

A Thomistic Reading of *Kagandahang-Loób* as *Benevolentia*, *Beneficentia*, and *Misericordia*

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Abstract: In this essay, we use the framework of Thomistic virtue ethics to recast *kagandahang-loób*, which is the disposition to regard the other as a *kapwa* or shared-self, as a Filipino virtue. *Kagandahang-loób* is analyzed as a morally good disposition and a good operative *habitus* by identifying its subject as *loób*, its object as *kapwa*, and its mean as established by *pakikiramdaman*. Next, this essay unpacks the Thomistic virtues of *benevolentia*, *beneficentia*, and *misericordia* to reveal their similarities and differences with *kagandahang-loób*. It does so not to improve the Filipino notion of *kagandahang-loób* but to yield new insights that offer intellectual and reflective resources for the building up of the Filipino community.

Keywords: *kagandahang-loób*, *loób*, *kapwa*, *benevolentia*, *beneficentia*, *misericordia*, virtue-ethics

Introduction

A central Filipino virtue is *Kagandahang-loób*. Its importance can be gleaned from the number of important Filipino scholars who have written about it, including, to name a few: Dionisio Miranda, Virgilio Enriquez, Albert Alejo, and Leonardo De Castro. Miranda, a Filipino theologian who

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has the longest focused study of *loób* to date, claims that *kagandahang-loób* is the quintessential Filipino virtue because it is the general disposition of a person who embodies the character of a virtuous Filipino.¹ For this reason, any anthology of Filipino and Thomistic virtues would be incomplete without a discussion of this quintessential Filipino virtue.

Within Filipino culture and society, the understanding of what makes certain actions morally upright is more intuitive. If one asks an average Filipino for an explanation why such and such a characteristic is morally good or evil, his response would probably be practical and explained through illustrative examples rather than through an elaboration of conceptual schemes. In this regard, Aquinas' systematic tradition of scholasticism is helpful in providing a framework to organize the understanding of Filipino virtues. This paper proposes that there are enough similarities between a Filipino and a Thomistic account of ethical conduct. First, it shall first unpack the notion of *kagandahang-loób* through a survey of Filipino studies that provide phenomenological descriptions of it. This also includes a linguistic analysis of the term in order to uncover its meaning through its use within the Filipino language. Second, it uses a Thomistic framework to explore how *kagandahang-loób* can be understood as a virtue. Finally, this essay concludes with a dialogue between the Filipino *kagandahang-loób* and the Thomistic virtues of *benevolentia*, *beneficentia*, and *miser cordia* that highlights their similarities and dissimilarities.

Understanding *Kagandahang-loób* in Filipino Psychology

To begin, we should note that *kagandahang-loób* is literally translated as “beauty-of-the-*loób*.” It is almost synonymous with *kabutihang-loób* as “goodness-of-the-*loób*.” This study focuses on the former term due to its preponderance in the academic literature. A good way to unpack its significance is by parsing the term to its component notions of *kagandahan* and *loób*.

Kagandahan is a substantive abstract noun which means “beauty” in Filipino language. It is derived from the root word *ganda*, which is a noun that also means “beauty.” The language reflects a deep connection between aesthetics and ethics, such that moral goodness is characterized as beautiful. “Good manners” is rendered in Filipino as, *magandang asal*, which literally means, “beautiful behavior/manners.” Not only is there a strong association between beauty and moral goodness, but also goodness in the sense of being a useful or pragmatic good. Instead of saying “It’s a good idea,” Filipinos would say, *magandang idea yan*, which means, “It is a beautiful

¹ Dionisio M. Miranda, SVD, *Butihin Pinoy: Probe Essays on Value as Filipino* (Manila: Logos Publication, 1992), 182.

idea.” This linguistic analysis exhibits the shared consciousness within Filipino society of the insight that goodness and beauty are convertible.

Loób is perhaps the richest concept in Filipino psychology and anthropology. *Loób* literally means “inside” and it is a rich metaphor for the inmost aspect of the human person. In the context of physical objects, *loób* simply means the internal side or part of an object like the inside of a jar or of a house.² However, in the context of Filipino anthropology, the notion of *loób* is not as straightforward.³ Leonardo Mercado emphasized how *loób* is a holistic notion that does not find a single equivalence in Western categories but is rather associated with a variety of meanings and terms.⁴

Loób can be understood as a “subject,”⁵ or “state of mind,” and is the closest Filipino notion to the Western conception of the “self.” The term *kagandahang-loób* does not refer to the quality of a particular “inside” faculty but to the moral character of the unitary totality of the person himself. As Miranda puts it, in *loób* “the unity of thought and will, vital condition and affective life” resides.⁶ The notion of *loób* already encompasses and contains the Thomistic faculties of intellect, will, and sensitive appetites in an undifferentiated and holistic mode. Jeremiah Reyes, in trying to bridge the Thomistic framework with *loób*, proposes to understand these powers to be ‘virtually’ present within the *loób*.⁷ *Loób* is a holistic notion that encompasses an array of psychological activities, affects, and operations of the person as he comports himself in the world and with other fellow-*loóbs*. Albert Alejo says, “The term ‘loób’ is used holistically, referring to the expansive truth of man in his emerging *relation* with

² Prospero Covar, *Larangan: Seminal Essays on Philippine Culture* (Manila: National Commission for Culture and the Arts, 1998) 23.

