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Realism in Philippine Values Education

Niels Mulder

In the 1990s and into the new century, elementary and secondary schools throughout Indonesia, the Philippines and Thailand are devoting considerable attention to the teaching of values. This emphasis on morals, ethics and appropriate behavior is nothing new. When I first started reading Thai school texts—some thirty-five years ago—I was struck by the importance given to good manners and right conduct. Since the curriculum reform of 1978, these have only grown in significance. In the same year, in Indonesia, Pancasila Moral Education—now known as Pancasila and Citizenship—was introduced as a compulsory subject.

The idea of formal values education was not strange, however, and sits well with Javanese ideas about the ethically accomplished individual. The Philippines, too, has a long tradition of teaching morality in school, harking back to Catholic ideas about the relationship of God, individual and fellowman, and, more recently, to American conceptions of Good Manners and Right Conduct (GMRC)—at some schools even called Eugenics, the improvement of the race. Since 1989, Values Education has achieved the status of an independent knowledge and skill area.

It seems attractive to trace the importance of values education to a Southeast Asia-wide common heritage. In the cases of Java and Thailand, the idea of a shared root in the Indian *dharmashastra*¹ is plausible, at least, and can be argued for the late colonial Javanese educational reform movements as well as for the establishment of formal school and university education in Thailand where, after all, the second university was called the Dharmashastra (Thammasat) University.

The idea that the cradle of knowledge is the study and understanding of ethics—discovering the unity of the good, the true and the beau-

tiful—is most alive in Buddhist Thailand. The wise person, the one who is aware of cause and effect, of the nature of things, and of the great teachings—in brief, who has insight in Dharma—cannot behave in an ignorant, unenlightened, and thus despicable way.² Thus teaching the Science of Dharma makes sense. Those who understand will not be subject to their drives and emotions; they will be beneficial to associate with. From them, good society originates. In Java, the prevailing of the rational faculty, of *akal*, over body and drives, or *nafsu*, is thought to lead to inner (*batin*) equanimity and a refined intuition (*rasa*) that will serve as an unailing guide in human association.³

Drawing Philippine thinking into this comparison perhaps seems less obvious. Indic influence is slight. Yet, some basic conceptualization is strikingly similar. The Indian-derived Tagalog word *budhi* means both conscience and intuition, and comes close to the Javanese *rasa*. When explaining that the Tagalog concept of *utang-na-loob* (“debt of the interior”= debt of gratitude, of honor) equates with the Malay-Indonesian *hutang budi*, every Tagalog immediately senses the similarity. In Thai, the same word (*phutthi*) also refers to the faculty of discernment and wisdom.

All agree that it is the absence of discretion and wisdom that leads to undesirable behavior, which is clear from the idea of *kurang ajar* (M-I) or *kulang sa pinag-aralan* (Tag)—falling short in learning. There is therefore no dispute that the *budhi* needs developing, that it can be trained through study and learning—which is an individual, intellectual pursuit.⁴ In short, ethics can be taught and learned. Values Education makes sense.

I am probably on safer ground if I refrain from drawing attention to the presumably Indic origins of the importance of ethics. The most striking similarity among the three cultures referred to is the shared perception of the nature of society and human bonds. Society is inherently a moral construct; the glue that ties people together is the debt of gratitude. Such bonds imply inequality and reciprocity, and are necessarily seen in personalistic terms. In dealing with others, people should be guided by their knowledge/awareness of the ethics of their individual place. If everybody followed its moral imperatives, society would be harmonious.

The imperative side emphasized consists of obligations: parents should educate their children, children should follow their parents; patrons should protect their wards, who, in turn, should serve them; in general, minors, or inferiors, must honor seniors, or whomsoever in a

higher position. Hence, individuals are important. If they renege on their obligations, they will endanger the desired harmonious order. Individuals must, therefore, be aware of their place, know morals and manners.

