

# The Concept of Honesty in Tagalog

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The Filipino concept of honesty can be better understood by analyzing its equivalents in Pilipino, using the language's Tagalog base. In order to arrive at these equivalents, the author consulted nine English-Tagalog-English dictionaries, among which were the most popular -- Vicassan and Leo James English (see bibliography).

All of the dictionaries agree that the Tagalog equivalent for "honest" is "tapat." The word "tapat," however, is equivalent to three other words: "faithful," "sincere," and "upright." To be "tapat," therefore, is also to be "honest" and "faithful," as well as "mapagkakatiwalaan," or trustworthy. And while to be "tapat" is to be "sincere," to be "sincere" is also to be "taos-puso." To be "tapat" is, moreover, to be "upright," but to be "upright" is also to be "marangal."

In English, honesty, faithfulness, sincerity and uprightness are quite distinct concepts. Honesty and uprightness are linked to an absolute truth, while faithfulness or fidelity, as well as sincerity, are not necessarily so. One can be sincere without necessarily being upright, and one can be faithful without necessarily being honest. The truth can hurt, and in order to be totally honest and upright, one must not be afraid to hurt or get hurt. One's faithfulness to a person must not stand in the way of being honest to him or her.

This definition is obvious in the 1983 edition of the Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary. First of all, it lists, as an obsolete meaning of honesty, the word "chastity." Its second meaning is broken up into two: a, "fairness and straightforwardness of conduct," and b, "adherence to the facts," to which it

attaches the word “sincerity.” Its synonyms are honesty, honor, integrity and probity. Honesty, it explains, “implies a refusal to lie, steal or deceive in any way;” honor “suggests an active or anxious regard for the standards of one’s profession, calling or position;” integrity “implies trustworthiness and incorruptibility to a degree that one is incapable of being false to a trust, responsibility, or pledge;” probity “implies tried and proven honesty or integrity.”

The 1999 dictionary-form Roget’s 21<sup>st</sup> Century Thesaurus, on the other hand, lists truthfulness and candidness as the main synonyms of honesty. And while it includes sincerity, loyalty and faithfulness as two other synonyms, these are included in a secondary list of 34 other synonyms, among which are, aside from those mentioned by Webster’s, bluntness, impeccability, incorruptibility, rectitude, right, scrupulousness, straightforwardness, straightness, uprightness, veracity, and virtue.

The preponderance of synonyms close to the 1983 Webster’s definition of honesty indicates a continuing concern among English-language speakers in the world for the closest, most “scientific,” adherence to truth and facts.

In Tagalog, the word "katapatan" links all four concepts of honesty, faithfulness, sincerity and uprightness. But to be *tapat* is really to be faithful and sincere; in the concept of *katapatan*, one takes into account matters of relationship, not only matters of truth or correctness.

In order to understand more fully the Filipino concept of honesty, therefore, we must analyze the word "katapatan." The root "*tapat*" physically means "to be in front of something or someone." Immediately, one can glean a relational character in the word "*tapat*." A neighbor in front of one's house is "*katapat*;" when one confesses something to someone the word used is "*magtapat*;" in classical Tagalog, a serenade is "*tapatan*" -- a confession of love and devotion.

In other words, when one is "tapat," one always takes into account the person one is in front of, close to, related with. One must take into account the feelings of that person, not only the truth the person must face. One must be both honest and faithful at the same time. Uprightness depends not only on the standards one upholds, but also on sincerity towards and fidelity to the people one serves.

To the Westerner, such a concept is outrageous. There should be no such flow between honesty, faithfulness, sincerity and uprightiness. Honesty and uprightiness belong to one category, definitely distinct from faithfulness, and quite apart from sincerity.

Does this mean that the Filipino has, in truth, no concept of honesty or uprightiness?

If the Filipino had no concept of honesty or uprightiness, there would be no Tagalog equivalents for truth and correctness or their contrasts, lies and deception. And yet there are. Truth is katotohanan or katunayan, while correctness is kawastuhan. A liar and deceiver is sinungaling, madaya, bulaan, mapanlinlang. Wrong is tiwali, mali, lisya, balintuna. A bad person is masama.

The Filipino has a sense of right and wrong, then. In fact, s/he has a marked sense of wrong, witnessed by the many words s/he uses for it, with their refined shades of meaning: A person can be sinungaling, bulaan, manlilinlang, madaya, switik, tuso, doble-kara, dalawang mukha, or mapaglamang. All these types are masama, or bad. The actions a deceiver may perform are categorized as lilo, linlang, panananso, lalang, libang and lansi. Their products would turn out to be palsipikado or peke, or, at its most astounding, kakatwa. What they do is definitely tiwali, mali, lisya, sala, balintuna.

On the other hand, those on the receiving end of the deception are paraya, padaya, lokohin, tanga -- the existence of both sides of the spectrum indicating that negotiations between deceiver and deceived have been rife for a quite a time, the deceiver, judging from historical data, having been the outsider, and the deceived the native, until the natives themselves, having been divided into distinct classes through subjugation, learned to adopt the means of pandaraya. And that is why some have learned to be diskumpyado (from the Spanish "disconfiado"), mapaghinala (suspicious), mapag-alinlangan (doubtful).

Though the words for truth and correctness in the absolute or "pure" sense are not as many, they are also as definite. Tama, tumpak, tuwid, talaga, totoo, and wasto, legal, all point to the same thing: what is correct, straight, legal, true and right. All these are good, mabuti, in the objective sense. But they are also so in the subjective sense, and here is where the cognate "tapat" comes in: for the good and the true are also dalisay, puro, mataos, walang-halo, walang-banto -- in other words, sincere; in fact, the sincere are not only loyal (from the English word) and sincero (from the Spanish word), but also ganap -- whole, buo, intact. Such katapatan, sincerity, with regard to what is right, results in the state of being marangal, upright, and even more than that, in the ultimate sense, makatarungan -- just, because in the scales of justice, one has weighed the good against the bad, correctly.

In other words it is possible to weigh the good against the bad and the correct against the incorrect through patotoo (testimony), prueba (from the Spanish for "proof"), patunay (various manifestations of the truth), and beripikasyon (from the English for "verification"). The presence of these words indicate a clear concept of right and wrong.

A full understanding of the sparseness of synonyms for the word honesty, as compared to the English language, and its translation into the word "tapat," which is really more equivalent to the English words "sincere" and "faithful," is

possible only through the prism of Prospero Covar's theory of Filipino personhood. The Filipino, Covar says, looks at people in the way s/he would look at a Manunggul jar: it has a labas, loob, and lalim. A person has a katawan, or body—the jar's labas; a kaluluwa, or soul—the jar's loob; and a budhi, or conscience (or in Christian terms, spirit)—the jar's lalim. The person must be seen in this wholeness, otherwise s/he is merely like a broken jar, his/her soul gone and his/her spirit shattered.

While the Filipino understands, appreciates, and upholds truth, facts, right and correctness, therefore, s/he also understands, appreciates, and upholds a person's wholeness. Against the truth, this person's wholeness must be, as much as possible, upheld. It must not be shattered by any means. Therefore, instead of being honest in the Western way—meaning to say, blunt, candid, direct, brutal—one must be tapat in the Filipino way, taking into consideration the whole person who must face the truth, making sure that that truth does not shatter him/her, but renders him/her at peace with him/herself, and the world.

Truth, in this sense, becomes relative to the person it is told to. But precisely because it is, perhaps it becomes all the more compelling, and reasonable. And, in the long run, most honest.

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