³ Reynaldo Iletto studied the meanings of loob in millenarian movements and the revolutions that propelled the Filipino nation to independence. See Reynaldo Iletto, *Pasyon and Revolution: Popular Movements in the Philippines, 1840-1910* (Quezon City: Ateneo University Press, 1979); Landa Jocano studied the notion of loob as sarili or “self.” See Jocano, *Filipino Worldview: Ethnography of Local Knowledge* (Quezon City: PUNLAD Research House, 2011); Albert Alejo unpacked loob in the context of “pakikisangkot,” which means “involvement” or “participation.” See Albert Alejo, *Tao po! Tuloy!: Isang Landas ng Pag-unawa sa Loob ng Tao* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila, 1990); Miranda explored dividing loob into three internal components, namely the cognitive-intellectual element, the volitive element, and the emotional-empathic element. See Miranda, *Loob: The Filipino Within* (Manila: Divine Word Publishing, 1989); Miranda goes on to say that loob “encloses an inner world [...] built up of the operations of “malay at isip” (consciousness and thought), dama at bait (feeling and common sense), ugali at kalooban (personality and will).” See *Kaloob ni Kristo: A Filipino Christian Account of Conscience* (Manila: Logos Publishing, 1992).

⁴ Leonardo N. Mercado, *Elements of Filipino Theology* (Tacloban City: Divine Word University Publication, 1975), 51-2; 132-4; 139; 226.

⁵ Miranda, *Butihin Pinoy*, 83.

⁶ Miranda, *Kaloob ni Kristo*, 69.

⁷ Jeremiah Reyes, “*Loób* and *Kapwa*: An Introduction to a Filipino Virtue Ethics,” *Asian Philosophy*, vol. 25, no. 2 (2015): 148-171.

himself and *with others*.⁸ Alejo's emphasis on the openness of *loób* to relationships is an essential characteristic in order to understand *loób*.

Reyes argues that in the conception of *loób* as the unity of thought and will, vital condition and affective life, it is the notion of will as a volitive movement that takes pride.⁹ It is because the will relates the person to his goals or relationships with others, whereas the other aspects of *loób* play a more supporting role. This primacy of the volitive dimension of *loób* is supported by cognates in the Filipino language like *kalooban*, which means "will," "wish," or "desire." The theological phrase "the will of the Father" is rendered as *kalooban ng Ama*. *Kalooban* can also mean the "innermost part of oneself," as a term that emphasizes the inside-ness or inwardness of *loób*. Another relevant cognate is the verb *ipagkaloob* which means "to entrust," or "to deign to give." The noun *kaloob* means "something entrusted" or "a gift." Thus *loób* can also particularly refer to the "will,"¹⁰ or "relational will,"¹¹ understood as a "holistic and relational"¹² reality, which is the seat of moral impulses, and not simply as a rational appetitive faculty.

The Filipino *self* or *loób* is never conceived of or experienced in isolation, but it is always in relation to *kapwa*. As Miranda puts it, "Indeed *loób* needs *kapwa* even to be *loób*: its continued responding to *kapwa* is the condition for its existence and authenticity as *loób*."¹³ *Loób* fully realizes itself only in relation to *kapwa*.

A *loób's* lived experience is to move and operate within a community of *loóbs*, who are referred to as *kapwa*.¹⁴ *Kapwa* roughly refers to another person, but with far more intimate meaning than any Western counterpart. Virgilio Enriquez, who pioneered the interest in *kapwa*, describes it as,

In Filipino, *kapwa* is the unity of the "self" and "others." The English "others" is actually used in opposition to the "self," and implies the recognition of the self as a separate identity. In contrast, *kapwa* is a recognition of shared identity, an inner self shared with others.¹⁵

⁸ Alejo, *Tao po!*, 14. The original is rendered thus: "Ang salitang "loob" ay ginagamit sa isang holistikong paraan, tumutukoy ito sa malawak na katotohanan ng tao at sa umiiral niyang pakikipag-ugnayan sa sarili at sa iba."

⁹ Reyes, "Loób and Kapwa," 92.

¹⁰ Leonardo De Castro, "Debts of Good Will and Interpersonal Justice," *Paideia*. Accessed May 18, 2021. Available from <http://www.bu.edu/wcp/Papers/Asia/AsiaDeCa.htm>.

¹¹ Jeremiah Reyes, "Loób and Kapwa: An Introduction to a Filipino Virtue Ethics," *Asian Philosophy* vol. 25, no. 2 (2015): 154.

¹² Miranda, *Kaboob ni Kristo: A Filipino Christian Account of Conscience* (Manila: Logos 2003), 71.

¹³ Miranda, *Butihin Pinoy*, 84.

¹⁴ Miranda, *Butihin Pinoy*, 83.

¹⁵ (Enriquez 1992, 52).

The *kapwa* is recognized as a shared identity whose existence is not in opposition to the self, rather *kapwa* is always bound up and in relation to one's *loób*. Recognition of another person as *kapwa* emerges because of a recognition of a shared identity. Katrin De Guia, a student of Enriquez, describes *kapwa* as a "shared self" or a "self in the other," to emphasize the intimate identification of a *loób* with his *kapwa*.¹⁶ *Kapwa* is an "inner self shared with others."¹⁷ Enriquez further describes how the notion *kapwa* contains and implies the communion of the *loób-kapwa* relation as mutually reciprocal and mutually dependent, when he writes,

The *ako* (ego) and the *iba-sa-akin* (others) are one and the same in *kapwa* psychology: *Hindi ako iba sa aking kapwa* (I am no different from others). Once *ako* starts thinking of himself as separate from *kapwa*, the Filipino "self" gets to be individuated in the Western sense and, in effect, denies the status of *kapwa* to the other. By the same token, the status of *kapwa* is also denied to the self.¹⁸

Enriquez' description brings to the fore the observation that *kapwa* is the result of a certain recognition of sharedness or togetherness with another human person. *Kapwa* is not an ontological category, like the scholastic "person," which is understood as an individual substance of a rational nature. Rather, the notion of *kapwa* is more of a relational category that results from a shared recognition and acknowledgement of each other as shared selves. That is why Reyes can describe *kagandahang loób* as that which is "responsible for the actualization and transformation of the other into a real-life *kapwa*."¹⁹ *Kagandahang loób* is the disposition to regard the other as a *kapwa*. It is what constitutes another individual as a *kapwa* or a shared self. The otherness of the other is overcome, and he is established as a shared self. Miranda describes *kagandahang-loób* as an act of affirmation and appreciation, a valuing and applauding of the presence of the other as a fellow human, as a *kapwa*.²⁰

In the notion of the *kapwa*, the relationship immediately comes to the fore, such that Reyes would translate *kapwa* as "together with the person," to emphasize that the starting point of our understanding of ourselves should be *togetherness* rather than the subsisting individual.²¹ This is not to say that there is no conception of another

¹⁶ Katrin De Guia, *Kapwa: The Self in the Other* (Pasig City: Anvil Publishing, 2005), 28.

