

# ETHICS

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## THE FILIPINO NORM OF MORALITY

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Reference: <https://www.thefilipinomind.com/2008/01/our-filipino-norm-of-morality-revisited.html>

Another way of looking at the problem of morality in the Philippines is to consider the actual and prevailing norms of right and wrong among Filipinos. It is quite obvious that there is a conflict between what they say as Christians and what they do as Filipinos; between their actual Filipino behavior and their ideal Christian behavior; in short, between what is and what ought to be.

One norm of morality in the Philippines is based on "group-centeredness" or "group-thinking." One's in-group determines for the individual what is right or wrong. The individual who has not yet attained moral independence and maturity will ask: "What will my family, or my relatives and friends, or my barkada think or say?" "What will others say" usually determines Filipino moral behavior; it is "conscience from the outside." For instance, parents tell their daughter who is being courted: "Iha, please entertain your boyfriend at home. Do not go outside. What will the neighbors say? Nakakahiya naman." Shame or hiya makes the parents and the girl conform to the social expectations of the neighbors lest they become the object of chismis or gossip.

Here again there is a conflict between the individual and social morality, between internal and external morality. The norm of morality should be internalized so that the mature individual should form his own moral conscience from the inside.

Another norm of morality in the Philippines is characterized by the "Don't be caught" attitude based on shame or fear of the authority figure. The authority figure may be a parent, teacher, priest or policeman. As one law student puts it: "What's wrong with cheating in the bar examinations as long as you do not get caught?"

During the war, it is told that a prison official of Muntinlupa addressed his new prisoners thus: "Here there are no Ten Commandments. You can obey or break the rules as you please. But God help you if you get caught." This norm of moral behavior also gives rise to a conflict in the individual between the "don'ts" of the authority figure and "what every else does" in the latter's absence. As long as a policeman is on duty, Filipino drivers will obey traffic rules but if there is no policeman, then everyone else tries make puslit or get ahead of the others often causing a traffic jam.

We find in the Filipino whose norm of behavior is purely external, a split between the ideal Christian norm of morality and the actual Filipino norm of morality. He will put on the externals of Christian moral behavior in front of the authority figure while at the same time follow in "real life" an inconsistent moral behavior when the latter is "at a distance."

The problem for the Filipino individual is to be "aware" that the two inconsistent norms of morality are allowed to coexist in his personality and life and that he must overcome this split if he is to become a mature Christian Filipino.

What can be done about the problem of morality in the Philippines? In this respect, the question of attitudes, whether on the part of the individual or on that of society as a whole, is quite relevant. The solution to a problem depends to a great extent on one's awareness of the problem and his attitude towards it.

Let us consider the various attitudes that the Filipino individual or Philippine society can take towards the problem of morality and religion. The worst possible attitude is not to be aware of the problem at all. The person who is not aware that he has a cancer or heart trouble will not see the doctor.

Another wrong attitude is complacency when one is aware but is not concerned. The individual who feels secure and comfortable with the status quo sees no need for change. Some individuals see the problem but it is too frightening. Hence they are afraid to make a decision and initiate change because it is painful and difficult. This is the attitude of timidity. Others try to escape from their real problems. They skirt confrontation with the real issue in their lives and hence rise up pseudo problems as camouflage.

Finally a very common attitude is rationalization. People who know they are doing wrong but do not want to change easily find excuses like "ako'y tao lamang" (I'm but human), "ganyan lamang ang buhay" (life is like hat), "bahala na" (come what may), or "everybody is doing it." In this age of "passing the buck," another excuse for shrinking personal responsibility is the Filipinism, "I am not the one".

All these attitudes of mind are wrong and without the proper attitude there can be no solution to the problem. Filipinos will make no progress toward a Christian solution until they realize that the problem is serious and urgent.