

Stewardship of Creation: Towards Indigenous Filipino Environmental Principles

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Abstract

This article puts forward a discourse on indigenous environmental principles based on traditional Filipino values and norms. Since culture plays an important role in the formation of ecological values, it argues that stewardship and ecological principles must be connected to the people's indigenous beliefs. There is a need to harness the wisdom of traditional values of culture in solving ecological maladies in the world. Such wisdom must be explored and utilized for people to realize the importance of preserving the environment. This article claims that ready-made solutions to environmental maladies will be inadequate unless they have their origin in indigenous beliefs.

Keywords: Environment, Culture, Indigenous, Filipino Values, Stewardship

Introduction

“God saw all that he had made, and it was very good.”¹ Since “creation reveals the nature of God”², created reality is good because the one who created it is good. Everything in the world is beautiful. Every piece and parcel of creation reflects the glory of its Maker. As such, all things have a trace of the divine within them. The creator has given human beings the gift of creation. From the air that they breathe to the fruits of the Earth, everything has been made ready for

¹ Gn 1:31 (New Revised Standard Version)

² Rm 1:20 (New Revised Standard Version)

humanity to flourish. Although “the Earth is the Lord’s and everything in it,”³ God entrusted creation to humans. The human person, then, has the primordial responsibility as a caretaker; a steward of creation.

The dominion given by the creator to human beings should be characterized by mutual respect between creation and the stewards. However, the latter have misinterpreted God’s command and began plundering the goods of the Earth. The Earth “now cries out to us because of the harm we have inflicted on her by our irresponsible use and abuse of the goods with which God has endowed her. We have come to see ourselves as her lords and masters, entitled to plunder her at will.”⁴

Though technological advancements and discoveries can help mitigate the impacts of these problems, there is a need to reevaluate how people see and interact with nature. There is a necessity to “look for solutions not only in technology but in a change of humanity; otherwise we would be dealing merely with symptoms.”⁵ Thus, humanity’s response to ecological problems should not be an intellectual pursuit alone. A change of heart, a *metanoia*, is required to address ecological problems caused by people’s indifference and objectification of nature. This change of heart is possible if people try to look into the indigenous values that each culture/context can offer and re-interpret them in the light of stewardship.

God urges humans to “be fruitful and multiply.”⁶ Ultimately, every effort to protect the Earth and to preserve natural resources is an effort to protect and preserve life itself. Hence, when people approach nature, they must take off their shoes for the place they are approaching is a holy ground. They must be able to see the glory and the grandeur of even the smallest life form and appreciate its importance to the world in general. When people no longer speak of their interrelatedness with others, when they begin to categorize everything as producers and consumers, when they see created reality merely as objects to be used and controlled, they cease to become stewards. Humans are God’s co-creator here on Earth. It is in their nature to create. When they destroy, they go against this very nature.

Modern technology has given people benefits that have helped alleviate suffering and made life better. But the abuse and misuse of

³ Ps 24:1 (New Revised Standard Version)

⁴ Francis, *Laudato Si*, Vatican.va, 2, accessed January 2019.

⁵ *Ibid.* 9.

⁶ Gn 1:28 (New Revised Standard Version)

this same technology have caused alienation from the environment where people live. Modern technology has indeed made life bearable. However, it has given new and more efficient ways to plunder the world's natural resources. Progress must never be pursued at the expense of nature. "Change is something desirable, yet it becomes a source of anxiety when it causes harm to the world and to the quality of life of much of humanity."⁷ Stewardship then should be at the heart of any progressive endeavor.

In this light, this article aims to elucidate the indigenous Filipino values in view of stewardship of creation. To do this, the following specific objectives are set: a) discuss the social dimensions of care for the environment, b) elaborate the relationship between human dignity and care for the environment, c) explain the possibility of harnessing traditional (Filipino) values vis-à-vis care for the environment, and d) create Environmental Principles based on traditional (indigenous) Filipino Values.

This study is qualitative in nature. It employs textual analysis of studies that tried to elucidate the tenets and ideas of Filipino traditional values. The paper critically examines the social dimension of care for nature and its relationship with human dignity. It also proposes the use of a contextual method to elucidate environmental principles based on the analysis of indigenous values. It uses constructivism in applying indigenous values as ecological principles which are all directed in bridging the gap between context/culture and care for the environment.

Discussion

Social Dimension of Care for the Earth

Humans are not only the beneficiaries of nature. More than that, they are stewards of it. Stewardship should be the foundation of the relationship that each person has with the environment. People have been created as both matter and form for a purpose. As form, one senses that the world is alive and growing and that the spirit of the world is upon every life form. Everything, therefore, is worthy of respect and be treated as such. As matter, God wants to remind them to work closely with the physical world. God has given them bodies to feel, first-hand, the beauty of creation or the detriment of it.

⁷ Pope Francis, *Laudato Si*, 18.

The human person who discovers his/her capacity to transform and in a certain sense create the world through his/her own work forgets that this is always based on God's prior and original gift of the things that are. God, as creator, has given the human person the greatest gift; that is to be God's co-creator. God has blessed his/her hands to be able to create and innovate. However, "instead of carrying out his role as a co-operator with God in the work of creation, man sets himself up in place of God and thus ends up provoking a rebellion on the part of nature, which has been more tyrannized than governed by him. Man thinks that he can make arbitrary use of the earth, subjecting it without restraint to his will, as though it does not have its own requisites and a prior God-given purpose, which man can indeed develop but must not betray."⁸

A true ecological approach to nature then is always a social one. The reason for this stems from the fact that people all share a common home. Concern for the environment needs to enjoin everyone regardless of race, culture, and religion. The present challenge to protect this common home should encourage everyone to participate in a concerted effort to solve the environmental problems that all experience. There is a need to embrace participation not only on the community level, but on a global scale. There is a need to forget differences in view of a common problem that needs a common solution. Admittedly, addressing ecological problems demand collective action. There is now a necessity for a new and universal solidarity which will bind all people together. Care for the earth binds people together while making them stewards in their own contexts and cultures.

