

The Filipino Virtue of *Pagpapakabayani* and the Thomistic Account of Virtuous Anger

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Abstract: *Pagpapakabayani* is a Filipino virtue that can be translated into English as “to be heroic.” This study explores *pagpapakabayani* in dialogue with the Thomistic account of virtuous anger. It begins with a phenomenological analysis of *pagpapakabayani*, drawing upon the foundational pillars of *loób* and *kapwa* to illustrate the relational nature of Filipino virtue ethics. It then explores the virtue of *pagpapakabayani* and its relation to the Filipino passion of *gālit*, which is the passion of anger directed towards a person who is perceived to be the cause of an injustice. *Gālit* can trigger *pagpapakabayani*, propelling a Filipino to that heroism that can correct an injustice. In a parallel fashion, virtuous anger can impel individuals to pursue the well-being of their beloved.

Keywords: Thomism, anger, Filipino, *galit*, *bayani*, virtue, *pagpapakabayani*

Introduction

Filipinos are often lauded for a range of positive attributes, including their renowned hospitality (*mapagpatuloy*), resilience in the face of adversity (*mapagtiis*), and devout prayerfulness (*madasalin*). These characteristics are inherent in the Filipino people wherever they may be. Indeed, these traits become outstanding and could not easily be hidden. It is possible that these traits

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were implanted in their being by God, named *Bathala* in early Tagalog mythology,¹ when he was still creating the human race. However, a deeper understanding of these virtues is imperative, as they must emanate from the innermost core of each individual and be nurtured to cultivate virtuous Filipinos.

One of the Filipino virtues often overlooked in Philippine society is *pagpapakabayani*, which can be translated into English as “to be heroic.” This study explores the relationship between the Filipino concept of *pagpapakabayani* and virtuous anger as it is understood within the Thomistic tradition. We begin with the two conceptual pillars of Filipino virtue ethics namely, *loób* and *kapwa*, to give us a clearer picture of how a Filipino desires *pagpapakabayani* even when he is angry. Furthermore, *pagpapakabayani* only manifests through an act of will. Thus, one becomes a *bayani* because of one’s love for his or her fellow human beings.

Understanding the Filipino Soul

We need to begin by understanding the Filipino soul, which has been shaped by a variety of cultures, especially by the foreign nations that colonized the country. Filipinos are majority Roman Catholic Christians even if the whole population includes other denominations and religions shaping most of the values shared around the archipelago. The grand narrative of the Filipino identity has taken its roots since the beginning of the discovery of the Philippines by the explorers and the evangelization of faith propagated by the religious missionaries sent to Asia. Also, Filipinos cannot discount the fact that apart from the Hispanic influence propagated by the Spaniards, the Americans have also contributed much, especially in running the educational system such as public schools where, apart from the home, Filipino traits are also molded and formed.

To better understand the Filipino soul, it is necessary to delve into a phenomenological analysis of how Filipinos relate to each other and to the world. According to Jeremiah Reyes, there are two pillars of Filipino virtue ethics, namely, *loób* and *kapwa*. These two realities are essential in comprehending how Filipinos exercise what Norris Clarke would call “substance-in relation” and “person-in-relation.” Both of these capture the very essence of Southeast Asian animism, which values connectivity among individual beings.²

Among Filipinos, it is a must that the term *loób* be clarified since its literal translation can mean “inside” as if referring to what is inside the house (*kung ano*

¹ Leo Jed Grenia, “Bathala as God’s Preparatory Revelation to Early Filipinos,” Research Paper, St. Alphonsus School of Theology-Lucena City, October 2011.

² Jeremiah Reyes, “Loób and Kapwa: Thomas Aquinas and a Filipino Virtue Ethics,” September 2015, Dissertation, KU Leuven, *Humanities and Social Sciences Group*, 73-74.

ang nasa loób ng bahay). However, it is more than that when we speak of *loób* as the person's interiority. It is better understood as a "willed action."³ It must also be for this reason that the Filipino translation of the Lord's Prayer is close to the hearts of the Filipinos since the prayer fervently mentions "*Sundin ang loób mo dito sa lupa para nang sa langit*" ("Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.") This meaning of *loób* when referring to a person is in contrast with his *lamang-loób* which speaks more of his internal organs. A derivative of *loób*, we can also refer to *kaloóban* which is the core of one's being as a human person. Thus, when speaking of a person's moral disposition, it is proper to call someone who is good-willed as *maganda ang kaloóban* or *magandang-loób*, or ill-willed as *masama ang kaloóban* or *masamang-loób*. There are also instances when a person whose property is violated or stolen would say, *Ako ay naloóban!* ("My [home] was violated!" / "Someone has broken into my house!") As a "person-in-relation," a Filipino would consider his property that is under his custody as something part of his person, and having felt violated for losing it, he claims that it is his "personhood" that has been violated.