¹⁷ Enriquez, Virgilio. *From Colonial to Liberation Psychology*. Quezon City: The University of the Philippines Press, 1992), 52.

¹⁸ Virgilio Enriquez, *From Colonial to Liberation Psychology* (Quezon City: The University of the Philippines Press, 1992), 54.

¹⁹ Jeremiah Reyes, "Loób and Kapwa: Thomas Aquinas and a Filipino Virtue Ethics," (PhD. Diss. KU Leuven), 126-127.

²⁰ Miranda, *Buting Pinoy*, 181.

²¹ Reyes, "Loób and Kapwa," 156.

human being as a distinct other. The term *ibang tao* which means “another human being” shows that the Filipino language admits of other human persons who are not within the shared-togetherness of the *loób-kapwa* relationship. Nevertheless, Filipino ethics is always embedded within a *loób-kapwa* relationship. *Loób* fully realizes its *pagpapakatao* or “humanity” only in relation to *kapwa*. Miranda explores *loób* as an intrapersonal notion and describes it through the value of *pakikipag-kapwa*,²² which means “being-a-fellow-*kapwa*-to-others,” or “being-a-shared-self-to-the-other.” Being ethical means embodying the value of *pakikipagkapwa* a communication with a *kapwa* involving an opening of one’s *loób* and a sharing of significant parts of one’s *loób*.²³ This leads to the convergence called *pakikipagkaloóban*, or “sharing-of-each-other’s-*loób*,” which leads to the state of *magka-loób*, or a likeness of each other’s *loób*.

Enriquez describes *kagandahang-loób* as a generosity or goodness towards *kapwa* that springs spontaneously from a person’s *kabaitan* or “goodness-of-heart.”²⁴ For *kagandahang-loób* to be genuine, the goodness extended to *kapwa* must have no other motive but inherent graciousness and kindness.²⁵ In simple terms, *kagandahang-loób* is goodness extended to a *kapwa* that spontaneously springs from a *loób* that wills the good of the *kapwa*. Nevertheless, there are many layers of meaning that *kagandahang-loób* contains that are deeper than simply doing good to others.

Leonardo De Castro describes what is entailed in extending goodness to others, when he writes, “To convey *kagandahang loób* is to give part of oneself for the benefit of others.”²⁶ *Kagandahang-loób* is not just a spontaneous good action that springs from a good heart, as a kind of external action of good will. Rather, the good action is understood as a sharing of oneself with the *kapwa*. Albert Alejo adds a richer dynamic to *kagandahang-loób* in describing it as a welcoming attitude with arms outstretched and open to receive the *kapwa*:

Who do we consider to have a *magandang-loób*? He who is generous, with “open palms.” For *kagandahang-loób* is the stretching out of our arm and the simultaneous opening of our palms in order not only to give whatever is held, but also to receive the very person receiving. Who is a generous person? He who knows how to receive the person asking-begging [...] for it is the very one asking-begging who is

²² Miranda, *Butihin Pinoy*, 23-76.

²³ Miranda, *Butihin Pinoy*, 83.

²⁴ Enriquez, *From Colonial to Liberation Psychology*, 57.

²⁵ Enriquez, *From Colonial to Liberation Psychology*, 57.

²⁶ Leonardo De Castro, “Kagandahang Loob: A Filipino Concept of Feminine Bioethics,” in *Globalizing Feminist Bioethics*, ed. by Rosemarie Tong (Colorado: Westview Press, 2000), 53.

welcomed by the one who is being *magandang-loób* [a beautiful will] to others.²⁷

Alejo beautifully sketches this dynamic movement of giving and receiving, because it is not enough to give to the other. One must also receive and welcome the *kapwa* into one's *kalooban*.

From this brief survey of descriptions of *kagandahang-loób*, a picture of the mutual sharing of selves between persons emerges. *Kagandahang-loób* is not just generosity and graciousness as an external action towards a *kapwa*. It is the offering of one's *loób* to the *kapwa*. Simultaneously, *kagandahang-loób* is an opening of one's *loób* to receive the *kapwa* as part of oneself. This process of mutual reciprocity leading to convergence and collaboration is called *pakikipagkalooban*, a "sharing-of-each-other's-loób," which leads to the state of *magka-loób*, or a likeness of each other's *loób*.

Jaime Bulatao paints a familiar imagery to best exemplify *kagandahang-loób*. Bulatao observes how a Filipino mother²⁸ is one who "tends to create and maintain a situation where the child remains an extension of herself rather than as a being, independent in his own right. She tends to identify with her child rather than to look at him as 'other.'"²⁹ This description may appear very intrusive and possessive when compared with the modern Western conception of the self-sufficient individual. However, traditional Filipino families and friendships are characterized by this blurring of distinctions and boundaries in favor of a *pakikipagkalooban*. This mutual sharing of selves is essential for the cohesion and unity of traditional tight-knit Southeast Asian communities and clans.