This moral construct which of course prevails in familial relations the world over, is at variance with the sociological view of society as an area of conflicting values and interests where individual choice (and behavior) is seen as determined by class position. In the three countries concerned—and in many more attracted to Confucian or Asian Values doctrines—the idealized moral perception of the social edifice is also applied to businesslike, wider society. Along the coast of the South China Sea, this perception even gains extraordinary urgency because of the bilateral structure of relationships: there are no higher forms of social organization—such as castes or clans—to command people's loyalties. What remains are families, patron-client ties, and states. These institutions thus receive ample emphasis in the teaching materials.

When I came to Thailand in the 1960s, the famous primer *The Treasure of the Gentleman*—meaning the rules of refined conduct—still was part of the curriculum. It was complemented by *The Duties of the Populace*. Meanwhile, with vast educational expansion and efforts at “democratization,” titles have changed. At the elementary level, the courses on Promoting Character and Disposition and Preparing for the Experience of Life—which take approximately one-half of teaching time—are about manners, presentation, attitudes, Buddhist wisdom, history, state ideology, et cetera. The explicit purpose of the school is to train “good people,” which boils down to dutiful subjects of the king, or state, who behave as members of a big family. Ethics are prescriptive, and clearly black-and-white.

Subsequent secondary social studies continue to offer a firm dose of state ideology, that is, the Doctrine of the Three Institutions, in which the good citizen honors his parents, the Nation, Religion, and King. The course makes it abundantly clear that the nation, and thus the state, the country, Thai society, is like an intimate community, like a family—and that problems originate from individual waywardness. If all Thais oriented themselves to Buddhism, the time-honored rules of right conduct, and fulfil their duties, life in Thailand would be as in paradise—and democratic to boot! Basically, the orientation is towards an idealized past.

In Indonesia, the emphasis on individuals as mere parts of an encompassing whole is even more pronounced than in Thailand. The person is part of a family, of a community, a society, a nation, a state,

and a commonweal. People are subordinated to these, much as wives are to their husbands. Indonesians should be loyal to the whole, execute their duties, and not insist on individual rights. This Pancasila ideological indoctrination comes close to the Confucian thinking that is these days often referred to as "Asian Values." The state as the incarnation of the people is always right. If religion prevails, the populace is definitely expected to be good subjects.

The texts on *Pancasila and Citizenship* agree that there are still problems, that the "Pancasila Man," or the "Whole Indonesian Human Being," is in the process of being created, and that some people are so un-Pancasila-ish as to be greedy, ostentatious, arrogant, individualistic, liberal, corrupt, and such. In the future, however, when everybody has reached a deep understanding of Pancasila ethics, we shall see a harmonious Pancasila society where people are devoted to the public good. Indonesian moral teachings have not changed the experience of most people and, more gravely, have not cured any of the multitudinous clefts that run through their society. Since they do not train for individual responsibility, or rather, moral autonomy, they are a poor guide for life in modern anonymous urbanity. Those educated in a modern Islamic school may see their way more clearly, just like those Thais who received supplementary education in Theravada Buddhist thought. This is probably the reason why Thai intellectuals are so sarcastic about school indoctrination and Mahathir's or Lee Kuan Yew's ideas about citizenship. In Indonesia, discussing ideas other than those of the New Order state has but recently become an option.

Whether within the confines of the Three Institutions or within the ideology of the integralistic Pancasila state, in Thailand and Indonesia the teaching of morality in school aims at creating dutiful subjects rather than (autonomous) citizens. These subjects should restrain themselves, honor superiors, be aware of their position, and preferably be devout believers as well. The nation is thought of as a big family, represented by the state. Under king or president, the paternalistic state provides moral guidance for the populace—at least as long as the pupils are at school.

