

# Review Essay

## Radical Thinking in Apolinario Mabini's *La Revolucion Filipina*

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Contemporary readers of Mabini's *La Revolucion Filipina* (LRF) are expressly grateful to the English translator/s of Mabini. Nevertheless, the translator's name is not mentioned in the recommended Library entry. The Series falls under the general title: *Documents of the National Library of the Philippines Compiled and Published Under the Directorship of Teodoro M. Kalaw*, 1941 (Manila Bureau of Printing). Enrique K. Laygo is the only other name mentioned by Kalaw who worked (under his supervision) on the texts of Mabini.

Honestly, one is tempted simply to reproduce in this Review Essay the forceful words of Mabini insofar as the singular act of opening the pages of *La revolucion filipina* is a form of radicalism in itself. Before proceeding to discuss

this reading of the text, let us point out three salient points. First, it is important to note that Mabini's book is not part of the mainstream of Katipunan thought.<sup>1</sup> His language and abstract style is indicative that Mabini did not write the text for ordinary people. Although certainly addressed to the leaders of the revolution, Mabini was not completely in the loop in the *Katipunan* insofar as Aguinaldo did not know him from the start of the Revolution.<sup>2</sup> Another observation we wish to make is that it is possible that the text is a compilation of various papers *supposedly* written by Mabini, and, as it were, edited and entitled, "The Philippine Revolution." A thorough critical edition of the text still has to be done in order to ascertain whether there are portions other than Mabini's authorship which have been added. These are philological concerns to be conducted by other capable minds. Finally, and most significantly, we would like to suggest that the text is a piece of radical thinking, written

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<sup>1</sup> According to Rafael Palma, "With the dissolution of the Liga, the members did not disperse, but instead each group formed its own organization. Those who were in agreement with the program of the Liga formed a Council of Arbitrers who took on the task of collecting funds for the newspaper and for the political campaign in Spain, while those who disagreed with them, led by Bonifacio, formed the more popular and formidable secret organization that existed in the Philippines and which became known in our history by the name of Katipunan. Mabini did not place himself at the side of Bonifacio, but with the Council of Arbitrers," Rafael Palma, "Apolinario Mabini Biographical Study," in *La Revolucion Filipina* Vol. 1 (Manila: National Historical Commission of the Philippines, 2011), p. 29.

<sup>2</sup> "Don Fernando Canon recounts that he saw Mabini for the first time in Binan in 1898 as he was coming from Bay on his way to Cavite, in response to the call of Aguinaldo," *Ibid.*, 21.

by a Filipino in the 19th c., and as such, may be considered as a source of Philippine philosophy.

The radicalness of Mabini's LRF is not imposed from the outside. It can be derived from the text itself. According to Mabini, ". . . to be able to establish the true structure of our social regeneration, it is necessary for us to change radically, not only our institutions, but also our way of living and thinking. It is important to undergo an internal and external revolution at the same time; it is necessary to establish a more solid basis for our moral education and to forswear the vices that we have inherited from the Spaniards" (103).<sup>3</sup> The main focus of this discussion, and perhaps the most important lesson of this text, is the mantra "internal and external revolution."

We must consider calmly and objectively the notion of "radicalism" in Mabini's writings in order to muster the courage to confront all that this word evokes within us.<sup>4</sup> The

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<sup>3</sup> ...para que levantar el verdadero edificio de nuestra regeneracion social es preciso que cambiemos radicalmente, no solo nuestras isntituciones, sino tambien nuestro mode de ser y de pensar (105). Apolinario Mabini, *La Revolucion Filipina: resena sintetica / por* Teodoro M. Kalaw., 1884-1940 (Manila : Manila Book Co., 1924).