²⁷ Albert Alejo, *Tao po!*, 111. *Sino ba ang tinatagurian nating may magandang-loób? Siyang mapagbigay, "bukas-palad." Sapagkat ang kagandahang-loób ay ang pag-unat ng bisig at sabay na pagbubukas ng palad upang hindi lamang maghandog ng kung anuman ang hawak kundi upang tumanggap sa pinaghahandugan. Sino ang mapagbigay? Siyang marunong tumanggap sa mga humihingi [...] mismong humihingi ang pinapatuloy ng nagmamagandang-loób.*

²⁸ The researcher proposes that the *virtue* of *kagandahang-loób* expressed through adoption of orphans can help the suffering of infertile couples. *Kagandahang-loób* enriches the understanding of adoption by transforming it from a desperate attempt to fill up a gnawing emptiness in the life of a couple, adoption becomes an impulse of mercy and *kagandahang-loób* towards an abandoned child. *Kagandahang-loób* emphasizes that adoption is not merely a substitute that infertile couples are forced to settle with, but a voluntary, life-giving decision to welcome a child who is in grave need of a home. In adoption, a couple rescues an abandoned child and lessens the suffering in the world. Through *kagandahang-loób* the otherness of an orphan is overcome and he is established as part of oneself, a shared self, a *kapwa-pamilya*; and the other affective and emotional experiences that accrue and sustain the relationship of a shared self would hopefully follow. See Siddharta Chiong, "A Moral Analysis of *In Vitro* Fertilization in the Philippine Context," in *Philippiniana Sacra*, Vol. LVII, No. 174 (2022).

²⁹ Jaime C. Bulatao, "Hiya," *Philippine Studies*, vol. 12, no. 3 (1964): 436.

In sum, *kagandahang-loób* refers to the good moral character of a person in relation to his *kapwa*. *Loób* can refer to the person in his emerging totality and it can also refer specifically to his will, understood as relational and holistic, and not as a mere rational faculty. *Kagandahang-loób* is an indispensable character among people because it conduces to *pakikipagkaloóban*, which ensure the cohesion and smooth relationships within the community. We now proceed to analyze *kagandahang-loób* with the help of Thomistic framework and categories, which hopefully enriches the understanding of the Filipino notion through new insights and connections.

Understanding *Kagandahang-Loób* as a Virtue

How is the Filipino *kagandahang-loób* a virtue? St. Thomas Aquinas builds upon Augustine's definition of virtues when he writes that a virtue is "a good quality of the mind, by which we live righteously, of which no one can make bad use, which God works in us, without us (*ST I-II*, q.55, a.4)." The last clause "which God works in us, without us," specifically refers to the theological virtues which are caused and increased gratuitously by God. The last phrase of the definition can be omitted to yield a definition that covers only the acquired human virtues, the category of virtues that could include *kagandahang-loób*.

Aquinas describes human virtues as a good operative *habitus* productive of good works (*ST I-II*, q.55, a.3). To be more precise, a good *habitus* is a quality or disposition of the soul or the mind that empowers it to do good works with facility, ease, and enjoyment (*ST I-II*, q.49, a.1). Since action follows disposition, "virtue itself is an ordered disposition of the soul (*ST I-II*, q.55, a.2, ad. 1)." In light of this definition, I propose that *kagandahang-loób* is a *habitus*, more specifically, a good *habitus* of the *loób*. To begin, consider a linguistic analysis: The grammatical formulation of many Filipino ethical traits is to add a qualifier to the term *loób*. The qualifier may be good or bad depending on the ethical quality of the trait. For example, *utang-na-loób* as "debt of gratitude"; *lakas-ng-loób* as "strength of courage"; *masamang-loób* as "ill-willed"; and *mahinang-loób* as "weak-willed."³⁰ These traits reflect the condition or quality of a person's *loób* that reflects his character as a moral agent. Similarly, *kagandahang-loób* refers to the beautiful condition or quality of a person's *loób*. It is a morally good

³⁰ Dionisio Miranda enumerate even more cognates of *loób* as expressions of the quality of a person's *loób*: "Loób is a Filipino term rich in many meanings, as found in its various cognates or derivatives. Consider, for example, these terms: *looban*, *kalooban*, *pagloloob*, *panloloob*, *pinaglooban*, *pinakaloob*, *kaloob-looban*, *kaloob*, *loobin*, *pagbabalik-loob*, *kusang-loob*, *kapalagayang-loob*, *lamang-loob*, *kabutihang-loob*, *kasamaang-loob*, *utang na loob*, *buong-loob*, *tamang-loob*, *maling-loob*, *malakas ang loob*, *mahina ang loob*, *maruming loob*, *malinis na loob*, *maliit na loob*, *malaking loob*, *sirang-loob*, *maayos na loob*, *panloob*, etc. Because of this there is more than a little truth to the observation that *loob* is initially best described rather than defined." Dionisio Miranda, *Loob: The Filipino Within* (Manila: Divine Word Publications, 1989), 1.

loób. It refers to a stable disposition of the *loób* to be, to feel, to respond, or to act in ways and manners that is *maganda*, i.e., “beautiful” or “morally good.” Therefore, the qualifier *kagandahan* describes a quality or disposition of the *loób* that enables and empowers the person to produce actions that are beneficial and helpful to his *kapwa*. It is a good *habitus* of the *loób*.

Since virtues are good operative *habitus* productive of good works (*ST* I-II, q.55, a.3), a good disposition of the soul must yield good and consistent actions. *Kagandahang-loób* fulfills this definition. A superficial reading of the adjective *loób*, meaning “inside,” may distort the anthropological notion of *loób* by giving one an impression of an enclosed interiority that needs to bridge the gap between internal subjective experience and external objective world. As discussed above, however, the notion of *loób* is deeply connected with *kapwa*, such that without this connection, *loób* ceases to understand itself as *loób*: *Loób* is naturally oriented towards the outside through its deep links with *kapwa*. Thus *loób* immediately and spontaneously opens and externalizes itself in relation with *kapwa* through activity and communication. Miranda explains this externalization of *loób* by saying,

Loób manifests its nature, its activity, and its quality through the principle of externalization... This externalization is executed via corporality, language, and materiality. One’s *loób* is expressed in the various activities made possible by one’s body, the use of communication, and one’s connectedness with material reality.³¹

Loób manifests itself through activities that allow it to participate in relationships with different *kapwa*. Therefore, *kagandahang-loób* expresses itself exteriorly through multiple and varied good actions of generosity and graciousness to others. It is expressed through the acts of other virtues like *malasakit* as compassion or *pagtutulungan* as helping each other. In sum, *kagandahang-loób* is an operative *habitus* productive of good works.

