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## Changing Social Values

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## Changing Social Values\*

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JAIME BULATAO

**F**ROM the opening of the Suez canal and the consequent closer contact with Europe, and especially from the Spanish-American War and the consequent closer contact with America, new values of liberty and equality, of economic progress and money-making, have taken strong root in the Philippine mentality. One hears nowadays many disparaging comments on the changing times, how national morals have deteriorated, how respect for authority has disappeared, how evil is tolerated even in the highest places. The suggestion of such comments is that the Filipinos' values have changed, have become exceedingly materialistic. The assumption, too, is that once upon a time, Filipinos had high spiritual values, were religiously mature, and it was from such a pedestal that their values fell.

While undoubtedly there have been many values, once highly treasured by Philippine culture, now irretrievably lost, it is my simple suggestion that the reverse is also true, namely, that certain values have not changed *enough*, have not developed qualitatively to suit the coming of age of the Filipinos. Certain values like social consciousness and individual responsibility have not grown up sufficiently to fill the demands of a mature democracy. While such values have always been in the Filipinos, there was a time when their presence was not as necessary as now for national survival and accordingly they

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were not as much valued then as they should be now. Just as personal initiative is not as necessary in a child as in an adult, so also in a maturing culture; and just as an adult will demand more liberty than a child, so also he normally has more responsibility and initiative than a child. The values of liberty, responsibility, economic productivity, initiative, social awareness and certain others should develop together to form a balanced whole.

When a good thing like liberty or public education or science or industry is introduced into a culture, it need not necessarily be looked upon as an evil, simply because it is new. When it is abused, one should blame the abuser rather than the good thing in itself. One should blame the ignorance and the immaturity of the person who does not know how to use it. It is the unbalance that should be blamed, not the introduction of the good thing. Take, as an illustration, the introduction of Japanese snails into this country. At present, Filipinos consider such snails pests, and yet there may come a time when their food value will be discovered, and what is now condemned as a pest will be regarded as a delicacy. And precisely when the people start eating the snails, the snails themselves will grow scarcer and will no longer be a pest. One can say either that we should develop the value of hatred of snails and destroy them, or we should develop the value of snails as food and eat them.

I thus respectfully submit that a larger factor in lowering government employee morale is the failure of the values of social consciousness and individual responsibility to grow and take hold of people's minds and thus counterbalance the coming of the five freedoms. It is only in very recent years that such movements as Presidential Assistance for Community Development (PACD), Philippine Rural Reconstruction Movement (PRRM), Operation Brotherhood, etc., have been born in the Philippines. And it was only four months ago that the elections showed the maturity of the individual voter, his independence from monetary and familial pressure. Social consciousness and responsibility still have much room left for growth.

Why has social consciousness as a Filipino social value not grown fast enough in relation to other aspects of the culture? How does lack of this value cause a breakdown in employee morale? Let us look a moment at the psychological theory of the social group as the extension of the self.

When I cut my finger, I feel hurt. When I see a pig being slaughtered for *lechon*, I do not feel hurt, but rather feel glad at the prospect of the feast. I feel that way towards the pig because the pig is not me.

When an uncle of mine gets hurt in a car accident, I feel worried too. As the saying goes, "Blood is thicker than water." I feel towards my uncle differently from the way I feel towards a stranger. I identify with my family and relatives. We are what the Tagalogs call *kami*. We are opposed to all who are not *kami*.

While the Japanese were here, it was all right to steal from them. They were not *kami*. When the Americans came as liberators, even from them it was all right to steal, even though with more hesitancy than from the Japanese. They were not *kami*. The Moslems of Lanao feel it is all right to steal from the Christians, who are not members of their *kami*. In other words, we human beings tend to form an in-group that we distinguish from an out-group. The in-group of some is narrower than the in-group of others. With some the in-group are relatives, the out-group everyone else. With others, the in-group embraces the nation. Perhaps the trouble with many Filipinos is that they have such a tight in-group that it remains very narrow and cannot extend itself beyond the family and relatives.

Consider the present Philippine situation. A customs appraiser is reading the manifest of goods being brought in by a Filipino student from the United States. He says, "*Malabo ito, pare. Paib hundred ba ito o paib thousand? Mahirap basahin, ah.*" The customs broker standing near the student whispers to him, "He is asking for a gift. Better give him a hundred pesos." The student whispers to the broker. The broker takes the customs appraiser behind the door for a moment.