Values Education in the Philippines

As observed earlier, since ten years Values Education has become a separate subject—next to English or Science—in schools in the Philippines. This means that ideally one period of every day is devoted to

the teaching of morals and that, of late, specialized teachers are being trained to instruct them. The formal establishment of Values Education can be traced back to the report *Building a People, Building a Nation: A Moral Recovery Program*, published by Senator Leticia Ramos Shahani in 1988 that identified the weaknesses and strengths of the Filipino character.⁵ If the nation is to prosper, weaknesses should be eradicated, and people must be convinced that their personal righteousness makes the difference between national advancement and stagnation.

In the fourth year of high school, the Preface of the official text (that serves as our guide in this chapter)⁶ reveals that the effort of teaching Values Education seeks to explain to students who and what they are; how they relate to each other; how to respond to their social responsibilities; how to attain (moral) maturity (“inner completeness/perfection”) (Punsalan 1995). These four subjects constitute the focal points of the course.

The choice of this particular text is attractive because the book is the best by far of the four volumes that comprise the full course. The texts for the first two grades—for twelve- to fourteen-year olds—are very academic and, in my view, suitable for beginning students of sociology. They explain what a group is, and describe a value—the subject matter of the course—as something that is freely chosen from among alternatives, and this in a thoughtful manner. A value is something to be cherished, publicly affirmed, acted upon, and acted upon again. This concept is then substantiated by sets of rules to go by. As a result, the tone of the first two years is dogmatic rather than realistic.

The teachings for the third year are more lively, and often reflect the public discussion in the media. They take their point of departure in the theses of the Moral Recovery Program report, that are elevated to the status of gospel truths. This results in the common practice of Philippines-bashing: Filipinos are self-centered to the extreme; their society is unjust and thus at war with itself; its ecology has been destroyed. Similar to the uninteresting two-way moral choices offered in the text, such pertinent statements are at a considerable remove from everyday experience. The book is explicit, however, when it discusses human rights and the problems of the nation.

The inspiration of the text for the fourth and final grade is derived more from moral theology than from abstruse social science. Its tone and wording are different from the earlier material, and the moral-choice situations the students are confronted with reflect everyday life. Implicitly, the focus is on attitudes and orientations. The text benefits

from the Roman Catholic Church's moral ingenuity, but does not elaborate on the liberation-theological issues when they are brought up. Moreover, a little more adolescent psychology would have benefited the discussions of falling in love and sex.

Be that as it may, an important difference in comparison to Thai and Indonesian curricula comes to light in the discussion of the individual. In modern Catholicism, the stress is on the individual conscience that roots in man's being created in God's image, and in the love for God and your fellowman. Love is the wellspring of good conduct and good society. Because of this, obedience and the duties that group membership entail are not so constantly emphasized. On the contrary, encompassing groups—especially the state—are distrusted in their capacity to provide moral leadership. Morally mature individuals should make their own decisions. Even so—and that is made very clear—they cannot escape from their family membership, its duties and demands of loyalty.

These Roman Catholic tenets must, of necessity, coexist with certain visions of state leadership. After all, it is the state, not the Church, that introduced the course in Values Education. According to the text, President Ramos—on the occasion of launching the Moral Recovery Program in 1993—emphasized that the moral basis of the nation stands in need of a thorough reform. The nation must renew itself, both spiritually and materially. In order to improve their moral basis, Filipinos need to renew their person-centered values and attitudes concerning honor, conscience and faith. The present laws are not rooted in the true values of the people and virtues such as nationalism, integrity and concern for others are only weakly developed. Self-centeredness and materialism prevail. "If we aspire to national renewal and progress, we must change the values that constitute the center of our life. We must rid ourselves of the ills that plague social life, such as irregularities, tax evasion, rotten politics, inaction and indifference. If we consider that the individual capacity for improving life hinges on personal spiritual power and stability, it is not far-fetched to think that the capacity of a community to renew itself is an inner (spiritual?) affair. Our experience of freedom is sweet indeed, but what we also need is devotion to duty and self-discipline. Our praying is not enough; we must act up to our values, too" (45–46).