There is, however, an important characteristic of Thomistic-Aristotelian virtues that may not be clearly articulated within the framework of Filipino ethics. Aquinas says that the goodness of moral virtues consists in their conformity with the rule of reason. Moral virtues derive their goodness from their ordination to the rule of reason (*ST* I-II, q.64, a.1), by observing at least the rational mean established by reason (*ST* I-II, q.64, a.2). However, because *loób* is not diversified into distinct powers of reason, rational appetite, and sensitive appetites, there is not much emphasis on the role of reasoning in good ethical conduct. These distinctive powers of Thomistic psychology operate more holistically and ambiguously within the *loób*

³¹ Miranda, *Kaloob ni Kristo*, 100.

of Filipino ethics. Landa Jocano describes the average Filipino as, “psychologically, we are a highly sensitive people... We reason more with our hearts than with our minds.”³² Manuel Dy would go on to say that, “a Filipino hardly acts on the basis of his rationality.”³³ This must not lead to the preposterous inference that Filipinos are irrational. Rather, they simply mean that the Filipino’s explanation for ethical conduct is not expressed through discursive reasoning or logical syllogisms. Rather, good ethical actions flow from an intuitive and immediate grasp of social expectations of moral conduct. One can say that actions flow from the heart, acting from the *loób*, implying that the heart and mind act in an inseparable movement.³⁴

Instead of the mean of reason, ethical conduct in Filipino society is established through norms acquired through social training within the family and the wider community. Patterns of ethical actions are acquired through years of socialization and *pakiramdam*.³⁵ Rita Mataragnon, who specializes in Filipino psychology, has this to say about *pakikiramdam* in Filipino society: “In Filipino social interaction, a concern for feelings and preference for indirect expression gives rise to the phenomenon of *pakikiramdam*, a covert individual process by which a person tries to feel and understand the feelings and intentions of another.”³⁶ The emphasis on *pakikiramdam* in discerning the moral action leads Reyes to conclude that *pakikiramdam* is the closest Filipino counterpart to the Thomistic virtue of prudence.³⁷ Thus Filipino ethics is more of feeling one’s way within social interactions, rather than reasoning out the virtuous mean. For sure, a virtuous Filipino must act reasonably in order to be intelligible to his companions. Furthermore, he can be expected to give a reasonable account of his actions. Yet this discursive approach from principles to conclusions is not at the forefront of Filipino ethical discernment and happens more often as an afterthought.

In the absence of a clear articulation of the role of reason in ethical discernment, Filipino ethics puts the highlight on another aspect that is present in

³² Landa Jocano, *Filipino Value System: A Cultural Definition* (Quezon City: Punlad Research House, 1997), 9.

³³ Manuel Dy, “Outline of a Project of Filipino Ethics,” in *Values in Philippine Culture and Education*, ed. by Manuel Dy Jr., (Washington D. C.: The Council of Research in Values and Philosophy, 1994), 20.

³⁴ Dy, “Outline of a Project of Filipino Ethics,” 20.

³⁵ *Pakikiramdam* is described as “a way of reconstructing another person’s feeling state or state of being. Apart from being a mere sensitivity to nonverbal cues, *pakikiramdam* is also the active attempt to reconstruct the speaker’s internal state.” Raj Mansukhani, “*Pakikiramdam* [Sensitivity to Feelings]: A Critical Analysis,” in *Filipino Cultural Traits*, ed. by Rolando Gripaldo (Washington: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2005), 187–188.

³⁶ Rita Mataragnon, “*Pakikiramdam* in Filipino Social Interaction,” in *Foundations of Behavioral Sciences: A Book of Readings* (Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, 1987), 479.

³⁷ Reyes, “*Loób* and *Kapwa*,” 162.

Aquinas' virtue ethics: the role of the passions in the virtuous life. Aquinas writes that, "It belongs to the perfection of moral good, that man should be moved unto good, not only in respect of his will but also in respect of his sensitive appetite (*ST I-II*, q.24, a.3)." The passions or emotions are necessary components in the moral life in a framework of attaining beatitude that emphasizes the following of Jesus Christ who experienced sadness, joy, pain, and anger.³⁸ Passions participate in the moral life by being regulated by the rule of reason. This happens when passions are consequent to reason, which happens in two ways (*ST I-II*, q.24, a.3, ad.1). The first is through redundancy, when the will's intensity flows over into the passions, thus intensifying the good action by inflaming them with emotions. The second is by choice, when the will chooses to be affected by preceding strong emotions in order to do good actions more promptly and more effectively. This can be seen with *kagandahang-loób*, which must be accompanied by movements of emotions for its integrity. De Castro notes that a virtuous agent "must be motivated by genuine feelings for the beneficiaries of his actions [...] For the agent needs to be motivated by such emotions as pity, sympathy, love, and charity. There can be no *kagandahang loób* if a person performs his duties without positive emotional involvement."³⁹ De Castro describes how a person of *kagandahang-loób* is ignited and aroused into action by the spontaneous emotional response to a certain situation or the plight of a *kapwa*.