<sup>4</sup> Radicalism: a tendency to press political views and actions towards an extreme, (e. g. Radical Islam) Historically, radicalism has always been associated with dissatisfaction with the status quo and an appeal for basic political and socia changes...Although in some countries, e.g. the U. S. A., 'radicalism' is mostly used with reference to the Left (where radicals are clearly distinguished from Liberals), it can also be characteristis of the Right; notable examples are Fascism or Nazism. The terms is also used in the wider sense of a disposition to challenge established views in any field of huamn endeavor, e. g. in the arts and scholarship. *The Fontana Dictionary of Modern Thought* edited by Alan Bullock, Olivier Stallybrass and Stephen Trombley 2nd edition (London: Fontana Press, 1988).

experience of reading Mabini leads to the realization that depth of thinking is propelled by the circumstances within which an author writes his texts. Contained in this text are not only universal ideas but all the glorious and tragic events that occasioned its writing. When one opens the pages of *La revolucion filipina*, one cannot help but feel the silent stirrings of a people ready to kill and be killed for their freedom, a readiness which prompts Mabini to say: “I do not suggest that you fling yourself into the battlefield without direction... (93).”<sup>5</sup> In other words, Mabini wrote this text to tell us not to fight for no purpose. At the end of the day, what we hear in this text are the million steps towards the direction of meaning, a people marching towards light.

This text is primarily a piece of radical thought. It asserts the meaning of the Revolution in terms of the “sovereignty [that] lies naturally in the people.” This first regulation of the Revolution echoes the Republicanism current in the 19th Spanish political milieu.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, he thinks that the

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<sup>5</sup> Yo no pretendo que te lances al campo sin direccion... (95).

<sup>6</sup> Promises of freedom of worship, universal suffrage,\* the abolition of the death penalty, and trial by jury—in short, the full legal panoply of progressive constitutionalism—engendered great enthusiasm. The 1868 revolution thus earned its soubriquet, *la gloriosa*, in direct imitation of England’s Glorious Revolution of 1688,” (Mary Vincent, *Spain 1833-2002 : People and State 1833-1902* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007): p. 39; “Amadeo abdicated on 11 February 1873, the very day that parliament declared Spain to be a Republic, (Ibid, 40). “Most came from advanced Liberal groups which had developed an increasingly radical stance in the 1830s, ceasing to support the order established by the Constitution of 1812 (which sharply limited the powers of the Crown and established a wide, though indirect, franchise) and advocating instead the granting of universal political rights and liberties under a democratic republic or a very restricted

revolution is both the overthrowing of a constituted government and the replacement with one in closer conformity to “reason and justice.”<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, he explains the justified reasons for the revolution: “they declared that we were not covered by the Spanish Constitution, and the people, afraid of the arbitrary power of the Governor General, could not appeal for justice, unless they were willing to face deportation, martyrdom, or death” (106).<sup>8</sup> Mabini grimly understood that despite all the liberal changes in Spain, the colonizer refused to recognize the equal citizenship of Filipinos. Moreover, this meant the continued tyrannical rule of the Governor-general who did not make

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monarchy dependent on the nation’s will,” (Peyrou, *Democratic Discourse in 19th c. Spain*, 237.) Radicals, by contrast, identified liberty with the political participation of the people. (Ibid., 237). The Spanish Democratic groups which emerged around 1840 aspired, above all, to popular sovereignty; a government of the people and by the people (Ibid., 240). [\*While Mabini understood sovereignty as belonging to the people, he did not stipulate for universal suffrage, which was tied to ability to pay taxes (“Congress is the union of the representatives elected by qualified taxpayers (135) {El Congreso es la reunion de los representantes elegidos por los contribuyentes capaces...(136)}. Women, on the other hand, were not barred from employment and therefore could pay taxes (Women will have the right to study any branch of science or the arts in establishments of public instruction maintained at the expense of the State, the provinces or towns, and to exercise the professions corresponding to their degrees, (133) Las mujeres podran aprender cualquier ramo de las ciencias o artes en los establecimientos de instruccion publica consteados por el Estado, las provincias o los pueblos, y ejercer las profesiones correspondientes a sus titulos, (134)].