Next, we move to *kapwa*, which is the object of *loób*. If *loób* is a willed action, then *kapwa* is the individual to whom the action is willed. It is through the interaction with the *kapwa*, which is his "other," that the Filipino understands himself as a person. In other words, for the Filipino, his identity is entangled with the identity of his neighbor. Note that *pagpapakabayani* is reliant on the presence of a neighbor. For the Filipino, one cannot stand alone and fight for justice or for the oppressed – one cannot be heroic – without the presence of the "oppressed" or without the presence of "another" (or "an other") for whom he is willing to defend, to fight for, or to lay down his life.

The Virtue of *Pagpapakabayani*

Pagpapakabayani is a Filipino virtue that can be translated into English as "to be heroic." It comes from the Filipino root word *bayani* which means, "hero." However, there is a more profound root word from which we can derive the word *bayani*, and that is *bayan* or *bahayan*, which we can loosely translate as "town," "nation," "country," or a "community."⁴ Thus, *pagpapakabayani* is a Filipino virtue that is centered in a community. One seeks to be heroic for the sake of his kin. No one becomes a hero without the presence of the *kapwa*. He becomes a hero for the *kapwa*. As Filipinos will say, what else is the use of *pagpapakabayani* if you do not have your neighbor's feet to wash? *Walang nagiging bayani para sa sarili lamang. Gagawin mo iyon para sa pangangailangan ng kapwa mo.* (No one becomes a hero for oneself. You do it for

³ Ibid., 74.

⁴ Froilan S. Rivera, "*Filipino Bayanihan: Towards a National Value Formation*," June 2021, University of the Philippines-Diliman, I.

the sake of others.) Thus, *pagpapakabayani* is composed of a passionate desire and readiness to eliminate a present difficult evil that must be rejected or surmounted for the sake of the other and the community.

Pagpapakabayani* and *Gālit

As we explained above, *pagpapakabayani* is a Filipino virtue that can be translated into English as “to be heroic.” It is often triggered by *gālit*, which can directly be translated into English as “anger.” However, *gālit* has a more diverse meaning than simply being angry towards a present evil, or a wrong done. As Angela E. Lorenzana explains well, a Filipino experiences *gālit*, not by a situation or a thing by its very nature.⁵ Rather, *gālit* is always directed towards a person involved or who could have been involved in the situation. For example, a Filipino does not feel *gālit* when he discovers that he does not have his keys to open the door of his dormitory. He may feel annoyed, but again, this is not *gālit*. On the other hand, he can and should feel *gālit* if he discovers that someone else has taken, or worse, stolen, the keys that can unlock the dormitory door. *Gālit* is always directed towards another person.

Note that *gālit* fulfills the definition of a Thomistic passion. One does not choose to feel *gālit*. It is an affective response that is triggered by an unjust person acting as a stimulus. When one is well-disposed, i.e., one is habituated virtuously, one feels *gālit* at the right time, at the right place, and by the right circumstances. Otherwise, when ill-disposed, one’s experience of *gālit* can bring about other undesirable outcomes. One virtuous manifestation of *gālit* occurs when it stirs the *pagpapakabayani* in a Filipino who desires to bring about the vindication of his neighbor who might happen to be a victim of some harm done.

Aquinas on Virtuous Anger

To deepen our understanding of *pagpapakabayani*, let us consider Aquinas’s account of virtuous anger. Anger is that passion and movement that is directed towards vindication for a harm that has been done: “For when a man is angry, he wishes to be avenged on someone. Hence the movement of anger has a twofold tendency: viz. to vengeance itself, which it desires and hopes for as being a good, wherefore it takes pleasure in it; and to the person on whom it seeks vengeance, as to something contrary and hurtful, which bears the character of evil.”⁶ It is a complex passion belonging to the irascible power, which is the power of the soul that responds

⁵ Angela E. Lorenzana, 2006, “*Galit*: The Filipino Emotion Word for ‘Anger,’” Bicol University, Paper presented at the Tenth International Conference on Austronesian Linguistics, 17-20 January 2006, Puerto Princesa City, Palawan, Philippines,: 3. <http://www.sil.org/asia/philippines/ical/papers.html>.

⁶ S.T. Ia Ilae, q. 46, a. 2.

to a stimulus that calls for arduous activity. The name of the power comes from the Latin word *ira*⁷ which is literally translated as “anger.” Although anger is not the only passion of the irascible appetite, the name of the appetite suggests that all the movements of the appetite culminate in anger. It is anger then that motivates a person to act towards a chosen good.