Applying Aquinas' distinctions to *kagandahang-loób*, emotions participate in moral actions through redundancy, where the intensity of the will is accompanied by the same intensity of the emotions, or through choice, where the will allows the movements of the passions to move a person to action. Consequent emotions by choice seems to be closer to De Castro's description since emotions of pity, sympathy, love, and charity are what initially spur and move the person to action. In this case the will which has been sufficiently educated through years of socialization and acquisition of good character traits simply consents and gives in to the movement of the emotions in order to promptly and spontaneously respond to the needs of the situation. A person of *kagandahang-loób* has educated his emotions to be well-disposed to respond appropriately to certain situations, and the will simply consents to these emotions because the intellect intuitively understands that these emotional responses are appropriate to the situation. Although this description compartmentalizes *loób* into faculties of intellect, will, and sensitive appetites, and fails to appropriately describe the holistic and intuitive movements within *loób*, it demonstrates how the strong emotions that characterize *kagandahang-loób* can be

³⁸ Servais Pinckaers, "Reappropriating Aquinas's Account of the Passions," in *The Pinckaers Reader: Renewing Thomistic Moral Theology*, ed. by John Berkman and Craig Steven Titus (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2005), 275-77.

³⁹ Leonardo De Castro, "Debts of Good Will and Interpersonal Justice." *Paideia* Boston University. Accessed October 18, 2023 through: <https://www.bu.edu/wcp/Papers/Asia/AsiaDeCa.htm>.

understood as virtuous in the Thomistic framework. Within the Filipino framework, the process of being roused to good deeds is more spontaneous, and decisions are more intuitive than the linear chain of command between reason and the intellectual and sensitive appetites.

When *kagandahang-loób* is absent, a person ceases to be a *kapwa* to other *loóbs*. Such a person is suspected to have *masamang-loób*, or “ill will” against others. The absence of *kagandahang-loób* diminishes one’s *pagkatao*, or “humanity” because one cannot relate properly to a *kapwa*. Likewise, a person of *masamang-loób* diminishes the *pagkatao* of the others because of the tendency to objectify and take advantage of others. He becomes one whom others would not include in their *sakop*, or “ingroup.”⁴⁰ He is someone whom others would not share their *loób* with. He is someone whom others would say, *mag-ingat ka diyán*, which means, “be careful of him.” *Ingat* means “to take care,” not in the positive sense of taking care to nurture and preserve, but in the more suspicious sense of being wary of a stranger.

Understanding the Subject and Object of *Kagandahang-Loób*

We now proceed to the identification of the subject and object of the virtue *kagandahang-loób*. In the Thomistic framework, an operative habitus as a quality resides in a subject, which is a particular power or faculty of the soul (*ST I-II*, q.49, a.2). The subject of a virtue is the principle of operation of the virtue (*ST I-II* q.50, a.2) through which the soul operates. Potential subjects include the intellect, the will, and the sensitive powers of the soul (*ST I-II* q.50, a.3-5).

In my view, *kagandahang-loób* cannot be identified with a specific power of the soul. Rather the subject of *kagandahang-loób* is none other than the *loób* itself, understood as a holistic reality. By identifying *loób* as the subject, *kagandahang-loób* is closer to Augustine’s definition of virtues as “a quality of the mind,” where the mind, connoting a holistic reality, is the subject of virtues. *Loób* as a subject of virtue can also be understood through the Thomistic principle that claims that “virtue is that which makes its possessor good, and his work good likewise” (*ST I-II*, q.55, a.3, s.c.; *ST II-II*, q.123, a.1; *ST I*, q.109, a.1). In other words, virtues do not only habituate particular faculties. They reside in the person himself, qualifying and habituating him as an integral substance. Virtues make a person’s actions and his faculties good, in as much as they belong to the person, the moral agent. It is the person as a whole who becomes unqualifiedly good because of the exercise of the virtues. This classical Aristotelian principle finds a home within Filipino ethics, because the Filipino

⁴⁰ *Sakop* is “any inclusive group, but especially one supportive of a person on whom they were dependent [...]” See William Henry Scott, *Barangay: Sixteenth-Century Philippine Culture and Society* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1994), 136.

virtues emphasize the wholeness of the person's *loób*, rather than his particular faculties and powers. When a person has *magandang-loób*, this does not only refer to the disposition of his rational appetitive faculty or of his intellect. Rather, it involves the whole person comporting himself in a moral stance towards his *kapwa*. Miranda describes *kagandahang-loób* as “a completion of one’s humanity.”⁴¹

In Aquinas’ framework, virtues are properly distinguished into species by the object, as the term or end of the operation. Furthermore, the moral quality of the action is derived primarily from its suitable object (*ST* I-II, q.72 a.1). The object is also described as the matter of the action as that “about which” something is done (*ST* I-II, q.18, a.2).

The object of *kagandahang-loób* is the *kapwa* who is in need. *Kagandahang-loób* is a *kapwa*-oriented *virtue* that reaches out, especially when the *kapwa* is in dire need. The Philippines is often beset by natural calamities like yearly tropical storms and earthquakes. The nation also suffered subjugation during its colonial history, and it continues to endure the poverty and corruption that plagues it as a modern state. These realities render the suffering-*kapwa* as the norm of daily living, not the exception. *Kagandahang-loób* is a sensitivity to the suffering of the *kapwa* and a recognition of the innate goodness and worthiness of the *kapwa*. Need and suffering do not always have to be grave. Since every person is a dependent rational animal, each person is dependent on his *kapwa*, making each an object and a candidate for *kagandahang-loób*.

Comparing *Kagandahang-Loób* to Thomistic Virtues

The description of *kagandahang-loób* brings to mind the Thomistic virtue of *benevolentia*, “benevolence” or “goodwill.”⁴² Reyes attempted a dialogue between Filipino *virtues* and Thomistic virtues, and he presented *benevolentia* and *beneficentia* as virtues comparable to *kagandahang-loób*.⁴³ He writes, “[*Kagandahang-loób*] is more like a certain aspect of charity called benevolence and its exterior act of beneficence, as it involves a movement from the superior to the inferior, like in the giving of gifts (*ST* II-II, q.31, a.1)”⁴⁴ Since charity as a theological virtue is infused and directly oriented towards God, Reyes focuses on the aspects of charity as dialogue partners to *kagandahang-loób*. Aquinas defines *benevolentia* as, “that act of the will whereby we wish well to another (*ST* II-II, q.27, a.2).” It differs from the love that accompanies friendship or close ties because “goodwill is neither friendship nor

⁴¹ Miranda, *Buting Pinoy*, 181.