Later on in the text, under "The Moral Dimension of Filipino Culture," the Moral Recovery Program—the very basis of the current Values Education—is reviewed. After noting some eight positive traits,

Filipino behavior also needs to be criticized because people fall short in self-knowledge and moral conviction. They are too self- and family-centered, without discipline and initiative; they have a slave mentality, are almost completely incapable of analyzing themselves or what happens around them. Besides, many people—because of being spoiled or poor—happily depend on others.

Filipinos are said to live in a very poor society, tainted by a big gap between the haves and the have-nots, and by inadequate government services. The rich have the power to govern, to exploit the political process to their own advantage; they have foreign tastes, and their American orientation is engraved in the educational system and the media. It seems as if the ability to speak English defines a person's self-esteem. Nonetheless, the people are characterized by an inferiority complex when dealing with Caucasians.

The present educational system does not agree with basic Filipino culture. Religious attitudes, however much they contribute to the capacity of accepting life's hardships, also lead to indifference and gullibility. Poverty promotes perseverance and self-sacrifice together with gambling and corruption. The media exemplify a slave mentality and are an opiate for most. Moreover, respect for seniors and leaders easily leads to admiration for all sorts of despicable behavior.

This negative self-image largely defines the ideas behind the Moral Recovery Program (MRP). Its stated goal is to renew society through cultivating nationalism, national pride, and self-esteem. The intention is to foster the common good, social concern, social justice, and respect for human rights. It also aims to instill loyalty and responsibility, discipline and diligence, and a distaste for irregularities. It hopes to create people with both self-respect and self-criticism, who value the spiritual and inner dimensions of existence rather than its superficialities (173–76).

Whether or not the intentions of the former president and his sister can be fulfilled through teaching Values Education at school, is a moot point. Many people seem to think so, considering the vastness of the undertaking. In any case, they feel that the present situation is intolerable, and apparently hope that moral restructuring is easier to accomplish than structural reform. Seemingly, they shy away from the latter, and do not want to think too much about any linkage between the two.

The course is obviously meant to remedy certain ills. In doing so, a certain image of society arises. This is not as much based on the out-

rageous generalizations of the presidential speech or the pretensions of the Moral Recovery Program, as it is on the practice and experience of everyday life. In this section we want to investigate this image, as deduced from the ethical conundrums that the students are invited to reflect upon.

Realism in Values Education in the Philippines

In all courses in Values Education commented upon in this essay, the input of the state is clear. In Indonesia, this reflects the ideal of the New Indonesian Man who is an obedient subject as well. With aims set so high, realism suffers, although it is avowed that there still is much rot in the realm. In Thailand, many problems are blamed on individual moral decay. The two-way choices offered, however, are not of this world. What, for instance, to do with the information that smoking, drinking, frequenting prostitutes, having mistresses, coming home late, and such, are destructive of family happiness? Some children can only reach the conclusion that their father is a devil rather than a saint—which does not appear as a correct portrayal of everyday life.

In the Philippine curriculum, at least in the final year of high school, subjection and obedience receive scant attention. The emphasis is on conscience, and thus on individual choice. In so-called “situations,” the student is presented with recognizable, often real-life dilemmas. As a result, the students are being made aware of certain situations they may always have taken for granted. It should be noted, however, that the perspective is entirely defined by modern—post-Vatican II—Roman Catholic teachings, to the detriment of other views, such as humanism; autonomous citizenship; social-structural considerations, or the connection between individual responsibility and democracy.

Be that as it may, given the age and experience of the students it is little wonder that their relationships with adults, especially with parents, often receive attention in the imaginary situations they are placed in. The first situation focuses on money and obligation. Si Kuwan is treasurer of a school project at the time his father falls ill. The parent is brought to the hospital, despite the family not having any money. The question the student has to face thus becomes whether he would use the project’s assets to care for his father. Because it is almost unthinkable that he would not, the problem becomes: “And what if you are then unable to refund the money?” (43).

