, conformity, and the western orientation, he is *walang pakikisama*. What kind of value is that? What self-image does that create for a Filipino? Should social scientists perpetuate such an idea? It is probably understandable for a westerner interested in Philippine society to jump to the conclusion that *pakikisama* is a Filipino value. After all he is not immersed in the culture, his interests and goals are different and he does not even understand the language! However, the Filipino should marshal his knowledge as a culture bearer and as a speaker of the languages to heighten his awareness of Philippine social reality.

Filipino identity is considerably overlooked when approached from the side of individualism. Filipino identity is group-identity; the realization of herself as a member of a particular group or with a specific cultural affiliation. It is inconceivable of her to think of her self as abstracted from the group where she is firmly rooted. She is not a "cog in the machine." The Filipino cannot think of the self as autonomous from society. She pursues self-realization only as an integrated member of the community. Admittedly, she is an ego that is dependent and inseparable from the primary group, which is her mode of operation. In this light of group-identity and concession, helpfulness appears to be a manifestation of the effected mutuality of thinking and behaving.

*Pakikipagkapwa* turns out to be more valuable than *pakikisama*. The *barkada* (peer group) would not be happy with the *walang pakikisama* but the Philippine society at large cannot accept the *walang kapwa*. *Pakikipagkapwa* is both a *paninindigan* (conviction) and a value. It includes all the other mentioned modes and levels of interaction. Thus, *pakikisama* is a form of *pakikipagkapwa* but not the other way around. Guevara (2005, 19) explains:

> *Pakikipagkapwa* overcomes egocentrism and reaches to the other in his otherness. His empathy is grounded in his ability to imagine what it would be like to be in the other's shoes. There are no ethical universal principles preceding social relations. Social relations for the Filipino are ethical relations. It is within the social relations, in the light of the *kapwa* of the other that the Filipino bases his ethical decisions. Although there are no universal principles independent of concrete situations with the other, there nevertheless are universal human experiences such as happiness, joy, suffering, love, commitment, a sense of justice and injustice, and the like. If the Filipinos were egotists, it would not be possible for them to empathize. It also would not be possible for them to imagine what it's like to be in the other's situations.

*Pakikipagkapwa*, then, is a value and when practiced, will produce socially conscious Filipinos. It is from this value that we become aware of other people outside our families. It goes beyond the family towards helping those in need, thus promoting *esprit de corps*. *Pakikipagkapwa* is to be practiced with the criterion that when confronted with conflict it is the concept of the common good which should prevail. In contrast, the practice of *lamangan*, together with its attendant values, blatantly negates the principles of fraternity, sorority, and equality. One readily recognizes the inconsistency between maintaining social relationships and undermining these relationships. The disparity between the two-value systems is more pronounced in comparing *lamangan* with the attendant value of *hiya*.

In this context, *pakikipagkapwa*, just like communitarian ethics, is understood as an ideal embodied by an individual who disregards her group, and sees herself as primarily an individual interacting with fellow individuals. Sharing exists in the life of the Filipino. Unfortunately, it is limited. It is easy to communicate with one's own blood; the faceless individual is beyond understanding. But, it is possible to condition the Filipino mind to an awareness of other loyalties, other intimacies, other persons, and other sharing. Thus, Guevara (2005, 15) asserts, "Whereas, *pakikipagkapwa* entails respect for, and the recognition of, the other as being different from the pack, from oneself, in *pakikipagkapwa*, we are the 'same' by virtue of being different."

If only to correct the impression that *pakikipagkapwa* is other-oriented like *pakikisama*, one must note that the Filipino does not always concede. She knows how to resist even when she seems utterly powerless. She knows the meaning of concerted action; she

knows that *pakikibaka* (joining a struggle) is a valid aspect of *pakikipagkapwa* in the face of injustice and adversity.

## CONCLUSION

Filipino values have been termed "values" because they are valuable to the group; they are *pinahahalagaan* because they are *mahalaga*. Values satisfy the Filipino's basic need. It is only when there appears to be a feeling of insecurity that these values become hindrances to development, detrimental to interpersonal relationships, and negligent to the common good. The Philippines is a society characterized by extreme insecurity. The Filipino adopts the family as the only source of safety and security. As a rule, therefore, the family replaces the whole society. This makes the contemporary Philippine society segmented, group-centered, and possessed by the "*tayo-sila*" attitude. Because the family considers socio-economic security as its highest value, individuals internalize the same thing. Filipinos are creating for themselves a kind of social security system. If I am in trouble, then I may go to someone I have helped before. She cannot refuse me because of *pakikisama*. If she does not want to help me, then she is overcome by *hiya*. These values are used to create security for one's self, one's family, and one's group. If practiced in a moderate and relative way, they create mutual helpfulness. But, Filipino values have lost their synthesis because of tremendous insecurity. They are used independently of each other in an attempt to create or restore security. In that case, they become absolute and no longer fit into a synthesis. The values are used independently in the absolute pursuit of socio-economic security instead of providing mutual help. If the situation demands it, then one value becomes absolute. Family individualism is a cultural block to communitarian building. It makes Christianity skin-deep and democracy a mockery. It stifles initiative in family corporations. And it reduces education to a means of climbing the social ladder.

It is said that the Filipino lives in fear of isolation. She is only what she is by virtue of the whole society and civilization which brought her to be and which nourishes her (Taylor 1985b, 205-206). This indicates that she is socially minded and communally aware. But society offers her no guarantee that her social awareness will be accepted and respected. Because the self can only maintain her identity within a particular culture, she has to be concerned about the share of her culture as a whole. Communitarian ethics argue for cultural differences. It does not propose ethnocentrism or conservative antiquarianism.

Communitarians argue that culture is not a matter of boundaries, but a matter of horizons. Around us, we see many forms

of violence leading communitarians to question the kind of belief and philosophical system we have. Communitarianism argues for cultural respect as a condition for the emergence of ethical life. It argues for unity in diversity; that people learn to live in a pluralistic world. They think that cultural differences are not a hindrance to unity. Unity is not uniformity! But, unity is an expression of respect amidst cultural differences. In the long run, culture is not a close system, but an interpretation of reality, a horizon among many horizons. For as long as groups oppress each other in the name of gender differences and cultural/religious superiority, the world remains a center for violence.

## NOTE

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# ARISTOTLE ON CHARACTER, WOMEN, AND NATURAL SLAVES

**Lok Chong Hoe**
***Universiti Sains Malaysia, Penang***

*This article discusses Aristotle's notion of character, and how it should be presented in a play, such as a tragic drama. In* Poetics *1450a 24, Aristotle entertains the possibility of a tragedy without character, and commentators have argued about whether a tragic drama can really unfold without characters of its agents being manifested; and whether Aristotle (in* Poetics *1450a 24) really meant a tragic drama that is completely devoid of character, or simply one that contains personalities that are considered to be stereotyped or wooden. I will discuss different opinions of commentators on this issue, and offer my reasons for supporting one of their views. Since this remark on "characterless tragedy" was made in order to show the superiority of plot over character in tragedy, I will need to discuss these two elements (i.e., plot and character) in full; and it is in Aristotle's discussion of the element of character that his view on women and natural slaves was presented (and made available for discussion).*

## THE ELEMENTS OF PLOT AND CHARACTER, AND THE RANKING OF PLOT ABOVE CHARACTER

This article focuses on Aristotle's reasons for ranking the element of plot above the element of character in tragedy. One of these reasons is stated in *Poetics* 1450a 24-26:

> ...a tragedy is impossible without action, but there may be one without Character. The tragedies of most of the moderns are characterless—a defect common among poets of all kinds, and with its counterpart in painting in Zeuxis as compared with Polygnotus; for whereas the latter is strong in character, the work of Zeuxis is devoid of it.

In order to discuss the above quotation, I need to offer a brief description of Aristotle's notion of "plot" (translated as "action" in the above quotation) as well as "character." Richard Janko (1987, 90) gives us a clear and accurate account of the way "plot" is used in the *Poetics*. He says that "plot" is used in two senses by Aristotle: (1) to refer to pre-existing story, and (2) to refer to "the construction of the incidents put into the poem by the poet." The best example of (1) is to be found in Chap. 8 of the *Poetics* when Aristotle (1451a 21) claims that the poets of the *Heracleid* are mistaken in believing that because "Heracles was one man, their plot was bound to be unified." Janko (1987, 90) points out that in this sentence *plot* "means merely a series of incidents, whether or not they are interconnected..." This means that "plot" is sometimes used in the *Poetics* to refer to the story of some particular person, whether or not the events in that story are interrelated to one another.

But Aristotle also uses "plot" in another way. Janko (1987, 90) points out that in 1450a 4, Aristotle is referring to the "construction of the incidents." This must mean the fitting together and arrangement of the incidents of the tragedy by the poet. Janko (1987, 217-18) further qualifies this by pointing out that (in Aristotle's view) the incidents should be put together or arranged in a certain way, i.e., in terms of "probability" or "necessity," and with the whole sequence being "complete," and containing a "change of fortune," etc. It is not my intention to discuss at length each of these features which a well-constructed tragic plot must possess (according to Aristotle). As explained in a previous article of mine (2007, 119-40), "probable and necessary" relation refers essentially to causal connection between the events of a tragedy, which ensures that each preceding incident is causally related to the one that follows it. It is a requirement directed at achieving a tightly-knit and coherent tragic plot. "Completeness" refers essentially to a plot that has a beginning, middle, and an end (*Poetics* 1450b 24); and the "change of fortune" required in tragedy is a change from a life happiness to one of misery, as in the case of King Oedipus, whose life completely crumbles when he discovered he has killed his own father and married his own mother. This is an essential requirement of tragedy, for only a plot that moves from happiness to misery can arouse the emotions of pity and fear (which is what a tragedy aims to achieve). Now it is this more complex notion of "plot" that occupies most of the *Poetics*, and not "plot" as the pre-existing story.

Having briefly explained Aristotle's notion of plot, it is now necessary to do the same for the element of character. Firstly, why does tragedy need the element of character (and also the third

element, which is thought)? The answer is provided by Aristotle in Chap. 6 of the *Poetics* (1449b 36-1450a 2):

> ... the subject represented is also an action; and the action involves agents, who must necessarily have their distinctive qualities both of character and thought, since it is from these that we ascribe certain qualities to their actions. There is in the natural order of things, therefore, two causes, Thought and Character, of their actions, and consequently of their success or failure in their lives.

Tragedy is an imitation of human actions, and we have to "ascribe certain qualities to" these actions. In other words, we must be able to bring these actions under certain descriptions; e.g., that they are courageous, liberal, temperate, cowardly, mean, etc. And such descriptions must be based on, or derived from, the thoughts and character-traits of the agent—which is why tragedy needs the elements of character and thought. I will say more about these two elements.

In the *Poetics,* Aristotle describes character as that which reveals "the moral purpose" of the agent (1450b 7 and 1454a 18); and most commentators agree that he is referring here to what the agent is habituated to doing, or his settled or permanent disposition (see Else 1963, 239). What the agent is habituated to doing (or his settled disposition) can also be described as his way of carrying on in life—or, in Anscombe's phrase (1977, 64), it is what he "thinks of as a good way of proceeding" in life. This brings us to the element of thought. In order to describe an agent's actions in the tragic play as (say) courageous, he must have acted from choice (see *Nicomachean ethics*, 1106b 36, where Aristotle points out that virtue "is a state of character concerned with choice")—and choice is what he decides to do after deliberation which has in view what he thinks of as a good way of going about in life. And to deliberate before making a choice involves reasoning, and so tragedy needs the element of thought. But choice also involves reference to character (for deliberation is done in relation to what the agent thinks of as a good way to carry on in life). This means tragedy also needs the element of character.

However, Aristotle was so eager to rank plot above character that he even claims it is possible for a tragedy to be characterless (in the same way that the paintings of Zeuxis are characterless)—even though it is never possible to construct a tragic play without plot (*Poetics* 1450a 24 -26). But what does Aristotle really mean in 1450a 24, when he asserts that "there may be one [tragedy] without Character"?

Aristotle is not saying here (1450a 24) that we can have a tragedy without personages or agents. He is instead referring to one in which the personages do not manifest any character-trait or settled disposition. But in what way will it fail to manifest the agent's character-trait or disposition? Many critics have commented on this, but they may generally be divided into those who claim that Aristotle literally means a tragedy in which no place at all is assigned to the presentation of character-traits of the agents; and those who believe that, even in a characterless tragedy, there is still presentation of the agents' character-qualities (in a weak or watered down form).

## TRAGEDY WITHOUT PLOT, CHARACTER, THOUGHT, MELODY, AND SPECTACLE

One commentator belonging to the first group stated above is Catherine Lord. Lord's article (1969, 55-58) is devoted chiefly to defending the view that 1450a 24-26 literally means we can have a tragedy without character—i.e., it is possible to produce a tragedy which does not reveal any settled disposition of its personages. But she supports this view by claiming that, in Aristotle's scheme, any one of the five elements (except diction) can actually be absent without affecting the goal of tragedy – which is the evoking of pity and fear, leading to the *katharsis* of these emotions (see Lear 1972). Lord points out that the rule of necessity (which ensures that no redundant incident is present in the tragic play) applies only to parts of the plot. But some people have also applied this rule to the elements of tragedy; claiming that each of the six elements is necessary to a tragic play. She asserts that this is a mistake: if Aristotle requires that each incident must not be redundant, this does not imply that each of the elements must also be necessary to tragedy. She (1969, 56) says:

> There is no justification for the view that all six parts of tragedy, taken together, should exhibit organic unity: Aristotle defines organic unity in specific connection with his discussion of plot. He tells us that plot should exhibit a unity such that if any one of the parts of the plot is 'displaced or removed the whole will be disjointed'. We must not identify the parts of the plot with the six parts of tragedy: the plot is one of the six parts.

Furthermore, most of the elements can each independently produce the tragic effect, so that the absence of any one of them can be compensated for by the presence of the other elements. She (1969, 56- 57) says:

> ...most of the parts are said to possess each its own intrinsic power. Thought can arouse 'pity, fear, anger and the like'. Spectacle can also arouse pity and fear and it has an emotional attraction of its own. Music, though termed an embellishment, gives intense pleasure (as does spectacle) and we know from the *Politics* that music has the power to induce *katharsis*.

And it goes without saying that plot and character can also each induce emotions of pity and fear (as for character, pity and fear may be evoked in us if some description is given of someone with a disposition like ours undergoing intense suffering, as a result of what he has done; which is also the way we would ourselves have acted if we were in a similar situation). Since the goal of tragedy is *katharsis*, and since each element is introduced in such a way that it can independently bring about this goal, we may say that each element (though not all of the elements) can be absent without affecting the attainment of the tragic effect. So Lord (1969, 57) goes on to say:

> Accordingly, we find that we can have tragedy without spectacle. We can have tragedy without music. We can have tragedy without thought, for the incidents should speak for themselves. And we can have tragedy without plot.

But Lord's claim that "we can [even] have a tragedy without plot" clearly contradicts certain remarks made in the *Poetics* itself! Aristotle regards tragedy as an imitation of action (see *Poetics* 1449b 24), and action is presented in tragedy in the form of its plot (see *Poetics* 1450a 3). This means that without plot there will be no action. And without action we cannot have a tragedy—for how may tragedy exist without its object of imitation?

Furthermore, in 1450a 24, Aristotle explicitly states that tragedy cannot exist without action—which means that it cannot exist without a plot. Indeed the purpose of 1450a 24 is to point out that while tragedy can exist without character, it cannot exist without a plot—which is why plot is more important than character. To say that tragedy can exist without a plot is to contradict 1450a 24 itself!

However, Lord supports her point by employing Butcher's translation (1957, 27) of 1450a 29-31, which is as follows: "...if you string together a set of speeches expressive of character, and well-finished in point of diction and thought, you will not produce the essential tragic effect nearly so well as with a play which, however deficient in these respects, yet has a plot..." According to this translation, Aristotle is claiming that a string of speeches expressive

of character and thought, and consisting of well-developed diction, will still not evoke pity and fear as effectively or satisfactorily as a story which is deficient in these elements but has a recognizable plot. However, Lord (1969, 57) says that with this claim, Aristotle is even entertaining "(for him) the more radical possibility of a plotless tragedy, or quasi-tragedy..." Lord's meaning here is unclear. She could mean (1) That Aristotle is, in 1450a 29-31, either thinking about a tragedy that has no plot, or about some quasi-tragedy which does not form a plot; or (2) Aristotle does not believe that a full-fledged tragedy can be plotless; but some quasi-tragedy can be without a plot.

If what Lord means is (1), then her claim can surely be rejected. For 1450a 29-31 does not imply that there can be a tragedy (i.e., a full-blown tragedy) that is plotless. If a string of speeches rich in character and thought, and consisting of well-developed diction, can produce some tragic effect, it does not imply that this string of speeches is "a tragedy." After all, Aristotle only refers to it as a string of speeches rich in character and thought, and with a well-composed diction; he does not refer to it as "a tragedy," or even "a quasi-tragedy." To say that it is a tragedy assumes that it can already take the form of a play or drama (even if it is a play of very poor quality). But a set of speeches may not yet assume such a form (i.e., it may not yet be a recognizable play). In a court of law, for instance, we can have speeches that are capable of evoking emotions like fear and pity. And such speeches need not necessarily form a plot ("plot" in the Aristotelian sense, of a series of incidents connected by way of probability or necessity, leading to a climax or culmination). A string of speeches must take the form of a play before it can be a tragedy in the full sense—but Aristotle does not say (in 1450a 29-31) that it already takes such a form.

And if such a string of speeches can be seen as some form of quasi-tragedy, what relevance would this have on Lord's discussion of 1450a 24 (which asserts that we can have a tragedy without character)? For in 1450a 24, Aristotle is asserting that it is possible to have a full-blown tragedy without character, even though we cannot have a full-blown tragedy that is plotless. And when he refers to the possibility of a tragedy without spectacle, or a tragedy that is not acted out (*Poetics*, 1453b 3-5), he is also referring to a full-fledged tragedy, and not to some quasi-tragedy. Even if it is possible to have some quasi-tragedy without a plot, we still may not have a full-blown tragedy that is plotless. When Aristotle speaks about tragedy without any of the essential elements (such as one that is without character, diction, or spectacle, etc.) he is referring to full-blown tragedies—not some string of speeches that can stir up pity and fear.

So far I have challenged Lord by arguing against her claim that plot is not a necessary element in tragedy. But Lord's article is directed chiefly at defending the view that we can have a tragedy without character—or a tragedy that does not reveal at all the fixed dispositions of its personages. Lord's argument here centers around the term *hamartia*. In Chaps. 12 and 13 of the *Poetics* Aristotle prescribes for tragedy to be structured in such a way that it portrays (1) a hero who leads a happy life but (2) commits a mistake which is termed *hamartia*, and it leads to (3) a reversal and his eventual downfall, and such a reversal can be accompanied by a discovery (see 1453a 6-16 and 1452a 12-36).

