



Apoha: Buddhist Nominalism and Human Cognition

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Apoha: Buddhist Nominalism and Human Cognition From Columbia University Press

When we understand that something is a pot, is it because of one property that all pots share? This seems unlikely, but without this common essence, it is difficult to see how we could teach someone to use the word "pot" or to see something as *a* pot. The Buddhist apoha theory tries to resolve this dilemma, first, by rejecting properties such as "potness" and, then, by claiming that the element uniting all pots is their very difference from all non-pots. In other words, when we seek out a pot, we select an object that is not a non-pot, and we repeat this practice with all other items and expressions.

Writing from the vantage points of history, philosophy, and cognitive science, the contributors to this volume clarify the nominalist apoha theory and explore the relationship between apoha and the scientific study of human cognition. They engage throughout in a lively debate over the theory's legitimacy. Classical Indian philosophers challenged the apoha theory's legitimacy, believing instead in the existence of enduring essences. Seeking to settle this controversy, essays explore whether apoha offers new and workable solutions to problems in the scientific study of human cognition. They show that the work of generations of Indian philosophers can add much toward the resolution of persistent conundrums in analytic philosophy and cognitive science.

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Editorial Review

Review

This is a landmark work in apoha theory and Indian epistemology and logic. The most distinguished contemporary scholars in this field have collaborated on a set of essays notable not only for their philological erudition and philosophical acuity but also for the fact that they engage one another so productively. Together they illuminate this topic more than any previous scholarship. Essential reading.

(Jay Garfield, author of *Pointing at the Moon: Buddhism, Logic, Analytic Philosophy*)

This volume hugely advances our understanding of one of the most complex and elusive doctrines of the Indo-Tibetan Buddhist tradition while at the same time giving contemporary philosophers and cognitive scientists some novel resources for thinking through basic problems in the understanding of language and cognition. These essays represent not only exemplary philological interpretations of Sanskrit and Tibetan philosophical texts but also venturesome and philosophically sophisticated attempts to understand what this first-millennium doctrine might teach us today. This collection is sure to be a touchstone for future work in several fields, including Buddhist philosophy, the philosophy of language and philosophy of mind, and studies in Buddhism and cognitive science.

(Dan Arnold, author of *Buddhists, Brahmins, and Belief: Epistemology in South Asian Philosophy of Religion*)

A generous addition to the field of Buddhist logic and epistemology as well as a brilliant exemplar of the virtues and incalculable value of rigorous scholarly discourse... South method and impeccable style.

(*Philosophy East and West*)

Every entry shows an impressive degree of scholarship and sophistication in thinking, and all the entries are well written.

(*Journal of American Oriental Society*)

About the Author

Mark Siderits is professor of philosophy at Seoul National University and the author of *Indian Philosophy of Language, Personal Identity and Buddhist Philosophy*, and *Buddhism as Philosophy*. Tom Tillemans is professor of Buddhist studies at the University of Lausanne, Switzerland. His books include *Scripture, Logic, Language: Essays on Dharmakirti and His Tibetan Successors*. Arindam Chakrabarti is professor of philosophy at the University of Hawai'i. He is the author of *Denying Existence: The Logic, Epistemology, and Pragmatics of Negative Existentials and Fictional Discourse*.

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