"The urgent challenge to protect our common home includes a concern to bring the whole human family together to seek a sustainable and integral development."⁹ The study then proposes a concept of care that expresses the social which takes into account "more-than-human connectivity"¹⁰ but an embodied unity in advancing the cause of nature. What is needed is a dialogue that will lead to a genuine call to stewardship not a nonchalant commitment to protect this common home.

⁸ John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus*, Vatican.va, 37, accessed January 2019.

⁹ Pope Francis, *Laudato Si*, 13.

¹⁰ Mary Phillips, "Embodied Care and Planet Earth: Ecofeminism, Maternalism and Postmaternalism," *Australian Feminist Studies* 3, no. 90 (2017): <https://doi-org.eres.qnl.qa/10.1080/08164649.2016.1278153>

At the center of any environmental discussion are people as the prime movers of the world. The ecological evils haunting humanity today did not spring overnight, but a product of their collective activities across eras and locations. Hence, they “are not only the victims; they are the main drivers.”¹¹ Their central role as both perpetrators and victims should deeply reshape the way they relate to it. Since ecological problems are social in nature, solutions need to involve as many people and contexts as possible.

The social dimension for the care of the earth is more than just a political, spiritual and economic statement. It is call towards solidarity; a cry for unity in the midst of the ecological harms inflicted to nature. While there are numerous environmental groups that heeded the call and environmental activists who responded to the daunting task, still saving this dying planet is everyone’s responsibility. After all, indifference anywhere is a threat to all ecological efforts everywhere.

The social dimension of taking care of the environment not only safeguards the present, it also assures the survival of future generations. “Once we start to think about the kind of world we are leaving to future generations, we look at things differently; we realize that the world is a gift which we have freely received and must share with others.”¹² The social dimension of ecology reminds people that the world belongs not only to them, but to those who will come after them. After all, everyone is just a pilgrim who will only pass in this world once. “It is about our human stewardship of God’s creation and our responsibility to those who come after us.”¹³ “Let us not leave in our wake a swath of destruction and death which will affect our own lives and those of future generations.”¹⁴

“Human beings and the rest of the creatures live because the environment does live.”¹⁵ Acknowledging this interconnectedness

¹¹ United Nations General Assembly, The Social Dimension of Climate Change Discussion Draft, 5.

¹² Pope Francis, *Laudato Si*, 159.

¹³ William Fay, “Global Climate Change: A Plea for Dialogue, Prudence and the Common Good,” *United States Conference of Catholic Bishops*. Last modified June 15, 2001. <http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/humanlife-and-dignity/environment/global-climate-change-a-plea-for-dialogue-prudenceand-the-common-good.cfm>

¹⁴ Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, accessed January 2019, Vatican.va, 215.

¹⁵ Rafael Fernando, “Pag-hinga: Linking the Filipino Sense of Rest and the Environment,” *BigkisSining: Creativities and Innovations for Global Environmental Sustainability* (February 6, 2018).

might be baby steps, but steps moving forward nonetheless. Humanity must never think that this small collective effort is not going to cause a ripple of effects, for the full realization of stewardship does not merely rely on codified treaties and leviathan movements, but on social conversion and communal adoption of lifestyles in harmony with nature. Environmental protection then does not merely rely on the creation of principles, but on a concerted effort to live out those principles.

The social dimension for the care of the Earth calls for an “experience of intuitive participation in nature itself; where one experiences a co-natural affinity with the world and the universe.”¹⁶ Humanity’s interaction with nature therefore is never linear, but dialogical. The fact the “we can interact with nature in a meaningful way implies that nature is perceived as social.”¹⁷

The Dignity of the Human Person and Care for the Environment

“Fill the earth and subdue it.”¹⁸ All the things of the world have been created for the human person. It is his/her task to “enhance their value by the resources of his/her intellect, and by his/her toil to complete and perfect them for his/her own use.”¹⁹ Undeniably, all the things that God created are placed at the human person’s disposal. God has given all the necessary things for the human person to thrive and live a full and dignified life.

Human dignity is the basis of creating a world worthy of human beings. It is “occasionally associated with the ideas of inviolability or sanctity of life.”²⁰ As such “human beings cannot be treated in some particular ways due to their condition as humans.”²¹ This is neither

¹⁶ Edmundo Guzman, “Creation as God’s Kaloob: Towards an Ecological Theology of Creation in the Lowland Filipino Socio-Cultural Context. A dissertation for the PhD in Religious Studies, Katholieke Universiteit Leuven (1995), 319 in Jose De Mesa, *Why Theology is Never Far From Home* (Manila: De La Salle University Press, 2003), 30.

¹⁷ De Mesa, *Why Theology is Never far From Home*, 31.

¹⁸ Gn 1:28 (New Revised Standard Version)

¹⁹ Paul VI, *Populorum Progressio*, Vatican.va, 22, accessed January 2019.

²⁰ Kurt Bayertz (Ed.), “Sanctity of life and human dignity,” *Springer Science & Business Media* 52 (2012) in Katerina Zdravkova, “Reconsidering human dignity in the new era,” *New Ideas in Psychology* 54 (2019). <https://doi.org/eres.qnl.qa/10.1016/j.newideapsych.2018.12.004>

²¹ Saulo De Matos, “Human Dignity as a Form of Life: Notes on Its Foundations and Meaning in Institutional Morality,” *International Journal for the Semiotics of Law* 33, no. 1 (2020). <https://doi-org.eres.qnl.qa/10.1007/s11196-019-09662-z>

given nor achieved, but an inherent concept that confers to human beings their humanity.