Lord claims that a plot can fulfill requirements (1), (2), and (3) without revealing any character-trait or settled disposition of the agent. First, she (1969, 57) asserts that *hamartia* should not be described as "a flaw or moral frailty," nor should it be defined as an error of judgment. An error of judgment "implies failure of practical wisdom," which for Aristotle, "is a flaw in character." *Hamartia*, she insists (1969, 57), should be viewed only as a simple mistake—and she defines simple mistake as a "mistake due to ignorance of the circumstance." Since such a mistake can be committed by anyone with any disposition, *hamartia* need not reveal character. Lord (1969, 58) gives, as an example of such a mistake, one that involves the hero's ignorance of someone else's identity (such as Merope's ignorance of the identity of her son, Iphigenia's ignorance of the identity of her brother, and the son's ignorance of his mother's identity in *Helle*). One can also say that Lord is referring here to unavoidable ignorance; e.g., the hero's unavoidable ignorance of someone else's identity. For one who acts from avoidable ignorance is still blameworthy. And so avoidable ignorance will still reveal character. But anyone with any character can commit an error from unavoidable ignorance of someone else's identity.

If *hamartia* need not reveal character, what about discovery and reversal? Lord (1969, 59) claims that discovery and reversal also need not manifest any character-qualities. Regret and remorse which follow discovery need not necessarily reveal any specific disposition; especially if such self-reproach is the result of discovering that one (Oedipus Rex) has married one's own mother. Any person of any character (including Al Capone) will feel remorse and regret if he realizes he has married his own mother. Because tragedy involves members of the same family, one expects certain kinds of reaction from the agents when discovery is made—and such reactions do not therefore reveal character. Lord (1969, 59) rounds off her argument by saying that "... tragedy, by its very nature, does not call for considerations of character..." and "the *hamartia*, the discovery, and the reversal function together as parts of the plot in a

way that enables the plot to do its work without the presence of character."

My objection to Lord is that if the tragic hero must be made to act in a certain way when discovery is made, i.e., he must feel remorse or regret for what he has done (for this is necessary to produce the tragic effect, as we can never sympathize with someone who shows no remorse for his wrongdoing), then some character or quality of the person must be revealed. We can at least say that he is a person who will feel remorse over such-and-such things. Lord says that anyone, including Al Capone, will feel remorse if he knows he has unwittingly married his own mother. But why should this be so? Indeed we will hardly be surprised if someone like Al Capone feels no remorse at all on discovering that he has married his own mother. And if he does, then something can be said about his character—e.g., that he is not someone who is indifferent to incest (or someone who takes such things lightly). We cannot escape such minimal reference to the settled disposition of the agent, if place is to be found for remorse when discovery is made.

Furthermore, can tragedy be entirely devoid of character, when the distinction between itself and comedy is based on the one making its personages better, and not worse, "than the men of the present day" (tragedy needs to make its hero better than the average person so that his downfall can evoke pity, which is a part of the tragic effect; while comedy makes its hero worse than us in order to produce the comic effect? Aristotle (*Poetics*, 1448a 17-18) tells us that we can distinguish a tragedy from a comedy simply because it imitates the actions of people who are above our level of goodness. And how may tragedy imitate personages who are "better than we are" without revealing the character of its personages?

This leads us to the next reason for rejecting Lord's interpretation of 1450a 24. The tragic effect is achieved by evoking both fear and pity, leading to the *katharsis* of these emotions. On the one hand, Aristotle wants a hero who is above the average person so that his downfall can more easily evoke pity. But he also wants the tragic hero to be someone who is like us, as fear is occasioned by witnessing the downfall of someone like ourselves. This is most clearly stated in *Poetics* 13, 1453a 6, when Aristotle asserts that the tragic hero must be both "like us" and "above our level of goodness." In other words, the tragic hero should be superior to the average person in terms of achievement and social standing (e.g., King Oedipus who is known to have liberated Thebes from the Enchantress, a feat that is not expected from an average person). But morally the tragic hero must be one who is like us (i.e., one who has our moral strengths and weaknesses), so that fear will be evoked in us when we see him progressing towards a life of misery and

suffering. So tragedy must manifest and specify sufficiently the agent's character if it aims at producing the tragic effect.

Aristotle (*Poetics*, 1450a 16) also points out that tragedy is an imitation of action concerned with happiness. The agents must therefore be pursuing what they regard as the purpose of life, or as the ethical goals of life. And such action must definitely reveal moral character. Tragedy, by its very nature, must reveal the hero's moral character.

## CHARACTERS WHICH ARE STEREOTYPED

However, there are commentators who (unlike Lord) believe that even in a characterless tragedy, Aristotle assigns a place for character of the agents. One such commentator is Butcher (1957, 343):

> The eager insistence with which Aristotle maintains the subordination of *ethos* to plot leads him into certain exaggeration of statement. The two elements are set against one another in sharp and impossible opposition. 'Without action there cannot be tragedy; there may be one without *ethe*'. Clearly, this last remark cannot be pressed in a perfectly literal sense. The meaning intended probably is, that there may be a tragedy in which the moral character of individual agents is so weakly portrayed as to be of no account in the evolution of the action. The persons may be mere types, or marked only by class characteristics, or lacking those distinctive qualities out of which dramatic action grows.

According to Butcher, Aristotle considers a tragedy to be characterless if agents portrayed in it are stereotyped, and without qualities that are in any sense distinctive. In other words, they have only qualities which we associate with people from certain classes or social positions. When a tragedy delineates character merely in this manner, it is "without character."

But a tragedy in which characters are stereotyped and without distinctive qualities may not (in Aristotle's view) successfully produce the tragic effect. In Chap. 13 of the *Poetics* (1453a 10) Aristotle requires the tragic hero to be one who is renowned for his great achievements and high social standing (such as Oedipus Rex, who is famed for liberating Thebes from the Enchantress, and who is depended on by the Thebans to save their city from any crisis). And I pointed out earlier that the tragic hero should have such qualities so that pity can be aroused by the extent of his downfall to

a life of great misery and misfortune. In other words, the tragic hero need not have these qualities in order to bring out the tragic effect. And if he needs to have these qualities, then he cannot be someone who is stereotyped and lacking in distinctive qualities.

## CHARACTER WHICH IS REVEALED IN SPEECH

Sir David Ross offers an interpretation of 1450a 24 which I regard to be much more reasonable. Like Butcher, Ross (1964, 285 -86) believes that even in a characterless tragedy, Aristotle assigns some place to the character-traits of the agents. He distinguishes between character as revealed in action and character as revealed in speech. Character in so far as it is enacted, or character which is manifested in action, will always be present in a tragic plot. But if the element of character is separately mentioned, then Aristotle must be thinking of its revelation in speech (i.e., in what the agent says). And this need not necessarily be present in a tragic plot. So when Aristotle speaks about a tragedy without character, he must be referring to one in which there is no revelation of character in speech. But even such a tragedy will reveal character through action.

I wish to point out another way in which character can be revealed in a play. The poet can use one agent to mention or describe the characters of other agents in the play. For example, the priest in the first scene of *Oedipus Rex* describes the special qualities of Oedipus (i.e., his achievement in freeing Thebes from the Sphinx, and how he is depended on by everyone to save the city from the plague, etc.). And Cassandra describes the vicious nature of Clytemnestra in *Agamemnon*. The chorus, too, is often employed for describing the qualities of agents of the story. So there are three ways in which the character of an agent may be manifested in tragedy: (1) by his actions, (2) by what he says, and (3) by descriptions given by other agents in the play. One can then add to Ross's account by saying that while (1) must always be present in tragedy, (2) and (3) may be absent. While the action in tragedy must always reveal character, further revelation by way of speech and description may be absent. And when (2) and (3) are not present, we have a characterless tragedy.

This interpretation of 1450a 24 helps to explain Aristotle's first reason for the supremacy of plot over character. In 1450a 16-19, Aristotle asserts that plot is more important than character because character only gives us qualities; but tragedy is meant to imitate actions and not qualities. Rather, qualities are only brought in "for the sake of the action."

Aristotle's point can be understood if we focus on character which is revealed by speech and description. What he means is that we do not write tragedy in order to give descriptions of the qualities

of certain people, or to reveal such qualities by making them say certain things. Rather, tragedy is written in order to imitate a certain kind of action (i.e., serious action)—and descriptions of character-traits, or their revelation through speech, are only brought in to further clarify or explain the actions of the agents (i.e., they are brought in "for the sake of the action"). In this way, they are supplementary to character-traits which are already revealed through action. And so they must be subsidiary to the action in the play. (And since they are only brought in to further explain and clarify the actions of the agents, it is possible to have a tragedy without them).

## ARISTOTLE'S REQUIREMENTS FOR THE PROPER PRESENTATION OF CHARACTER

Having argued that in Aristotle's scheme a tragedy must necessarily reveal character, we may now look at some of his requirements on the proper presentation of this element. In *Poetics* 1454a 16-23, he says:

> First and foremost, that they [i.e. the characters in tragedy] shall be good. There will be an element of character in the play, if (as has been observed) what a personage says or does reveal a certain moral purpose; and a good element of character, if the purpose revealed is good. Such goodness is possible in every type of personage, even in a woman or a slave, though the one is perhaps inferior, and the other a wholly worthless being. The second point is to make them appropriate. The characters before us may be, say, manly; but it is not appropriate in a female Character to be manly, or clever.

I intend to focus here on the two requirements for the proper presentation of character in tragedy. As these two requirements are closely related to one another, I shall discuss them together. While characters in tragedy should be good, the goodness exhibited by each agent must be appropriate to his or her class, sex, social standing, etc. We begin by considering what Aristotle means by appropriateness of character, before proceeding to the requirement for character to be good.

Firstly, there are at least three ways of interpreting this demand for making characters appropriate. One may take it to mean certain virtues are exclusive to certain types of people—while other types are not capable of manifesting them. The translation of 1454a 22 by Bywater ("The Character before us may be, say, manly; but it is not

appropriate in the female Character to be manly, or clever.") certainly suggests this view that certain types of people (e.g., women) should not be made to manifest certain qualities (e.g., manliness or cleverness). And there are also commentators who interpret Aristotle's requirement in this way, such as John Jones (1968, 41-42):

> And so with the stage figure. He also is the realized type. Type-definition pursues him beyond his bare humanity, of course, into the facts of his life; he is a king or slave or woman, as well as a human being—which Aristotle acknowledges by telling dramatists to make stage-figures appropriate. Thus the dramatist who wishes to portray courage or cleverness must remember it is not appropriate in a woman to be brave or clever. Moreover, we observe the requirement of appropriateness interwined with that of goodness in Aristotle's demand that the stage-figure, as well as being kept distinct in his type, shall be good of that type...The stage woman should possess the womanly virtues and the stage-slave slavish virtue; the former should not be brave like a man nor the latter generous-tempered like a king, for this would produce ultimate aesthetic anarchy.

For Jones, the requirement of appropriateness means that certain types of people are excluded from certain virtues (e.g., women should not be made to manifest bravery, nor slaves be made to appear generous). I believe there is textual evidence against this view, which I shall bring up after describing the other two ways in which this rule of appropriateness has been interpreted.

One may also interpret Aristotle's requirement to mean that for any particular virtue (such as courage), the different types of people are capable of exhibiting it in different degrees. Some types of people (e.g., men who are free) are capable of a higher degree of a particular virtue, while other types (such as women and slaves) are only capable of manifesting a lower degree of that same virtue. Janko's translation (1987, 47) supports this interpretation: "It is possible to be manly in character, but it is not appropriate for a woman to be so manly or clever." And so does Halliwell's translation (1987, 47): "For it is possible to have a woman manly in character, but it is not appropriate for a woman to be so manly or clever."

Janko (1987, 110) supports this interpretation in his commentary: "...qualities less suited to particular types of person should be attributed to them to a lesser extent." And so does Else (1963, 460), who says that: "Courage, for example, is a virtue (a

part of goodness), and a woman may show some of it, but not to an amount inappropriate to her status as a woman."

Women and slaves may exhibit some degree of a virtue like courage, but not to the extent which only men (i.e., freemen) are capable of. There is a passage in Aristotle's *Politics* (1277b 20-22) which supports this interpretation offered by Janko (1987), Halliwell (1987), and Else (1963 and 1986):

> ...a man would be thought a coward if he had no more courage than a courageous woman, and a woman would be loquacious if she imposed no more restraint on her conversation than a good man...

In the above passage it is clear that Aristotle is not denying courage to women. But he is suggesting that they have *less* courage than men who are free. Any man who has only the *same amount* of courage as a woman must be considered by others to be a coward. Also women, who are naturally talkative, must show *a greater degree* of restraint than men in order to be modest. A woman who shows only *as much* restraint on her conversation as a man must be a chatterer. Jones is therefore mistaken when he says that, according to Aristotle, it is inappropriate for a woman to be brave or clever.

There is, however, another way in which this requirement for character to be appropriate may be interpreted. According to Potts (1968, 78), for any particular virtue (e.g., courage), there are kinds of that virtue which are appropriate to a woman; and there are kinds of that same virtue which are inappropriate for a woman to display. This is suggested in his translation itself (1968, 36 -37): " ... anyone can have a brave character, but there are kinds of courage, as well as sagacity, that may be inappropriate to a woman." And he makes his position clear in his commentary:

> I do not believe Aristotle would have made the silly statement that it is inappropriate in a woman to be brave or clever: especially as it conflicts with several famous examples in Greek tragedy and epic—for instance, Homer's Penelope, Aeschylus' Clytemnestra, Sophocles' Antigone, and Euripedes' Medea. But he may well have said that there are kinds of courage and cleverness that are in woman.

There is also a passage in the *Politics* (1260a 20-24) which supports Pott's interpretation:

> ...moral virtue belongs to all of them; but the temperance of a man and a woman, or the courage and justice of a

> man and of a woman, are not, as Socrates maintained, the same; the courage of a man is shown in commanding, of a woman in obeying. And this holds of all other virtues, as will be more clearly seen if we look at them in detail...

Here, too, Aristotle is not denying courage to women, but certain kinds of courage. A man is said to display courage by commanding well, and a woman by obeying the command. The same can be said for the other virtues, such as temperance, justice, liberality, and so on. So Jones's contention that (in Aristotle's view) it is inappropriate for a woman to be brave or clever is simply not justified.

Although Jones's interpretation is unacceptable, there is textual evidence to support both the other two interpretations. I believe Aristotle should be taken to hold the view that women exhibit *less* courage than men—however, there are also situations where the difference is not in degrees but in kinds (i.e., there are situations where women exhibit different kinds of courage from freemen). It is indeed doubtful that Aristotle would exclude women from certain virtues such as courage. For to do so would be to exclude them from happiness—as acting virtuously is a necessary condition for happiness.

But the issue is different with regard to slaves. Although 1454a 20 mentions women and slaves together, this does not mean that what is true of the former must also be true of the latter. Certain remarks made in Aristotle's *Politics* suggest that slaves are incapable of moral virtues. And if they are incapable of moral virtues, they certainly cannot be capable of different kinds (or, for that matter, different degrees) of each of the moral virtues. So in 1454a 20, when Aristotle says that slaves are capable of goodness, he must mean that they are capable of some kind of other virtue (and not moral virtue).

According to Aristotle (*Politics* 1254a 21-23), nature has adapted certain men to be masters, and others to be slaves: "... that some should rule and others be ruled is a thing not only necessary, but expedient; from the hour of their birth, some are marked out for subjection, others for rule."

But how are certain people (i.e., natural slaves) marked out for subjection since the time of their birth? Aristotle provides the following account from his *Politics* (1254a 24-32):

> Nature would like to distinguish between the bodies of freemen and slaves, making the one strong for servile labor, the other upright, although useless for such services, useful for political life in the arts both of war and peace. But the opposite often happens—that some have the souls

> and others have the bodies of freemen ... (1254b 2-22) Nevertheless he who can be, and therefore is another's, and he who participates in rational principle enough to apprehend, but not to have, such a principle, is a slave by nature.

We do not identify a natural slave by his physical appearance, but by the fact that he can participate "in the rational principle enough to apprehend, but not have, such a principle." But what does Aristotle mean by saying that a natural slave can apprehend but not possess the rational principle? The reply to this can be found in his division of the soul into two parts; i.e., the rational and the irrational elements (see *Nicomachean ethics* 1102a 28-29).

The rational element is that which deliberates and controls, while the irrational element can be further divided into (i) The vegetative part which causes nutrition and growth and (ii) The appetitive part which feels and desires, and can also apprehend and obey reason (see *Nicomachean ethics* 1102a 33-35, 1102b 13-1103a 1).

Natural slaves have the irrational element of the soul, with both its vegetative and appetitive divisions. As the appetitive part cannot only desire, but also understand and be persuaded by reason, the natural slave can apprehend and obey reason (i.e., he can "participate in the rational principle enough to apprehend" such a principle). But he does not possess the rational element of the soul—hence he cannot deliberate, and control the appetitive part. Therefore it is better for natural slaves, "as in all inferiors that they should be under the rule of a master" (*Politics* 1254b 18-19). As Mulgan (1977, 41) points out:

> The natural slave, we are told, differs from his master in the same way as the body differs from the soul or animals from men: he is a separate part of his master's body, ruled by his master's soul in the same way as the master rules his own body.

This means that the natural slave is incapable of directing himself. For instance, he will be incapable of saying to himself that he should stand his ground and not give way in this situation, or that he should give way in that situation, and so on. And he needs someone else to direct him, and to tell him what to do. Since the natural slave is not even capable of directing himself (and must be directed by others), he cannot be capable of different kinds of each of the moral virtues (as in the case of women). When Aristotle says that even slaves are capable of goodness, he must mean that they are capable of mere *arête*, or mere excellence, such as the excellence of a good guard dog.

It may be useful here to consider why Aristotle regards certain character-traits to be inappropriate to women and to slaves. According to House (1956, 1961, 89-90):

> In all societies based upon status the position of slaves, of women and of kings provide marked and extreme examples of definition of status by law and custom...Aristotle, with his insistence on practice as the source of character, would have maintained that one brought up in slavery, doing the acts of a slave, would become slave-like if not, in the more prejorative sense, slavish. His theory of genesis of character would have tended to stabilize a type of character appropriate to the status. One brought up, as he had seen Alexander brought up, as heir to a monarchy would stabilize a habit of command and authority; and so on. In this sense his feeling for 'appropriateness' corresponds to the modern belief in the importance of environment. Environment would have a greater formative influence when it was clearly defined by law and daily imposed legal and social restrictions, and would tend more to the production of 'types'.

According to House, Aristotle believes that environmental influences, which include codes of behavior defined by customs and laws of the state, shape characters of women and slaves. So that it is inappropriate to describe women or slaves behaving and acting in ways contrary to what customs and the laws of the state have prescribed for them.

We can challenge House by pointing out that, for Aristotle, natural slaves are already singled out for subjection since the time of their birth (i.e., they are not provided with the rational element of the soul). And so it cannot be the environment, or in particular the laws and customs of the state, which are responsible for shaping their "slavish" character.

It is true Aristotle says in the *Politics* (see 1255b 13-17) that those who have the potential to govern and rule must be given proper education and training, and the correct norms must be inculcated in them before they can become good rulers. And if good rulers must be trained and inculcated with the right norms, then there is no reason why the same cannot be said for good slaves. But the natural fact that slaves are not provided with the rational element of the soul must make certain kinds of training and education (such as training to become good commanders in the battlefield) useless. So that all a slave can be trained to do is to become a good and efficient slave. In the case of women too, certain kinds of training and education must

be useless; as they have less courage than men (and there are also situations where the courage they display is of a different kind). Although these views on the inequalities between men and women, and between freemen and slaves, are unacceptable, they are nevertheless upheld by Aristotle (see Fortenbaugh 1977).