One who is angry and acts is hopeful that he will achieve the vindication that he desires. Note that anger can be experienced in two ways. First, an angry person can be angry in accordance with the right reason, and such anger is worthy of praise.⁸ Aquinas quotes John Chrysostom who says: “He that is angry without cause, shall be in danger; but he that is angry with cause, shall not be in danger: for without anger, teaching will be useless, judgments unstable, crimes unchecked.”⁹ This is virtuous anger that leads a person to the good. It leads him to the exercise of a virtue. A perfect example of this would be the anger which leads the activist to work towards the realization of the cardinal virtue of justice in a racist society. In contrast, an angry person can be angry in an unreasonable manner. An example of this would be the anger of the bully who is slighted by the words of one of his classmates. This would be a vicious anger that could lead to more violence and criminal behavior.

***Pagpapakabayani* in Relation to Virtuous Anger**

Returning now to *pagpapakabayani*. A Filipino understands himself to be a “substance-in-relation,” a person who recognizes the presence of another human person other than himself, in himself. This leads to an exercise of loyalty towards one’s *kapwa*, be they long-time comrades, friends, or strangers met for the first time. *Pagpapakabayani* is that virtue which moves the Filipino to be heroic in his striving to overcome an unjust obstacle or challenge in his community. It is often triggered by *gālit* which is directed towards that individual who is thought to be responsible for the injustice.

Moving now to virtuous anger, there are significant similarities between Aquinas’s account of virtuous anger and the Filipino understanding of *gālit*. Both are directed towards a righteous correction of an injustice. One noticeable difference, however, is that for the Filipino, *gālit* is always directed towards a person rather than a thing, while virtuous anger can also be directed towards a situation or a thing.

Gālit, like virtuous anger, can be a primary motivation for *pagpapakabayani*. It compels a Filipino to “transform” himself into a “hero” or a “patriot” if his *kapwa*’s

⁷ S.T. Ia IIae, q. 46, a. 1, Reply to Obj. 1.

⁸ S.T. IIa IIae, q. 158, a.1.

⁹ “Hom. xi in the Opus Imperfectum, falsely ascribed to St. John Chrysostom” quoted in the *Summa Theologiae*.

life is at stake. Consider the parable of the Good Samaritan. For a Filipino, more than by pity, the Good Samaritan would have been motivated by *gālit* directed towards the priest and the Levite who ignored the beaten, robbed, and dying man on the road. He would have been *gālit* because of the indifference of the two other characters in the parable, not only because they did something evil in ignoring suffering, but also, yet worse, because they did not do anything good to mitigate it. Moved by *pagpapakabayani*, the Good Samaritan did something for his neighbor as an act of compassion. He was able to show he is a *kapwa* to his *kapwa-tao* (the “other” person as neighbor).

There are similar stories in Filipino mythology that reveal that *gālit* as virtuous anger can result in *pagpapakabayani*. An example would be “Prinsesa Urduja,” a Muslim epic that tells the story of an amazon-princess named Urduja leading her *bayan* to battle the conquerors of their land in what we know today as Alaminos, Pangasinan. She possesses *pagpapakabayani* and is motivated by *gālit*.

In the annals of history, among Filipinos who exercised *pagpapakabayani* are those who fought for the independence of the Philippine nation against foreign invaders. Although some of them are unknown by name, especially the war veterans, they are, nonetheless, makers of history and founders of the Filipino identity as *bayani*. They became heroes who were motivated by a virtuous anger that wanted to liberate the Filipino people from its colonial oppressors.

Conclusion

The Filipino virtue of *pagpapakabayani* can be easily situated within the Thomistic account of virtuous anger especially when we include *gālit* into the phenomenological analysis. As a *bayani*, a hero for his community, a Filipino can become a Good Samaritan who is a *kapwa* to his *kapwa-tao*. In doing so, he can reveal the image and likeness of God who is “loving and forgiving, slow to anger and rich in kindness.” (Psalm 103:8) **PS**

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Rivera, Froilan S. “*Filipino Bayanihan: Towards a National Value Formation*,” June 2021, University of the Philippines-Diliman.



¶ *En el nombre del Padre y del Hijo y del Espíritu Santo
Amén. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.
Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.*

¶ *La salve Regina es de...*



Dulce te Dios Reyna y ma
de de misericordia vida
dulçura y esperança nra. Dios
te salve at llamamos los desle
crados hijos de Eva. Qui suspi
ramos quiendo y llorando en
aqueste valle de lagrimas. Ca
pues abogada nuestra, buelue
anofores en los tus misericor
diosos ojos. y despues de a. 3.