

REPORT ON THE ACADEMIC PROGRAM

[held at the University of Havana, Cuba, Nov. 6-17, 2017]



“Buddhist Ethics and the Social Problems of Contemporary Science”

Presented by Professor Suwanda H J Sugunasiri, University of Toronto, Canadá

Academic Coordinators:

MsC. Maydi Estrada Bayona

Dr. Carlos Jesús Delgado Díaz.

The Department of Philosophy and Political Theory for Mathematics and Natural Sciences, Faculty of Philosophy and History, of the University of Havana, presented the lecture series, "Buddhist ethics and the social problems of *contemporary* science", which was presented by Dr. Suwanda H.J. Sugunasiri, Professor, University of Toronto, Canada, in memory of the scientist Swarna Sugunsiri (1937-2017).

The academic program took place between 6 and 17 November the year 2017 with 40 hours of teaching. It turned out to be a space for exchanges interdisciplinary and intercultural, with a systematic registration of 67 representative professionals of:

1. Institute of Neuroscience of Havana,
2. University of Medical Sciences,
3. Center for Research and Development BioCuba-Farma,
4. Enrique Jose Varona Pedagogical Institute,
5. Ministry of Culture,
6. Latin American Institute of Chess,
7. Culture Institute Juan Marinello,
8. School of Art Paulita Concepcion,
9. Juventud Rebelde Newspaper,
10. Center for Theological Studies Father Loyola;

11. Faculties of Psychology, Journalism; and Philosophy and History, University of Havana.

It was distinctive for the presence of professors from the Departments of Philosophy, Philosophy for Social Sciences and History. The Program was a scientific, interdisciplinary, intercultural and fraternal space between the University of Havana, as host and the University of Toronto in Canada. This marked the guidelines for discussions about the limited conception of science, wisdom and challenges of modern science with its impact on contemporary societies, modeled by an epistemic racism, which also limits our horizons of life.

The series of Seminars on "Buddhist Ethics and the Social Problems of *Contemporary Science*" reflected the assumptions of Buddhist Philosophy and Ethics and their contributions to both the natural and the social sciences. Similarly it allowed determining the elements of connections between the Western and the Eastern world, dialogue starting from the relations of senses and meanings of their codes [symbols, symbolic codes, symbolism], identifying similarities and differences in the focus of expression. The Seminars also contributed to personal development, and directly to the welfare and emotional balance based in the method of introspective awareness, based in the Buddhist technique of meditation. The Seminars provided a holistic and humanistic understanding of reality and the importance of mindfulness of its participants.

This opened a door to a dialogue from other worldviews to understand the existence and relationships between [and among] humans, deepening the study of mind-body dialogue, the mind map, its functions and the infinite possibilities of a healthy mind. Another theme addressed was Bioethics, Buddhist ethics and human dignity from a gender perspective, introducing us also to meditation techniques, ancient knowledge today coming into the scientific stage as knowledge validated in the search for alternatives to social problems and contemporary science.

The academic program had a total of 40 hours spread over two (2) weeks, in 6 seminars and a frequency of 3 weekly meetings - Five conferences and one workshop on meditation:

Academic program details:

Week	Academic activity
Week of 6-10 Nov. 2017	3 lectures
Week of 13-17 Nov 2017	2 lectures 1. Workshop on Meditation

SEMINAR SCHEDULE :

Week of 6-10 November: Monday 6, Wednesday 8, Friday 10.

- I. Rebirth as the empirical basis for the Buddha's Four Noble Truths (Buddhadhamma).
- II. Mind-body communication. "You are what you sense".
- III. The mysteries of the mind: Triune mind in Buddhism.

Week of 13-17 November: Monday 13, Wednesday 15, Friday 17.

- IV. Buddhist ethics and the social problems of contemporary science.
- V. Embryo as person: Buddhism, bioethics and society.
- VI. Workshop: Mindfulness and Buddhist personal ethics (sila).