Throughout the text, the reader is repeatedly assured that parents always love their children and are full of goodwill towards them. Situ-

ational parents, though, do not always live up to that image. We are told of parents who are extremely cruel to Kuwan's elder siblings, to such an extent even, that the eldest plans to run away. For fear that the fierce father would hurt the boy, Kuwan can neither inform the parents of the plan, nor convince his brother to give up. So, what should she do? Since it is almost impossible to give a straight answer here, the next question becomes whether the sister thinks that fleeing will contribute to the personality formation of her brother (43).

This last possibility seemingly anticipates the following exposition on "the true meaning of aging." Growing older should be a process of maturation, of growing up spiritually, and of carrying responsibility gracefully (47). A few pages onward, however, readers are confronted with the possibility of less than mature parents, and children becoming responsible for the wholeness of family life. Under the title "The Family as the Foundation of the Moral Personality," ideal parenthood is contrasted with the many problems current Filipino families experience. With both parents working outside the home, they have little or no time to devote to their offspring, let alone to their upbringing. When this situation arises, it makes the children responsible for family wholeness. They must look for ways of tying the family together, of keeping the home in good order, while cultivating mutual understanding and love. This is all the more important because the wholeness of society—at present full of problems—ultimately depends on the firm spiritual foundation of its individual citizens (50–51).⁷

Anyway, problems with parents abound. Some mothers are absolutely unwilling to listen to their progeny and just hit them at their slightest displeasure. Some daughters are so dependent on their mamas that they cannot take any decision by themselves. After all, many parents are in the habit of forcing their will—however unreasonable—on their offspring, and the latter are supposed to obey. Often parents equate children with their school results. When these grades constitute the only measure to appreciate them with, children will naturally feel abandoned and of no value. Besides, not all parents behave nicely. In some homes they shout at and fight with each other every day (104–5), and certain fathers are well-known to be less than honest in taking advantage of their position of honor and trust in the *baranggay* (141). Can a child protest against such things?

Using position, connections, or white lies to one's own advantage is often at the heart of moral-choice situations. The school's advice on fathers who personally profit from the communal development fund

is to refuse to accept the much needed pair of shoes bought with that dirty money (141). Then, what if you lose a contest and father offers to pull strings to improve your grade? (104). Apart from dubious manipulations in the world outside the home, there can be many domestic problems with parents. Some are so strict as to forbid the simple pleasures allowed to your friends. Would you go against your parents' dictates and yield to the pressure of your peers? (250).

A reason is not always given for bad parent-child relationships. So what to do when father and child are angry with each other as to avoid each other, even to the point that the child stays away from the family meals? (202).

There are also a few situations about the debt of gratitude a child is to feel towards its parents. When the girl in question prefers having a good time to studying, she is clearly in the wrong because her parents have to scrape for every penny to send her to school (173). But what about a mother who, because of the child's miraculous cure, vows to St. Martin that her son would become a priest, while the boy concerned does not feel attracted to that vocation at all? (154-55).

It is interesting to note that problems with teachers and the school administration hardly receive any consideration other than two cases in which a pupil is cheated on his grade in competitions in which the runner-up has been declared the winner (121). The in-and-out-of-school situations that receive ample attention, however, are the problems with peers. Often the ethical emphasis is on being courageous, willingness to sacrifice personal considerations for the sake of others, generosity towards and sympathy with those who need it, and on having the guts not to give in to peer pressure (128-29).