Aristotle speaks also of another requirement. Aristotle's most important requirement for character in a tragedy is that it must be good (see *Poetics* 1449b 36-1450a 2). According to Halliwell (1987, 91-92):

> ...the notion of 'seriousness' commits tragedy to dramatizing action in pursuit of ethical goals and fulfillment (the quest for 'happiness', in Aristotle's terms). But the kind of dramatic material required by pity and fear must embody a vulnerability which can touch the audience's deep sense of common humanity. This combination of ideas would seem to find the heart of tragedy in the poetic demonstration of ways in which suffering is entangled in even the finest strivings of human action.

According to Halliwell, the notion of "seriousness" (tragedy is an imitation of serious action, unlike comedy) implies that the play must portray someone who is in pursuit of "ethical" (i.e., morally significant) goals. But tragedy is not only an imitation of serious action, it also needs to produce the tragic effect (i.e., evoke pity and fear). And to be able to produce this effect, the tragic hero must also be characterized as one who is pursuing morally praiseworthy goals. And so the tragic hero must be someone who is good.

I believe that Halliwell's account is an acceptable one. But I wish to say more about his view that serious action requires an agent who is striving after goals which are morally significant (i.e., ethical goals). If the agent is in pursuit of morally significant goals, this does not imply that they must be goals that are praiseworthy. For the agent can still mistake certain goals to be the right ethical goals. He can still pursue goals which he sincerely believes to be praiseworthy, but which turn out not to be so. As an example, one may cite the actions of Clytemnestra in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*. Clytemnestra not only had an affair with Aegisthus, but together with her lover she plots the murder of her husband, Agamemnon. And she believes she is doing the right thing; for after killing her husband in his bath she justifies her act as rightful vengeance against him for having killed her daughter (as sacrifice to the gods) before setting out for Troy. Indeed she even claims to be acting out of sheer necessity (see Aeschylus, *Agamemnon* 1372). But her goal (which

is to avenge her daughter by killing her own husband) is not one that we would consider as praiseworthy. So serious action itself does not guarantee that the agent is striving after laudable goals. And this is why Halliwell has to mention another reason (i.e., the need to produce the tragic effect) to explain why the tragic hero must be one who is good (or virtuous).

But serious action can also have a broader meaning than the one offered by Halliwell. Serious action can also mean action which has moral significance. Described in this way, serious action need not even be directed at what the agent considers to be a good way of carrying on in life. For it can also be an action that is done because of a passing desire, but which is morally significant—such as seducing a neighbor's wife because of a passing desire. And there is nothing in the *Poetics* to suggest that we cannot give this broader meaning to serious action.

And serious action, when described in this way, also does not guarantee that the agent must be striving after laudable goals. But it must necessarily reveal the agent's character. Even if he seduces his neighbor's wife because of a passing desire (and shows extreme regret after the deed is done), his character will still be revealed through his action.

There is another reason (apart from this need to produce the tragic effect) why the tragic hero must be good—i.e., tragedy (according to Aristotle) is an imitation of people who are "better than we are" or who are "above our level of goodness" (see *Poetics* 1448a 17-18). I have pointed out that "above our level of goodness" refers to one who is superior to us in renown, popularity, past achievements, and social standing. An example of such a person is King Oedipus, who is well-known for having liberated Thebes from the grip of the Enchantress, and who is looked upon by others as one who is capable of resolving any problem or crisis which confronts Thebes. Such an agent must necessarily be regarded as good.

This, however, does not mean that all the agents in a tragedy must be good. Although the principal agent must be good as he is "above our level of goodness"; there is no suggestion in the *Poetics* that everyone who is portrayed must have such a quality. There is simply no indication that the lesser figures cannot have mistaken goals, or even goals which we would scorn at. Indeed Aristotle has given the tragic poet enough scope to portray lesser agents with mistaken goals, when he says that character will be revealed if what the agents does or says has a moral purpose, and "a good element of character, if the purpose revealed is good" (*Poetics* 1454a 17-18). It is possible, then, for the moral purpose revealed to be one that we disapprove of; even one that we would scorn at.

I wish, at this stage, to remind the reader of the close connection between the demand for tragic heroes to be good and the need for their characters to be appropriate. While the tragic hero must be good, he should not be good in an unqualified way—e.g., he should not be perfect in the same way as those heroic figures of classical mythology. While possessing some of the qualities of these heroic figures (the requirement for him to be "better than ourselves" ensures this), he should not be perfect or pre-eminently virtuous. Aristotle places two restrictions on his goodness: i.e., (i) he should also be "one like ourselves," for fear may only be evoked by witnessing the downfall of one who has some of our qualities (see *Poetics* 1453a 6); and (ii) his goodness must be appropriate to his type, or class (a requirement which we have just discussed). If the central figure is a woman, then she must not be portrayed as someone who is as courageous as freemen. This may be an unacceptable sexist view, but it is nonetheless upheld by Aristotle.

Let us consider if Aristotle's demand for presenting character "like the reality" (*Poetics* 1450b 10) comes into conflict with his demand for character to be appropriate. Firstly, one might interpret "like the reality" to mean the actual character of a certain historical personage described in the play. But it is surely possible for character-traits which are commonly associated with a particular legendary or historical personage to be also those which are not appropriate to his or her sex, social position, class, etc. One example is when the poet chooses to portray a woman who (in legend or in history) is courageous enough to lead men into battle, and to emerge victorious from such battles (such as the famous Joan of Arc). Or he may choose to portray a king who (in history or legend) is known to have qualities akin to those which Aristotle would assign to a woman, or a natural slave. In this way, the requirement for appropriateness will conflict with the requirement to make character "like the reality."

But Halliwell provides another interpretation of Aristotle's requirement for portraying a character "like the reality." He (1987, 142) says that making the tragic hero "like reality" means making him "like us," i.e., as a person who has our ethical failings and inadequacies. I favor this interpretation of Halliwell as it enables us to tie this requirement for character to be "like the reality" with the demand specified in Chap. 13 of the *Poetics* for character to be "like ourselves" (1453a 7-8). We can then also see this requirement for character to be "like the reality" as one that is aimed at producing the tragic effect—as Aristotle also says in Chap. 13 that fear is occasioned by witnessing the downfall of one who is "like ourselves" (1453a 6).

This means that the analogy with portrait-painting, which is made towards the end of Chap. 15 (see *Poetics* 1454b 8-14), is not

to be applied literally. The portrait-painter presents the distinctive features of a particular man, and he also makes him handsomer (or better-looking) than he really is. While the tragic poet presents someone who is like us in moral terms (and not someone who is morally perfect, and incapable of any moral failings), he also makes him one who is good. As an example I refer to King Oedipus, who is like us because he can be quickly roused to anger and to suspicion (as he wildly accuses Creon and Teiresias of scheming against him), and who is also good (as he is known for freeing Thebes from the Enchantress, and is looked upon as the one who would resolve any crisis confronting his city).

Another Aristotelian requirement for characters "is to make them consistent and the same throughout; even if inconsistency be part of the man before one for imitation as presenting that form of character, he should still be consistently inconsistent" (Aristotle, *Poetics* 1454a 26-27). This, simply, is the requirement for making an agent speak or act in ways which one would expect someone with a certain (or given) character to speak or act in the different circumstances which are present in the tragic plot.

The reason for this demand is obvious. As we determine the character of a personage by all the things he says or does in the play, the poet can only establish the character of his agent by making him consistently speak or act in ways which are peculiar to one with a certain fixed disposition. But if inconsistency is a character-trait of the agent, then he should be made to act inconsistently in the different incidents in the play.

Nevertheless, Lucas (1968, 160) points to a particular problem related to the portrayal of an agent who is consistently inconsistent. He claims that if an inconsistent character

> is presented on stage there is an obvious danger that in different scenes he will give the impression of being different people; nor is it easy within the restricted compass of a Greek play to reveal that a character is normally inconsistent.

One may ask what Lucas means by giving "the impression of being different people." If he means that a particular agent who acts inconsistently in the different scenes in the play will be considered (by the audience) to be different individuals, then his claim is unacceptable. This is because the agent will be physically the same person (the same actor will be playing his part, and he will be called by the same name); and he will be related to others in a certain way (e.g., as the father of Antigone, and the husband of Jocasta).

Even if it is possible for an agent with inconsistent traits of character to be considered as different individuals (and I have pointed out that this is unlikely to happen), the poet could prevent it. (i) By making one agent mention or describe the inconsistent character of another agent. After all, using one agent to describe the qualities of another is something which is often done in Greek tragedies. For example, in the opening scene of *Oedipus rex* the priest describes Oedipus as one who is famed for his great achievement (i.e., his success in freeing Thebes from the Sphinx), and who is also being looked upon as the person to deliver the city from the plague (see 35-52). And in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*, Cassandra describes Clytemnestra as a "doubled-fanged viper" who is vicious enough to strike down those who are close and near to her (see 1230-1236). Since Greek tragedies do reveal character by making one agent describe the disposition of another, this same method can surely be employed for revealing the inconsistent character-trait of a particular agent. And when this is done, what that agent says or does in the different scenes need not "give the impression of being different people." (ii) By making the chorus mention or describe the agent's inconsistent disposition. The chorus has sometimes been employed to describe the agent's character—e.g., in Sophocles' *Antigone* the chorus describes her as one who is bitter, and will not yield nor compromise her principles even when she is threatened (see 471-472).

## CONCLUSION

I wish to summarize by pointing out that while Aristotle ranks plot above character (as well as above the other elements) this should not be taken to suggest that we can have a tragedy without the element of character. In Aristotle's scheme, tragedy can only achieve its effect (i.e., evoke pity and fear, leading to the *katharsis* of these emotions) if the hero reveals certain character-traits, i.e., if he is "like us" in having the same moral strengths and weaknesses, but above us in terms of achievement and renown. For fear is evoked in us by witnessing the downfall of one who is morally "like us," and pity by the extent of his fall from a life of "great reputation and prosperity" to a life of great misery and misfortune (see *Poetics* 1453a 10-11). And this means that Aristotle's claim in Chap. 6 of the *Poetics* that there may be a tragedy "without character" (1450a 24) cannot be taken literally to mean a play in which no place at all is assigned to the presentation of the agents' character-traits. Such a play would simply fail to produce the tragic effect through its failure to reveal the settled disposition of its hero. I have instead opted to interpret Aristotle to mean a tragedy in which character-traits are not revealed through what the agents say, and neither is there revelation of

character by making one agent mention the fixed disposition of other agents in the play. But the agents in such a play will still reveal their character-traits by what they do. In this way, the so-called "characterless tragedy" can still be made to reveal those character-traits which are necessary for producing the tragic effect. In this way, the element of character, though ranked below the element of plot in importance, is still a necessary component of a tragic drama. My discussion on (Aristotle's view on) women and natural slaves must be seen as a significant part of this article because Aristotle often stresses the importance of *conviction*, as a work that is unconvincing may fail to produce the tragic effect (i.e., evoking pity and fear). In other words, if the characters of slaves and women are described in ways entirely beyond the expectations of the typical Greek audience, the tragic effect will not be produced—and producing the tragic effect is the ultimate aim of any tragic drama.

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# OF SUPER-EVOS AND NON-EVOS: IMAGINING KARMIC LAW IN THE 23RD CENTURY

**Leni dlR Garcia**
*De La Salle University, Manila*

*The philosophical musings in this article are inspired by Laura Esquivel's multimedia novel,* The law of love, *set in a world of high-end technological gadgets in the 23rd century where people are aware that their lives are governed by the law of* karma. *The reflections try to show that although sophisticated technology might be able to help in tracking one's spiritual growth in many ways, in the long run it will only hamper the true evolution of the soul.*

Every action we take has repercussions in the Cosmos. It would be infinitely arrogant to believe that we are the be-all and end-all, and that we can do whatever occurs to us. We are that all and everything that vibrates with the sun, the moon, the wind, water, fire, and earth, with everything outside us determines what we are, so, too, everything we think and feel has its effect on the external world. When a person accumulates hatred, resentment, envy, and anger within, her surrounding aura becomes black, dense, heavy. As she loses the ability to capture Divine Light, her personal energy goes down, as does—logically—the energy of everything around her. To build up her energy level, and, with it, the level of her life, that negative energy must be released.

—Anacreonte
Laura Esquivel, *The law of love*

In the gnostic or divine being, in the gnostic life, there will be a close and complete consciousness of the self of others, a consciousness of their mind, life, physical being which are felt as if they were one's own. The gnostic

> being will act, not out of a surface sentiment of love and sympathy or any similar feeling, but out of this close mutual consciousness, this intimate oneness. All his action in the world will be enlightened by a truth of vision of what has to be done, a sense of the will of the Divine Reality in him which is also the Divine Reality in others, and it will be done for the Divine in all, for the effectuation of the truth of purpose of the All as seen in the light of the highest consciousness is in the way and by the steps through which it must be effectuated in the power of the Supernature.
>
> —Sri Aurobindo Ghose
> *The life divine*

> [The devotees] were free from longing and craved for nothing. They were pure, impartial and competent. Things of the world did not distract their minds and they were indifferent to the fruits of action. They neither rejoiced nor grieved. They did not hate anybody and had no desires. They were the same in joy and sorrow. They were beyond good and evil...
>
> —XII-12, *The bhagavad-gita*

## INTRODUCTION

The word "karma" has become a very common term that anybody can use it in the proper context yet not know its origin and, therefore, miss out on the richness of its meaning. We know "karma" to mean something like the Confucian Golden Rule: "Do unto others what you want others to do unto you" and "Do not do unto others what you do not want others to do unto you." In Filipino, this has been called "*Batas ng panunumbalik*" or the law of return, meaning that every deed has a corresponding reward or punishment according to its own nature. The fruit, we say, takes after the nature of the tree and of the seed from which it grew. As the popular adage goes, "*Ang santol ay hindi maaaring magbunga ng mangga*" ("The santol tree can never bear mango fruits") (Timbreza 1982, 22). This is why, when we are about to commit an act which we can admit to ourselves as not "purely good," or is, at least, tinged with an ulterior motive, we pause and ask, "Will I not get bad *karma* because of this?" (In Filipino, we say, *"Ma-karma kaya ako nito?"*) Similarly, when we are hesitant to do something good, we convince ourselves that we must go ahead and do it because "it is good for our *karma*."

Unfortunately, this is a very limited view of the workings of *karma*. It forgets the intricacies involved in the teachings that the wise people of Ancient East sought to have their disciples understand.

Laura Esquivel's multimedia novel, *The law of love,* explores, in a very creative way, the deeper meanings of the term "karma" and how it relates to the process of rebirth. Its elaborate plot caused one commentator to call it "a Mexican *Midsummer night's dream.*" Contemplating on this fantasy gave way to many of the reflections that will be discussed in this paper which endeavors to: first, show how Esquivel's creative plot allows for an envisioning of a world that is governed by *karma*; second, see if this envisioning can sustain itself when viewed within the context of eastern philosophical view of *karma*, particularly those held by Hindu thinkers; and third, show that although advanced technology—that which allows us to see what was before unseen or record what was before unrecordable—can help one keep track of her spiritual progress, it can also pose as an obstacle to spiritual growth.

## THE TWENTY-THIRD CENTURY

*The law of love* is set in the twenty-third century and Esquivel's imagination brings to her readers not only a society with high-end technology but also interplanetary presidential elections which obviously require interplanetary travels on space ships. Very sophisticated appliances exist and assist people in all that they do. For example, instead of regular apartment doorbells, alarm devices that register a person's *aura* or energy field, which radiates in colors around the body, are installed. If a visitor's aura is not registered in the device and she rings the doorbell, her aura will disintegrate within twenty-four hours. That definitely beats security systems that register only authorized fingerprints or retina or voice which, we know from action movies, can be forged! One's *aura*, so the clairvoyants say, is absolutely unique and cannot be copied. And although it can be *aurographed* by using a special camera, it cannot be reproduced for the purpose of being worn by somebody else. In fact, in this world, the aurograph serves as one's un-tamperable identification card!

Another amazing equipment available to Esquivel's characters is the photomental camera which sees into people subconsciousness. Instead of the ordinary videocameras, photomental cameras are installed in offices and other public places to monitor people's real thoughts and feelings. One, therefore, cannot pretend to think good thoughts and try to act pleasantly if she is really thinking ill thoughts because the photomental camera can easily record the discrepancy which the authorities can investigate. Now, this definitely puts the present lie detectors we have out of service.

Among household appliances is the televirtual set which "transports the viewer to the site of new events, placing one right in the middle of the action." It is a cross between a television and a virtual reality apparatus. Everything that happens "out there" is happening inside the room where the televirtual set is. There is also an aerophone booth which one uses to get to where she wants to go without traveling the distance. It works pretty much like *Star trek's* teleporter which disintegrates one's body into its component molecules and then reconstructs it once more upon arrival at one's destination. Aside from these, there are other interesting things like the *plantspeaker* which one can hook up to plants. It translates the plant's electrical emissions into words, so one can actually talk to plants!

The whole novel is, as mentioned earlier, based on the fantasy that people all over the galaxy are aware of the workings of *karma*, and of the processes involved in paying for bad *karma*. Advanced technology that allows visual manifestations of everything that has to do with one's *karma* allows one to monitor her own spiritual progress. As a result, there are also new occupations which can be engaged in for this purpose. For instance, the main character in the novel, Azucena Martinez, is an *astroanalyst*. Instead of mere psychotherapy, she regresses her patients in order to find out about their past lives. Astroanalysis seems to work on the principle that when a person understands the reasons for her bad karma—which are, of course, rooted in one's past lives—then she will be able to heal herself psychologically and pave the way for the evolution of her soul. The availability of memories of the past gave rise to new social classifications—Super-Evos and Non-Evos—depending on the extent of "astral" evolution of one's soul.

Certain offices are also established for the purpose of tracking people through various lifetimes. There is, for example, the Center for the Oversight of Previous Existences or COPE where, it seems, people can have their past lives investigated. There is also the Consumer Protection Agency where a person can go to complain about her present life and bargain for a better one.

A positive result of all of these advancements is the apparent elimination of crimes. Esquivel (1996, 28) explains:

> This had resulted from the development of an apparatus that, from a single drop of blood or saliva, a broken fingernail or a hair, could reconstruct the entire body of a person and indicate his whereabouts. Criminals, therefore, could be arrested and punished minutes after committing an offense, no matter where they had transflashed themselves.

And this "transflashing" can bring one not only to another country but to another planet! Improvements in technology have allowed space travel and seem to have eliminated the problem of the scarcity of land.

However, hi-technology also gave rise to a certain suppression of freedom. For instance, there is an office responsible for the "control of equipment" and it censors certain things like CDs and other things which are believed to have a negative influence on a person's aura. Also, because of technological advancement, certain illegal businesses have developed. One interesting business is the selling of bodies. Those bodies with no registered auras can be sold to anyone who wants to disguise himself.