⁴² Miranda, *Buting Pinoy*, 180.

⁴³ Reyes, “Loób and Kapwa,” 160.

⁴⁴ Reyes, “Loób and Kapwa,” 160.

love.” *Benevolentia* is the will willing the good of others, without the motivation of an existing relationship. *Benevolentia* is said to be “the beginning of friendship” (*ST* II-II, q.27, a.2). This characteristic is suggestive of *kagandahang-loób*’s character of affirming and valuing the presence of others by transforming and establishing them as real-life *kapwa*. *Kagandahang-loób* is the beginning of the *loób-kapwa* relationship.

Aquinas defines *beneficentia* thus, “Beneficence simply means doing good to someone. [...] This good may be considered in two ways, first under the general aspect of good, and this belongs to beneficence in general, and is an act of friendship, and, consequently, of charity [...] But if the good which one man does another, be considered under some special aspect of good, then beneficence will assume a special character and will belong to some special virtue (*ST* II-II, q.31, a.1).” *Beneficentia*, which is about doing good deeds like giving gifts, can be understood as an act of charity. Thus, *benevolentia* and *beneficentia* are characterized by good deeds done to others, whether motivated by sheer goodwill as in the case of *benevolentia* or the love of charity or friendship as in the case of *beneficentia*. These two virtues reflect aspects of *kagandahang-loób* because of their universality in scope, extending goodness and graciousness to all.

However, Aquinas’ description of *benevolentia* misses important aspects of *kagandahang-loób*. Aquinas writes, “Goodwill does not imply impetuosity or desire, that is to say, has not an eager inclination, because it is by the sole judgment of his reason that one man wishes another well (*ST* II-II, q.27, a2).” In other words, *benevolentia* is a virtue that disposes the will, operating as a rational appetite without the affections of friendship or empathy. An ethics that is limited to rationality and devoid of feelings would strike Aquinas as hubristic attempts to imitate God, who is merciful but impassible.⁴⁵ Robert Miner notes that humans cannot reliably or consistently act with charity without feeling the pain of others.⁴⁶ It is in this affective aspect of the moral life where *kagandahang-loób* demonstrates its strength as a Filipino *virtue*. Since *loób* is not restricted to a single faculty but also involves affective and sentimental movements, *kagandahang-loób* is more than *benevolentia*.⁴⁷

There is another aspect of Christian charity that captures the affective element of *kagandahang-loób* that Reyes did not take the opportunity to delve into deeper. *Kagandahang-loób* seems to be closer to the virtue of *misericordia* or “mercy.”

⁴⁵ Robert Miner, “The Difficulty of Mercy: Reading Thomas Aquinas on *Misericordia*,” *Studies in Christian Ethics*, vol. 28 (2015): 74.

⁴⁶ Miner, “The Difficulty of Mercy,” 74.

⁴⁷ Reyes does acknowledge the real differences between the two virtues systems and stops at this recognition. See Reyes, “*Loób* and *Kapwa*: Thomas Aquinas and a Filipino Virtue Ethics,” 136. However, this paper would like to go further than Reyes and propose another Thomistic virtue that is analogous to *kagandahang-loób*.

Misericordia is considered as an interior effect of charity (*ST II-II, q.28, prologue*). Saint Augustine defines it as a “heartfelt sympathy for another’s distress, impelling us to succor him if we can.”⁴⁸ This conveys the strong emotional and emphatic connotations of *kagandahang-loób*. The same text is also translated as, “a kind of fellow feeling in our hearts for the misery of another which compels us to help him if we can.”⁴⁹ This definition emphasizes fellow-feeling, the *pakikiramay* of the *loób-kapwa* relationship.

Augustine’s definition begins with heart-felt sympathy as a kind of emotion that impels someone to aid the misery of another.⁵⁰ Action springs from a spontaneous emotion to help and relieve others.⁵¹ Nevertheless, even if *misericordia* seems to begin with emotion is nevertheless a virtue because it impels one to action making it consistent with the account of virtues as operative habitus inclining to action (*ST I-II, q.55, a.2, ad.4*) This description is closer to the Filipino experience which is more intuitive and affective.

Aquinas describes the subjective disposition which is necessary for a merciful response as, “one grieves or sorrows for another’s distress, in so far as one looks upon another’s distress as one’s own.” (*ST II-II, q.30, a.2*). This happens due to two types of union with the one suffering. The first is the “union of affections” as an effect of love due to friendship. Because of the strong affections of love that bind friends, the suffering of one is felt as the suffering of the other. The second type is due to a “real union” which arises when one identifies with the suffering person leading to a realization of his own vulnerability manifested in the other. This type of union is really a concern for one’s own suffering rather than the other because one pities the other for one’s own sake.⁵²

Anthony Keaty proposes to interpret the relationship between real union and the union of affection by comparing it with the order of affective mercy to mercy as a virtue. He writes,

⁴⁸ St. Augustine, *The City of God*, Book IX, art. 5 quoted in *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, q. 30, art. 1, *respondeo*.

⁴⁹ St. Augustine, *The City of God*, ed. and trans. R. W. Dyson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 365.

⁵⁰ Anthony Keaty, “The Christian Virtue of Mercy: Aquinas’ Transformation of Aristotelian Pity,” *Heythrop Journal*, vol. XLVI (2005): 191.

⁵¹ Aquinas lists down three kinds of evils that befall others that evoke the heartfelt sorrow associated with mercy (*ST II-II q.30, a.1*). The first is corruptive or distressing evils that frustrate man’s natural inclination for life. The second is an unforeseen accident that turns out badly what was hoped to be well. The third evil is when misfortune befall a man who has always striven to do well, robbing him of the happiness he has worked hard to achieve. This last type of evil evokes greatest pity because, “we pity most the distress of one who suffers undeservedly” (*ST II-II q30 a1*).