Frequently the imaginary situations in which the students are placed are quite complex, and sometimes even seem to imitate the prevailing person-centered dynamics of politics for which the country is famous. What about the following:

The girl you're engaged to is certain to win the honor of being the valedictorian of her school. You told her and her parents that you'll be your school's valedictorian. However, the next day you get to know that you'll have to compete for the honor with your close friend. The two of you will be given a special examination in order to know who's the winner. Your friend, who is of a very poor family, absolutely needs to win if he is to enter college for free, and thus at all. On the other hand, your family is quite well-to-do. What if you are not going to finish first? Wouldn't you lose face with your betrothed and her parents? What are

you going to do? Now, in case you are the poor student, would you propose to your well-off friend that if he pays you, you will let him win? Explain your answers. (43–44)

Regularly, the issue of smooth interpersonal interaction is broached. After all, “to know how to get along with others,” or *pakikisama*, is and remains an important asset if one wants to be accepted. So, what to do if you have been orphaned, then accepted into the household of your aunt. This aunt is almost never at home, and your cousins flaunt the most reprehensible of manners: watching lewd movies, drinking with their friends, and always noisy. Of course, they invite you to join, but you, because you feel disgusted, cannot bring yourself to go along. As a result, they get angry with you. They take your refusal as an insult to their friends and a shaming of themselves. This is the message they convey to their mother, who does not even ask for your side of the story. “If you cannot get along with your cousins, you had better find another place to stay.” What will you do? (91–92).

A related argument is presented in the case of a young adult who, because he’s handsome, infatuates many girls. He himself, however, is not interested, and spends most of his free time chatting, discussing and drinking with a friend. In this way, he becomes the target of gossip. His behavior is understood as a show of disrespect for the opinions of his relatives and neighbors. As a result, he is advised to break with his “sissy” friend (92).

Apparently, people often need to tread the narrow path between individual common sense, taste and desire, and the expectations of others. Moreover, if a newcomer, a person should first achieve security through cultivating amiable relationships. It is not really possible to give sensible advice if that runs counter to the opinion of an established group. The latter may simply feel insulted, or irritated at the very least (118).

People do need to associate pleasantly with each other. Some fellow students, though, are simply abandoned, apparently unable or uninvited to join in the activities of the majority. This is no fun for them, and Kuwan is advised to extend sympathy to the loner, who may be a newcomer or be stigmatized. This becomes more delicate when the person concerned is the butt of sly digs and such. Would you dare side with him or her, and risk the contempt of your classmates? (129; 154).

This lesson on lack of consideration for others can be extended to cases such as the discrimination of the Ita ethnic minority, or the tolerance of corruption. To side with the ‘silent majority’ is apparently

safer (141). Yet, students are repeatedly advised to consciously make their own decisions, to the extent that girls are encouraged to let career prevail over (early) marriage (252–53), and that in a society that exercises considerable pressure to the contrary.

Apart from these general problems in the relationship with peers, there is also the problem of love. When the girl Teri assures Kuwan that she loves him too, the boy feels great, and more committed to make the best of high school. Soon after, however, he meets Teri in the company of a former rival. Kuwan gets so jealous that he even misses a day of school. He confronts Teri saying that he is the only boy to accompany her and that she must stop seeing the other. This is protested by Teri, who advises Kuwan that if he insists on such a restricted relationship, he had better find another girl friend who is similarly narrow-minded (92).

Love not only leads to untamed feelings; it can also be exploited. The boy complains to the girl that she is very intractable, even to the extent that he doubts whether she really loves him. Being afraid of being abandoned, the girl wants to know how she can prove her devotion to him. “If you really love me, you must be willing to give yourself to me even though we are not yet married” (92).

Other situations reveal the possibility of aggressive and unreasonable behavior in emotional relationships, whether between lovers or between parents and their issue. Whatever the source of trouble between the latter, they may well affect the minds of the children concerned. Such is the case with Baby’s boy friend, who proposes that they have sex so that he can forget his problems with his parents. In order to do that safely, he even advises that she starts taking the pill. What is Baby to say or to do? (97–98).