The customs appraiser returns with a smile, picks up the manifest, and says "Ah, *lumilinaw na*." Granted that a serious effort is currently being made to correct this customs situation, nevertheless, it has been common for some time.

Follow that customs appraiser home. You may find him tense, perhaps, and a bit temperamental, but he is a "good fellow". He sends some money to his parents in the province, helps a nephew to go through school and even contributes to the Church. "*Mapagkapwa tao*," his relatives would say about him. "He has good public relations," the parish priest says.

The only trouble with him is that his *pagkapwa tao* and his "public relations" reach only a small in-group. His extended self, his *kami*, does not go beyond relatives and friends of the vicinity. He can prey on people returning from America — "They are rich." He can prey on Chinese — "They are cheats themselves." He does not realize that his new duty as public servant binds him to serve the nation, that he falls and rises with the nation, that the nation cannot be hurt without him being hurt too. To "serve the nation" is only an ideal learned at a lecture in some seminar. There is no urgency to it, nor is it practical. It is a new idea that will take time to sink in and be absorbed into the personality of the nation.

Why is his extended self so narrow? There are many reasons that may be adduced. Historically, one may suggest the former isolation of various localities, the strong family system, lack of education, etc. Psychologically, taking a cue from studies of the interpersonal dynamics of groups, we may suggest two causes: a lack of emotional and intellectual communication and interchange with others than one's immediate group, and a lack of upright, non-partisan leadership.

When a group, say, a discussion group or a board of directors, meets for the first time, every person in the group is only a separate "I". If there are ten persons present, there are ten "I's" — but no "we". It takes time to form a "we". It takes much discussion and working together towards a common goal. It takes consciousness of an enemy, a "*sila*", a rival company perhaps, to knock the group together, just as it took many wars to form the nations of Europe by forming each na-

tion into a kami. Thus it takes time and much discussion and emotional interchange within a group before the members get to realize that they think alike and feel alike, that they are members of a group.

Furthermore, they need a leader who will embody in himself the consensus of the group. The group becomes one because in one person they find someone who can reconcile their opposing views, someone who has a broadness of view sufficiently above the bickerings of partisans. This is the leader. Without him no group, no office, no bureau, no department, no nation can find its identity. Nations like Britain are aware of this need and thus maintain a king, whose main function is to embody this national unity. Even a distinctly two-party system like the United States demands that its President rise above partisan politics and represent the entire nation. Cannot one say that the ups and downs of morale in the Philippines depend in part upon how well the President is able to transcend his individual interests and centrally consider the good of the Philippines as a whole?

I suggest, then, that low morale in Philippine officialdom is due not to changes in social values, but rather to the fact that these changes have not occurred fast enough, have not kept up with the changes of democratization and industrialization, thus leaving an imbalance. But I also suggest that social consciousness will come with the increase of education and intercommunication, and the rise of mature leaders.

Besides social consciousness, there is another value which has yet to take root in Philippine culture. Individualism also is often looked upon as a pest, like the Japanese snail. In many minds it connotes a lack of filial piety, a lack of modesty. It is a breaking away from the traditional ways of doing things. It makes the individual break away from the group, makes him stand out — and is therefore to be avoided. This is evident at a party, where the girls stay in one group and the boys stay together in another, and no girl dares leave the girls' group for fear of being branded as "singular", "daring", *walang hiya*.

The need to immerse the individual in the group is perhaps due to our authoritarian tradition as well as to our strong

family system. The individual has always been expected to do what he was told to do. He must not trust his own thinking for fear that he might deceive himself. He must follow the advice of the elders. The individual was "group-oriented." His norm was the group conscience. He observed proper behavior because he feared what people might think or because he feared to disgrace his own family. It was a good system of social control—in its time.

But in the course of social evolution the use of "group-think" as guardian of public behavior has become more and more inadequate. There has come a demand for entrepreneurs, for independent-minded voters, for individual initiative and responsibility. The new values of individualism are coming up, but are clashing with the old family-oriented values. Should the newly married couple declare their independence from their parents? Should the unmarried daughter break away from the home and set out on her own career? Should the wife work to help support a hard-pressed family? Should the business executive take outsiders into the family corporation? These are the conflicts brought about by the changing values. They pose true problems. But the answer does not lie in going back to "group-think". The nation is committed to individual responsibility. The very nature of democracy demands that the individual accept his responsibility as "king". He must learn to think for himself and to follow the right as he sees it. Morale will depend not on removing the value of individual responsibility, but on allowing it to develop. Even morality itself will be something enforced from within the person rather than from the group, from self-discipline rather than from group discipline.