> This business owed its inadvertent beginnings to a group of late-twentieth century scientists who had been experimenting with the artificial insemination of barren women. The procedure worked in the following manner: first an operation was performed to remove an egg from a woman. This egg was then fertilized with the husband's sperm in a test tube. When this test-tube fetus was several weeks old, it was implanted in the woman's womb. Sometimes the woman's body rejected the fetus and spontaneous abortion occurred, in which case the entire process had to be repeated. As the surgical procedure was uncomfortable, the scientists decided that instead of extracting one egg at a time, they would extract several. They would then fertilize them all, so that if for some reason the first attempt at insemination failed, they would have a replacement fetus from the same mother and father ready to be introduced into the uterus. As it was not always necessary to utilize a second fetus, much less a third, the extras were frozen, thus creating the first fetus bank.

The unused fetuses were frozen and used for experimentation until the "Great Earthquake" when the laboratory where these experiments were being held was buried. When it was discovered, a scientist bought all the frozen fetuses and, again with modern technology, developed each fetus into an adult body. Since these bodies had no soul, they were never registered. Body-salesmen then offer these bodies to those who want to change bodies through a soul transplant. This and other small crimes have developed because of technology and these allow for the making of an interesting plot for the novel.

## A WEB OF *KARMIC* RELATIONSHIPS

The story of *The law of love* stretches from the sixteenth to the twenty-third century tracing the various karmic relationships among its characters. In the twenty-third century, the protagonist Azucena Martinez, an astroanalyst, meets her twin soul, Rodrigo, who disappears the next day when news of the assassination of Mr. Bush, the American candidate for Planetary President, astounds everybody. Azucena then tries all means available to her, including illegal means, to find Rodrigo. This search for Rodrigo brings her in contact with the circle of the novel's antagonist, Isabel Gonzales, who is also a candidate for planetary presidency. Unknown to Azucena, Isabel uses Rodrigo as an alibi for the assassination which she herself plotted. Rodrigo's memory is erased and he is sent to the penal planet, Korma. When Azucena finds this out, she goes to Korma and rescues Rodrigo, transferring his soul into another body and regressing him in order to recover his memory.

In rescuing Rodrigo and trying to expose Isabel's evil plot in order to win the election—which includes falsification of her past lives, pretending that she was, at one time, Mother Teresa—Azucena discovers a web of karmic relationships in which she and Rodrigo are caught. Three of their lifetimes are shown to be very significant in the story: their lives in 1521, in 1890, and in 1985. In 1521, Rodrigo was one of the Spanish conquistadores who conquered Mexico. He was awarded a land in Tlatelolco where the Aztecs built the Temple of Love on one of the pyramids in the ancient times. He built his house around the apex of the pyramid of the Temple of Love since he could not tear it down. At that time he was married to Doña Isabel de Gongora, but was lustful for an Indian woman, Citlali.

Citlali was a princess of the Tenochtitlan royalty but was made a slave, just like all the natives who remained after the fall of Mexico. On the day Rodrigo arrived, she had just given birth to a son whom Rodrigo killed. Then, since she is his household help, Rodrigo raped Citlali over and over. To avenge herself and her people, Citlali killed the son that was born to Rodrigo and Isabel. This son was Azucena in one of her reincarnations.

In 1890, Citlali, in her reincarnation as a man, was brother to the male Isabel. Isabel was then the husband of the female Rodrigo. One day while the male Isabel was sleeping, the male Citlali raped the female Rodrigo. Finding out his crime, the male Isabel murdered the male Citlali. Then in 1985, Isabel was a single parent to Citlali. Rodrigo was her lover who fell in love with Citlali. A daughter was born to Rodrigo and Citlali—Azucena—whom Isabel murdered out of jealousy.

All these Azucena finds out in her present reincarnation as Isabel's daughter. When she was born in the year 2180, Isabel found

out from an astrologer that Azucena would cause her downfall. To prevent the oracle from coming to be, Isabel ordered one of her men to kill Azucena. However, the man who was supposed to kill Azucena took pity on her and placed her instead in an orphanage. Azucena had no knowledge of her relationship to Isabel until now. Azucena's angel, Anacreonte, explains to her that she survives this reincarnation because it is, as it has always been, her mission to teach the law of love.

When Isabel's dirty plot is revealed, Azucena and Rodrigo are restored as twin souls and Azucena's mission to spread the law of love—as part of the working out of her own *karma*—is finally accomplished.

> Order had finally been reestablished and all doubts resolved. Azucena learned that she had been assigned the mission of reinstating the Law of Love as part of a punishment. She had been the foulest murderer of all time, having blown up three planets with nuclear bombs. But the Law of Love, in its infinite generosity, had given her the opportunity to restore equilibrium. And to the benefit of all, she had succeeded. (Esquivel 1996, 265)

## *KARMA* AND THE LAW OF LOVE

There are many schools of thought that believe in some kind of *karmic* return. Among the earliest religions, Hinduism and Buddhism are two of those which put a heavy premium on the workings of *karma* in relation to spiritual salvation. Laura Esquivel, however, seems to focus on the Hindu version of *karmic* cycles. According to Hindu thought, *karma* works because there is a permanent, immutable soul called *atman* that reincarnates from lifetime to lifetime, taking on different sexes and castes, but carrying the same *karmic* energy all throughout its existence in this world, the world of *samsara* or the cycle of rebirth. Those who are enlightened try to achieve *moksa*—spiritual liberation from rebirth—by working out the *karmic* energy they have accumulated in their past lives. It is, however, quite difficult to achieve *moksa* because a reincarnated soul loses memory of its past lives and therefore has no knowledge of its karmic past nor of how to start working it out in order to achieve salvation. To the Hindus, this salvation is *nirvana* or a state of nonreturn or nonrebirth.

Laura Esquivel's novel may be a fantasy, yet, it is still an envisioning of a world aware of *karma*. It is a kind of wishful thinking about how much easier it would be if people knew about their past lives and could consciously work toward the evolution of

their souls in order to achieve salvation. Esquivel even pushes this fantasy further by creating angels who can communicate to their charges and lead them to the right path. It is therefore worthwhile to see if, in case this fantasy was possible, it would be consistent with the insights of the ancient spiritual *gurus*.

The law of love, as quoted in the introductory part of this paper, seems to be consistent with the basic mystical insight that everything in the universe is one, that everything is interconnected and therefore everything affects everything else. This is because all finite things have their roots in that which is infinite. The law of love, therefore, also stems from something infinite—divine love.

> It isn't so easy to understand Love. Usually people think they find it through a partner. But the love we experience while making love with another is only a pale reflection of what is truly Love. One's partner is only the intermediary through whom we receive Divine Love. Through the kiss, the embrace, the soul receives all the peace necessary to align itself and make the connection with Divine Love. But be warned: that does not mean that our partner possesses that Love, nor is he or she the only one who can bestow it. Nor is it true that if that person leaves, he will take Love with him, leaving us unprotected. Divine Love is infinite. It is everywhere and entirely within reach at every moment. (Esquivel 1996, 102-03)

The role of *karma* is clear—whatever one does affects not only herself but everything else in the world, not only now but also in the future, and the effects have a way of returning to her. Therefore, unless one acts in accordance with the law of love, there is no chance for his or her liberation. Yet, before one can act in accordance with the law of love, one has to learn it first. This is why reincarnation cannot be separated from the karmic process. One reincarnates in a situation which will give him the best possible opportunities to learn what he has not yet learned in his past lives. Azucena's angel, Anacreonte, explains thus—

> The Universe will place us in situations that correspond to our degree of evolution. That's why in Azucena's particular case, I always opposed rushing her meeting with Rodrigo. Not because she wasn't sufficiently evolved, and not because Rodrigo still had outstanding debts, but because Azucena needed to learn to exercise more control over her impulsiveness and rebelliousness before

> confronting her present situation. I knew very well that she was going to fly off the handle, and I certainly got that part right! Her confused state of mind prevents her form seeing the truth. (Esquivel 1996, 104)

What Anacreonte is trying to teach Azucena seems to be congruent with the Hindu philosophical teaching on *karma* and *moksa*. As long as the ego does not give way to the manifestation of the divine self, the wheel of *karma* will continue to roll accumulating more and more *karmic* materials to be worked out which, in turn, means more need for rebirths. The ego tends to be attached, while spiritual liberation requires detachment. This is the lesson the lord Krsna was trying to teach the warrior Arjuna in *The bhagavad-gita*. To cleanse oneself of karmic material, one has to perform her duty without any regard for the consequences of her action. In other words, one must not have any ulterior motives in doing her duty. But, reborn in the world, one's ego comes to fore and all sorts of vested interests are created.

> You have control over your action and never over its fruits. You should not live for the fruits of action, nor attach yourself to inaction. (II-47, *The bhagavad-gita*)

The Mundaka Upanishad illustrates this well by relating the story of two birds sitting on the same tree. One partakes of the fruits of the tree and tastes their sweetness or bitterness. The other does not eat the fruits but just looks on. The Upanishad explains,

> The individual self, deluded by forgetfulness of his identity with the divine Self, bewildered by his ego, grieves, and is sad. But when he recognizes the worshipful Lord and his own true Self, and beholds his glory, he grieves no more. (Prabhavananda and Manchester 1975, 47)

Similarly, in *The bhagavad-gita* (II-15), the Lord Krsna says:

> The man who is not disturbed by the contacts of the senses with their objects, who is even-minded in pain and pleasure and who is steadfast makes fit for eternal life.

It is only the ego that experiences joy or sorrow and causes itself to be disturbed. The divine Self, *atman*, experiences neither and is therefore always at peace. The divine Self is not individual. It is all; it is the universe. Thus, the metaphor used in describing the

experience of enlightenment: "To be a drop of water that disappears in the ocean." In the state of enlightenment, one cannot distinguish one's Self from the Selves of others. The existentialist Martin Buber (1990, 117), focusing on relational philosophy which encourages people to treat others not as *its* but as *Thous*, relates a Hindu tale in the following manner:

> The Brahmana of a hundred paths relates that the gods and the demons were once engaged in a contest. Then the demons said: "To whom shall we offer our sacrifices?" They placed all offerings in their mouths. But the gods placed the offerings in one another's mouth. Then Prajapati, the primal spirit, bestowed himself upon the gods.

In an article that studies the meaning of *karma*, the author Will Ross (1991, 12) writes of this difference between the ego and the true Self—

> We have to realize that we have constantly to let go of the means that helped us tread this ordinary path of our everyday lives. But we cling for a while to a number of things; we become part of our conditioning, subject to certain fixed ideas and certain ways of life that proved to be valuable in gaining a particular experience. We are all too often afraid to let go, and turn to something new and more enlightening. It is this process of living and letting go which is the essence of evolution.

In the novel, Azucena has trapped herself in precisely this situation even though she is already a "Super-Evo" and, as Anacreonte says of her, has achieved sufficient evolution of her soul. She has taken her circumstances personally and has attached herself to her twin soul Rodrigo that she ends up confused and disoriented and unable to accomplish her mission. In forgetting her mission, she has once again allowed herself to be swept away in the whirlpool of *karma*.

In spite of this congruence between traditional mystical teachings and Esquivel's fantasy, there are several things in the novel that seem to contradict the implications of having a world of people who are aware of the karmic law and are working for the evolution of their souls. The novel still perpetuates the common incorrect notion of the karmic process as a mere cosmic accounting of good and bad deeds. It seems that the modern technology available to people make them regress instead of progress in the ladder of spiritual

evolution. The following are indications that the idea of karmic return might have been misunderstood.

*Karma and ultra-modern technology.* The technology of the twenty-third century seems to contradict the required detachment from material things in order to achieve karmic release. With televirtual sets that allow one to wake up to the "dawn of Saturn, or hear the sound of the Neptunian sea," one tends to get too attached to sensual pleasures made available in the world. In fact, televirtual sets have become a status symbol that people without them cannot anymore be satisfied with a regular television set.

> While Cuquita was making her own preparations for bed, she suddenly spied the remote control of the Televirtual. She felt a surge of pleasure and forgot about her exhaustion and her bruises. All her life she had longed for a Televirtual, but had never had the money to buy one. The closest she had come was a run-of-the-mill 3-D set. (Esquivel 1996, 112)

Televirtuals have caused envy and even enmity among neighbors. How can they work toward the improvement of their lot if they are constantly envious of others' material wealth? Televirtuals are, of course, the least of the problems. The machines used for transplanting souls which lead to selling bodies without auras, and microchips that contain programmed data that can be implanted in one's brain so that photomentals will not see what is actually in one's mind, are advancements that ironically lead souls downward in the ladder of spiritual evolution. It seems that the more advanced technology becomes, the farther away people are from karmic release. It is just too tempting to make use of technology to benefit oneself, even if it means committing a crime. This is the reason that spiritual seekers of long ago chose to sever their links with the society and went up the mountains to meditate. They had nothing with them but their walking sticks.

Of course, in the story, technology is appreciated for the good things it has brought about. For instance, because of aurographs, photomentals, and televirtuals, crimes seems to have been eliminated. Yet, as Esquivel (1996, 113) herself writes,

> It hadn't worked out that way, however. Admittedly, crime had been brought under control, but not so much because people had learned their lesson, as because of advances in technology. Until Mr. Bush's assassination, no one in ages had dared commit a murder. Again, not because they didn't have the desire, but because of their

fear of punishment. New devices meant that no one escaped capture.

Karmically speaking, this does not save anyone. To not commit a wrongdoing because of fear of the consequences weighs as heavily in karmic scales as to do a good deed because of the benefit it will bring. Both of them are "interested in the fruits of action"—unable to contribute to karmic cleansing.

*Karma and twin souls.* Another advantage of technology in the story is that through the photomental cameras and other devices, people's past lives can now be retrieved and recorded. An office, the Consumer Protection Agency, keeps all these records. A person, aware of her past lives and who personally keeps track of her progress, can go and file a complaint with the agency in case she is not satisfied with her present lot. The scene described below gives a picture of what goes on in this office.

> From where [Azucena] stood she could not avoid hearing all of Cuquita's conversation with the bureaucrat. Communication between the two was complicated with Cuquita's repeated efforts to impress the woman by using language she considered elegant and cultivated. However, since she didn't know what half the terms means, she only ended up annoying the clerk.
>
> "Listen, Señorita. You have any idea how meretricious I've been?"
>
> "I beg your pardon?"
>
> "I've levitated my soul high enough to merit scatological treatment."
>
> "I'm sure you have, Señora, but the problem is you have to pay for everything in life, either in installments or a case on the barrelhead—but you still have to pay."
>
> "I know, but look, I've paid off my karmic dues, verbatim. And now I want my divorce."
>
> "I'm very sorry, Señora, but our records indicate that you still owe outstanding debts to your husband from prior lives."
>
> "What debts?"
>
> "Do I need to remind you of your life as a film critic?"
>
> "Well, okay, I admit I was pretty nasty, but not enough to deserve this!" I've spent enough time paying off karmas from posterior lives not to be stuck with a man guilty of default and battery. Just look at this eye! If you don't grant me a divorce soon, I swear I'll kill him."

> "Do what you like, but you'll still have to pay. Next, please."
>
> "No, Señora, it won't work. Let me tell you, lots of people are in the same boat. They all want beauty, money, health, or fame—without ever doing anything to deserve them. But still, if you really want to go ahead and meet your twin soul without earning the privilege, we can always work out a credit. That is, assuming you're willing to pay interest."
>
> "How much interest are we talking about?"
>
> "If you sign this form, we can put you in touch with your twin soul in less than a month, but you'll have to commit to spending ten more lives with your current husband, taking beatings, humiliation, whatever he chooses to dish out. If you agree to this, we can arrange it immediately. (Esquivel 1996, 55-56)

It would, indeed, be wonderful if something like this was real and people could bargain for a better life. But what would *karma* be for? A scenario like this would be completely devoid of any spiritual sense. This, like the popular, simplistic notion of *karma*, reduces it to a mere "tit for tat"—if one did good, she would expect something good, like a reward, or something bad like a punishment, if her deed had been bad.

One thing we usually miss when contemplating on *karma* is that the goal is not to gain good *karma* to have a good life in future rebirths as a reward, but to attain a state of being in which we do not have *karma* left to work out, good or bad. In short, we should be after "zero" *karma*, not just "positive" *karma*. Good *karma*, according to the law, will definitely be rewarded, since everything returns in kind. But the reward is still in the realm of *samsara*—one still has to be reborn in order to claim the prize. The Mundaka Upanishad says:

> Finite and transient are the fruits of sacrificial rites. The deluded, who regard them as the highest good, remain subject to birth and death.
>
> Living in the abyss of ignorance, yet wise in their own conceit, the deluded go round and round, like the blind led by the blind.
>
> Living in ignorance, the deluded think themselves blest. Attached to words, they know not God. Works lead them only to heaven, whence, to their sorrow, their rewards quickly exhausted, they are flung back to earth. (Prabhavananda and Manchester 1975, 44)

Thus, there is no point in bargaining, unless one forgets that the goal is not to be reborn to a good life, but to escape the cycle of rebirth altogether. As one commentator (see Lean 1989, 87) says, "knowing this law [of karma], forget it! Never be self-conscious about it, trying to live according to rule; right living must become instinctive..."

In connection with this, it is also strange that there still exists a social classification of Super-Evos and Non-Evos. This reminds us of the caste system that was oppressive to members of the lower castes. Super-Evos should be enlightened enough to know that everything houses the divine Self. As Krsna in *The bhagavad-gita* tells Arjuna: the enlightened one sees everything with equal vision. Besides, what is the point of having all the means to know about one's past lives if people will still remain un-*evolved*? People like Cuquita in the story only prolong their agony by refusing to gracefully suffer the consequences of their past misdeeds. As the bureaucrat at the agency points out, the more shortcuts one tries to take, the longer their route becomes to becoming evolved souls.

Finding one's twin soul is another issue. The idea of having and eventually finding one's twin soul—commonly called "soulmate"—has been so romanticized that it has become the subject of many love stories. The promise of a totally fulfilling love relationship is simply too attractive for us to let go of the idea. But what are soulmates but souls that have experienced life together? They are bound to meet again in order to work out a joint *karma*, but the goal is always *to let go*. As it is, there is not much letting go that goes on in this story.

*Karma and memory.* It would really be nice if we could remember all our part lives. The data would be an interesting addition to our curriculum vitae and it would also make it easier for us to cope with the realities of our present life because then we would know the reasons behind the events that happen to us. It is true that we always wish for what we do not have. But if we did have this memory of our past lives, would it be as beneficial to us as we believe it to be?

Years and years ago, an episode entitled "Memories" of the old television series *Twilight zone* (season 3, episode 6) showed a story about a therapist who, in the twentieth century, hypnotizes her patients to enable them to remember their past lives. In spite of her success with her patients, this therapist cannot remember any of her past lives. One day, while regressing herself with a tape recorder, she falls asleep and wakes up to a different century. Realizing she has been transported to another time and that she cannot get out of it, she tries looking for a job but is always rejected because she

cannot cite the jobs she has had in her past lifetimes, an information required in the job application forms.

Thus, the therapist realizes that this world she woke up to is one where people have the natural capacity to remember her past existences. In this world, she says to herself, there is no need for her services. But she comes across a woman, one of those street-people who live in the gutters and abandoned old cars, wailing and crying and obviously in deep pain. The therapist tries to convince the woman to go to the hospital, but the latter refuses, saying that she wants to die and move on to her next life, hopefully better than her present life. This woman in misery cannot anymore bear the knowledge of her past lives, when she lived as a rich, beautiful, and powerful person. Everyday she remembers and compares her present lot with her past, and her agony only worsens.