The social dimension for the care of the earth ultimately stems from the dignity of the human person. All are enjoined to care for the earth insofar as all share in the same dignity that provides life its immutability. To abuse nature does not only defile it, but also compromises the quality of life and by extension the dignity of the person affected by ecological backlash and those who are severely affected by environmental dilapidation. When human dignity is taken for granted, the degradation of nature consequently follows. "The idea of human dignity is directly associated with narratives about how our form of life can be fundamentally put into question through (intentional) actions of other individuals, collectivities and institutions."²² Environmental evils impair human dignity, so its "recognition can help us frame arguments and provide a vocabulary for articulating solutions."²³

Human dignity is more than a philosophical, moral, and political concept. In fact, it has an ecological value. The most valid response to ecological problems is not just framing legal policies or intensifying ecological movements to care for the Earth, but to let human dignity guide the course of actions. "We must train our sights to the dignity that is violated along the continuum of life-when someone's home is, community, or future health is irreversibly injured or destroyed."²⁴

There should not be anything that the human person should ever want by virtue of the fact that everything needed was already provided. However, this is not always the case as human persons proved to be insatiable creatures. They have forgotten that they themselves are "dust of the earth."²⁵ They have forgotten that their very bodies are "made up of her elements, we breathe her air and we receive life and refreshment from her waters."²⁶ The misuse and abuse of creation happen when the human person does not see anything but himself/herself and that his/her existence is apart from nature. When human persons fail to consider themselves as nature's extension, they

²² *Ibid.*

²³ Erin Daly & James May, "Exploring Environmental Justice through the Lens of Human Dignity," *Widener Law Review* 25, no. 2 (2019): 177.

²⁴ Bernice Donald & Emily Linehan, "Dignity Rights and the Environment: Affirming Human Dignity through Environmental Justice," *Widener Law Review* 25, no. 2 (2019): 154.

²⁵ Gn 2:7 (New Revised Standard Version)

²⁶ Pope Francis, *Laudato Si*, 2.

begin to look at created reality as mere objects to be exploited. When they fail to see themselves as part of nature, they will “see no other meaning in their natural environment than what serves for immediate use and consumption.”²⁷ The dramatic degradation of the beauty of creation is something that all must acknowledge and be accountable for. People have committed and continue to commit a crime against their very own selves by the rate of destruction they are causing nature.

“Our mistreatment of the natural world diminishes our own dignity and sacredness, not only because we are destroying resources that future generations of humans need, but because we are engaging in actions that contradict what it means to be human.”²⁸ To take care of nature then is to take care of the human person. To preserve the dignity of creation, people are preserving their dignity as well. “To be treated like a human being is to be given liberty to freely reason and act, as long as this does not interfere with the same liberty of fellow human beings.”²⁹ “Our duties towards the environment are linked to our duties towards the human person, considered in himself/herself and in relation to others.”³⁰ There is an inherent dignity in creation because it was given by God. In addition, the human person’s dignity complements this. Caring for the environment is caring for human dignity per se.

Caring for creation is a means to ensure respect for human dignity. “We must push back against the destruction of entire communities who face being forced out of their homes and towns because of pollution and climate change. We must fight for the futures of children who suffer horrible birth defects and we must advocate for families who are uncertain of what illnesses await them for prolonged exposure to toxic chemicals.”³¹

²⁷ John Paul II, *Redemptor Hominis*, accessed January 2019, Vatican.va, 287.

²⁸ Robert Lynch, “Renewing the Earth: An Invitation to Reflection and Action on Environment in Light of Catholic Social Teaching,” *United States Conference of Catholic Bishops*. Last modified November 14, 1991. <http://www.usccb.org/issuesandaction/human-life-and-dignity/environment/renewing-the-earth.cfm>

²⁹ Maria Margarita Lavidés et al., “Haphap: A Filipina Perspective on the Biracial Child’s Dangkal,” *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 23, no. 1 (2018): 201.

³⁰ Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, accessed January 2019, Vatican.va, 48.

³¹ Donald & Linehan, “Dignity Rights and the Environment,” 154.

Filipinos Values and Care for the Environment

Filipino indigenous values have much to offer in the cause of preserving nature's glory. It is now high time to recognize that these Filipino values are not only reflections of what the Filipinos consider true, good, and valuable, but tools towards nature conservation. When used as environmental principles, stewardship takes roots in the culture. It goes without saying that old problems need not modern solutions. Amidst the technological advancements of this modern era, traditions of the past remain an inexhaustible source of wisdom.

Indigenous values can be translated into environmental principles. "The building of a humane and life-giving society begins in the *loob*-in the sentiments, attitudes, and behavior of the people desiring to build that society-before it is rooted as intellect in the mind or expressed as skills of the hand."³² Deep within the *loob* (self) are cultural values which comprise constructions of reality. They comprise the worldview of people which somehow remain unadulterated by even the drastic of changes. "Like a sea with different levels of depth, there is movement on the surface but the deeper we plumb its depths, the less movement we experience."³³ Undeniably, the rich Filipino cultural heritage remains unabashed underneath the ripples of waves modernity has spearheaded.

This is the reason why it is crucial to tap into indigenous principles to raise ecological awareness and spur ecological movement insofar as the former reside at the deepest level of the self. All ecological endeavors must be based on values that people would live and die for. Universal ecological principles may be important and at times helpful, but unless these principles are context bound, they will never be truly appreciated by people living in a specific social milieu. Since "culture has its own signs and expressions,"³⁴ it can be a source of indigenous values waiting to be realized. An ecological framework, based on traditional wisdom, then would be more practical, as it is culturally-relevant, and at the same time needed in this contemporary time. Consequently, using the ideas that culture holds dear ensures everyone's participation and cooperation.

³² De Mesa, *Why Theology is Never Far From Home*, 71.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ Leonardo Mercado, *Inculturation and Filipino Theology* (Tagaytay City: Divine Word Publications, 1992), 19.