⁵² Keaty, “The Christian Virtue of Mercy,” 191.

The disposition to another's suffering that leads to a 'real union' (recognized vulnerability) with the suffering of another is to be ordered to and governed by the disposition that leads to a 'union of affections' (friendship love), just as the sorrow that is a passion is to be governed by the sorrow that is a virtuous act of the will.⁵³

Thus, in the ethical order, these are not just two kinds of unions that bring about mercy. Rather, real union must be ordered to union of affections in order for it to be genuinely *misericordia*. To drive his point, Keaty uses the analogy of the relationship between mercy as a passion/emotion and *misericordia* as a virtue.

Since it is the movement of the intellectual appetite or will that follows the mean of reason, mercy felt in the sensitive appetites should be regulated by the will for them to be virtuous and concordant with justice (*ST* II-II, q.30, a.3). Mercy in the sense of mere emotion cannot qualify as a virtue. To be compassionate in affect does necessarily imply providing help in effect.⁵⁴ Mercy as an emotion corresponds to the Filipino term, *awa*, which is translated as "mercy" or "pity." *Awa* is more passive in nature and does not always translate to action. Rather, it is *misericordia* as the habitual disposition to help others according to the mean of reason that is a virtue.⁵⁵ Mercy as an emotion should transcend to become *misericordia* in action.

In the same way, real union, which reminds one of one's own vulnerability must be ordered and elevated to the union of affection, where one sees the suffering other as an object of love of charity. Real union only implies a realization of one's own vulnerability. This does not yet involve a genuine concern for the other, until it transforms into a union of affection. This interpretation is insightful when understood within *loób-kapwa* terms. *Kagandahang-loób* as *misericordia* impels a movement to action not only because of a recognition that the suffering person is also a *tao* or a human being. Rather it goes beyond this to a recognition of the suffering other as a *kapwa*, through an affirmation and actualization of the other as a real-life *kapwa*. This movement from seeing another as mere *tao* to an acknowledgement of him as *kapwa* implies a shift from mere real union to a union of affection analogous to affection of friendship or kinship. Aquinas describes this union thus, "Since he who loves another looks upon his friend as another self, he counts his friend's hurt as his own so that he grieves for his friend's hurt as though he were hurt himself (*ST* II-II, q.30, a.2)." Aquinas' description of friendship shimmers with a *loób-kapwa* language.

⁵³ Keaty, "The Christian Virtue of Mercy," 191.

⁵⁴ Miner, "The Difficulty of Mercy," 74. See also (*ST* II-II q.45, a.6, ad.3)

⁵⁵ J. Budziszewski, *Commentary on Aquina's Virtue Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 170.

It is reminiscent of the Filipino phenomenon of being *magka-loób* or “oneness-of-the-loób.”

Kagandahang-loób as *misericordia* is thus a *virtue* that opens the *loób* to other human beings as extensions of the self, thus blurring the lines between self and other; blurring the lines between in-group members and those beyond the circle of the clan to encompass every human being that one encounters. Like *benevolentia*, *kagandahang-loób* does not require an existing union of affection to be steered into action, rather it is the beginning of the *loób-kapwa* relation or friendship and what establishes the union of affection.

Alasdair MacIntyre has a similar description when he notes how *misericordia* blurs the lines between people who have a claim on us due to determined social relationships and those who are severely afflicted and in need of help, regardless if a relationship is present or not.⁵⁶ MacIntyre interprets the Thomistic *misericordia* as an uncalculating generosity to another, without any strict proportionality and reciprocity in giving and receiving, and no predetermined limits to acts of mercy shown to another.⁵⁷ This description of *misericordia* bring to mind the imagery of mother and child as the ideal metaphor for *kagandahang-loób*, since it conveys the disproportion and lack of reciprocity between the one showing *kagandahang-loób* and the one receiving it. It is never part of the equation whether the one receiving can ever reciprocate or even express *utang-na-loób* or “debt of gratitude.” What matters in the virtue of *misericordia* is the impassioned movement to extend goodness to a *kapwa* because the *kapwa* is a shared-self, whose suffering is one’s own.

The everyday relationships of people do not always demand feelings of pity in order for it to be mutually beneficent. One does not have to pity another in order to do good to them. Subtle feelings of concern or mere goodwill are often enough. Likewise, *kagandahang-loób* should not be construed as an emotionally taxing *virtue* that demands that passions be stirred up all the time. In the ordinary exigencies of life, *kagandahang-loób* is closer to *benevolentia* and *beneficentia*, in their calm good deeds. *Kagandahang-loób* is a virtue that is multifaceted and not restricted, thus it partakes of the characteristics of a variety of Thomistic virtues.

Conclusion

Kagandahang loób is a *virtue* that cannot be adequately identified with Western paradigms because particular virtues are intelligible and make sense within

⁵⁶ Alasdair MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals: Why Human Beings Need the Virtues* (Chicago, Illinois: Open Court Press, 1999), 125.

⁵⁷ MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals*, 125-126.

the practices and historico-cultural contexts from which they develop.⁵⁸ The very conception of a “Filipino virtue” already brings about tensions because of a merging of different value systems. If *kagandahang-loób* is a virtue, it is only so in an analogous way. But this exploration helps us understand the uniqueness and commonality of Filipino virtues with Thomistic virtues of *benevolentia*, *beneficentia* and *misericordia*. This study has brought to the fore the insight that beneath the particularities of both ethical frameworks, there lie common human values that serve as nexus points for dialogue and a shared understanding of what it means to live a good life. **PS**

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⁵⁸ See Alasdair C. MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*. 1st ed. (Indiana: Notre Dame University Press, 1981); *Short History of Ethics: A History of Moral Philosophy from the Homeric Age to the Twentieth Century* (England: Routledge, 1987).

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