University - society dialogue

In achieving this objective of wide interest and practical experience that was developed at the Faculty of Philosophy and History at the University of Havana, Talks and Meditation Sessions were in ecological parks, such as the Almendares, with the purpose of awareness about the need to thank the sweet waters and forgive the high levels of pollution to which they have been subjected to, with the presence of about 100 people of the city. Another venue was the Acapulco Theatre where two presentations were offered – one on Buddhist Ethics and the other on the technique of mindfulness meditation – and an encounter with choirs of children as Cantora Coralina, Biomusic (from Paulita Concepcion's school of art) with the presence of 400 people. Another significant encounter was at the O2 Cultural Center where 30 intellectuals explored topics in Nano science, nutrition, agro ecology, community projects and Buddhist and Marxist ethics, with professors from the Faculty of Philosophy and the Host Department, reflecting on mindfulness and healthy nutrition and the complexities of contemporary science, with the participation of Dr. Concepción Campa, Marta Pérez Viña, Carlos Delgado and Maydi Estrada. Another important location for interaction was the area of Cojimar, affected by the hurricane Irma. An opportunity for ecumenism was given when the catholic priest offered his Church for a Buddhist meditation as an exercise in healing body and mind of those affected and the place itself.

Note that the end of the course was at the **Faculty of Philosophy which for the first time, brought together 60 students**, in the cold room to experience in a practical way the method of introspective observation with the technique of mindfulness meditation. All dressed in white, not to imitate any Buddhist temple, as a present journalist said, but to experience in this color the peace of body and mind.

Here is a summary of what the participants share about the Seminars:

We thought it was a brilliant idea of the Faculty of Philosophy and History and of the Department of Philosophy and Political Theory for Natural Science and Mathematics. This exchange of knowledge has been very productive for all that have attended. The Teacher, through his schemes, diagrams and flow charts, and also through examples, manage to deepen into the threshold of the Buddhist teachings, setting out for us the basics of Buddhism, [in a way] understandable to all attendees. With the interventions of Professor Carlos Delgado, and questions and issues introduced by Professor Maydi Estrada, the focus of the discussion to the objectives of the course was well preserved. The interventions of other colleagues as well allowed the dialogue to be not only between Western and Buddhist rationality, but also between the Disciplines represented there.

On a personal level, the Seminars translate into benefits towards spiritual enrichment, individual resizing, and the voyage or quest towards greater concentration, relaxation, self-control and self-awareness, which result in better mental and physical health, as well as the evaluation and improvement of interpersonal and environment relationships.

Professionally, the Professor called upon us to deepen the gaining of knowledge, epistemologies, cultures, ethics, and the need for systematic interdisciplinarity.

In relation to work and social life, the Program brought us the tools to focus more fully on the close interaction between the mind and the body. An important reflection applied to any area of our lives regardless of branch or specialty, is a philosophy that applies to life in general. It also provides for the health of dialogue in our country, that is, to expand our minds to other worldviews, being a little more reconciled with the past and a future.

We congratulate and thank to the Dept. of Philosophy and Socio-Political Theory for the Natural Sciences and Mathematics for the organization of this seminar series and in particular to your academic Coordinator, the MsC. Maydi Estrada Bayona, for the methodology approach of this proposal.

Plurality of voices: what was left with us?

1. Historians Group:

The series of Seminars held between 6 and 15 November, under the auspices of the Department of Philosophy and Political Theory for Natural Sciences and Mathematics, of the Faculty of Philosophy and History, and offered by the Teacher, Swanda H J Sugunasiri, primarily contributed to harmony and peace of the participants. With the call sent out by Professor Maydi Estrada, we felt the need to incorporate and extend

our knowledge about one of the most attractive knowledge emanating from the ancient Asian cultures.

We think that none of us are the same since we received from the hand of the Professor the Teachings of Buddha. Personal and interpersonal dialogue is enriched as we reflect and internalize. Mind-body communication obliges the dialogue as a resource and method of teaching and learning. It is enriching. Identifying with the Pali term DHAMMA is the result of a cognitive process in which the sensitive minds, physical and mental construction itself lead us to understand KAMMA. It is so interesting a process occurring as such, in unison. It was very interesting and worthy of submit it to this necessary dialogue induced in the interaction caused by teaching and learning.

It is our consensus that we believe that the Seminars have enriched our personal lives. Terms like SATTA, meaning both humans and animals, the books of the TIPITAKA, the search for NIBBANA, etc., have allowed us to gain another dimension of knowledge. Perhaps it has contributed to appreciate fully the enjoyment of ‘flowing together’ and understand the meaning of the wheel of life under the word SAMSARA. A beautiful teaching about something that must influence the life of the human being is self-discipline, SILA.