<sup>7</sup> “con otro mas conforme a la razon y a la justicia,” (108).

<sup>8</sup> “nos a declarado fuera de la Constitucion espanola, y el pueblo amenazado por las facultades arbitrarias del Gobernador general no puede clamar justicia, amenos que prefiera la deportacion, el martirio o la muerte (109). Rule 2: Revolution is always justified when it is carried out in order to overthrow a usurper and a foreign government (105). La revolucion esta justa , siempre que trata de derribar un gobierno extranajero usurpador (108).

room for “appeal for justice.” We are all familiar with the brutal consequences of any form of dissent against the Spanish colonial government during the latter part of the 19th century.<sup>9</sup>

It is crucial to understand the idea that the power of dissent belongs naturally to the people. We are, however, less interested in this review to know the intellectual context of the term “naturally” and more in the idea of sovereignty belonging to the people.<sup>10</sup> This presents many questions to the historian of ideas. The first question we ask is whether the word “people” here consists of those who precede the revolution. Moreover, we ask whether the notion of

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<sup>9</sup> Historical parallelism between 19th c. Spanish democratic thought and Mabini’s life might be helpful: “Their discourses, practices and popular mobilization contributed to the gradual opening up of the liberal system that had itself been painfully established in Spain from 1808, in an uneven process whose main highlights were the revolution of 1868, the establishment of the First Republic in 1873, the proclamation of universal male suffrage in 1890 and, finally, the coming of the Second Republic in 1931,” Florencia Peyrou, “A Great Family of Sovereign Men: Democratic Discourse in 19th c. Spain,” *European History Quarterly* 43(2) 235–256; cf. also “Mabini, born, in 1864; studied philosophy in 1884; completed law in 1894; Revolution erupted in 1896; joined Revolution in 1898, wrote LRF around this time,” [According to Kalaw, he first entered into public life in 1892, which coincides with his being initiated into Masonry. There is ample evidence, he wrote LRF in April 1898]; cf. Apolinario Mabini, *La Revolucion Filipina* Vol. 1, (Manila: National Historical Commission of the Philippines, 2011), p. 92.

<sup>10</sup> “La revolucion es el medio de la fuerza que los pueblos, en uso de la soberania que naturalmente les corresponde, emplean para derribar un gobierno constituido y sustituirlo con otro mas conforme a la razon y a la justicia.” (108) [Revolution is the power the people, in using the sovereignty that naturally corresponds/belongs to them, used to bring down a constituted government and replace it with one in greater conformity to reason and justice. (105)] Cf. Cesar Adib Majul, *Mabini and the Philippine Revolution* (Quezon City: University of the Philippines, 1960.)

“people” is prior to the individual. Obviously, the idea of citizenship comes prior to the revolution, which itself is initiated by the will of the people.

In his reading of the *LRF*, Rafael Palma concentrates on what might be tedious to young readers, namely, Mabini’s attempt to reorganize the government. “Mabini recognized the need to immediately reorganize the provinces and municipalities in order to take over the system established by the Spanish administration.”<sup>11</sup> What might be more in the purview of the Law is understood by Palma as the crux of the revolution. Immediately, however, we find here philosophical ideas of rulership and representation. We mention Palma’s reading here because the transition to a modern state lies in the idea of “the will of the people.” “Will” here is understood as “what they want” (or what the Revolutionaries considered as “the aspirations of the people,”) which is distinguished from the act of willing, that is, the freedom of the people.<sup>12</sup> From a philosophical point of view, these are not motherhood statements. The underlying objective of this kind of inquiry is to recover the power behind these words. Mabini’s radicalism lies in understanding the priority of this regulation by the people themselves over mere representation.

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<sup>11</sup> Palma, *Biographical Study*, 33.

<sup>12</sup> The section entitled “To my compatriots” contains one of the richest reflections on freedom one could ever find, Mabini, *La Revolucion Filipina*, 102-103.