The way community life is problematized points to a near-absence of civic action, indifference (147), and exploitation. We already encountered corrupt *baranggay* officials—people who are supposedly there to act for the common welfare—who have the power to allow a karaoke bar to noisily and drunkenly destroy the night and the good order of its neighborhood (122). What steps can ordinary citizens take to defend their surroundings, or what can they do against the inconvenience caused by irritating and abusive out-of-work youths hanging around at street corners? (119). It seems that people can only complain, and that no action is ever taken. Besides, those in power routinely abuse their workers and servants (118, 119, 141, 146–47), and it takes a lot of guts to protest. “Do not provoke the other, do not build yourself an

enemy" seems to be the prevailing wisdom. So, if you want to keep your job, do not ask the boss for justice.

The rich seem to favor their narrow self-interest above being good bosses or initiating civic action. The reasoning of the members of Kuwan's family is interesting. A flood has struck the area where they live, and the poorer people have been especially hard hit. Kuwan's father is a rich and prominent member of the community, who should be expected to lead the relief effort. He does not feel like it. "If we start helping, nobody else will lift a finger." The mother does not agree. "What will the people say about us if we do not step in?" (129).

Next to indifferent and sly "haves," we are also presented with the less virtuous of poor people. Some of them seem to really cultivate their dependence on do-gooding, alms and government, and have no inclination to take personal responsibility, let alone action. Besides, they appear to be insulted when they are reminded that there are things they can do themselves (147).

The difficulty of appealing to law, civic spirit or consideration for each other—do not vex thy neighbor or the powerful!—is a theme that runs through many "situations." Of course, people should dare to advance their opinion, to confront others about their antisocial behavior, and people must even have the courage of facing themselves (201), yet, in the final analysis, they are no more than ants in a big world full of evil, controversies, noise, anger and confusion (200). So what to say to or do about those who dump their garbage anywhere, who make a lot of noise, who cause grave environmental problems? (181–82). What about a neighbor who likes to fire his gun, especially when drunk? People are already afraid of him, so it becomes a very delicate problem (202).

Apart from such instances, corruption and getting away with dubious action almost seems to be part of the culture. Would you just say no to a good opportunity because you are under age? It is so easy to up it by a year or two, and boss or coach will see to it. Is tampering with statistics not a normal thing to do? Who would abstain from copying from a neighbor if that helps you to pass a test? Aren't the newspapers hiding the truth because of tea money or a bribe? Isn't it true that those in power are always right? (211).

This last instance is elaborated in various examples. It may be seen in the controversial position of the rich versus the poor—and as long as it lasts, there will be no justice and thus no peace (200). It appears as the protection of illegal rackets by the authorities. Would Kuwan

support this by also gambling in the perennial *jueteng*? (250). You witnessed a rich man's car hit a poor fellow. The car ran off. You know the number of the license plate. What do you do? (173). Then, closer to home: you know of a murder committed by someone high up, who is rich and well-connected. He needs you to cover up his crime. Because you refuse, he causes you, and even your relatives, all sorts of trouble. What are you going to do? (254). Similarly, your very chief in a road-building project appears to be masterminding the use of inferior materials and the upping of the budget. If you shut up, you automatically become his accomplice. Well? (254–55).

Comments

Throughout the text, there is considerable emphasis on overcoming the individual's own limitations and developing personal judgement and conscience. These ideas also surfaced in President Ramos's advice. If people are guided by their responsible conscience, and act accordingly, society will be in good order.

This idea of the individual being the wellspring of good society seemingly corresponds to the moral conceptions we noted for Thailand and Indonesia. There, however, the emphasis was more in the negative: individuals have the capacity to damage the good order of society, and the teachings particularly stressed that they should submit to group and hierarchical relationships. Moreover, as we have seen in the situations constructed around the Philippine imperative of *pakikisama*, or of cultivating smooth interaction, the ethics course clearly advised to demonstrate independence and personality rather than to go with the flow. As a result, rule following and obedience received little attention, at the same time that the image of wider society—whether real or ideal—remained vague. This thus stands in considerable contrast to the ethics taught in Thailand and Indonesia.

