

## **DUNGNGO: A PHILOSOPHY OF LOVE**

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**ABSTRACT-** The paper “Dungngo: A Philosophy of Love” is a philosophical inquiry into the theory and practice of love. “Dungngo” is analysed to look into some reasons of its absence nowadays and to criticize the conditions which are responsible for this absence. “Dungngo” is an Ilokano term for “love”. It reflects motherly and fatherly love, the love to a partner, brotherly and sisterly love, love of country and love of God. This endeavour proceeds with a presentation divided into two. The theory of love is first presented, and then the practice of love. It ultimately shows that dungngo (love) carries with it a promise of an attainment of a true love or at least the opportunity to love once again in a truer sense. Dungngo (love) is not only a sentiment, but more of a conscious perfection and development of oneself in order to love and the active outpouring of transformative and emancipating genuine loving service to others and the world, most especially to whom love seems to be absent: the poor, oppressed, needy, sick and disabled. It is the hope of this paper that it becomes an avenue to introduce an Ilokano philosophy of love into the great philosophical discourse all over the world and contributes to thousands of efforts in the search for true love.

**KEY WORDS:** Dungngo, Nakem, Theory of Love, and Practice of Love

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

History would show that love continues to evolve, and people continue to attempt to fully comprehend what it means. Love has been shown in many faces and has been experienced in many ways. No one however has arrived at a definite concept of love and even rules for love. This fact shows love as something difficult to grasp and understand. In face of love, some people are intellectually humbled.

They see themselves as amateurs as if they are still beginning to learn about love. There are still many things to know about love and how to be successful in love.

The philosophers had so many descriptions of love. Plato, for example, looks at love as something which makes persons whole again. People love in order to be complete and make themselves entire once again. It is seeking to that which makes a person complete. It is going back to an original state of completeness. In the Symposium, at a dinner party, Aristophanes said that human beings before have 4 arms, 4 legs and 2 faces. They were punished by a god and they were divided [1]. With 2 arms, 2 legs, and a face, they now have to seek for their partner, the one that completes them. Plato said - “...and when one of them meets the other half, the actual half of himself, whether he be a lover of youth or a lover of another sort, the pair are lost in an amazement of love and friendship and intimacy and one will not be out of the other's sight, as I may say, even for a moment...” [2] Arthur Schopenhauer is with another example. He would see love as tricky. It tricks people into having babies. For him, love is for the purpose of procreation [3]. It is a sexual desire that leads people to believe that another person will make them happy. This however is a trick since it eventually leads to procreating and to suffering. The sufferings are brought about by the pains of bearing and nourishing children, and the sorrows brought about by problems in relationships.

Bertrand Russell looks at love as an escape from loneliness. To love is to look for satisfaction of both physical and psychological desires. Love gives delight, intimacy and warmth. It helps in overcoming fear of the world and escape from

loneliness for it gives opportunity to be engaged more in life [4].

Simone de Beauvoir, also an example, sees love as reaching out beyond oneself. It is a desire to integrate to another and it infuses one's life with meanings. She stressed more the fact that people can love better and be authentic in love by reaching out to others and to their world. For her, authentic love must be founded on reciprocal recognition of two freedoms; each lover would then experience himself as himself and as the other: neither would abdicate his transcendence, they would not mutilate themselves; together they would both reveal values and ends in the world [5]. In this kind of love, both are free and equal, they are great friends, and both are striving to attain meanings together in this world [6].

All these views would tell people that love is of a relational character. Plato's love is a journey towards being complete again. Schopenhauer and Russell speak of love as desiring others. Beauvoir would say love as reaching out to others.

The lives of people would say more or less the same – love is seeking and being with others. This fact however has been interpreted in many ways. And in the course of history, the story of love has been always the struggle of searching for love and learning how to love.

The first interpretation could be of love as completeness is being fulfilled in one's plan or dream, increased in wealth, and perpetuated in power. This could be completing oneself by getting married out of practical considerations. The records of some members of royalties and even common people show that their marriages were pre-arranged or arranged because of practical considerations. Some people wanted their plans to be completed by marrying to perpetuate themselves in power and positions. They wanted their influence to be wider and their riches to be more. In the Philippines, people before practiced betrothal or pre-arranged marriages to perpetuate bloodline, money, and power. World history shows also the King of Mari (a part of the modern day Syria), in 1775 BC, married a princess in Yamhad (a part of modern day Mesopotamia) [7]. The king planned of expanding his trade and power, and look for a partner in marriage to complete such plan. For him, marriage should allow doors to open in order to get

benefits in terms of trade, connections or linkages, and security during war. It is an opportunity of securing for more lands and treasures.