*LRF* presents Mabini's definition of revolution in terms of the "sovereignty [that] belongs naturally to the people."<sup>13</sup> Indeed, the impetus for revolution is the consciousness that the people have the power to change things, especially the structure of government. The subsumption of the individual will into the will of the people, however, defines the essence of the Philippine revolution. Mabini's understanding of freedom informs his notion of revolution.

Revolution is sacrifice, but not a mere sacrifice of life; instead, it is a sacrifice of momentary and individual freedom. This is probably the single most important discourse on freedom by a Filipino thinker: "It is not enough that the revolutionary renounce his life and forsake the comforts of family and home to become a true revolutionary; he must also renounce his freedom for the moment, the way an honest peasant has to sacrifice his time for leisure and rest in order to work, if he wants to save money so he will not have to work for his old age. We will not obtain the freedom of our country without giving up our own first, especially since this sacrifice will have no

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<sup>13</sup> The meaning of "revolucion," in 19th c. Spanish is interesting to note here: "In nineteenth century Spain, the term "revolution" was used in several different senses. Popularly and by their protagonists, every minor radical insurrection was described as such, irrespective of whether it brought about any change in the way the country was run," Progressives thought the term meant the establishment of a republic, for Moderates it meant social and economic changes. For "regenerationists it actually meant the maintenance of the existing social order, cf. Ross, *Modern History for Modern Languages*, p, 15.

meaning for us because we have never enjoyed real freedom under the Spanish regime” (101).<sup>14</sup>

Secondly, the text’s radicalism is found in the Objectives of the Revolution (Rule 4) which has three stages. The first phase is the expulsion of the Spanish government and religious corporations along with the reclamation of all illegally seized property. The second phase seeks to make known the True Decalogue, which is going to be the basis for the moral education of Filipinos—as humans and citizens. The third phase establishes the constitutional program of the Philippine Republic—immediately “after the triumph of the Revolution.” These three stages operationalize the idea of internal and external revolution. Perhaps, *sotto voce*, we accede that in the light of the present realities of our tragic Republic, the Program outlined by Mabini has failed. He keeps on repeating throughout the text the caveat: “after the triumph of the Revolution.” Verily, the Revolution has begun, but has not triumphed. This is mainly because we have lost this sense of the radical in the revolution, or if you will, we have lost the idea of internal and external revolution.

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<sup>14</sup> No basta que el revolucionario renuncie a la vida y abandone los gozes de la familia y del hogar, para ser verdaderamente tal; ha menester, ademas, de que renuncie por un momento a su libertad, como el honrado labriego quiere tener economias y dedicar al descanso los ultimos dias de su existencia. No conseguiremos la libertad de nuestro pueblo si antes no sacrificamos la nuestra, tanto mas cuanto que este sacrificio nada significaria para nosotros, toda vez que bajo el regimen esanol nunca hemos disfrutado de verdadera libertad (103).

That sense of being radical refers to the idea that sovereignty lies in the people (naturally), and the objective is to find a moral basis for being human and being a citizen. This is where “doing philosophy” becomes important. The more we ask this question, the more disturbed we get. The revolution is not going to transpire if we do not find a moral basis for our “being human and being citizens.” Humanism resonates the first objective of being human, but according to Mabini, being human cannot be separated from being a part of one’s nation. *Ang pagpapakatao ay maging makatao*. To be human is to become part of the people, to whom sovereignty belongs (naturally).

This is where a society’s conformity to justice is important. Mabini’s Decalogue Number 9 (Love your neighbor as you love yourself) presages Martha Nussbaum, who, in her book *Political Emotions*, discussed that this notion of justice must be coupled with “love,” for it is the emotions that make people act.<sup>15</sup> But love itself must be enacted within a “critical political culture,” often effected through humor and satire.<sup>16</sup> Simply put, if we cannot call out the mistakes and failings of our leaders, we are not living in a

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<sup>15</sup> Martha Nussbaum, *Political Emotions: Why Love Matters for Justice* (Cambridge, Massachusetts : The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2013).