In practice, this contrast is not as stark as it appears. In the Philippines, it is as important as in the neighboring countries "to know how to join," to smooth in with one's fellows, not to (openly) oppose, to guard and save face, and not to rock the boat. In the Philippines, too, people see themselves as part of groups and identify strongly with them. This belonging, or the possibility of doing so, is much more important than the development of an "autonomous" conscience. The ethical advice advanced by the study materials for the fourth year of high school reflects hopeful developments, future ideals, and still is at

quite a remove from the way life is lived. It does however, realistically reflect problems of everyday practice and morality.

Image of society

The image of society as a whole remains, because of selective presentation, rather disorderly. In this, the Values Education course is doing no better than the study materials for Social Studies.⁸ Sociological considerations of structure and process remain vague, and are not elaborated. In one paragraph about liberation theology, unjust structures are mentioned (144), but the meaning of that phrase is not explained. There are haves and have-nots, rich and poor, exploitative bosses and subservient laborers, but how they all stick together is never illuminated, and social oppositions are simply reduced to ethical, and thus personal, questions. Interestingly, school-based moral situations that involve its vertical relationships—pupils versus adult personnel—are totally absent, while the statement we found in both the President's speech and the Moral Recovery Program, namely that the present educational system does not agree with basic Filipino culture/values, receives no clarification at all.

The image that has been presented in the President's and MRP's analysis is one of trouble and strife, a kind of negativism known in wider society as Philippines-bashing or self-flagellation. Filipinos are no good; they are family-centered egoists, exemplary of what, in anthropology, has become known as amoral familism. Such behavior is strategic and understandable, because it operates in a basically unjust society presided over by a weak government.

The clearer picture is that based on the experiences of the students. Fifteen- or sixteen-year olds are, according to the hypothetical situations given, fully aware of the corruption, hypocrisy, abuse of power, and the general absence of civic-mindedness that surrounds them. To counter these negative tendencies, they have to go through Values Education. They need to reform themselves, or at least to strengthen their personalities and dare to go against the flow. Putting so much (social) responsibility on individual shoulders may—though not necessarily—reinforce the negative image of social life. After all, the magnitude of the social chaos—to which people are well adapted in any case—is such that a sense of despair easily leads to widespread indifference and cynicism. Most people certainly are men of good will, but individually they are powerless against the deep-rootedness of problems in the unjust hierarchies of politics and exploitation.

The students also appear to be rather fully aware of love and its consequences, of sex and birth-control pills, and a few of them seem to have already made up their minds about who will be their life's partners. The way the situations concerned are presented is rather realistic: sex is a male preoccupation; love leads to jealousy and strong emotions. What is called "love" is represented as a most egocentric drive, and it is unfortunate, certainly so for the students, that the text leaves it at that.

The overall image of Philippine society that emerges is unpleasant. There are many good-willing individuals—and one meets them practically every day, that is also experience. Yet their society itself is ugly, messy, and hard to cope with. This image is, sorry to say, fair.

Notes

1. *Dharma*—the right course/teaching/nature of things/duty; *Shastra*— sacred writings, "science."

2. Note that the opposition is between informed/wise versus ignorant action. Not good versus bad, neither righteous versus sinful. The idea of "sin" is a recent—and ill-understood—introduction to Southeast Asia.

3. Note the Arabic origin of the three first concepts; *rasa* is Indic (in Tagalog *lasa*).

4. The Dharmashastra tradition emphasizes knowledge/rationality/wisdom as the basis for moral decision making. Christian-western thinking stresses feeling (love and conscience.)

5. It is this idea of valuable behavior issuing from individual moral personalities that seems to explain the responsibility of the child for its family. While it is avowed that personality is influenced by the home environment, the school, the church, the media and the whole of society, the person must also individually shape his/her personality (51).

6. For a discussion of the Social Studies curriculum, see Niels Mulder (2000).

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