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Elements of Filipino Philosophy

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deeply imbued with charity, she considered leprosaria the choicest of apostolates.

The author has given us too much and too little. At times the profusion of detail seems excessive. On the other hand she is strangely reticent when one would have desired a fuller development. The crisis in India happens without a word of explanation. Mother Helen is provincial on one page and on the next she is not. Similarly, what really happened in Rome? She was requested to step down as general and did so with exemplary virtue. But what was it all about? Finally the picture presented of the sisters with whom Mother Helen lived and worked is hardly less flawless than that of the foundress herself. Were they all so perfect? The author does not do justice to her subject in omitting human frailties. These, no less than the heat of Trichonopoly and the ferocity of the Boxers, were instruments of sanctity for these women who in spite of them achieved great holiness.

The life of Helen de Chappotin will be profitable reading not only for the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary but for other religious men and women, and indeed for all who can admire a soul entirely dedicated to God.

Leo A. Cullum, S.J.

ELEMENTS OF FILIPINO PHILOSOPHY. By Leonardo N. Mercado, SVD. Tacloban City: Divine Word University Publications, 1974—244 pp.

The philosopher who wants to be at home in his own country and at rapport with his own people must in his philosophizing return to original experience and the original world, divested of alien theoretical superstructures. Through this return the world shows itself again with its human face, becomes again our home country, in which we dwell and long for a better fatherland.

Fr. Mercado, however, would have nothing to do with this originality: he would rather be *non-engage* in his philosophizing. Guided by superstructural theories of anthropologists and linguists, he placed himself high above the subjects of his inquiry, treated all contents of his consciousness with the same method as the physicist analyzes matter in terms of its ultimate elements. He worked on his topic with the assumption that the philosophy of a culture is implied in the people's way of thinking and behaving.

The Filipino mass-man, in Mercado's calculation, has to be understood as a causal-meaningful unity within the context of the Oriental cultural *Ganzheit*, a systematic whole rooted in an aesthetic-intuitional cognition.

The Filipino looks at a person from the viewpoint of harmony. He wants to be in harmony with his fellowmen just as he wants to be in harmony with himself. In this harmony, he notices the hierarchy and

dichotomy of himself and of others, he sees himself fulfilled in the other's or the *sakop's* fulfillment. With his non-linear view of reality, the Filipino sees the incarnational unity of his body and soul, of subject and object, of the individual and his group, of the religious and the profane. The *sakop* (reference group, *tayo-tayo* group) is one and at the same time the city of man-God.

In and through the *sakop*, everyone frees himself of his freedom and finds it again on the summit, that is, in the hands of the "Big Brother."

Every child that is born in the *sakop* is heir to a ready-made scheme; as he emerges into a milieu under *utang-na-loob*, he is himself bound by that which has been taken for him by his parents. Even before birth, he is a determined possibility of his parents and relatives; his limit is their limit not only as long as he is mere possibility but even in the after-life he is bound by his communion with his ancestors. Beyond the mathematical calculations of time and space, his *utang-na-loob* becomes his own *kapalaran*.

The Sartrian *terreur*, appearing as *utang-na-loob*, *hiya*, and *pakikisama*, is an attempt to produce in the group both an ontological and practical unity. Incapable of "abstract and logical" thinking, everyone becomes an inorganic being through which the group's purposes will be accomplished. The freedom which is left is the freedom of the group, not of the individual, except as he finds it through the group. When individual freedom is thus alienated, or entrusted to the group, then the group becomes its real nature, a *sakop*, and finds its incarnation in the "Big Brother."

The individual as *loob* interiorizes the will of the *sakop* that has overcome him and now holds him captive. Poetically, this captivity may be translated thus: "Isinasaloob ng tao ang kalooban ng sa kanya'y sumasakop." Paradoxically, man is responsible for his own actions and this responsibility springs from within himself as *bahala na*.

The book, originally a doctoral dissertation, reveals a characteristically medieval attitude toward man and the universe as the Augustinian symbol of theocracy is thinly veiled as Confucian harmony-with-nature. The "Big Brother" is a visible God, *the sakop*, a city of the man-God: all nature, including man, shows the existence of teleological, animistic forces working toward the harmony of the whole, and the whole to be crowned by a benevolent and omniscient God, the "Big Man" who embodies the national *sakop*.

Thomas Aquinas may seem a strange companion to Jean-Paul Sartre, but in Mercado's book he joins their hands in recognizing the power of the group as a whole in the total life of the individual. The interpretation of nature and of man is strengthened by the long habit of thinking in terms of hierarchies. The principle of order finds its myth in those nice gradations that mark upper from lower in both heaven and earth: the hierarchies concretized in the relationship between parents and children, between the Big Brothers and Little Brothers, between the Big People and Small people, between freeman, slaves, and the nobility.

Mercado's social commentaries inserted in this book would dispose the

readers to expect a new, deep, and enlightening analysis of social issues and other philosophical problems. Regretfully this sort of expectation is not justified by the book. The author merely repeats what is more precisely said in many competent sociology texts. Viewed as a sociological theory, it has some social significance. His message may be summarized thus: "Apply the Yin-Yang principle to our socio-cultural conflicts and disharmonies and our society gains immeasurably and enriches itself by being supplemented by the harmoniously infused different cultural values."

His claim as an "objective spokesman-systematizer" of the common *tao* destroys the intentionality of his acclaimed methodology. Consequently, the dimension of the present does not exist for his theoretical framework. Human reality loses one of its *ekstases* and must be interpreted solely by a regression toward the past from his standpoint of the future. At the same time the fundamental structures of the Filipino, which are signified by his languages and acts, are not so signified *for him* but for an "objective spokesman-systematizer" who uses the "holistic" method to make these meanings explicit.

The cosmologico-epistemic theory (i.e. the dyadic view of knowing the universe) upon which this "pioneering work" is premised leads to a cultural determinism in which the Filipino is prostrated in his Confucian facticity, and though concerned with his possibilities and the possibilities of his *sakop*, he is "thrown" back to his Oriental past. The common *tao* becomes a static entity in a world where all things are immutably fixed in their divinely appointed places.

In spite of its approximations and defects, and even because of them, the book reveals the many possibilities open to the Filipino. Moreover, Mercado's work presents evidences that may serve not only as a prop to the nationalists, but as a refutation of the philosophical dualists.

Nicanor S. Abueg