The sum of the teachings we received was valuable. Buddha means knowledge. The Four Noble Truths can help us apprehend the Path, MAGGA, Buddha is the one who knows the reality of life.

2- Group Philosophy professors UH (specialty and natural sciences and mathematics)

For Philosophy, the fruits of universal cultural miscegenation are a permanent investigative challenge. The Cuban academy recognizes the western epistemic and cultural prevalence, also a deficit in research and dialogue about the Eastern cultures.

The presentation on Buddhist Ethics and its contemporary reception has been very useful, both at a personal as well as a professional level. Human biopsychosocial conditioning, evaluated by science and contemporary thought, found epistemological and cultural correspondences, in universal ancestral heirlooms, Buddhism among them. Contemporary social studies indicate interdisciplinary and intercultural nature as an epistemic premise and method in the treatment and understanding of current challenges.

The Holy Word of the Buddha, and of his numerous followers, is kept alive in Sri Lanka. And so the question is how much value does Cuba put on its aborigines, those civilizations following the wisdom of the Earth? How much value does it give to its African and Asian population in its analysis of ethno-nation? Those were able to find their gods in other lands, because they were aware of the world as one, and the forces

of the living nature manifested everywhere for those enough luminous of spirit to find them.

Of particular interest was the Buddha's denial of the existence of a soul, but the mind, Buddhism paralleling Marxism and its materialistic theories about the ideal. So also are the demands of a moral life. For the Teacher [presenting the Seminars], there is neither good nor evil in the Biblical sense: Buddhism teaches us to deal with our decisions and to take responsibility for them. Finally, the consideration of his school about the meaning of life: Life is like a river, and this metaphor with a Heraclitean touch, is used to reaffirm that, just as we cannot say what the end of a river is, equally unfathomable is the beginning and the end of life.

Therefore we believe that Seminars like this present one is of paramount importance. The arrogance of the West seeks to deny all knowledge which does not conform to its rational standards. But then, what is the rationality for the West behind world wars and the Holocaust? If the Program was an encounter with other cultures and ways of thinking, it also provides fair value to all forms of knowledge. The assertions of the Master of the importance of the Buddha resonated about with the importance of Christ for our Jesuit friend [participating in the Seminars]. And could I also emphasize the importance of Marx, Fidel and Marti, who, though not gods, remain in our hearts as Suns of the moral world, the same moral life that was so emphatically defended by the Master about those intending to reach enlightenment.

For everyone, the religious, or the ideological, climate that prevailed [throughout the Seminars] was a respectful dialogue and not a dogmatic imposition.

3 - OM meditation group

A better understanding of Buddhist philosophy fills gaps in the knowledge of the development of the human being as a bio-psycho-social species. Contemporary science has now been offered an alternative view as regards the development of humanity, taking a different approach to explain the development of life on Earth, where it is taken a biological, non-spiritual approach as a fundamental basis to explain the emergence of life. This worldview is related with a set of opinions and images, conditioning the individual in relation to the world that surrounds us, and to our reality, including the social context and culture. The mind concept and its implications or direct relationships with reality was very well captured by the Teacher via the charts and flow diagrams. It was a way to expand the mind and see reality from another point of view, closely related to the psyche of man and neuroscience. Buddhism presents a method, a lesson of how to get to the truth, showing the different levels of it. Those who have identified with Buddhism think that studying it, applying it helps us to be better human beings. Although being ordained as a monk is a very strong challenge in our socio-cultural environment.

A reflection about the biological uniqueness of an individual tells us that it is structured by its genetic code contained in each of our cells, where the set of unique characteristics give the identity. The expression of genetic potential will depend on the emotional past and the specific eco-factors that stimulate or inhibit their development. By mirror neurons, we know the intentions and motivations of another person, reflect our being in the emotional mirror of the other, activate our spiritual intelligence and open a space for reconciliation between reason and the spirit.

The human being is an emotional being, and this visceral and mental nature is closely related to the reptilian brain, the limbic or the emotional and with the neo cortex or upper brain and throughout the body. Emotions act on the CNS and within this in the autonomic nervous system responsible for the regulation and operation of the vital organs.

The Seminars gave us the opportunity to open new doors to delve into these topics and interpret clearly how the human brain works according to its six senses, as well as philosophical knowledge of other cultures in different societies.

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