Taking pity on this woman, the therapist offers the only help she can give—to hypnotize the woman and make her forget. The authorities eventually find out about this, track the therapist down and make her work for them. Apparently, she is the *messiah* they have been waiting for, the one who has no memory of her past lives coming to bring them the gift of forgetfulness. She is then employed to hypnotize people and erase all memories of their past lives and help them cope with the present.

Stories like this make one rethink the value of remembering the past. One writer (see Lean 1989, 82) affirms the lesson given in the *Twilight zone* episode:

> Suppose the veils were for a moment torn apart. If we could see our whole past and future and could know the full sum of our debt, then we should live in a perpetual state of apprehension, dreading the way ahead. I do not think we could face the future if we knew what was coming to us. That is why full knowledge of the past and of the future is denied to all save the spiritually mature who are wise enough and great enough to bear it.

Laura Esquivel (1996, 176) writes of a similar insight in *The law of love:*

> Sometimes, it is a real advantage not to have a memory, because by not remembering the bad things others have done to us, we can look at those people without prejudice. If that were not so, memory would become a powerful barrier to communication. When we see a person who once harmed us, we say: this person is bad because he did such and such to me. We should ignore the past in

> order to establish healthy ties, and create an opportunity for relationships to develop to the point they are intended. Without memory, prejudices do not exist. Because opinions inevitably draw us toward or away from others, we must know how to set them aside if we are to capture the real essence of a person.

Yet, this is exactly the trap in which the characters in the story are caught. This is the reason that it is so difficult to have the people in the twenty-third century understand and then live by the law of love. The means available that should make the law more accessible to them instead allow them to lose sight of it. In particular, the availability of karmic memory, although it makes people remember the past, leads to forgetfulness of what truly matters.

## POETIC LICENSE

The issues discussed above show that although the story of *The law of love* is about teaching the law of love, the task proves quite difficult to achieve in the setting chosen by Esquivel. Although Azucena's task is achieved in the end, still the whole context is set in the realm of *samsara*. The law of love may have been understood, but the focus of attention is still this relative world where people get reborn over and over again. Realizing the Law may give people better lives and may allow further evolution of the soul, yet the true release of the soul to the realm of nonrebirth or *nirvana* is left quite out of sight. And we dare say that this is because between one's soul and its salvation lies all the hi-tech contraptions of Esquivel's twenty-third century. Of course, this is why *The law of love* is a fiction, and an enjoyable one at that. In any case, it was never the aim of this paper to make a critique of the story, but only to join Esquivel in her thought-experiment while setting it against a more serious paradigm.

The philosopher-guru Sri Aurobindo Ghose seems to have envisioned a world like Esquivel's while being more faithful to the ancient teachings about the workings of *karma*. In an opus called *The life divine*, Ghose (1965) explains how the soul descends, through a process he calls *involution* to the world and joins matter in order to *divinize* it. Only when the spiritual in matter is awakened that the process of *evolution* occurs and the *Supramental* person is developed. It is now the Supramental being, called *Gnostic being*, who affects the divine life on earth.

However, this divine life on earth is not like the world in *The law of love*. The trend is relational, not technological

advancement. *Karma* and rebirth serve this purpose. Memory of past lives is considered overrated and the notion of evolution is more holistic rather than individualistic. Ghose (1965, 556-67) writes:

> A supramental or gnostic race of being would not be a race made according to a singly type, moulded in a single fixed pattern, for the law of the supermind is unity fulfilled in diversity, and therefore, there would be an infinite diversity in the manifestation of the gnostic consciousness although that consciousness would still be one in its basis, in its constitution, in its all-revealing and all-uniting order.

Thus, in Ghose's vision, there will be no rifts between "Super-Evos" and "Non-Evos" and there is definitely no need for a Consumer Protection Agency. Personal motives will not have any place in the development of the Gnostic Race whose only purpose is to bring the Spirit down to Matter and divinize it—to make a kind of Nirvana here on earth. Perhaps, instead of space ships and aerophones, there will be more trees and cleaner rivers. Instead of aurographs and photomentals, there will be plain clairvoyance which will develop in each being. And instead of angels guiding individuals to the realization of the law of love, the law of love will naturally be found in the heart of every individual.

This is, perhaps, how we would imagine a world governed by the knowledge of *karma* and rebirth. However, this envisioning would not be as funny as Esquivel's, nor would it sell as much. *The law of love* is a wishful thought that allows one to have her cake and eat it, too—to use technology and memory for the betterment of one's next life. As mentioned earlier, it treats the process of *karma* and reincarnation as a mere accounting of credits and debits. The serious business of spiritual evolution, however, seems to be less interesting, and a task more demanding and more difficult to achieve. Spiritual concerns go in the direction opposite that taken by technological advancements.

## CONCLUSION

I used to think that Filipinos did not have to cope with the conflict between spiritual growth and technological advancement simply because in terms of technology we were always about twenty years behind compared to the advancements in the fist-world countries. However, this was considered undesirable, so now we seem to be up-to-date with the world's progress. Everyone has cellular phones, computer palmtops, Internet connections, and all

that would constitute a technophobe's nightmare. On the one hand, this allows for the betterment of the lives of the Filipinos, but on the other hand, it can also hinder spiritual growth. They create desires like the one exhibited by Cuquita's coveting a televirtual. They also take away so much of our time, e-mailing, chatting, texting, etc. —time that could be spent on less impersonal communication or more spiritual meditation. Technology can be very addictive and can tempt us to use it for not-so-moral endeavors. It is like, as people say, the Witch's red shoes in the *Wizard of Oz*. On Dorothy, they can do good, but in the hands of the Witch, they can be very destructive. Perhaps, what we need to have first is a deeper understanding of our nature as spiritual beings. For people who believe in the workings of *karma*, the law of love, as it has been referred to in the novel, has to be made the foundation for all of our human endeavors. If that is established, it is very possible that all other advancements in the material realm will prove insufficient, obsolete, and perhaps utterly unnecessary.

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# "HIDDEN KEYNOTE" IN GIOVANNI PICO DELLA MIRANDOLA'S UNDERSTANDING OF HUMAN DIGNITY AND FREEDOM

**April Capili**
***Katholieke Universiteit Leuven***
***Belgium***

*This paper points out that the idea of creation serves as the "hidden keynote" in Pico's celebrated* Oration. *Against the claims of some prominent commentators, the author argues that Pico does not see freedom as the ultimate basis of man's dignity. By contrasting Pico's statements with those of Jean-Paul Sartre, it can be seen that freedom for Pico is conditioned. This view has implications for understanding the human condition, the possibilities for self-definition, and for determining the moral worth of various manners of living. Drawing attention to the notion of creation helps one to understand Pico on his own terms and the historical context, and to see how his notions of human will and dignity are distinct from modern and contemporary conceptions.*

## INTRODUCTION

Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (or "Pico" for short) belongs to the company of Renaissance humanists who proclaimed the dignity of the human person. Though the notion of the dignity of man were also discussed by Ancient and Christian writers in the West (Kristeller 1972, 4), Pico is one of those who made it a theme, expressed it eloquently in the fashion of the humanists, and gave it a conspicuous and prominent place in one of his writings, the *Oration*, which was meant to serve as Pico's introduction to his proposed—and suppressed—disputation on nine-hundred various theses collected from diverse philosophers, "theologians," and traditions of thought. Though only the first third of this work—

which in later editions acquired the longer title *Oration on the dignity of man*—speaks of man's uniqueness and incomparable dignity, it remains perhaps one of the most celebrated and well-known of Renaissance works. Such is the elegance and convincing power of this piece that even a modern reader may perhaps recognize in Pico's striking and seemingly modern claims his or her own convictions—most probably unarticulated but nevertheless operative and effective—as to what makes him or her a unique individual worthy of the respect of others.

There are scholars who, holding that it is the main theme in the *Oration*, read Pico's celebration of man's dignity as an antagonism toward the supposed devaluation of man in the Christian Middle ages; they believe that Pico's words constitute "a counterpoise to the increasing tendency of medieval religion to depreciate man's nature" (Pater 1922, 41).[1] Such a view is perhaps linked to the assessment of medieval times as a Dark Age during which Western civilization made no progress at all, being mired in ignorance and bogged down by the dogmatism of the Church, a milieu that humanity was able to escape and from which it has distanced itself thanks to the achievements of the Renaissance. This latter view has of course been discredited, though it remains no less true that the Renaissance is not simply an extension of the Middle Ages. This new period in the history of thought brought with it not only hitherto unknown or forgotten classical texts, but also new attitudes and ways of treating these works, and certainly also developments in various philosophical traditions. It may also appear to a contemporary reader that Pico anticipated modern radical conceptions of human freedom, an example of which would be that of the self-styled existentialist Jean-Paul Sartre. As Copenhaver (2002, 56) puts it, this text of Pico has traditionally been hailed "as the great Renaissance proclamation of a modern ideal of human dignity and freedom." Copenhaver, however, doubts that this text is really only or mainly about the dignity and autonomy of the human person. Paul Miller, in his Introduction to *Pico della Mirandola on the dignity of man*, clarifies that it is anachronistic to claim that Pico is putting forward an idea of absolute freedom or will, for volition in Pico (1998, xiv) is not auto-foundational, but is in fact, grounded in something else. If Pico's *Oration* does not present a modern ideal of autonomy, a position that would imply that human will is self-grounding, how can we then understand his view of man's dignity and freedom?

We will here attempt to bring into view something like what Pieper (1957, 45) in his little book on Aquinas calls the "hidden keynote," an idea or presupposition that "dominates whatever has been explicitly said," in the works of Aquinas. This "negative

element" in the thought of the Angelic Doctor determines all other important notions in his grand and total vision of reality. This hidden key is creation or the fact that everything that exists—save one, the Creator—is created *ex nihilo*. The transcendentals, for instance, which are predicated of everything that exists, can be fully understood only in light of this hidden key. Being is true, good, and beautiful. But being is all these because being is *creatura*. Nothing exists first, only to become good as the attribute of goodness is, in a second moment, imposed upon it. To be true or good or beautiful is to exist (and vice-versa). We would like to do something similar in our reading of Pico's *Oration*; that is, we want to bring out the hidden key, that which will enable us to better understand Pico's idea of the dignity and freedom of the human person. This paper seeks to discuss the ground of Pico's assertion of the unique dignity of man. We wish to argue that freedom is not the basis of man's dignity, as commentators have usually asserted, for even human freedom is itself conditioned by something else. What we are doing here is perhaps only a matter of stating what is already quite obvious, but is perhaps missed or dismissed by other interpreters of Pico. Bringing out this presupposition, which Pico does in fact express and speak of, leads us to a better understanding of his position on the proper dignity of the human person and helps us see how this idea of Pico is quite distinct from modern understandings of human will and dignity.

## MAN AS HIS OWN CREATOR?

Paul Kristeller (1972, 13) notes how it has been the tendency of some contemporary scholars to suppose that Pico is speaking of the absolute freedom of the human person to the point of denying the presence and efficacy of supernatural grace. To some extent, this interpretative tendency is understandable for at first glance, Pico does seem to be painting a picture of man as bearing the capacity for total self-determination. At the beginning of the *Oration*, Pico mentions several reasons for claiming that nothing is more marvelous than man himself: he possesses reason and intelligence, and is immersed in the flux of time and yet is paradoxically open to eternity, that he occupies the middle position between the angels and brutes, etc. Pico judges all of these justifications unsatisfactory and proposes what for him is the real reason for the superiority of man and the basis of the claim that man is the greatest of wonders. Man, being "confined by no bounds," whatsoever, says Pico (1998, 5) is capable of "creating" himself, of giving shape to his own personhood by cultivating his inherent potentialities and thus *leading* his own life. It seems then

that man's nature is nothing but the work of his hands. Pico (1998, 5) adds that it is given to man "to have that which he chooses and to be that which he wills." Ernst Cassirer, labeled by Copenhaver (2002, 58) as a "post-Kantian critic" who regards Pico primarily as a "champion of human dignity and freedom," interprets this line to mean that temporal distinctions in the case of man are dissolved. Man does not have a fixed and unchanging nature, unlike inanimate things and unthinking animals or even angels whose natures and capacities have been given from the very beginning. While the perfections of earthly things and even of spiritual entities were already determined at the outset, "man possesses his perfection only as he achieves it for himself independently and on the basis of a free decision" (Cassirer 1942, 323). This means both that the task of forging his personhood and achieving his own perfection cannot in this life come to an end, and that there is that ever-present possibility of moral failure (Cassirer 1942, 330).[2] Given such a novel claim about the human will, it is no wonder that, as Kristeller (1961, 60) remarks, Pico's "*Oration* on the dignity of man became the most famous expression of that humanist credo to which he gave a novel philosophical interpretation in terms of man's freedom to choose his own destiny." It is perhaps no wonder that presented in this manner, Pico's view on human dignity and freedom cannot fail to bring to mind a contemporary philosophical and literary expression affirmation of man's radical freedom. The affinity of Pico's position with that of self-proclaimed atheistic existentialist Sartre may appear undeniable to a modern reader impressed by interpretations of the *Oration* such as that of Cassirer. Elsewhere, Kristeller (1966, 67) notes that the lines in the *Oration* about the power of man to determine his own nature "are among the few passages in the philosophical literature of the Renaissance that have pleased, almost without reservation, modern and even existentialist ears." Man's protean character and his capacity to actively will his own self-formation appear to be consistent with the claims outlined by Sartre (1965) as the basic tenets of existentialism, in the widely-known piece tellingly entitled "The humanism of existentialism."

There are two points that we have to consider as regards the position of Sartre. First, according to Sartre, all existentialists give priority to existence over essence; or, in other words, for existentialists, subjectivity is the only starting point of philosophizing. This means that whereas in the case of made things essence precedes existence, which means that their capacities and functions are determined by some external intelligence before they are made or come into being, man's uniqueness and dignity consist in the fact that man finds himself here in the world first and then eventually gives definition to himself: "man exists, turns up,

appears on the scene, and, only afterwards, defines himself" (Sartre 1965, 35-36). This idea is rooted in Sartre's atheistic conviction. For him, since there is no artificer God or some supreme intelligence to conceive of the fixed and unchanging nature of man, man then has no determined form or essence. Nothing determines or holds man back; he is confined by no bounds and is absolutely free. The second point is closely connected to and follows from the first one: "Man is nothing else but what he makes of himself" (Sartre 1965, 36). Man becomes his own creator. It is man who concretizes himself through his own decisions. Like in Cassirer's reading of Pico's *Oration*, Sartre sees that the way to self-definition is fraught with danger: since man cannot appeal to or consult God, and since there is no transcendent realm of values that he can access when confronted with possible courses of action, then man has no fixed standard of right and wrong, good and evil. In the quest for self-definition man is absolutely free but at the same time is radically alone; while Sartre says, in a fashion that brings Kant to mind, that in making a choice an individual will have to take the whole of humanity into account, that a particular individual alone will have to bear the consequences of his decision.

Sartre shows, in response to Christian critics who accuse him of looking only at the baseness of human existence, that his atheistic existentialism upholds the dignity of the human person, as it makes him aware of his power to take charge of his own existence through conscious choice and involvement in human affairs. Unlike things in the world that are determined and which simply passively undergo change, the absolutely free Sartrean man resists all external determination and is the source of change and the molder of his own personhood. This is quite similar to Pico's claim that man is outside the traditionally held idea of the hierarchy of beings. Whereas for other thinkers, like his contemporary and friend Marsilio Ficino, the dignity of man lies in his being at the center of the chain of beings, for Pico man is outside that hierarchy, and is able, like a chameleon able to assume the color of the surface it touches, to move up or down the ladder of beings. Though in a real sense man for Pico is like other earthly beings and also similar to the higher intelligences, we agree with Cassirer (1942, 320) when he notes that it is man's difference from every other creature that "confers on man his exceptional and in a sense privileged position" as his own "maker." As Kristeller explains, Pico goes one step further than Ficino, who holds that man is specially placed at the center of the order of things. Pico thinks that "man no longer occupies a fixed though distinguished place in the hierarchy of being but exists outside this hierarchy as a kind of separate world" (Cassirer et al. 1967, 219).[3] Just as the Sartrean man is radically

different from inert things that have fixed natures, by virtue of his freedom to mold his own essence, man for Pico is not only different but also outside the order of natural and supernatural beings.

Although there are indeed striking parallels in the positions of the fifteenth century humanist Pico and the twentieth century existentialist Sartre, we have remarked above that it would be anachronistic to think that Pico holds a view of human freedom that is in complete agreement with the modern understanding of absolute consciousness or will. We will explain this by pointing out certain features of Pico's thought that are obviously irreducible to and incompatible with an atheistic philosophy of human will and self-determination. We would like to argue here, much along the lines of Copenhaver's position (2002, 58) on the matter, that the famous speech of Pico is neither only nor mainly about "dignity and freedom as any modern or post-modern reader would understand these terms." Our aim however is more modest than that of Copenhaver, who contends in the just cited essay that the speech is really an outline of a program of mystical ascent towards union with divinity; we merely wish to show both that the dignity and freedom of man that Pico speaks of have to be understood as conditioned by something else, and that these should be seen in light of the presuppositions evident in the *Oration* and elsewhere. To point these out is not so much to minimize the novelty and radicalness[4] of Pico's ideas, as to understand Pico in his own terms and in light of the context in which he was situated.

## MAN AS *CREATURA*

Let us first turn our attention to what interpreters seem to have missed or ignored, but is actually something that we cannot at all underestimate and overlook if we are to understand the basis of human dignity for Pico. Following the enumeration of reasons for marveling at man, Pico presents his own argument through an account of man's *creation*. We then read in the *Oration* God addressing the first man, Adam. So within this context, if man is said to be marvelous because he has the capacity to "make" or "create" himself, it should not be forgotten that Pico (1998, 4) imagines God to have decreed at the moment of creation not only that man does not have a determined nature but also that all the attributes of other created beings are possessed by him: "Finally, the best of workmen decided that that to which nothing of its very own could be given should be, in composite fashion, whatsoever had belonged individually to each and everything." It may seem to be trivial—a point that curiously, Kristeller seems to stress by repeating it (Kristeller 1966, 67; 1965, 53)—but the fact that Pico

situates his praise of man within a certain imaginative rendition of the creation narrative should not be ignored, for it surely has important implications and in fact sheds light on the meaning of man's dignity and freedom.

Cassirer (1942, 332) rightly claims that man derives a pattern for his own existence from himself and that he has the protean power to actively will change and assume the form of other creatures, which all passively undergo change. It is, however, equally true that the seeds that man can cultivate are given to him by God.[5] "At man's birth the Father placed in him every sort of seed and sprouts of every kind of life. The seeds that each man cultivates will grow and bear their fruit in him" (della Mirandola 1998, 5). Perhaps modern readers are so impressed to find in Pico an idea of freedom so much like their own that they fail to notice the necessary correlate, and to speak in Kantian terms, the condition of the possibility of the freedom of man: "*We made thee*. Thou, like a judge appointed for being honorable, art the molder and maker of thyself; thou mayest sculpt thyself into whatever shape thou dost prefer" (della Mirandola 1998, 5; emphasis mine). The idea of having been given to himself in creation and receiving diverse seeds of perfection already subtends the freedom of man, which if seen properly within this context cannot in anyway be absolute, for there are givens within the realm of which alone human choice becomes possible.