“Our inherited way of feeling, believing, and behaving in a patterned manner is so much part of us that we are, for the most part, not conscious of it anymore.”³⁵ Since this link between culture and the person is something that cannot be overridden, the virtue of stewardship becomes the Filipinos’ second nature. Only when stewardship becomes a part of the *loob* that indigenous environmental principles start the journey towards “coming back to our roots.”³⁶

Towards Indigenous Environmental Principles based on Filipino Social Values and the Dignity of the Person

Changes in lifestyle based on indigenous Filipino values are not only optional but necessary in this day and age where environmental problems threaten the very idea of existence itself. Many modern solutions have been offered and utilized to solve this crisis, but all to no avail. This is the reason why the research puts high premium on the usage of indigenous Filipino values as ecological principles. In order to address the environmental problems which all are experiencing, one must look back on traditional values. There is now a need to explore and harness the potentials of indigenous values to shed light to principles which are congenial to people’s most cherished beliefs.

Values reside at the deepest-level of culture. “This is the level of people’s psychology that tells them what is useful, true, and valuable.”³⁷ How people look at reality is defined and conditioned by the values they hold dear. Traditional values, then, should play a crucial role in the formulation of environmental principles. There is a need to look at these in a new light since they could provide insights in the crafting of ecological principles which will help solve environmental problems. The challenge is to look into these traditional beliefs to expand the potential of value-analysis. Saving mother Earth can be done by creating a framework, from a certain perspective within the particular context of the people involve.

Environmental principles, which are supposed to preserve nature, must touch the values that people hold dear. “Creative integration of native wisdom into urbanized and modernized lifestyle is key to stop, if not reverse, the environmental damage modern living

³⁵ De Mesa, *Why Theology is Never Far From Home*, 89.

³⁶ *Ibid*, 71.

³⁷ Mercado, *Inculturation and Filipino Theology*, 19.

has done to nature.”³⁸ They must be in harmony with what the people consider true and good or else they will be perceived as something foreign or even oppressive. Hence, the application of indigenous Filipino values will be relevant to Filipinos in their own particular contexts. It will assure that steps which will be taken to preserve nature are not alienating, but something that are *home-made*. “It is a stimulus to make a creative use of our native wisdom and genius to affirm our identity as a people and to motivate us to move as a people to transform the environment, and through it, society.”³⁹ To create environmental principles that heed the context and the values that people cherish ensure that all will be able to participate in the cause of taking care of the Earth.

“People in the course of history not only have brought to life beliefs, values, and customs through a long course of experiences, but also have created particular social and institutional structures which are expressive of these beliefs, values and customs.”⁴⁰ As such, the usage of traditional values as environmental principles do not only spur action, but creates cultural structures which sustain it. The family, school, religion, government, and other social institutions are bound to safeguard these ecological expressions insofar as they are cultural expressions. The indigenous values then become ecologically reoriented. In this light, the life-giving aspects of culture become retooled to preserve the live-sustaining presence of creation.

Moreover, environmental principles must revolve around the concept of *dangal* (dignity). It is not enough that these principles are indigenous and relevant, they must be presented in such a way that they protect the sanctity of the world and all its inhabitants. The potent force of age-old wisdom manifests itself not through abstract grandiose concepts, but by a life (personal and collective) lived and oriented towards *dangal*. As such, indigenous values and the concept of dignity relate as a pair; empowering humanity in creating a life worthy of dignity.

Care for the earth is never private nor personal. As “*loob* needs *kapwa*, its continued responding to *kapwa* is the condition for its own existence and authenticity as *loob*.”⁴¹ The self, insofar as it is relational,

³⁸ De Mesa, *Why Theology is Never Far From Home*, 31.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 123.

⁴¹ Dionisio Miranda, *Buting Pinoy: Probe Essays on Value as Filipino* (Tagaytay City: Divine Word Publications, 1992), 84 in Jeremiah Reyes, “Loob and Kapwa: An

finds meaning in others who share the same world. How others treat *kapwa*, and by extension, nature, reveals not only who they are, but what they believe in. A consciousness that protects nature, then, should be “rooted in our common humanity which respects and recognizes the dignity of the person.”⁴²

In this vein, nature’s dignity mirrors the human person’s dignity. Restoring nature’s *dangal* therefore is restoring people’s *dangal*. *Dangal* is “a prerequisite of *kapwa*,”⁴³ that which leads to the realization that in this great tapestry called life; all are interrelated. The self is “what it is insofar as it is only completed and imbedded inside this web of connectivity.”⁴⁴ Knowledge of nature’s worth stems from the dignity of the human person who breathes and lives from the Earth’s bosom.

a. *Sakop Mentality-based Environmental Principle*

The Filipino is intrinsically a social being. He is almost never alone. In fact, “he is expected to have a companion from birth until death.”⁴⁵ The Filipino experiences authentic life not in solitude, but in concrete social context. “Regardless of changing economic and social situations, Filipinos attach a high premium to living together.”⁴⁶

“As a being-with-others, he is expected to have reference groups (*sakop*).”⁴⁷ His basic *sakop* is his family. “The family is in fact one’s primordial existential humus: the source of one’s identity, of emotional and material support, and of major commitments and responsibilities.”⁴⁸ However, aside from his immediate familial *sakop*, he can also form other *sakops* such his *barkada* (peer group), office companions, church groups, and the like.

Sakop resembles the need for Filipinos to always bond with others. It shows a collective desire to be with one another, to feel each

Introduction to a Filipino Virtue Ethics,” *Asian Philosophy* 25, no. 2 (June 1, 2015): 154. DOI: 10.1080/09552367.2015.10433173

⁴² De Mesa, *Why Theology is Never Far From Home*, 90.

⁴³ Lavidés et.al, “Haphap A Filipina Perspective on the Biracial Child’s *Dangal*,” 202.