Take once more our friend, the customs appraiser. He was brought up in an authoritarian atmosphere where he was made to behave by "authority" figures outside of himself. Then, with the change in social structure, he finds himself in a position of authority. He has never learned self-discipline, much less to run a disciplined organization. He has learned only to obey, and now that he finds no one to obey, or no one to enforce obedience, he loses all sense of discipline. In the old

days, the rulers were moved by a sense of *Noblesse oblige*. Their inner sense of nobility kept them from abusing the power in their hands. But now that persons with the mentality of servants are placed in positions where nobility is called for, is it at all surprising that they act like little bureaucrats? If we look at the people we have elevated to high government posts, we find many from the lower class. In itself, this change is an example of the coming in of democratic values, which allow any citizen a chance at the highest offices. But the question now is, have such persons acquired the virtues proper to a ruling class? Do they have self-discipline? Do they have a conscience? The problem is not new. In ancient Rome, the writer, Juvenal, seeing the Roman soldiers who were supposed to keep order themselves engaging in rapine and plunder, asked the famous question: "*Quis custodiet custodes?*"—"Who will police the policemen?" Until the Filipinos develop a mentality in which discipline comes from within the personality rather than from fear of authority figures, we shall have policemen who are "*Magnanakaw daw, po.*"

But how to do it? How to develop such a sense of responsibility? How to develop social consciousness? How to develop social *conscience*?

I have sufficient faith in the democratic process to believe that, given time, the democratic process itself will gradually work out a solution. It will ultimately pick out men who have a sense of responsibility to the whole people. Fundamentally we have to fear only the loss of the democratic process itself, as in China. But given a chance to work, the democratic process will develop the leaders. Freedom of speech, freedom of the press, freedom of religion, freedom of organization, freedom to elect one's own rulers—in such an atmosphere, leaders will inevitably arise who have a social consciousness and a high sense of individual responsibility. *Ubi injuria, ibi remedia*. The same freedom, the coming of which to the Philippines has brought about such upset, will be the instrument for remedying that same social upset and bringing about a higher degree of social maturity.

Psychologically speaking, then, the prime need of the hour is to educate our people, and especially our children, in the proper use of freedom. Gone are the days when it was right and socially proper for the grandfather or grandmother to rule the family with a stern hand, when children were to be seen and not heard, when the teacher in the classroom could dictate what the children should memorize and give back to him. The changing values of the time force us to put a new value on individual initiative and to take a wider view than that of one's immediate family.

To sum up: In a period of culture change, the people should develop those values which balance out the culture. The coming of the drive towards money and big business should be balanced with a drive towards social consciousness and an awareness of one's duty to be committed to the social and economic uplift of others. The coming of the drive towards freedom should be balanced with a drive towards individual responsibility, the responsible assertion of personal, individual values.

In particular, we should encourage freedom of communication among ourselves. Meetings where people can freely speak out their real minds, interchange ideas, give an outlet to their emotions, have the salutary effect of making us understand each other better. A broader *kami* spirit is thus more easily formed. There is no doubt that even the United Nations, with all its faults, has succeeded in bringing the nations of the world closer together because it has provided a way of communicating among them. The "have" nations are more conscious of their duties towards the "have-nots". The "have-nots" come to realize that even the "haves" are human beings. So also, even in a business or government office, responsibility and involvement come to employees when these same employees come to feel that they have a say in management, when their opinions are respected, when they feel free to speak out without hurt-the boss' *amor propio*.

Again, we should encourage our children to speak out their real minds, so that they will feel understood by the adults and will thus be more willing in their turn to understand the pro-

blems of the adult world. We should allow them gradually to learn to trust their own judgements and stand on their own feet. After all, what are social consciousness and individual responsibility but the marks of a mature personality?

Finally, we should keep faith in the democratic process and determine to make it work. We should treasure the vote, and elect those whom we truly consider honest and competent. We should be willing to stick our necks out in the cause of justice. We should not always play the "*segurista*" who squirms under injustice but refuses to testify at an honest investigation. We ourselves have to make ourselves aware of our obligations towards society and of our responsibility as individuals in a free society.