Yet, on the other hand, the idea of receiving diverse perfections also highlights the incomparable freedom possessed by man. It appears that by saying that man can forge his own nature, Pico (1998, 5) is emphasizing the moral freedom of the human person: "Thou canst grow downward into the lower natures which are brutes. Thou canst again grow upward from thy soul's reason into the higher natures which are divine." Remember that there are already potentials or seeds endowed by God to man, so it is quite clear that man cannot be his own cause or his own beginning. He can only work on what he already has, that is, perfections that other creatures properly possess; man thus has the moral choice to be either like unthinking and irrational brutes, naturally inclined to follow their instincts and appetites in the darkness of unknowing and incomprehension, or become like angels through philosophic contemplation. This is the fundamental trait of being a creature: one is given to oneself. But what is unique about the human person is his freedom to either sink as low as the brutes or to elevate himself to the station of angels. Not having a fixed place in the hierarchy of beings while also possessing potentialities from which he can choose, man is thus free to forge his own moral character. Perhaps this is the wonder of the creature that is man: he has been created

as a being that can distinguish himself from everything else—even from his Creator—through moral self-definition.

Moreover, although man is free to become either like beasts or higher intelligences, there is nevertheless a desirable (if not prescribed) path to be followed by man if he is to achieve perfection. Pico (1998, 7) warns against "abusing the very indulgent liberality of the Father" and to "make the free choice, which he gave to us, harmful to ourselves instead of helpful toward salvation." Despite his tendency to emphasize how Pico breaks with the preceding philosophical tradition and manner of thinking, I believe Cassirer (1942, 330) understands what being a creature means for Pico: to always be confronted by the moral dilemma of choosing between two paths, to be given freedom to choose between good and evil. As Kristeller (1972, 14) perceptively points out, not all of the forms of life that are available to man correspond or lead to his proper dignity. There is rather a certain ranking of the potentials or goods that man can choose. It is only if and when man pursues the higher manners of existence that there is the possibility that he will attain his proper perfection. Let us note that Pico states clearly that "this excellence belongs to his given nature only in so far as this nature includes among its potentialities those higher forms of life." It can safely be said that Pico understands man to have a fundamental orientation. Man then is like one of the prisoners in Plato's myth of the cave (1991, 517b onward): he has been given the choice to either climb out of the cave and contemplate the light of the sun, that is the Good itself, or to turn his back on it and remain among mere shadows and illusions. But since the higher things that are the proper objects of our love and judgment are lesser known than the things of the world, Pico exhorts his free and able listeners to turn their gazes from the low and earthly things and to aim for those that are higher; he advises his audience to strive to become like cherubs, whose activity of contemplation can prepare us mortals for the seraphic fire of love and can enlighten us on matters of judgment, which is the province of the thrones. It is thus the life of contemplation that Pico, in a way following the two great Greek ancients, Plato and Aristotle, proposes for the attainment of happiness.

Though other paths are accessible to the self-defining human person, it is quite clear that for Pico (1998, 5), if man is "not contented with the lot of any creature," happiness can be achieved by returning to God, that is, by being "settled in the darkness of the Father, who is above all things." Pico (1998, 10) thinks that by following a certain cleansing regimen or laboring through moral philosophy, dialectic, and natural philosophy we may come to "rest in the bosom of the Father...consumed by a theological happiness."

These lines indeed seem to indicate the mystical ascent to the "divine darkness of unknowing" that Pico learned from Pseudo-Dionysus and his Cabalist sources, and which he himself desired and hinted at in his *Oration* (Copenhaver 2002, 66-72).

Although the idea of human freedom proposed by Pico appears at first glance to be like those of secular philosophers, we are actually confronting here a religious and philosophical interpretation of human nature, or put another way, a philosophical account of being human that is determined by religious belief. We have seen that the dignity and freedom of the human person that Pico speaks of in his well-known speech must be understood in light of the idea of creation. Although it may seem to be a rather simple point to take the idea of creation and his religious convictions seriously into account, the reading of Pico's *Oration* certainly gives us a picture that is quite different from the one painted by critics and commentators like Pater and Cassirer.

It has also become evident how divergent Pico's view of human dignity and freedom is from that of Sartre. While Sartre (1965, 62), in presenting his philosophical anthropology and his existentialist doctrines, claims to be drawing the conclusions of a coherent atheism,[6] Pico is speaking as a Christian believer before a Christian audience. And religious conviction here spells all the difference. For whereas Sartrean subjectivity that is constrained neither by a pre-given essence nor by a prescribed pattern of action is the sole starting point, the idea of creation, which is presupposed by Pico's understanding of freedom and dignity, brings with it three things: First, it already implies a certain beginning that no human person can deliberately choose or refuse. To be created is to be given to oneself along with potentials that can only be realized but not pre-selected. Second, the kind of freedom that a creature has enabled him to, in a sense and only to a certain extent, "make" or "create" himself. Being free then means being able to choose among possibilities that are already laid out or given, but not being able to decide upon the fundamental orientation of one's existence. Third, though the human person is free, there is still a recommended or desirable path to be taken, which flows from the idea of his basic orientation toward God, if he is to attain perfection or happiness. Indeed, as Copenhaver argues, the *Oration* presents a program of mystical ascent, a regimen drawn from various sources (among them Denys, the Neo-Platonists, the so-called ancient theologians, and the Cabbala) that was most likely unintelligible to the intended Christian audience of Pico. Thus, along with his conviction that diverse philosophers, theologians, and traditions of thought can be shown to be bearers of some religious truth and thus are in basic agreement, we can see too that the kind of freedom

Pico attributes to man is also in accordance with the supernatural order to which man, for Pico, certainly belongs.

## CONCLUSION

We hope that we have been able to show that something, namely, the idea of creation (among other religious beliefs) underlies and determines Pico's idea of human dignity and freedom. Though the themes human excellence and freedom occupy a special place in the famous *Oration* of Pico, they are neither the only nor the main subjects of his speech. We have tried to argue that these themes can be best understood in light of the "hidden key," the notion of creation, along with the religious aims and convictions of Pico. We have asserted that Pico's claims about dignity and freedom, though admittedly similar to our own modern notions, are certainly different from more recent views on these matters. In the *Oration*, Pico is presenting an idea of man's dignity that is inseparable from his freedom to determine his own selfhood; this freedom, however, is situated within an understanding of the human being as created, fundamentally oriented toward God and seeking ultimate happiness in a mystical union with the Creator. I do not think that these points would tend to undermine the importance of Pico's understanding of the dignity and freedom of the human person. I believe that to point out and to insist that human dignity and freedom should be seen in light of creation actually shields Pico's text from modern anachronistic and reductive interpretations.

It is our conviction that this reading of Pico's text is consistent with the following current and accepted views about the Renaissance. (1) Though the Renaissance discovered and made available ancient texts, produced certain new trends, ideas, and ways of thinking, there is certainly no total break from the preceding age and its traditions of thought, as for instance, "we notice the stubborn survival of scholastic philosophy throughout the Italian Renaissance" (Kristeller 1961, 99; see also Cassirer et al. 1967, 8). We also know that Pico, from his studies at the University of Paris, had thorough knowledge of the schoolmen Albertus Magnus, Thomas Aquinas, and Duns Scotus. (2) Though seeds of modern ways of thinking can be found in the Renaissance, it is neither a totally secular age ("the Middle Ages minus God") nor does it offer radically modern anthropocentric philosophies (Kristeller 1962, 2-3). The *Oration* of Pico is an excellent proof, among his other writings and those of his contemporaries, against this erroneous assessment of the period. (3) The humanists were not at all anti-Christian, and to suppose that they were all atheists is preposterous, as they patently held religious convictions and many saw

themselves as guarding their beliefs when they are attacking other philosophies and ways of thinking, such as the Aristotelianism and Averroism taught in the universities (Cassirer et al. 1967, 4-6). As Pico (1998, 29) himself explicitly states, even his study and employment of Hebrew texts were motivated by the intention of proving the truth of Christian faith. We thus agree with Paul Miller (see della Mirandola 1998, xxvii) who says that the "philosophy of Pico della Mirandola expresses the fundamentally religious spirit of the Renaissance."

The religious motivation that underlies the thought of Pico can also be discerned in his attempt to reconcile what he sees as only apparently rival philosophers and traditions of thought.[7] The nine hundred conclusions that Pico gathered and which he proposed for public debate and his constant references to disparate thinkers coming from various streams of thought indicate a certain openness to otherness. These are also testaments to his conviction that a fundamental religious truth is not confined to Christian accounts of revealed truth, but can be found as well in pagan expressions of the striving to reach the truth. Given his religious conviction and the assumption that religious truth can be found too in other cultures and systems of thought, the concordance of various philosophies, and that of philosophy and what for Pico is the one true religion, are not only possible but become the ideal of the philosopher who desires to attain both truth and genuine happiness.

## NOTES

1. Cited also in Copenhaver and Schmitt 2002, 163-65.

2. On the same page and continuing to the one following, Cassirer considers the possibility of failure as a testament to the greatness of the human person: "Man's failure is hence for Pico not merely guilt; it is rather the expression of that same indestructible power that makes it possible for him to attain good. Only a being capable of, and as it were at the mercy of sin, can achieve that highest worth that lies in the independent overcoming of sensuality, in the free elevation to the Intelligible."

3. Kristeller reports that Pico also makes this point in his later work *Heptaplus*.

4. For instance, Kristeller (1972, 13-14) suggests that Pico's conceptual removal of man out of the hierarchy of being may have led to the abandonment of the traditional idea of the order that embraces all existents: "This is a rather bold view, and it may be considered as one of the first steps in dissolving the notion of the great chain of being that had dominated Western thought for so many centuries."

5. In his Introduction, Paul Miller (see della Mirandola 1998, xv) makes the same point that it is God who gives man the seeds of potential that he can cultivate and actualize.

6. Sartre seems to be presenting the implications of the words of Dostoevsky's infamous character Ivan Karamazov, "If God is dead everything is permitted."

7. In "On Being and the One," Pico (1998), like Ficino, follows the Christian medieval tradition of reinterpreting and thus reconciling Plato and Aristotle. Pico equates the Platonic One that is beyond Being to God who is above and beyond all creatures. By identifying the Platonic One and God according to Aristotle with the God of Christian belief, Pico is able to show that Plato and Aristotle are in no significant way opposed to each other.

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# GOVERNANCE IN A POSTMODERN WORLD: CHALLENGES FOR PHILIPPINE SCIENCE AND POLITICS

**Antonio P. Contreras**
*De La Salle University, Manila*

*This paper shows that a postmodern reading of science and politics in the Philippines can lead to strategies that close the gap between them not through the deployment of a homogenizing discourse that would make them converse in a single language, but through their involvement in communities of understanding even as they remain in positions of difference. It is through these communities that science and politics would become integral in the establishment of a science-based governance in a postmodern world. It is this type of science that would match the organically-rooted postmodernism that is found in Philippine society.*

## THE POSTMODERN WORLD

We live in a postmodern world. Many would probably doubt this, particularly in the context of the usual association of being modern with the notion of being developed. Indeed, to claim that we live in a postmodern world would be strange in the face of poverty, poor infrastructure, corruption, and environmental destruction. The dominant images of being modern involve affluence and plenty, good quality of life, clean environment, and good governance. Hence, the "post" in "modern" may lead some people to assume that it means something that would be much better than being rich and developed.

However, being postmodern does not imply that we have achieved modernity and is now in the phase where we are beyond it. This paper would argue that being postmodern, in fact, is an epistemological outlook—that is, a way of looking at the world and how knowledge about it could be constructed through social and academic discourse, and where the constructs of modernity are being problematized and are now seen through a different

analytical lens. The image of a postmodern world emerges as a challenge to the ideas of the Enlightenment and of science that there are grand theories and totalizing explanations about our reality. Much of these are derived from empirical positivist science—the one where knowledge is established only through the scientific method of inquiry. This view has been effectively challenged in a postmodern world, a world wherein the grand theories and totalizing explanations about reality are confronted both by the pluralizing implications of localization as well as by the homogenizing outcomes of globalization.

Our present world could be characterized as one wherein commodities and culture are both traded in the world market. It is in this domain that a different kind of politics and way of thinking emerge to unsettle what appears to be settled. Here, the idea of epistemological and moral unity of science has been challenged. It is in this era when Einstein becomes only as important as indigenous knowledge; where science becomes just another way of looking at the world; and where human individuals become the locus of their own liberation, even as they are also the bearers of their own oppression.

The dominant social sciences that we see are now critiqued as "trying hard copycats" of the natural sciences. Drawn mainly from the Enlightenment, the social sciences aimed to liberate us from the darkness of ignorance and poverty. However, instead of bringing in discourses of liberation, the social sciences, like the natural sciences whose methods and precepts they imitated, has brought a totalizing discourse that led to the exclusion and disempowerment of many forms of knowledge, and consequently, their bearers. Thus, the sciences had become avenues for knowledge that do not liberate but instead control. Together with this, history, as the field of knowledge that defines our past, was written from the point of view of the victors. Not surprisingly, history became a narrative that privileged the views of men, of white people, and of the elites.

Consequently, development sciences, as children of modernity and the Enlightenment, have failed to solve the problems of underdevelopment and poverty. In fact, instead of solving underdevelopment, our social sciences and their attendant development practices have only managed underdevelopment to a point that the need for expertise is sustained as a profession that feeds on the misery of others. This is the natural consequence of a science and a worldview that is structured in the language that is an exclusive domain of the learned and the pedigreed. Here in this world, you have to earn a Ph.D. or an equivalent academic credential before you can have the right to talk about poverty and prescribe a cure to it.

It is indeed ironic that the Enlightenment project that led to the modern worldview and the scientific dogmas that it brought to bear has contradicted the meaning of its name: far from "enlightening," it has become avenues to at best "muddle," at worst "darken" discourses of hope and liberation. The irony of it all is that these muddling and darkening enable the expert social scientist to continue to flourish as a profession. Development professionals need poverty and corruption in the same way that doctors need people to get sick so that they continue to be needed.

Postmodernism, as a phase in the social imagination of reality, confronts these shortcomings of modernity and the Enlightenment project. It is critical of the idea that there is only one story, one grand narrative, and one great scientific body of knowledge that can tell us what to do with our world. We now see the explosions of local stories coming from people themselves, who are now becoming more assertive in their interpretations of their own experiences, through emerging social movements that are increasingly now based not on class struggle, but on identity politics. This is true even as we continue to experience the globalization of culture and of the economy. In this context, we experience the increasing importance of transnational bodies and institutions. We also experience a global *diaspora* of commodities, symbols, and people. This is now actively aided by the information superhighway, where ideas and images are rapidly transmitted across vast spaces, effectively touching people's lives. In this global age, the face of terror, pain, and suffering, as well as the lifestyles of the rich and famous are delivered to our living rooms courtesy of cable television and the Internet.

In this age of information, mass media emerge as a powerful institution that shapes not only our visions of the present, but also our imaginations of the future and our interpretation of the past. Popular culture, through popular media, has gained enormous power to a point that it no longer merely reflects and tells stories, but in fact influences the unfolding of the stories of our lives, and the way we tell them. The rise of mass media is particularly evident in the production of politicians and its attendant forms of politics now seen more as a spectacle sports, as "theater" or "reality TV." This is manifested in the electoral victories of movie celebrities; or in the way televised news has become a powerful venue for the shaping of political agenda. Mass media are the lynchpin that makes soap operas, fantasy series, and reality game shows into daily fare that captivates the citizen, effectively rendering simulations of reality as powerful as the reality it simulates.

In this context, government and the state lose their sole monopoly over authority, and science has begun to accommodate

the views of those whom it had excluded. Hence, we now see the emergence of participatory governance, and its attendant discourses of adaptive co-management, social capital, and a plethora of technologies and concepts that now relocate a lot of the impetus for establishing social order away from the state and into civil society and local communities. This decline of state monopoly of governance is seen in measures such as privatization and deregulation, and in the adoption of participatory development strategies wherein partnerships with local communities and other civil society organizations are enabled. We now also see efforts to bring in participatory science, where science is now made politically relevant, and has become embedded in the discourse of governing. It is in this interesting domain of articulation that we find a potential in the Philippines for a healthy interface between a transformation in the practice of science and a transformed way of doing politics.

## POSTMODERNITY IN THE PHILIPPINES: FOCUS ON SCIENCE AND POLITICS

Using our current experiences as a basis, one can easily say that we are a country without a viable scientific culture, and that we have a very weak state. People who said so lament these as unfortunate, rendering us unable to truly develop in the modern sense (Pertierra 2006, 19). These two—the rationality of science and the controlling ethos of a strong state—are the very foundations of modernity. However, one can also argue that while indeed the lack of a culture of science might be debilitating, and that a weak state can be a disadvantage, these can be turned into blessings. There are arguments that may be raised against those that belittle our knowledge systems and label these as lacking in science, and demean our modes of governance and label these as symptoms of a weak state.

Indeed, we are lagging behind compared to our neighbors, both in terms of our budget allocation to scientific research and development and in terms of the actual growth of such allocation. Some would argue that we lack a scientific culture, as evidenced by a scientific vacuum in our consciousness and in our everyday lives. As Pertierra (2006, 30-31) points out, even scientists manifest some characteristics associated with some kind of fascination with the supernatural such as a belief in a supreme being or the determinacy of life as ordained by fate that would indeed be incongruous with how the scientific mind should behave. A true scientific mind, arguably, is one that upholds the power of the human intellect to reshape life, and not in accordance with any destiny ordained by God.

Even if it is granted that we have no scientific culture, at least of the dominant construct, even among our scientists, the issue of whether we are better off or worse off for it is nevertheless debatable. Indeed, the claim that we have multiple bases for our reality could compromise the possibility of celebrating science. Science, in fact, is an authoritarian body of knowledge that insists on only one mechanism to discover truth. Thus, it would not accommodate myths, or superstition, or philosophy, or even religion from being sources of factual knowledge. Thus, it becomes an Archimedean point for the establishment of truth and knowledge, a grand narrative that would exclude any other way of telling the story of life.

However, the Filipino mind is one that celebrates the multiplicity of narratives. We are, at the very least, a clear example of the postmodern—one that celebrates the polyvocality of life, where many voices emerge to provide different views of human experience. Of course, this could come with its disadvantages. However, it could also have its advantages. This could be the source of our strength, in the sense that we have higher levels of tolerance for the otherwise irrational and dysfunctional behavior of political actors. We simply dismiss these as "other" ways that we should ignore.

The scientific mind could indeed be superior in providing a mechanical, materialistic basis for progress. Needless to say, our present economic condition as a country would be a good measure for the problems that societies like ours could face. The empirical claim is that Filipino culture restrains the Filipino mind from attaining scientific stature. Therefore, the logical conclusion is that we are inferior to our more scientifically endowed neighbors in Asia, and in the world. The implicit premise is that science is a superior domain. However, it could also be argued that this does not make us into a lesser community. The discomfort one may feel as a reaction to this argument is due less to nationalistic pride being hurt, than to an academic sensitivity. This misplaced sensitivity emanates from a failure to completely appreciate our own experiences. Indeed, Filipinos have difficulty dealing with the different political tragedies we are confronting now as a people. These tragedies are consuming us to a point that there is no more rage left, only amusement on one hand, and exasperation on the other. The logic of politics, based not on any scientific rationality, has infected our political community. We are governed by a system that defies reason, and that explodes not only myths but even textbook knowledge of what is normal and sane. However, this does not in any way make us a society condemned to be politically inferior to the rest of the world.