⁴⁴ Reyes, “Loob and *Kapwa*: An Introduction to a Filipino Virtue Ethics,” 154.

⁴⁵ Leonardo Mercado, *Elements of Filipino Theology* (Tagaytay City: Divine Word Publications, 1975), 54.

⁴⁶ Levy Lanaria, “The Filipino Family-Lights and Shadows: Challenges to the Domestic Church,” *Asian Horizons* 7, no. 2 (June 2013): 241.

⁴⁷ Mercado, *Elements of Filipino Theology*, 54.

⁴⁸ Dindo Rei Tesoro & Joselito Alviar Jose, *The Rise of Filipino Theology* (Pasay City: Pauline’s Publishing House, 2004), 192.

other's pain, and to celebrate each other's triumph. It shows the Filipino way of acting which is always communal and interrelated. *Sakop* mentality, without a doubt, is at the heart of Filipino values. Its inclusion in the formulation of environmental principles, then, is of utmost importance.

"The *sakop* is a multipurpose group."⁴⁹ It can provide basic needs, be a source of emotional support and encouragement, give employment opportunities, and provide a sense of security. "But one thing predominates: the *sakop* prevails over the individual."⁵⁰ The research argues that nature forms the ultimate *sakop* that people can form a bond with. To say that nature forms the ultimate *sakop* means that the former supplies them with every fiber of humanity they possess and every possible way to advance human flourishing.

The welfare of nature, seen as *sakop*, should never be compromised and defiled in the name of progress, wealth, and greed. On the contrary, the individual is expected to make sacrifices for the sake of nature (*sakop*). This is because nature is an extension of one's humanity. Nature is in the individual as the individual is in nature. Hence, the *sakop's* (nature's) welfare is the individual's welfare. The *sakop's* destruction is the individual's destruction. The *sakop's* problem is the individual's problem. The *sakop's* fulfillment is the individual's fulfillment. He/she always sees himself/herself in relation to the *sakop*. The *sakop* is not only his/her extension but himself/herself. Whilst the *sakop* has paved the way for some negative attitudes, still it holds a primary place in the Filipino hierarchy of values.

The *sakop* champions the idea of *sapat* (enough). One should just get what is *sapat* for him/her. Getting more does not only show insensitivity to the other members of the *sakop*, but also injustice to those who will not receive anything or less than they utterly deserve. This characteristic of getting more is despised even condemned by Filipinos who belong to one *sakop*. The *sakop* extols fairness and no member shall get more at the expense of the other members of the *sakop*.

In the same vein, considering nature as a *sakop*, is to just get what is enough. Getting more from nature is not only destroying it, but depriving others of things they ought to receive. Hence, *sapat* does not only ensure that all receive their share, but all shares were distributed

⁴⁹ Mercado, *Elements of Filipino Theology*, 54.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

fairly. The environmental problems that people are now experiencing is the result of the insatiable hunger to get more than what is needed. There is a need to reinforce the concept of *sakop*, based on the *sapat* mentality, to better foster awareness that ours is a finite earth. The resources that people enjoy now may never be enjoyed by future generations.

Sapat mentality preserves human dignity. It stresses a life of sufficiency rather than that which advocates unlimited growth and accumulation."⁵¹ To abuse nature is to deprive others of a more humane and dignified life. People must be wary of greed and envy which turn people's hearts into stones. The environmental problems people are now experiencing are just forceful reminders of what humanity's callous souls have wrought.

b. Hiya and Pakikisama-based Environmental Principles

The *sakop* enjoins *hiya and by extension, pakikisama*. *Hiya* is often seen as a negative value often translated as shame or embarrassment. Lynch (1962) describes *hiya* "as the uncomfortable feeling in a social acceptable position or performing a socially unacceptable action."⁵² It has been reduced to public censure where people behave according to the principles set by the society, lest they become deviants.

While the former is often highlighted, *hiya* should instead be seen as "an active and sacrificial self-control of one's individual wants for the sake of people."⁵³ As a virtue, "it connotes active effort; conscious self-control and restraint."⁵⁴ It is a "sense of propriety;"⁵⁵ prudence and temperance in maintaining self-control.

Hiya "moderates natural desires for the sake of a higher purpose."⁵⁶ In this way, the common good is achieved and unanimity is

⁵¹ Mary Antonette Beroya & Max De Mesa, *Sapat: An Environmental Ethic for Personal and Social Transformation* (Quezon City: Ethos, 1995), 1 in De Mesa, *Why Theology is Never Far From Home*, 29.

⁵² Frank Lynch, "Philippine Values II: Social Acceptance," *Philippine Studies* 10, no. 1 (January, 1962).

⁵³ Jeremiah Reyes, "In Defense of *Hiya* as a Filipino Virtue," *Asian Philosophy* 26, no. 1 (2016): 66. DOI: 10.1080/09552367.2015.1136203

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ Rogelio Pe-Pua & Elizabeth Portacio-Marcelino, "Sikolohiyang Pilipino (Filipino Psychology): A legacy of Virgilio G. Enriquez," *Asian Journal of Social Psychology* 3 (2000): 55.

⁵⁶ Reyes, "In Defense of *Hiya* as a Filipino Virtue," 67.

concretized. *Hiya* then, as a virtue, is desired in the Filipino society. It models the Filipino way of preserving human dignity. It is not just crucial to *dangal*, it is the latter's vehicle. It mirrors empathy towards the *kapwa*; a way to understand others' context. While it is "not exclusive to Filipinos, there is a difference in the weight and important given to it in the Filipino culture."⁵⁷

An offshoot of hiya is pakikisama. This Filipino values reflects smooth personal relations. This implies a sense of compromise; of considering others before oneself. *Pakikisama* is the true measure of one's allegiance to his/her *sakop*. While *pakikisama* may have its share of criticisms as a form of mindlessly yielding to the majority, it must be anchored on the true meaning of the *hiya*. "*Pakikisama* can be defined, therefore, as virtue of the person that controls individual wants for the welfare of the *kapwa* majority."⁵⁸ Instead of a limiting view on *pakikisama*, the need to consider others before oneself is crucial not because it is what is expected, but because it is the right thing to do. As members of *sakop*, the members display compromise for the welfare of the entire *sakop*. It is not necessarily joining the bandwagon, but knowing when and how to compromise. It is not just getting along well with others, but acknowledging one's role for the overall welfare of the *sakop*.