Second, getting married in terms of practical considerations might lead to the distinction between marriage and love, public affairs and private affairs. In 1745, the king of Versailles in France was married and had a mistress. The king was betrothed to his queen, since marriage to a queen is what legitimizes his kingship. Yet at one point in time, he felt something is lacking. He searched for something that would complete him, most especially in his personal and private life. His wife is what answers his state life or public functions. His mistress plays to satisfy his private tendencies.

Third, because the public plus the practical considerations are too heavy sometimes, secret marriages were done. The search for someone to complete one's being seems to be unstoppable. Couples wanted to be married to those whom they love. So, they come into marriage without parental permission and without consideration of wealth and power. For these couples, what is important is love. This is a sort of romanticism, where there is feelings over reason and impulse over tradition. The most famous example is the secret marriage of John Lampton and Harriet in 1812 [8].

Fourth, the search for completeness is a call for maturity. This is putting together love and practical considerations together. But this is not simply putting them together, the relationship has to develop and grow. It has to mature in skills, knowledge, and management. Love here is a balance between tenderness of the heart and strong practical managerial competence. This is the example set by Fitzwilliam Darcy and Elizabeth Bennet in the story written by Jane Austin in 1813 [9]. Austin in the story said "anything is to be preferred and endured rather than marrying without affection."

The fifth and the last interpretation could be found in Charles Darwin's "Origin of Species" in 1859 [10]. This search for someone to complete a human being could have closed the doors of monogamy and opened that of polygamy. There is always in every human the animal, and that animal part is always in search for someone to love. Furthermore,

this could have perhaps opened the possibility of free sex and divorces.

In 1965, the Free Love movement was identified with Jefferson Poland. He stood against a society advocating sexual repression. For him, sex is free and open for all. It is a human function. He and the movement questioned monogamy, and has opened the issues of gay relationships and same sex marriages.

Cases of divorce have been registering high records recently. In 2015, for example, divorce in Belgium has increased into 71%. The UK registered an increase for 42%, US for 53%, Hungary for 67% and Portugal for 68%.

With this long history of love, one can conclude that the person has still a lot of things to learn about love. The presence and increase of divorce and separation rates are not to be seen as hindrances to knowing more how to love. These could be indicators of the absence of love. The future of love needs people to be interested in the debate for clarity and maturity on love. So, this paper brings the debate in the Ilokano setting or brings the Ilokano brand of love to the table of debate. It gives the chance to do philosophical inquiry into the Ilokano brand of love – dungngo (love). It therefore re-sets the question – from what is love to what is dungngo (love).

## **2. DISCUSSION OF KEY CONCEPTS AND ARGUMENTS**

In this section, the discussion is about dungngo (love). It attempts to show the gap between the theory of love and the practice of love. As a theory, dungngo (love) is not just a sentiment that is transitory, and, as a practice, it is not something easy. It is not that anyone should take it lightly. It is a serious matter, not because many people could easily get involved into it. In other words, dungngo (love) is a conscious endeavour to develop individual personality in order to actively participate in the transformation and emancipation of the society.

With this objective, the discussion is divided into two parts: the theory of love and the practice of love. The first part discusses the concept and nature

of dungngo (love), while the second part would be showing the practice of dungngo or love in action.

### **2.1 The Theory of Love**

Dungngo is an Ilokano term for love. It also means beloved, darling, or sweetheart, most especially when it is employed as an expression of endearment. This is like in the poems of Sonia Albano Chan. She used dungngo for love and dungngo as endearment [11]. When it is used as a verb, it becomes dung-dungngoen ka (present-progressive tense and it means I love you or I am loving you), dinungngo ka (past tense and it means I have loved you), and dung-dungngoenkanto (future tense and it means I will be loving you).