The Filipino has, for several years since the first extra-constitutional political transition in 1986, engaged political science in ways that political scientists, particularly Filipino political scientists, should devote some time to reflect on theoretically and conceptually. Textbook categories, concepts, and theories that are taught in our political science classes have been challenged, or deconstructed by Philippine political experiences. The Philippines is one of the few countries in the world—if not *the* only such country—where the Senate gives chairpersonships to people from the opposition minority parties. We have a convoluted party-list system that does not fit the taxonomy of any textbook classification. The dynamism of the theory of "devolution," which in its original conceptualization, applies to the transfer of power from state institutions to local political authorities, has been constricted by our own interpretations of "political" and "authority." Through the Local Government Code, we have arrested such dynamism by limiting the "political" to state-institutions and "authority" to bodies that are bestowed with legal-rational legitimacy only through electoral contests. Thus, we limited devolution to the process of transferring power from national state bureaucracies to elected local government units (which are also state institutions). But in fact it could include, and must in fact include, organic political bodies such as indigenous institutions and organizations that are also political authorities in their own right.

However, while we have limited devolution to a statist, and static definition, we have also made a contribution that has enriched the realm of civil society theory. We have provided a vocabulary to distinguish a Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) from a People's Organization (PO), something that other countries do not make, and in which the dominant and non-Filipino literature on civil society is silent.

While we may not have the scientific mind according to the dominant Western construct, we have elevated the art of political satire and of simulation through the hyperreal domain of television, texting, and the cyberspace, which have become central institutions not only for political socialization, but also for political legitimation and articulation. The strength of our polity lies not in the formal institutions of the state but in the resilience of civil society, thereby challenging the literature offered by dominant political science.

These are just some of the instances where the Filipino has carved a niche of its own in political theory. Thus, even if we, indeed, may be faulted for not adhering to the kind of science that the Enlightenment would like us to have, and even if we as a people may have troubles with our political experience, we are not made of lesser stuff. We contribute a new perspective, even as our very

own existence as a people challenges the dominant paradigms of science.

How can we be inferior as a people when, despite all our flaws and our troubles, we are able to offer a collective deconstruction of the powerful institution of science? This paper argues that the idea of "inferiority" is debunked when one adheres to the postmodern, in which polyvocality is celebrated. Here, alternative voices that challenge existing perspectives are encouraged and nurtured, and no single perspective is privileged. In fact, the very nature of the development of scientific knowledge is not totally alien to the presence of alternative perspectives and explanations. Scientists do not get recognized because they simply validate knowledge through repeated experiments. They win awards because they challenge existing knowledge and build new ones. This paper enumerated above the instances where the Filipino has carved a niche of their own in political theory. What is now needed is simply for us to inquire into these not as aberrations, but as alternative forms—if not powerful deconstructions of—Western and dominant political science, theory, and practice.

On another point, even our own political analysts have repeatedly lamented the fact that we have weak political institutions. Our political experience, from the failed coup attempts, to the series of people power mobilization, to the corruption in government, has fueled a plethora of lamentations about the fragility of our political institutions and of the weakness and vulnerability of our political community. These pained reflections on what is wrong with our society, and of condemnations of our supposed flaws as a people are mostly based on prevailing textbook categories of how strength should be projected by modern states and political communities. This view is equally problematic since it equates strength with the absence of crisis.

The Philippines, with all its crises, is an exciting place to be in. Its people face life with so many challenges, some of which are disastrous in magnitude. It is battered by typhoons. Earthquakes shake it. Volcanic eruptions are quite normal. Human error and greed compound the country's natural propensity for calamities to further bring more tragedies. Overloaded ships collide and sink. Planes that are badly maintained crash. Unregistered and rickety buses fall off ravines. The Philippines has been ruled by a dictatorship. It has also been ruled by actors-turned-politicians. It experienced several coups, albeit unsuccessful. In addition, of course, it has its traditional politicians and rent-seeking elites, which collectively is enough to give the country a century's dose of human tragedy and violence, both structural and physical. Nevertheless, in all of these, the Filipino people survive, with their sanity and

sense of humor intact. There are many instances where the crises-tested Filipinos, in fact, emerge stronger than those who are not used to the crises of life.

If at all, life is full of crises. Yet, the measure of one's strength is not diminished by crises, but how we, individually and collectively, survive despite these. There is another word for this, more powerful than strength itself: it is resilience, and in addition perhaps, creativity, too. This is particularly seen in the Filipino's unique sense of humor. It is just both wicked and creative. We can easily convert our tragedies into comedies, and make them into fodder for stand-up comedians, gag shows, and crazy text messages.

The more serious scholar would again lament this trivialization of governance, and the lack of serious engagement of politics. In this league come related complaints about how we simply do not subscribe to a politics of substance. Instead, we easily elevate to the positions of elected power people whose major talent is dribbling balls in the hard court, or reading prompt cards, or trying to be funny in movies, or looking good while endorsing a detergent or a vitamin brand, or launching failed coups. What compounds the irony is the fact that we are also a people that are easily aroused by political combat. Elections are treated with much fanfare. We have one of the highest electoral turnouts in the world. This is not to mention the fact that we hold the distinction of being the only country that was successful in mobilizing its people to peacefully oust two sitting Presidents.

This seeming contradiction is in fact the key element of our power as a political community. The strength of our political community is seen not in the robustness of its formal political processes, but in the health of its organic civil society processes. We may have weak state institutions, but we have strong civil society institutions. Our formal governmental structures may not be at par with the stable models from North America and Europe. We may fall short of the efficiency of Singapore, Thailand, and South Korea. In fact, we have been repeatedly lumped with the banana republics of South America, and some have even griped that Vietnam has overtaken us even as Cambodia and Laos are gaining on us.

But we have to quickly remind ourselves that while we do not have the strong Republic model, we have a strong sense of community and civility. When Marcos left the Philippines in 1986, we had no government for three days. Yet, we survived. There was no massive looting. No mayhem. No rioting. The series of coups launched against the Aquino government, and later, against the Arroyo Administration, all failed, even as similar coups have succeeded in Thailand and in other countries. But what was significant, particularly in the coup attempt now labeled as the

"Oakwood Mutiny," was not much the deployment of the brute and formal powers of the military wing of the state to suppress the challenge. Instead, more significant was the deployment, and triumph, of a sense of community—of friends urging friends to give up, of *mistahs* talking to fellow *mistahs* to solve the problem another way, of relatives pleading to their loved ones to give peace a chance, and of a mother who talked to a President on behalf of her rebel son. Earlier in 1986, Marcos, despite his demonization, could have ordered troops to fire at the crowds at EDSA. He did not. These are powerful symbols of strong, and not of weak, political communities. These are strong evidence of a political community that is stable in its own unique way and has the capacity to recuperate from crisis.

Perhaps, the source of the lament of scholars is the fact that most of them perceive politics from what can be referred to as a "statist" perspective. Here, the stability of society is derived from the stability of formal institutions of governance, particularly those that use state processes to consolidate the political community and achieve political order. Indeed, if this is the parameter that will be used, then the Philippines will be found wanting.

However, the way power is exercised in our society goes beyond the state and its instrumentalities. For the most part, ordinary citizens perceive the state as a theater, and statist politics as just some kind of a show, or a performance. The source of political order in most of our communities are not the laws and their agents, but the norms and traditions that abound in the many organic spaces that we inhabit—our family, kinship, neighborhoods, and associations. In fact, it could even be said that most citizens do not take statist politics seriously because it is not as relevant to their lives as their local institutions where they derive their individual and collective senses of security and sanity.

This is the source of our strength. It is where our resilience is welded into our collective consciousness, and where an organized chaos and postmodern pluralism become the watershed that seals the very creativity that keeps our body politic from crumbling and makes it sane despite the many challenges it has sustained from natural disasters and human follies. When we are confronted by crises, we summon the very root of our strength—our collective sense of polity found not in the halls of Congress or Malacañang, and not in the armory of the Army, but in the awesome display of community.

In the end, our society may have its own advantages over those that seem to have everything in place—strong political institutions, stable political parties, efficient civil service, robust economic fundamentals. Yet, these are typified by communities

falling apart through unbridled individualism; or one that could not even elect a woman president; or one that could not punish a president who lied to his own people just to go to war; or one wherein people talk in whispers when they are critical of their governments; or one wherein a simple slowdown of traffic or a power outage can create mass hysteria.

Of course, Filipinos still would like to see our elected politicians, appointed bureaucrats, and military brass behave in ways that would be true to what is expected of them in accordance to our social contract. We would also not justify the prevalence of corruption and ineptitude as a natural resource that we are cursed with and therefore have no choice but to cope with our own brand of civility and creative sense of humor. In fact, even as we laugh over the stupid antics and are amused at the self-serving grandstanding of politicians, or even if we shrug our shoulders at the corruption of our public officials, or even if we tolerate the discomforts brought upon by incompetence, there is also a limit to our patience. Even as we watch the political spectacle with amusement, there is also a time when we collectively express our political outrage.

While we know that those who tried to wrest power from a corrupt government, but done through violent means, had a point in their condemnation of corruption, and while we lauded their idealism, the people disagreed with their means, inasmuch as we suspected the agenda of those behind what could otherwise be called righteous anger. We also shuddered at the possible consequences had they succeeded. Thus, in all of the coup attempts to topple government, we stayed in our homes and left the plotters and rebels out in the cold to eventually succumb and yield to the pressures of community. It was only when the rebellion was staged as a "community," such as those seen in EDSA 1 and EDSA 2, that it was able to get the support of the people.

Thus, it is safe to argue that the Philippines is structurally prepared to meet the challenges of governing in its own unique way, through the deployment of its own strategies to consolidate the social community to establish social order. The question, however, that becomes key is how do we bring in science into this whole process of governing a postmodern Philippines.

## SCIENCE-BASED GOVERNANCE IN A POSTMODERN WORLD

One of the core mistakes in our attempts to search for a solution to the complex problems of our country is that we have premised it on wrong assumptions. We have always assumed that the solutions

would be more technical than political, and that the political solutions rest in strong states while the technical solutions lie in Western science. While indeed a strong state, through clear policies and credible institutions, and strong science would constitute a significant part of the strategies to protect and govern ourselves, the big lie exists when we totally accept the argument that strong states and Western science as they are presented are unproblematic, and they are the only sources of solutions.

However, even in the "more-developed societies," the link between science and policy is also problematic. The dominant literature suggests that good governance rests, among others, on a good policy infrastructure. The soundness of this policy infrastructure depends not only on the political support needed to sustain it, but also on the scientific warrants that provide it the technical justification. More often, however, scientific rigor loses to the exigencies of politics. This is partly due to the inability of the scientific community to translate its outputs into politically-readable forms. In some cases, even the scientific community becomes embedded in the political infrastructure of the state, thereby losing its capacity to provide independent perspectives. On the other extreme is when an independent scientific community becomes isolated from the arena of policy-making. Key to the interface between research-based knowledge, on the one hand, and the policy-making arena, on the other, would be the institutions involved in the production, consumption, and reproduction of knowledge—namely, the academe, mass media, and policy advocates such as NGOs and other private interests.

Thus, there is a need to examine the dynamics that exist in the interactions between research-based knowledge, on the one hand, and the policy-making process, on the other. The focus of any inquiry on this should be on the conditions and the institutional processes that enable a healthy interface and how to promote these conditions and processes. Conversely, of equal interest would be the conditions and processes that constrain such healthy interface and how to mitigate these. More politically important, however, in this endeavor is to link science-based governance to the democratization process, and how such can enable the multiplicity of voices from various actors. The "health" of this interface, in the context of postmodernity, will no longer be judged on the basis of efficiency, or even efficacy relative to achieving the desirable policy or science objectives. Of more concern will be the ability of such interface to become a safe domain for polyvocality, in that it is able to recognize the validity of other sources of knowledge. This becomes extremely challenging in the context of the fact that both science and politics exist as homogenizing discourses. Science deploys the scientific method as

its sole basis for operation, while politics, even in its democratic configuration through a pluralist society, is still operationalized through techniques of "state simplification" manifested in systems of governance that depend on codified laws and institutions that homogenize diversity (Scott 2006, 26).

In a postmodern context, in which I have argued the Philippines belong, there are many attributes that we have to deal with in our search for strategies. One of the key mistakes that we always commit is to look for a single formula, a grand policy regime that would address our complex problems. Hence, we have this fixation for a single Water Code, a single Land Code, a single Forestry Code, a single formula for problems that have diverse manifestations. We find it convenient to codify our strategies through single policy regimes despite the fact that we deal with multiple and complex realities. The Philippines is an archipelago. Each island system possesses attributes that are unique. Cultural diversity and differences are more the norm than the exception in this country of more than eighty ethnolinguistic groups. It is about time that we have to have governance arrangements that are authentic relative to this complexity. The vocabulary for this, in fact, is already in place, with our concepts of devolution, participatory local governance, community-based resource management, and other management strategies that open the avenue for the many local voices. What is perhaps needed is a more serious effort to scale this up at the national level, and to prevent the State from simplifying complex policy settings into convenient single policy domains. The move towards decentralization of government is a step in the right direction in this regard, as this provides a stronger institutional basis for more localized, appropriate, and relevant modes of governance relative to the local context and conditions.

The concept of good governance has positioned participation as one of its key parameters for development and democratization. It is also in this context that rights-based approaches to development have emerged as a prescribed strategy to enable the mainstreaming of the marginalized sectors of society, such as the urban poor, women, indigenous communities, and children. As a consequence, policies are no longer shaped through top-down processes, but are now formed as outcomes of inclusive processes wherein stakeholders have significant levels of participation. States are forced to adjust their perspectives in a world that has increasingly become globalized, but where alternative political actors and processes have offered their own perspectives based on grounded experiences and local narratives.

An important task in pursuing an alternative type of governance is to "deconstruct" science. This would entail a process of demystification, where the alleged "neutrality" of science will be challenged, and where the politics involved in the production of

scientific knowledge will be interrogated for its exclusionary and hierarchical tendencies. Thus, science will have to be made to answer for its structural power which effectively hides behind the façade of its alleged objectivity. The power of science as ideology lies in its capacity to project itself as non-ideological (Aronowitz 1988, 337). The task is to unmask this to reveal the ideological foundations for the production of scientific knowledge.

One of the cornerstones of postmodern politics is the problematization of the existence of a dominant constructs, which come in the form of grand narratives, of which scientific knowledge is a perfect example. These grand narratives become too powerful and totalizing that they acquire the ability to influence not only scientific knowledge. They also become embedded in state politics, particularly in how bureaucratic institutions formulate policies in relation to issues that are relevant to the object of such science. The dominant perspective becomes embedded in a politics that is manifested in the manner how the objects of science and its associated problems are defined.

The case of environmental governance is telling in this particular instance. Environmental science has dissimulated the political element of knowledge production by rendering the process of defining what constitutes environmental resources, such as forests and forest-lands, as merely a technical process devoid of politics. However, the production of knowledge is always imbued with the operation of power. This is particularly evident when a certain type of defining a forest would enable certain institutions to exercise control over it. Defining a forest in a particular way is certainly a form of discourse, because since it constitutes a characteristic way of talking about it. The social meaning of the forest, as a discourse, is always a product of nondiscursive practices of power as embedded in institutions, even as they also generate the necessary driver for the production not only of other discourses emanating from such definition, but also of institutional power (Stott 1999, 35). Escobar (1998, 57) pointed out that this process coexists with the capitalist process. Here, the forest no longer exists simply as a biophysical resource, but becomes a constellation of social meanings that manifest the agenda and ideology of a dominant group that derives material benefits from their access to and control over the said resource. This, in turn, is silently reproduced by the different technologies of forest management, and the bodies of knowledge embodied in the science of forestry which is used to generate such technologies.

In her study of the emergence of forest science in Thailand, Laungaramsri (2000, 92) captured the logic of this argument when she argued that:

> ...The changes in the discourses of "forests" and "nature" in Thailand represent not only the shifting state attitudes and practices towards natural landscapes but also the complex forces circumscribing the multiple forms of technologies in the state resource control.

The development of forestry knowledge in the Philippines is also along this historical trajectory, in which the colonial process has strongly established the basis for the science of forestry in the country. Forestry, as a science, is a colonial child which served as an anchor for the exploitation of our forest resources (Contreras 2002, 68-69).

A postmodern critique of this totalizing scientific presence would aim its arguments at the core of science itself. Here, science is debunked by the fact that it is in fact a social product, an outcome of a process which is dominated by certain exclusionary rules that limit scientific work only to a certain set of people. This process is largely male-dominated, and is subjected to the control of transnational forces. For example, biotechnology is significantly under the control of transnational science-industry complexes. Through patenting rights, big corporations have effectively sequestered control of traditional knowledge away from local communities.

The domination of science by Western actors and constructs is matched by the failure of countries like the Philippines to provide scientific research adequate public funds. This renders local scientists largely dependent on foreign funds and/or foreign partners, which effectively compromises their autonomy in terms of defining their agenda. What is even more tragic is the inability of the science community to engage public policy, in their failure to translate their scientific work into materials that would be useful for governance. This is aggravated by the apparent "cultural" difference between those engaged in the world politics and governance, which include politicians and policy makers, and civil society advocates; and the scientists. The discursive gap seriously undermines any meaningful articulation between science and governance in the development of mechanisms to address societal problems. Nevertheless, an appreciation of the postmodern nature of science and politics, as one that would privilege multiple sources and practices, would provide a different avenue to nurture a healthy interface between the two, and may engender the emergence of a "new" science.

It is apropos to this that a new kind of science has emerged to offer an alternative model which is largely characterized by its radical contrast relative to the old science. This contrast is summarized in Table 1.

*Table 1. New Science vis-à-vis Old Science*

| *Old Science* | *New Science* |
|---|---|
| Emphasis on individual researchers | Emphasis on team researchers |
| Academic control over research | Research direction shaped by interaction with users |
| Curiosity- and discipline-driven | Problem- and issue-based, multi- and inter-disciplinary |
| Problems defined to minimize uncertainty in result | Problems all contain large and pervasive uncertainties |
| Local organizational knowledge base | Diverse sources of knowledge and networks of information |
| Quality judged by peer review | Judgment by users and peers |
| Apparent disinterest of researchers (value-free) | Researchers are partisans (value-laden) |
| Communication by scientific articles | Diverse forms of communication |
| Linear logic from results to action | Highly non-linear relationship between results and action |
| Stakes are low | Stakes are high |

Source: (Lebel 2000)

A careful examination of the features of the new science reveals its privileging of multiple voices not only across academic disciplines, but also across the formal scientific knowledge vis-à-vis local and indigenous knowledge. This new science is marked by its readiness to accommodate political advocacy, and its privileging of a participatory process in which scientists are no longer isolated from the complexities of the societal context within which they exist.

At present, there is already a ground for these multiple dialogues to ensue, found in the work of epistemic communities, which refers to a community of scientists working together with activists and advocates in addressing various issues of concern (Haas 1990, 55). These epistemic communities, currently visible in transboundary governance dialogues carried out through multi-stakeholder platforms, have to be replicated within the boundaries of nation-states, as structured domains for the production of knowledge and power by a deconstructed science articulating with a type of politics that would enable the many voices of the marginalized to be heard but not colonized. This is the key challenge for governance in the context of a postmodern world.