Relating to nature, the value of *hiya* is of much use. *Hiya* is "care and concern"⁵⁹ for mother Earth and her people. To display *hiya* is to curb out the desire to get more than we need. It is *hiya* that mirrors respect for human dignity and the quality of human life. It is refraining from abusing natural resources because it not only harms nature, but puts people's lives in jeopardy. *Hiya* is looking at created realities as the vessel of the divine, lest people become *walang-hiya*. People should feel that sense of embarrassment (*mahiya*) when committing a transgression against nature not only because it is wrong, but because they failed to restrain themselves (*nakakahiya*) from doing such a defiling act. It is *hiya* that should be one of the guiding principles that will propel stewardship. To consider nature as *sakop* is to care for this place people call home. It would unthinkable and downright evil to defile something that is considered an extension of humanity.

Furthermore, to show conscious effort in protecting the environment using *hiya* is to set a model of stewardship through

⁵⁷ *Ibid.* 69.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.* 74.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.* 71.

pakikisama. *Pakikisama*, as a virtue, enjoins Filipinos to “believe that they are one with humanity and is connected with creation.”⁶⁰ In a way, genuine *pakikisama* is sakop-oriented. It is to compromise for the sake of nature; to delay gratification for the common good.

c. Animism-based Environmental Principle

Early Filipinos were animistic. They worship nature. They recognize that everything in creation, from a lowly stone to the mighty sun, possesses a divine spark. They can see the heavenly traces of God in all of the things surrounding them. Therefore, there was no demarcation between the sacred and the profane because the sacred is in the profane and vice versa.

Animism, as a folk belief, is dismissed as having no significance in this modern era. “Belief in spirits and enchanted beings are more often than not regarded today as mere vestiges of an unsophisticated and unscientific way of thinking among ancient people.”⁶¹ The advent of technology and science has undoubtedly swept ancient wisdom under the rug. “Our sense of wonder for our natural world has terribly weakened and caused the careless use and destruction of our natural resources.”⁶²

This paper argues, however, that this modern era, where technological advancements are misused and abused, is actually the main culprit in the proliferation of the notion that everything in nature is at people’s disposal. Modern era has encouraged people to think that nature merely exists for people and that they can always get from nature whatever they want. Too much reliance on technology made nature look like a big machine, where parts can be replaced, modified, and removed. It stripped nature of the sense of beauty and sacredness which once covered it. “The earth has been looked upon as a great source of raw materials foe what we wish to do and produce.”⁶³

⁶⁰ Jove Jim Aguas, “The Filipino Value of Pakikipagkapwa-tao vis-à-vis Gabriel Marcel’s Notion of Creative Fidelity and Disponibilitè,” *Scientia* 5, no. 2 (December, 2016): 17.

⁶¹ De Mesa, *Why Theology is Never far From Home*, 29.

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ *Ibid.* 30.

Unfortunately, “we are losing the attitude of wonder, contemplation, and listening to creation.”⁶⁴

This paper puts forward a discourse on animism not to encourage believers to convert to this ancient folk belief, but to analyze its potential as an environmental principle. Animism may bring people back to that sense of awe about the world around them. It is “a signal of transcendence, points to the presence of the holy, and preserves man’s sense of God.”⁶⁵ Animistic practices could actually help Filipinos see God in everything around them. It could facilitate the understanding that God is within the world and God’s loving presence is seen in the created realities.

Creation is not just matter. Animism helps people see that there is more to creation than what is tangible and consumable. It bridges the gap between the spiritual (form) and the material (matter) which has been severed by western dualism. “Materiality is not the antithesis of spirituality but its vehicle and expression, and that whatever is sacred is not set apart from the realities of human life.”⁶⁶ Spirituality and materiality are never apart. To see creation with a spark of animism is “to take the presence of God in history, and culture seriously, recognize its epiphany in human life, and acknowledge its diaphany in the world of the ordinary.”⁶⁷

Filipino animism sees creation as a reflection of the transcendent God. It “treats things as persons. A farmer, after a long dry spell when at long last the rains fell, exclaimed in joy: *tuwang tuwang mga halaman*.”⁶⁸ With the rise of rationality and scientific inquiry, mythical understanding of the world has been neglected. “In view of the ecological crisis which threatens the very possibility of the continuance of life on earth, traditional wisdom of the past is becoming a factor in contemporary discussions and decisions related to the preservation of the environment.”⁶⁹ To consider that God is in the world is to respect everything in the world. People show respect to

⁶⁴ Pope Francis, General Audience (June 5 2013). https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/audiences/2013/documents/papafrancesco_20130605_udienz-a-generale.html

⁶⁵ Vitaliano Gorospe, *Filipino Values Revisited* (Manila: National Bookstore Inc., 1988), 69.

⁶⁶ Jose De Mesa, *Bakas: Retrieving the Sense of Sacramentality of the Ordinary* (Pasig: Anvil Publishing Inc., 2008), xv.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ Gorospe, *Filipino Values Revisited*, 69.

⁶⁹ De Mesa, *Why Theology is Never Far From Home*, 29.