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Rule 14, which contain the rights upheld by LRF: “Every Filipino shall have the right to freely express his ideas and opinions through speech or in writing, through the use of the printing press or other similar method, without being subject to censorship (132). (Todo Filipino tiene derecho: De emitir libremente sus ideas y opiniones, ya de palabra, ya por escrito, valiendose de la imprenta o de otro procedimiento semejante, sin sujecion a la censura previa (133).

system of justice and love. If children could not make fun of their parents, then their parents might have been too tyrannical and arbitrary.

The Philippine history of ideas informs us that while we have expelled the Colonialists and continue to resist foreign encroachments and interventions in our internal affairs, the revolution still has to triumph insofar as we have not found an adequate moral basis for our being human and our being citizens. The truly radical idea in this text is the hope that eventually the Philippine Revolution shall overcome our petty interests. As Mabini has stated, what is needed is an internal and external revolution. The reason change does not happen is that we do not know what change is. How can we effect that which we are not clear about? In the same token, the reason radical change does not happen is that we do not have a modicum of consciousness of radicality.

If being radical refers to the idea that sovereignty belongs to the people, the other question that has to be asked is to what extent the notion of independence in *La revolucion filipina* requires individualism. As the early Democrats realized, the notion of national sovereignty has the danger of becoming tyrannical insofar as the majority imposes its will on individuals. We realize that Mabini conformed to forms of republicanism current in the 19th century. But the other question we need to ask is how he truly envisioned independence. The notion of independence is not a mere

absence of a foreign colonizing power (which naturally is a *conditio sine qua non*). Independence has conditions of possibility, and autonomy is crucial to it.

At the root of this is Mabini envisioning himself (although not like Moses) as someone who provides “The True Decalogue” as the condition of independence.<sup>17</sup> But he presents The True Decalogue not as a law but as “objects of consideration” and “the knowledge and of which will assure us of achieving our longed for freedom that is the promised Independence” (102).<sup>18</sup> For Mabini, true freedom is following one’s reason or conscience. It is for this reason that radical change is needed. With the use of reason, we shall achieve independence. Reason itself is what we use to reflect on the proposed True Decalogue: “So if you reflect deeply on this, far from confusing you, it will enlighten your mind, because it is clearly righteous, as it is the truth.”<sup>19</sup> The full ramification of what Mabini says is a treasure of insights that he has bequeathed to his contemporary readers.

What is astonishing for philosophers is his notion that the Philippine revolution is incumbent on the individual’s

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<sup>17</sup> The relationship between Mabini’s true Decalogue and Judaeo-Christian ethics is a project not of the Mabini scholar *in se* but of Filipino Christian Democratic thinkers. Cf. Genis Barnosell, “God and Freedom: Radical Liberalism, Republicanism, and Religion in Spain, 1808–1847,” *IRSH* 57 (2012), pp. 37–59.

<sup>18</sup> ...expongo a vuestra consideracion diez verdades, cuyo conocimieto y ejecucion nos aseguran la posesion de la ansiada libertad, o sea la prometida Independencia (105).

<sup>19</sup> Por eso, si reflexionais mucho sobre ellas, lejos de aturdirnos, se iluminara vuestra mente, porque su justitica es clara, como que es cerdad (105).

reasoning power as a condition of independence. This reasoning power is what imbues the sovereignty which belongs to the people: “However, since we do not possess sufficient strength to put up any serious resistance to either of the combatants, we must resort to skill and astuteness, curbing the fire in our hearts and subjecting our actions to the coldest reasoning and scrutiny” (96).<sup>20</sup> As such, part of the Philippine revolution is a massive education project (cf. Title X On Public Instruction).