The most common usage of dungngo is to show parental love, as in the Biblical expression –“sika ti dung-dungngoek unay nga anak, may-ayoak unay kenka” (you are my beloved son, in you I am well pleased) [12]. In some songs, like the Dung-dungngoenkanto [13], it is also illustrative of maternal love. It can also be a word manifesting patriotism or love of town and country, like in the song Suyo a Dungngo [14]. In recent applications in the Bannawag, it illustrates sexual love, like in “panagdinnungngo iti maymaysa a katre” [15] (to have sex in a bed) and “nakaadayon ni Sally ngem mariknak pay laeng ti nadungngo a piselna” [16] (Sally is already far yet I could still feel her loving touch).

#### **2.1.1 Dungngo and the concept of the human person.**

The theory of dungngo (love) must start with the concept of the human being. This is an idea supported by Erich Fromm in his book *The Art of Loving*[17]. It is impossible to speak of dungngo (love) in separation with the human being. It is also incomplete to talk about the human person without talking about dungngo (love). To speak of dungngo (love) is to speak about the story of the human person.

Dungngo (love) is not an emotion[18]. It is a consciousness intending, extending, and oriented towards the others. It is first of all the awareness that the person is with other persons. Above all, it is the awareness of the person that he or she has someone to be with and to live with.

The human person realizes himself or herself in relation with himself or herself, others, and the world. The human person is never viewed in isolation with others and the world. A person is always a worldly man (man properly belonging in the world), and the world is always a human world. He or she fulfils his or her dreams and plans only in the context of family and community. He or she maximizes his or her potentials only with others. This relational character of the human person is shown in love.

Love seeks relationships or unity. This fact is so real in the experiences of isolation and separation [19]. This separation produces the motivation for the human person to reach out to others and to the world. Among people, this love is seen as charity to the poor and the oppressed, advocacy to the world and environment, and the love often ratified and consummated in marriage.

This love seeking for unity is concretized more in giving. The relationships built or the unity established is itself the one allowing the existence of giving. In unity and relationships, giving is naturally coming to life.

Giving is the highest expression of human love. One gives his or her life and everything to others and the world. He or she empties himself or herself for a life-partner, others, and the world. In the religious practice, one gives his or her life for the church and God.

The act of giving is also expressed in care, responsibility, respect and knowledge [20]. Care is the active concern for love and the growth and development of this of this life. Love as giving care values life. It offers food, shelter, and clothing so that first and foremost this life is nurtured and protected. It is supported to let life grow and develop. It is given health and educational supports, security, and others.

Responsibility is the ability to respond to the needs of others and the world. Love as giving and responding to others is the preferential option for the poor and the oppressed. It is shared and enjoyed with others. it is not letting others to be left behind. It is growing and developing with others.

Respect is the ability to see a person as he or she is. Love as giving respect is to be aware of the person's unique individuality. The awareness of

differences among people is never a discouragement but always an encouragement to all the more love other people. The recognition that some people are poor, sick, disabled, victims of injustices, and marginalized is an opportunity for love to take place. In like manner, the recognition that others are wealthy, healthy, and favoured is also an opportunity of love and not of jealousy. It is an occasion to be inspired of their success life stories and get better in life.

Knowledge is learning more about the others. Love as giving is knowing more the others. It is giving and paying attention to others. It is in knowing more others that people can be giving more, caring more, responding more and respecting more. Knowledge, therefore, is that which facilitates care, responsibility and respect.

Dungngo (love) therefore is a conscious act of the human person that relates to one self, others and the world and an act perfected in giving, caring, responding, respecting, and knowing.

### **2.1.2 Dungngo as the love between parent and child.**

Dungngo is parental love. It is the love between a parent and a child. It is motherly love (mother and child) and fatherly love (father and child).

In this aspect, the tendency is for a child to simply enjoy to be a father's child or a mother's child. All he or she does is to be loved. He or she is to be the dungngo (beloved). This however has to move forward. It has to mature [21].

The road to maturity in love could be described in two phases: infantile love and mature love. The meaning of infantile love is found in the expression "I love because I am loved" or "I love because I am a dungngo (beloved)". It operates in a sort of the spirit of "exchange" – "I give you because you give me too". The only problem with this, and this is what it is to be developed into mature love, is loving is triggered by a feeling of being loved, without being loved it does not reciprocate nor give back.