God when they respect God's presence here on Earth. The environmental crisis that people are experiencing nowadays "is a forceful reminder that people are more important than objects, that we must respect the bond between man and nature, that we must not destroy indigenous culture and the integrity of a people in the name of modern technological development."⁷⁰

Created reality is a sacrament; that which points to an invisible reality. Filipino animism, as an indigenous environmental principle, adheres to the basic assumption that all beings are worthy of respect. Through animism, the great divide separating the material world and the corporeal world; nature and humanity has been bridged. It enables people to see that each has a spark of the divine. It safeguards the understanding that nature is *kapwa*; not just an entity out there, but a part of humanity. To utilize animism is to recognize nature as a member of one's own family that deserves the respect and care rendered to all members of the kin. In this way, Filipino animism does not only safeguard human dignity, but accords to nature its inherent worth and value.

Nature is *kapwa* not because it is 'other' as translated in English, but because nature and humanity are one and equal. This concept of this "shared inner self"⁷¹ stems from its "starting point as together."⁷² It "endorses the deeper experiences of mankind, akin to an ancient animist connectedness of feeling one with all creation."⁷³ While *pakikisama* is other-oriented, *pakikipagkapwa* is self-oriented. This is not egotism, however, but the acknowledgement that "others are an integral part of the self."⁷⁴ Cognizant of the fact that nature is *kapwa*, the treatment towards nature is one of affinity; a mutual affiliation of the syncretic nature of the care for the Earth. Nature is not "*ibang-tao* (outsider), but *hindi-ibang-tao* (one of us)."⁷⁵

⁷⁰ Gorospe, *Filipino Values Revisited*, 69.

⁷¹ Jose Antonio Clemente, et.al, "Revisiting the Kapwa Theory: Applying Alternative Methodologies and Gaining New Insights," *Philippine Journal of Psychology* 41, no. 2 (2008): 2.

⁷² Reyes, "Loob and Kapwa: An Introduction to a Filipino Virtue Ethics," 156.

⁷³ Katrin De Guia, *Kapwa: The Self in the Other* (Pasig City: Anvil Publishing Inc., 2005), 73 in Reyes, "Loob and Kapwa: An Introduction to a Filipino Virtue Ethics," 156.

⁷⁴ Lily Mendoza & Jim Perkinson, "Filipino Kapwa in Global Dialogue: A Different Politics of Being-with the Other," *Intercultural Communication Studies* 7, no. 4 (January, 2003):288.

⁷⁵ Pe-Pua & Portacio-Marcelino, "Sikolohiyang Pilipino (Filipino Psychology): A legacy of Virgilio G. Enriquez," 56.

Pakikipagkawa reflects the “Filipinos’ holistic world view.”⁷⁶ “The Filipino looks at himself as a self, as one who feels, as one who wills, as one who thinks, as one who acts: as a total whole-as a person, conscious of his freedom, proud of his dignity and sensitive to the violation of the two. Unlike the traditional Western philosophy which strictly divides body and soul, the Filipino thinks holistically.”⁷⁷ Since the Filipino mind is not oriented towards dichotomy, everything is part of an integrated whole. Consequently, the Filipinos view the *sakop* as one. Though the members may be distinct, they consider themselves as part of a unitary group. “The self is regarded not as a totally separate entity, but an integral part of the world.”⁷⁸ Hence, *pakikipagkapwa* is inward. It creates opportunities for a synoptic viewing of nature as an integral part of the self. “It is not limited to equality.”⁷⁹ It is integration.

Filipino animism accords to nature life, growth and decay. As something alive, nature is sensitive (*nakakaramdam*). *Pakiramdam* is a “kind of emotional a priori”⁸⁰ that shows feeling for *kapwa*. People must establish rapport with nature insofar as it is sensitive to humanity’s needs and actions. After all, everything alive and breathing is worthy of respect.

d. *Utang na Loob-based Environmental Principle*

Utang na loob is loosely translated as debt of gratitude. “It is not necessarily a burden as the word debt connotes, because in the Filipino pattern of interpersonal relations, there is always an opportunity to return a favor.”⁸¹ Hence, it exemplifies the Filipino value of reciprocity. However, this reciprocity is not equal since the “benefactor does not set any conditions, or ask for the expression of gratitude. All depends on the inventive generosity of the recipient.”⁸² When a person in need is offered help and accepts the help, he/she has

⁷⁶ Aguas, “The Filipino Value of Pakikipagkapwa-tao vis-à-vis Gabriel Marcel’s Notion of Creative Fidelity and Disponibilite,” 17.

⁷⁷ Mercado, *Elements of Filipino Theology*, 50-51.

⁷⁸ Aguas, “The Filipino Value of Pakikipagkapwa-tao vis-à-vis Gabriel Marcel’s Notion of Creative Fidelity and Disponibilite,” 17.

⁷⁹ Lavidés et.al, “Haphap A Filipina Perspective on the Biracial Child’s Dangkal,” 199.

⁸⁰ Pe-Pua & Portacio-Marcelino, “Sikolohiyang Pilipino (Filipino Psychology): A legacy of Virgilio G. Enriquez,” 56.

⁸¹ *Ibid.* 55-56.

⁸² Mercado, *Elements of Filipino Theology*, 171.

a debt to the person who offered help that is binding for a long time even a lifetime and the generation after that. “For *utang na loob* is a kind or relational debt which has no exact amount so that one can go on paying for it for a long time.”⁸³

Utang na loob is seen as a key to maintaining the harmony of the *sakop* and by extension, the community. People who have *utang na loob* to others would never do anything that will antagonize their benefactors. It preserves friendship and nourishes respect. It ensures that everyone in the *sakop* will maintain a kind of relational respect and courtesy. Although *utang na loob* may have its share of problems, it is nonetheless a virtue that has sustained the Filipino society.