The idea of “reflection” mentioned in the text is sufficient evidence that this text is a potential resource of Filipino philosophy. In other words, what Mabini strives to do with the True Decalogue is engage the revolutionaries in a rational discourse. The second rule of the Revolution states: “Worship God in the form that your conscience deems most upright and fitting, it is through your conscience that God speaks to you, reproaching you for your misdeeds and applauding you for your good deeds.”<sup>21</sup> The third Decalogue states that adherence to one’s conscience allows one to walk on “the path” (an important philosophical idea) of the good and justice, which would in

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<sup>20</sup> Pero no disponiendo nosotros de medios de fuerza bastantes para oponer resistencia formal a cualquiera de las partes combatientes, debemos recurrir a la habilidad y a la astucia, conteniendo las fogosidades del corazon y sometiendo nuestros actos al mas frio racionicio (98).

<sup>21</sup> Adora a Dios en la forma que tu consciencia estime mas recta y digna, porque en tu consciencia que reprueba tus actos y aplaude los buenos habla tu Dios (106).

turn enable the person to achieve his own perfection, and “by this means you will contribute to the progress of humanity.”<sup>22</sup>

This adherence to individual conscience also fulfills one’s vocation: “thus you will accomplish the mission that God himself has given you in this life.” Therefore, Mabini states that adherence to conscience enables the person to fulfill his vocation and contribute to the progress of humanity.<sup>23</sup> It is also clear that Mabini’s notion of reflection that leads to rational discourse puts him in line with the idea of modern democracy as dynamic rational dissent and discourse.

Let us end with the text’s stance against monarchy and absolute rulership. Decalogue 8 states that the revolution is against political dynasties: “Strive that your country be constituted as a republic, and never as a monarchy: a monarchy empowers one or several families and lays the foundation for a dynasty. While the borders of the nations established and preserved by the egoism of race and of family remain standing, you must remain united to your country in perfect solidarity of views and interests in order to gain strength, not only to combat the common enemy,

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<sup>22</sup> Cultiva las aptitudes especiales que Dios te ha dado, trabajando en la medida de tus fuerzas, sin separarte jamás del camino del bien y de la justicia, para procurar tu propia perfeccion y por este medio contribuir al progreso de la humanidad: así realizaras la mision que el mismo Dios te ha senalado en esta vida, y, realizandola, tendras honor, y teniendolo, glorificaras a Dios (106).

<sup>23</sup> Procura para tu pueblo la Republica y jamas la Monarquia: esta ennoblece a una o varias familias y funda una dinastia; aquella constituye un pueblo noble y digno por la razon grande por la libertad y prospero y brillante por el trabajo (107).

but also to achieve all the objectives of human life.” Independence means the absence of dynasties; it is where authority belongs naturally to the people.

We know that philosophy aims for the individual’s fullest human development. Mabini teaches, moreover, that to be human means to belong to the people who possess the fullness of sovereignty. Independence is produced and constructed from a vision of the people. He presents the capability for greatness of the Filipino people: “These people are called to greatness<sup>24</sup> . . . there is no power to hold them back . . . we yearn for more.”<sup>25</sup>

Ultimately, Mabini makes us ponder on the dilemma between revolution and reform. Are we for reform or revolution, that is, violent change? The impasse and splintering of these paths of inquiry lead to an understanding of Mabini’s notion of radicality. This radicality means holding on to one’s own individual and proper reason. Unequivocally, Mabini thought that the truly radical is the one who thinks with his *own* reason. This is the objective of all philosophical enterprise which builds a nation: “It is for this reason that we should reflect, especially since serious thinking is an act that characterizes a strong nation, and an indispensable prerequisite for all enterprise, large and small” (100).<sup>26</sup> In

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<sup>24</sup> Es pueblo esta llamado a ser granden (97).

<sup>25</sup> No hay fuerza que la detenga (97).

<sup>26</sup> razon por la cual debemos reflexionar, ya que la reflexion es el acto que carateriza a un pueblo viril y la condicion indispensable para toda empresa frande o pequena (102).

other words, whether it be revolution or reform, what the individual needs to enact is radical change brought about by the full wakefulness to the powers of his own rationality.

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