The meaning of mature love is also found in the expression "I am loved because I love" or "I am a dungngo (beloved) because I love". There are some things here to specify. First, the act of loving becomes the pre-requisite in being loved. For a

beloved in order to be a dungngo, he or she must love. Second, it seems it does not matter to be loved, what matter most is to love. To be loved comes only second. The last and the third is the fact that what allows one to be a dungngo (beloved) is the capacity to love. It is in loving that one is called more as a beloved.

Another tendency of dungngo as parental love is utility. A child loves parents because he or she needs them or the parents love the child because they need the child. This is what is called immature love. The meaning of immature love is inside the expression "I love you because I need you". [22] In here, love is given to someone who is needed or useful.

Immature love has to be purified and become a mature love. The meaning of mature love is found in the expression "I need you because I love you". It speaks of the nature of a dungngo (beloved) who is not only loved but needs to love someone. He or she is always in search for his or her object of love (someone to love).

**2.1.3 Dungngo and the object of love.** Dungngo (love) is a consciousness or an orientedness. It is always directed to someone or something (object). It is always extending and reaching towards others and the world. This is so because of the relational character of dungngo (love). To whom this love is oriented?

First, it is given to brothers and sisters. This is called brotherly or sisterly love. [23] This is the love among equals. These brothers and sisters are not only referring to siblings or members of the immediate family. It also includes the brothers and sisters one has in the community. This love is the most fundamental love. This is the love for all humanity. In the religious sense, this is the love of neighbour.

Second, it is directed by parents to their children. This is love for the helpless. This is motherly and fatherly love [24]. For parents loving their children, this is an unconditional affirmation of the child's life and needs. This is the love, care and responsibility that is absolutely necessary for the preservation of the child's life and growth. This is also a teaching to instil in their children the values in raising a family and eventually serving the community.

Third, it is directed to someone desired to be with intimately. This is what is called erotic love [25]. This love is the craving for complete fusion, union with another person. It is exclusive.

Fourth, it is also extended to the self. This is self-love [26]. It is a love for preserving one's integrity and dignity. It is keeping one's core intact. It is almost automatic to love oneself first and foremost. In this sense, self-love is important but has to come second or at least side by side with other objects. This makes this love self-love and not selfishness.

Last and fifth, there is also a love given to God. This is love of God [27]. God is the most desirable good for a person. Just the thought of God tells one to be responsible, to respect, and to love. This may not be more of loving a God whom one cannot know and even can have any solid knowledge and explanation of its existence. It is more of growing and developing in the virtues and teachings that God represents. With these virtues and teachings, one finds to act good and to love truly.

## **2.2 The Practice of Love**

The second part of the paper deals with the practice of love. It does not offer concrete steps in improving love but it would emphasized more the importance of practicing love. With a presentation above of a very noble theory of love, dungngo (love) as practice should be of ultimate concern to each and every individual. This is because some facts of today do not really show that people know how to love or be successful in love. Love is something to be understood and practice in full mastery as possible to bridge the gap between the theory and practice of love. An individual has to make this as his or her commitment.

Here are some of the conditions contributory to the widening gap of theory and practice of love.

Statistics for worldwide figures for 2017 showed that there were close to 800,000 suicides or suicide cases [28]. This is not to forget the unknown number of people attempting suicide. In general, the cause is the absence of love. Some people simply stop loving the self, others and the world, and there was no one there to be with them. There is a very meagre support system for suicide cases. There is no strong provisions for mental health, mandating hospitals to extend services from

medical to mental health. There is also very low budget given to mental hospitals and institutions.

People are simply left alone and isolated. Because of this, problems become so heavy and burdensome; no one would offer help and love. The young are not properly guided because no one would like to take responsibilities. People are slowed down because they feel so alone and reject. This lack of *dungngo* (love) is in particular manifested in family problems, adolescent angst, financial troubles, thwarted love, depression over career disappointments, stress, and others [29].

In marriages among Filipinos, in the span of 10 years 2007-2016, Filipino marriage rate decreased to 14.4 %. This is so since many people are slowly growing in disbelief to institutions and to the sacredness of marriage. Many couples would resort to cohabitation instead of being tied into marriage. There are so many practical considerations into play here. There are also discontent and getting weary on the seemingly pending fulfilment of the promises of institutions and marriage, like: good life, friendship, and partnership “for better or for worst, until death”.