Utang na loob is one of the main conservers of human dignity. It is a “debt of human solidarity to a fellow human being.”⁸⁴ It is “not merely a debt to be repaid for a kind deed, but “a priori; being responsible to someone in the name of human solidarity.”⁸⁵ “It is a plea in the name of common humanity, a humanity that needs to be respected.”⁸⁶ All people owe each other by virtue of that shared *loob* worthy of recognition and protection. “Once we forget, neglect, deny, or suppress the bond of being human that ties us to each other, we cannot but expect the worse in terms of exploitation and belittling of our common humanity.”⁸⁷ When this shared humanity is forgotten, the false pretense of solidarity under the auspices of a ‘good’ life, progressive world, and modernity become inevitable.

Theologically, God created the world and all that are in it for human beings. Humans, and by extension, the world, would never have existed without God. Therefore, they bear the ultimate *utang na loob* to the maker. And God does not ask any expression of gratitude for creating nature except to preserve its beauty and restore it to its former grandeur when necessary. Showing gratitude for this generosity best exemplifies the concept of mutual reciprocity. The virtue of *utang na loob* should discourage people from abusing and misusing the environment.

Outside the bounds of religion, *utang na loob* remains an indigenous virtue that can help solve ecological maladies. Nature has

⁸³ De Mesa, *Why Theology is Never far From Home*, 89.

⁸⁴ Jose De Mesa, “In Solidarity with the Culture: Studies in Theological Rerooting,” *Maryhill Studies* 4 (1991), 70-71.

⁸⁵ Lanaria, “The Filipino Family-Lights and Shadows: Challenges to the Domestic Church,” 249.

⁸⁶ De Mesa, *Why Theology is Never far From Home*, 90.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.* 91.

given to human beings everything that they need. Without nature, humanity would have perished and no life would even have started. Humanity has always been at the receiving end of nature's bounty. Showing appreciation for the gifts of creation then should motivate individuals and countries alike to sustain the magnificence of the world. The relationship that people have with nature should be dialogical. It should be a mutual harnessing of generosity and gratitude; one wherein both parties give and receive. For nature to continue giving, people must establish mechanisms to ensure this continuity. *Utang na loob*, as an indigenous environmental principle, ensures, *pananagutan* (accountability) towards the bearer of debt. It is "being ready and willing to be accountable for one's action not only to oneself, but to the other members of the *sakop*."⁸⁸

Moreover, *utang na loob* emphasizes the nature of *malasakit*. It is the "highest ideal in Filipino culture, synthesizing all the other ideals, that translates into selfless commitment to service."⁸⁹ As such, people's enduring *utang na loob* to the environment should transform into deep concern towards the latter (*malasakit*); "alternating and strengthening the relationship in the process".⁹⁰ It is only when the needs and sufferings of nature have been prioritized and heard that true stewardship commences. Nature's *kagandahang loob* knows no bounds and humanity must heed this enduring benevolence.

Human beings' *utang na loob* to the world should translate to *kagandahang loob*; an altruistic action which spurs conversion (*metanoia*). It is only when there is a change of heart, of looking at nature as subject not object, that the future of the world is secured. Truly there is no greater insult in the Filipino culture than to be "labelled as *walang utang na loob*;"⁹¹ people who refuse to repay that which has been given to them. Nature exists for the well-being of people and people should exist to protect that which sustains them.

⁸⁸ Lanaria, "The Filipino Family-Lights and Shadows: Challenges to the Domestic Church," 249.

⁸⁹ F. Landa Jocano, "Filipino Family Values," in *The Filipino Family: Spectrum of Views and Issues* with foreword by Corazon Juliano Agrava, ed., Aurora E. Perez, Quezon City: UP Office of Research and Coordination, 1995, 9-10 in Lanaria, "The Filipino Family-Lights and Shadows: Challenges to the Domestic Church," 248.

⁹⁰ Reyes, "Loob and Kapwa: An Introduction to a Filipino Virtue Ethics," 149.

⁹¹ *Ibid.* 162.

Conclusion

The world is beautiful. It is the duty then, of human beings, to preserve this beauty. As ecological problems threaten the idea of existence itself, it is now a high time to highlight the importance of solidarity and unity to address ecological problems. Caring for the environment is always a social endeavor since all people share a common home. At the same time, it proceeds directly from the dignity of the human person. Caring for the environment is ultimately caring for the dignity of the human person as he/she tries to live a full and dignified life.

The social dimension of the care for the Earth should encourage all people to advance the cause of camaraderie in solving ecological struggles. Now is the most opportune moment to protect the dignity of the world as people try to create a more just and humane society. In the spirit of *bayanihan*, let human beings commit themselves to the cause of nature. After all, human dignity is valued more when the Earth's dignity is prioritized. The marriage between Filipino values and human dignity is the much needed catalyst that will spur positive ecological transformation.

Indigenous Filipino values have much to offer in the mission to save the world. Amid the plethora of ideas that pertain to stewardship, still a more indigenous framework, which are attuned to people most cherished beliefs, will be greatly appreciated. Hence, Filipinos should keep in mind that the folk belief of animism is not some kind of heresy. While it has its pagan roots, it is a potent reminder of the sanctity of everything in the world. As Filipinos are group oriented, a *sakop*-based environmental principle will help them acknowledge nature as home (*tahanan*). Animistic traces of the past encourage them to treat nature as *kapwa*; to imbibe the *sapat* mentality. It impels the concept of solidarity (*pakikisama*) and the virtue of *hiya* as environmental sensitivity. More so, it establishes the dialogical relationship between persons and nature as seen in the concept of *utang na loob*.

As ecological problems present serious repercussions to life in general, there is a need to explore the potentials of traditional values which may shed the light towards the creation of environmental principles. It is now necessary to localized environmental principles to ensure that all will realize, in their particular contexts, the need to be a steward of nature. A cultural approach to environmental problems may just be what people need; lest these principles fall on deaf ears. Like a plant, let the seeds of traditional wisdom take roots in our

collective hopes and may the water of human dignity sow the nutrients of a world all may consider a paradise; a heaven on earth. May these indigenous environmental principles pave the way for our homecoming; *pagbabalik-loob sa ating tahanan*.

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