In the Philippines, activist environmental organizations have already began to appropriate alternative and people-based science in support of their different advocacies. University based scientists are now found not only as detached from politics or co-opted by dominant interests, but also as active providers of alternative forms of knowledge that challenge the hegemony of dominant "science." As an example, we can see these operating in the environmental arena, particularly in the debate on Genetically Modified Organisms (GMO). Groups such as Greenpeace and SEARICE, have deployed their own "science," and have effectively used this to widen their support to include not only civil society actors and religious supporters from the Catholic Church, but even within the formal institutions of the state such as the courts and the local and national legislatures in their fight against the commercialization and entry of GMO-tainted products into the country. They are pitted against a dominant scientific construct being deployed by other University-based scientists supportive of the agenda of agro-chemical companies such as Monsanto and Syngenta which are active GMO advocates. This is just one indication of how multiple and contending narratives and voices, some of which bear local indigenous knowledge, have begun to challenge the dominant discourse of science, even as they appropriate and deconstruct the term "science" and re-present these in a different form, as an alternative to the one borne by dominant and transnational capitalist interests.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

This paper has shown that a postmodern reading of science and politics can enable strategies that close the gap between them, not through the deployment of a homogenizing discourse that would make science and politics converse in a single language, but for them to become involved in a community of understanding even as they remain in positions of difference. It has also recognized the potential for both science and politics to be transformed in the process to accommodate such dialogue. It is through these that science and politics would become integral in the operations of a post-modern world. In such arrangement, science would be transformed to match the organically-rooted postmodernism that is found in Philippine society. There are indications that this is now happening on the ground in the Philippines, in the domain of political advocacy and in civil society activism.

The challenge, however, is how to mainstream this type of science in the way Philippine academic and research institutions are organized and operate. This may indeed prove to be challenging, particularly when a global system of academic accreditation is pressuring local universities to put a high premium on academic excellence defined according to the dominant, usual, and Western standards of academic peer-reviewed journals. In this world, scientific work is more valued when they appear as articles in ISI publications, and not when they are embedded in grassroots advocacies of "street-level" scientific workers. The brighter note, however, rests on the fact that for those who are already immersed in a kind of scientific work that, consciously or unconsciously, already privileges the tenets of this new science, these dominant, usual, and Western academic standards are totally irrelevant to their postmodern political vocations.

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# BOOK REVIEW

## Eddie R. Babor: *Ethics: The Philosophical Discipline of Action*

**REX Bookstore**
**2004, 268 pp.**

*Ethics: The philosophical discipline of action* is a textbook that does not really intend to present a thorough analysis of all moral teachings. It cannot also be construed to have been written as a shrewd attack on moral decadence. Instead, this work simply but comprehensively provides the readers with basic information, arguments, analyses, and critical evaluations on the different ethical teachings and the multifarious issues belonging to the province of morality (p. ix). The author takes pride in this work because it is a product of the number of years he spent teaching philosophy. He decided to come up with a book in ethics that puts much attention on the needs and capabilities of students to facilitate their learning. An exercise page with a set of questions at the end of each topic serves as a good reviewer for students and teachers alike. Nevertheless, the book is not limited to students only but is oriented towards everybody.

The book starts with a prologue where the author tries to answer fundamental questions such as "Why must one be good?" (or to put in a real moral spectrum: "What ought I to do?"). Is goodness possible even if there is no God? Is ethics still relevant in today's world? Why should we study ethics? With all the immorality going around, does it still pay to be ethical? As the author (p. 2) says:

> The relevance of ethics is seen in the fact that it is a basic discipline. It is the backbone of human existence. It serves as a vertebrate that gives support to the whole life direction of man. Without ethics there will be a total collapse of the whole man and the entire human society.

The prologue proceeds with a presentation of the preliminaries of ethics such as its meaning, its difference from morality, its relationship with other disciplines, and the relationship between man and morality. Ethics is then compared with other disciplines dealing

with the human person: psychology, sociology, logic, anthropology, and moral theology. Ethics, for example, is shown to have a close connection with psychology, which posits the question "How does man behave?" Ethics, on the other hand, posits the question "Why man ought to behave?" (p. 9). Categorically, there is morality only in the context of humanity. In other words, there is morality because there is man. It follows from this that a discussion on morality and human existence is in order.

The book is divided into three parts. Part One deals with an exposé of the Western and Eastern ethical teachings. There seems really to be no comparison between the two. Comparison necessarily envisages a finding on which is superior or inferior between the objects compared (p. 23).

Chapter one contains the presentation on Western ethics. It includes Greek ethics (Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle), Christian ethics (Jesus Christ, St. Augustine, and St. Thomas), Kantian ethics, Utilitarian ethics (Bentham and Mill), Existential ethics, Dialectical ethics, Analytic ethics, Evolutionistic ethics, and Situation ethics (Joseph Fletcher).

Chapter two deals with Eastern ethics which includes the ethical teachings of Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism, Zen-Buddhism, and Islam. Eastern thought was neglected and unfairly treated in the past; however, Buddhism, Hinduism, and Islam are starting to be embraced by some Westerners at present. Generally, Western ethics teaches that man has a self; is an individual and a person. Thus, ethics in the West obliges man to be a self, to be what he is, and to be a human person. Eastern ethics is different. It teaches a doctrine of "many selves." Thus, man is not treated as an individual who is isolated and alone but rather someone who is a part of a bigger whole. In Part One, the author wishes that the readers (especially the students) may be able to see the whole picture of morality, i.e., that there is only one moral law, but it is interpreted and taught differently by different moral teachers.

Part Two is about general ethics. Two major parts of moral philosophy are discussed: values and human acts. Regarding values, topics like the human person and values, the place and significance of value in ethics, the meaning and definition of value (this includes a discussion on axiology and the definitions of Max Scheler, Harmin, Raths, and Simon), properties of value, classification of value, value conflicts, and Filipino values are discussed. Who is a Filipino? What does he value? The discussion on Filipino values gives a glimpse on the Filipinos themselves and what shapes the Filipino nation. It is good to know that there is even an indication of a higher consciousness of the Filipino self today. Foreign readers can have an insight on who a Filipino is, his character traits, and his values.

Regarding human acts, the reader is presented with its definition, its elements (knowledge, freedom and voluntariness), its classification (human acts in relation to the will and reason), its voluntariness (thirteen kinds or degrees), its modifiers (ignorance, concupiscence, fear, violence and habit), its norms (human acts are properly directed through the law and his/her conscience), and its morality.

Part Three is devoted to a discussion on special ethics. First presented are the basic human rights, duties, and justice. In juridical terms, rights are attached to persons, either human persons or institutions; and rights are understood also as the correlative of duties. In other words, rights imply duties (p. 200). Thus, one cannot discuss human rights without discussing human duties or moral obligations. And when human rights and duties are discussed, one cannot help but touch on the delicate issue of justice. Justice means the habit that enables one to give each and every human person his due or his own right (p. 206). All in all, this discussion on justice should make one realize that the beginning of every action is one's own self. One can only demand justice if one has been just to oneself, to his or her fellow human beings, and to God. It could have been a good idea if the author has included some discussions on the social contract theories of Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau. They would give the readers an idea of the person's rights and duties as members of the state and the state's rights and duties as constituted of members.

Medical and healthcare students are presented with very relevant issues on bioethical matters such as euthanasia, abortion, surrogate motherhood, drug addiction, suicide, murder, and mutilation. Bioethics refers to the systematic study of human conduct in the areas of the life sciences and healthcare. Lastly, a discussion on human sexuality and morality, where the author touches on issues such as sexual perversions (homosexuality, lesbianism, masturbation, bestiality, rape, and incest) and practices related to sex (divorce, adultery, concubinage, pre-marital, and birth control) are tackled. Further discussions on media and business ethics could have made a difference if these were included among the concerns of this part of the book.

*Ethics: The philosophical disciple of action* is a "must read" for those teaching ethics. A relatively comprehensive textbook and reference material, it covers the representative issues and questions on ethics. The author, however, is careful not to overload the students' minds by presenting the discussions in a short, yet substantial fashion. This book helps both teachers and students as they try to discover—within themselves and their fellowmen—their nature and how they should relate with one another as fellow human beings.

Though student-friendly, the book is really oriented to everybody since morality is the business of each one.

For those who want to study ethics and its issues on their own, they would find this book helpful. The words used are not highly technical and an added information for philosophers and theologians alike can be found in the endnotes. While one may need a thesaurus or a dictionary when reading other books on ethics, he or she does not need one for this book. The flow of thoughts is easy to follow and this entices the reader to keep reading and eventually finish the book.

**Roland Lorenzo M. Ruben**
*De La Salle-Dasmariñas, Cavite*

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# REVIEW ARTICLE*

## Siep Stuurman: *Francois Poullain de la Barre and the invention of modern equality*

**Cambridge: Harvard University Press**
**2004, 361 pp.**

François Poullain de la Barre (or "Poullain") was born in Paris in 1647, three years before Descartes's untimely demise in Sweden. His prosperous bourgeois family intended him for the priesthood so he dutifully studied philosophy and theology at the Sorbonne. This type of learning, however, did not develop in him the desire for the clerical life, but a love of philosophy and a contempt for its Scholastic variety as taught at the University of Paris. He came of age just as the "new philosophy" (Cartesianism) was all the rage. This was a fascinating time in the history of ideas: the "dangerous" and "subversive" ideas of Galileo, Descartes, Gassendi, Spinoza, and others were gradually pervading intellectual society in Europe. A brilliant account of this can be found in the painstakingly detailed studies of the Enlightenment by Jonathan Israel (2001, 2006).

The Cartesian philosophy that seduced young Poullain was officially *verboten.* Descartes was put on the Index in 1663. All university lecturers in France were obligated to refute his ideas. Banned ideas always attract attention. In discribing his turn to the new philosophy in 1666, Poullain said, "[O]ne day I paused to take stock of the knowledge I had acquired. To my surprise I discovered that I had labored in vain...that all my knowledge was of no use whatsoever in the world, except to make my living in a specific walk of life I did not want to engage in" (Stuurman, p. 43). What attracted him in Descartes's work was the method rather than the system. Stuurman (p. 44) wrote: "[The] language and method of presentation represented above all else a clean break with the cumbersome style of Scholasticism. [He] frequently points out that Cartesian philosophy is 'simple' and 'easy to understand'."

*As used in this journal, a review article is not a "literature review," but a review of a book using other sources, that is, with parenthetical references and reference list (in some cases even notes).

Poullain was a feminist. He fashioned a defense of gender equality based on the Cartesian method to attack the prejudicial views on women which he attributed to the "old" philosophy. He published *De l'Egalite des deux sexes* (1672) and *De l'Education des dames pour la conduit de l'espirit dans les sciences et dans les moeurs (1674)*, which were treatises on the equality of the sexes and on the education of women. Both books were published anonymously and they failed to excite the readers the way Poullain had expected. He published a third work in 1675 entitled *De l'excellence des hommes contres l'egalite des sexes*, which is a satirical discussion of male supremacy and which attracted some attention. Poullain's work is significantly different as it is the first attempt to furnish a fully coherent justification of sexual equality based on the Cartesian principles. Descartes himself never dealt with social philosophy. Poullain, twenty-two years after Descartes's death presented such a philosophy in support of human equality. It was a first-of-its-kind work recently rediscovered by feminist investigators.

The idea of equality was "in the air" among the new philosophers of the 17th century. Both Hobbes in *Leviathan* and Descartes in *Discourse on method* express unequivocal belief in the idea. Yet we know very little about just where it came from. Israel (2006, 545) wrote:

> Among the most divisive and potentially perplexing of all basic concepts introduced by the Radical Enlightenment into the makeup of modernity, and one of the most revolutionary in its implications, was, and is, the idea of equality. Assertion of universal and fundamental equality was undoubtedly central not just to the Radical Enlightenment but to the entire structure of democratic values espoused by the modern West. Yet neither the philosophical nor the historical grounding of this idea, that is, its intellectual origins and roots, is at all obvious and this whole issue has been, to a quite remarkable extent, shrouded in neglect in the historical literature. Surprisingly ignored as a cultural phenomenon, claiming the basic equality of men and women also continues to be widely opposed and rejected in much of the world today.

In the case of Poullain, what led a 25-year-old Latin teacher to write several firm defenses of gender equality in an age when such ideas were universally deemed to be daft? Stuurman (p. 49) said that we are in the dark about this:

> There is no good reason to doubt the sincerity of [Poullain's] feminist convictions. His writings show a personal and heartfelt indignation about the oppression of women. Why he chose the subject we cannot ascertain, given the absence of sources on his personal life, and in particular his contacts with women. The only thing he tells us in his writings is that he had conversed about various everyday and intellectual topics with women from all walks of life and had found their opinions at least as reasonable as those of most men, if not more so.

Poullain adapted Descartes's ideas to his argument that the mind "has no sex" based on the dichotomy between mind and matter. Criticize everything based on authority alone, admonished Descartes. This inspired Poullain to examine the bases for the subjugation of women. There could be no physical basis as the mind in itself is body-less. Mentally both sexes are equipped with the same abilities. This can be demonstrated historically and through what contemporary experience provides the mind in its pristine nature is free of prejudice. Prejudice whose basis is the body accounts for no end of human stupidity. It is difficult today to imagine how benighted with bogus ideas the 17th century was. Descartes was ever on the lookout for prejudice. Poullain was a perfect follower. He said (Stuurman, p. 94):

> It is easy to observe that the difference between the sexes pertains only to the body, since it is only the body that is actually used for human reproduction; the mind only assents to it, and since it does so in the same way in all humans, one may conclude that it has no sex.

This book presents one figure in the invention of modern equality. Given what Israel says about the dearth of scholarship about the origins of the idea, its attempt to uncover a nearly forgotten pioneer is more than laudable. Stuurman (pp. 295-96) announces Poullain's importance:

> [He] was the first thinker to make equality a foundational concept of his social philosophy...[His] historical significance is that he formulates a systematic egalitarian philosophy in which for the first time, the idea of the natural equality of *all* reason-possessing human beings is applied to *all* types of social relations...Poullain's theorization of equality, then, represents the first formulation of a fully universalist concept of equality in European history.

For feminists, for political philosophers, for historians, this is a fine book to use. It catalogues early feminist works and discusses the scholars responsible for bringing them to light. It gives a new twist to discussions of equality as a political idea. And it sheds important light on the development of Cartesianism in France in the years after his death when he was, ironically—the greatest of all French philosophers—condemned, harshly criticized and as much as possible, ignored by the great and powerful in government (the age of absolutist Louis XIV) and church. However, those with critical faculties, like Poullain and many others presented by Stuurman, felt where the winds were blowing and left us their wisdom.

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**Patrick Filter**
***Philosophy Centre Jinja***
***Nkozi University***
***Jinja, Uganda***

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*Art & Thought.* 2008. 47th (7th) year, no. 88 (no. 13). April-July. [Goethe-Institut]

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# PHILOSOPHICAL ASSOCIATION OF THE PHILIPPINES

## NATIONAL ANNUAL CONFERENCE, 2008*

**THEME:** ***Philosophy, Science, Nature, and the Environment***
**VENUE:** Bakasyunan sa Baybay Dagat, Iba, Zambales
**DATE:** 9-11 April 2008

### 9 April 2008

1. Launching of the PAP Monograph, Vol. 3. *Reflections on some contemporary philosophical issues.* Edited by Dr. Rolando M. Gripaldo (Philippine National Philosophical Research Society, Quezon City) and Dr. Jove Jim S. Aguas (University of Santo Tomas, Manila). Selected Philosophical Papers delivered at PAP Conferences.

2. Plenary Lecture: What is matter? By Daniel McNamara, S.J., PhD (Ateneo de Manila University, Quezon City).

### 10 April 2008

3. Plenary Lecture: Einstein's relativity and the global positioning system versus cultural relativism (How a science and its technology expose a philosophical error). By Theta Ponce, PhD (University of Asia and the Pacific, Pasig).

4. Panel Discussions: (a) Foucault's critique of medical science and technology and the alienation of the self. By Christian Bryan Bustamante, MPA, MA (San Beda College, Manila). (b) Philosophy's entanglement in metaphysics and ontology and their relationship to science and technology in Heideggerian philosophy. By Eddie Babor, LIB, PhD (Holy Name University, Tagbilaran City)

5. Panel Discussions: (a) *Wei ziran*: A Daoist ecological ethic to ground an ethics of the environment. By Andrew Soh, MA (Ateneo de Manila University, Quezon City). (b) Ecological feminism and global mysticism: Towards the emergence of a planetary new consciousness in the light of the mystical cosmology of Hildegard of Bingen. By Melany DR Natividad, MA (St. Louis University, Baguio City).

*No mid-year philosophy conference because PAP actively participated in the 3rd COMIUCAP (Conference Mondiale des Institutions Universitares Catholiques de Philosophie) World Congress at the Ateneo de Manila University last 11-13 September 2008.

## 11 April 2008

6. Panel Discussions: (a) Traces of the author: God revealed in the nation of space and time, according to Newton, Einstein, and Hawking. By Anamaria Avecilla (Ateneo de Manila University, Quezon City). (b) A more inconvenient truth (James Lovelock's Gaia theory). By Richard Heisen Menor. (St. Augustine Seminary, Calapan, Mindoro).

7. Plenary Lecture: Contextualizing bioethics: Reflections on the rootedness of bioethics in its cultural context. By Lukas Kaelin, PhD (Ateneo de Manila University, Quezon City).

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# NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

**ADESHINA L. AFOLAYAN,** PhD [University of Ibadan], is Lecturer II of the Department of Philosophy, University of Ibadan, Nigeria. He has published papers in anthologies and journals. He specializes on postcolonial African philosophy, cultural and political studies, and epistemology.

**MARK JOSEPH T. CALANO,** PhD [St. Louis University, Baguio City], is Assistant Professor of Philosophy at the Ateneo de Manila University, Quezon City. He has read papers locally and abroad. Continental philosophy is his area of specialization.

**APRIL CAPILI,** MPhil [Katholieke Universiteit Leuven], is currently taking up his doctoral studies at Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, Belgium. Prior to this, he taught at the Ateneo de Manila University.

**ANTONIO P. CONTRERAS,** PhD [University of Hawaii], is the former dean of the College of Liberal Arts, De La Salle University, Manila. He is currently a Visiting Research Professor at the University of Hawaii under a Fulbright grant. He has published books and several articles in various journals.

**PATRICK FILTER,** MA [De La Salle University, Manila], is presently teaching at Philosophy Centre Jinja, Nkozi University, Uganda. He was a practicing lawyer in the United States before he decided to study and teach philosophy.

**LENI dlR GARCIA,** PhD [De La Salle University, Manila], is Associate Professor of Philosophy and presently the chair of the DLSU Philosophy Department. She has published papers in anthologies and journals.

**LOK CHONG HOE,** PhD [Monash University, Victoria], is Associate Professor of Philosophy at Universiti Sains Malaysia. His field of expertise includes aesthetics and classical Greek philosophy.

**ROLAND LORENZO M. RUBEN,** MPR [De La Salle University, Manila], is currently teaching philosophy at De La Salle-Dasmariñas, Cavite. He is finishing his doctoral studies at De La Salle University.

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