Aside from this indicator, there is the rise of divorce and separation cases in the Philippines. Marriage help lines and support groups have gone extinct. There is few and weak efforts among couples to address marital problems and differences. These couples go for easier solutions: divorce and separation.

Divorce is not yet legal in the country, but there is a strong effort for it to be legalized. On March 19, 2018, the House of Representatives approved on third and final reading House Bill (HB) No. 7303, which seeks to legalize absolute divorce in the country, over a decade after it was introduced during the 13th Congress in 2005. These efforts however are tainted with personal interests by politicians and legislators. These leaders are known to have entered into illicit relationships; and so, to remedy their situations or love-affairs, they have to work on Bills legalizing divorce.

### **2.2.1 Committing oneself to the practice of *dungngo* (love).**

The practice of *dungngo* (love) is for the purpose of achieving perfection. The failure to do so is leading to destruction. Hence, there are at least three things

to have in this process: discipline, concentration, and patience.

The most basic in the practice of love is discipline. With discipline, one has to be integral and cannot be in disarray. It is the ability to put oneself in unison and harmony. The body and the spirit are all together united in activities and responsibilities. The different dimensions of the person (social, spiritual, mental, biological, and others) function together for one goal. There is one heart, one mind and one soul for every step of life.

Concentration is also something one needs to have in the practice of love. It is the ability to focus on the objectives, goals or aims. It is also directing all power and energy to things one wanted to achieved and accomplished.

This focus on the goal includes sensitivity. This is sensitivity to the dignity and feelings of others. As one moves to achieve his or her goal, he or she is to respect others. Others are not to be treated as tools and instruments to promote one’s goal. No one should not be used and abused just to achieve what is desired for.

Concentration also includes knowledge. These are ideas that build up one’s intellect in action and decision-making. It is also paying attention to important lessons, which oftentimes lead to improvement and development in life.

Patience should also be in the practice of love. Love is not to be rushed, and true love does not happen in a day. There is a long process for it, and there is a long wait. Patience therefore is the joy and hope in waiting for true love.

**2.2.2 Love, Courage, and Faith.** Most of the times, the combination of love and courage is patriotism. Because of the love for one’s country, one is courageous to fight for the people against injustices, oppressors, and opportunists. One is empowered to stand up for the truth and defend civil societies and liberal democracies. There are people who would sacrifice family, friendship and partner for the service and love of country. Their love is often expressed in courage. These people would go to war and defend their country from terrorism and invasion. They give their lives for peace, order, freedom and independence.

There are also those who would sacrifice family, friends and relatives for the love and faith to the church and God. This is love of God. They endure long years of formation to learn how to love and serve the Lord. This is how they prepare in loving their faith. They organize people and communities. And most of the times, they put up schools and hospitals for people different to them.

They are sent to missions in unfamiliar places to spread God's words and teachings. These people are courageous too. They sometimes face the threats of imprisonment and other harsh punishments in countries disrespectful to religion, and yet they proceed to do their work diligently. Their love, courage and faith put as one is manifested in their martyrdom.

### **3. CONCLUSION**

Dungngo (love) is relational, transformative and emancipatory. It could be understood further in three time slots. There is the future, the present, and the past. These slots could be the categories through which one can look more into love. These at the same are the points this paper recommends for further research and study.

First, dungngo (love) brings people to think of the future. It makes them realized the importance of preparing and practicing for the time to come. A person looks at one's ability to love. He or she sees imperfections and defects. He or she therefore moves to develop and to improve, a promise of a more perfect and truer love.

This slot is represented by all those hope for a bigger, brighter and better future in love. Love is futural. The philosophies of Plato, Schopenhauer, de Beauvoir, and others speak very well of this love.

Second, dungngo (love) is simply enjoying the presence of the beloved, right here and right now. This is most especially represented by Baruch Spinoza. This slot points to the current or present – "the here and now". Here, love is present.

Finally and the third, love is always validated by something great in the past. There is in the past that allows people to fall in love again. Love is a matter of remaining faithful to an original source of inspiration. This thought is represented by Alain Badiou. Here, love is past.

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