

Introduction to Buddhist Logic (©2017-2020)

Lecture 5: Beginning of Buddhist Logical Method

In the last reviewing lecture, we have made some revisions regarding the previous 3 lectures during which we have discussed the historical background, the relationship between Indian and Buddhist logic and the foundation of Buddhist logic. From the previous lectures, we have learned that generally speaking, Indian logic and Buddhist logic shared the same historical context and intellectual background of the broad Indian philosophical tradition. Furthermore, it was based on the traditional Indian logical method that Buddhist philosophers such as Asaṅga, Vasubandhu, Dignāga and Dharmakīrti would systematize and develop Buddhist logical method later on. We have also discussed some important Indian philosophers such as Gautama and Vātsyāyana, and the early Buddhist philosopher such as Nāgārjuna as the early sources of Buddhist logical system. In this lecture, we shall discuss two more Buddhist philosophers as the founders of Buddhist logical system.

Asaṅga: a biography sketch

Asaṅga was one of the most important Buddhist philosophers that not only bridged the gap between Nāgārjuna and later Buddhist philosophers but also together with his brother, Vasubandhu, he laid down the foundation for the Yogācāra philosophy. Although he is a well-known Buddhist scholar, his identity and in particular his intellectual works cannot be easily settled.

By tradition, the encyclopedic work *Yogācārabhūmi-śāstra* is attributed to Asaṅga, at least it was co-authored by him. Such an attribution is by no means certain, though. Legend has it that after discussed his philosophical questions with Bodhisattva Maitreya, they both collaborated on a grand work of Yogācāra philosophy, which is the *Yogācārabhūmi-śāstra*. The work is important for Buddhist philosophy of consciousness and phenomenology. But it is even more important for Buddhist logic, for in one section (#15/chapter 15), the discussion is about logical reasoning and its development history.

As Stcherbatsky observes, “Asaṅga was probably the first Buddhist writer who introduced the theory of five-membered syllogism of the Naiyāyiks into the practice of Buddhist circles. He also established a body of rules on the art of debate, not materially different from the rules prescribed in the Nyāya school. He does not seem to have been very original in the domain of logic and dialectics”. (Stcherbatsky, 1993:29) So here it may be noticed that Asaṅga in effect initiated the beginning of Buddhist recognition of logical method as a important way of philosophical inquiry.

Vasubandhu: biographical sketch

Perhaps we are now fortunately to have access to a large part of the life of a Buddhist philosophical giant – Vasubandhu. First of all, he can be dated around 4th century CE, and his life was closely associated with the court of Gupta Dynasty of ancient India. He is said to have been a royal tutor to the crown prince and queen of King Chandragupta the Second (Vikramaditya, r. 380-415). Secondly, Vasubandhu’s fame is compounded by the fact that he came from a family of scholarly tradition. At least one of his brothers was an established scholar in his own right. His name, of course, is Asaṅga. Because there are so many treatises attributed to Vasubandhu, the epithet “master of one thousand treatises”, which is generally bestowed to Nāgārjuna, is also designated to Vasubandhu.

As you may have learned, Vasubandhu is usually regarded, with his brother Asaṅga, as a master of Yogācāra philosophy. But it is important to remember that he also compiled many philosophical tracts of different nature, such as treatise of logical reasoning. Specifically, his treatise, which entitled *Vādaśāstra* or *Rules of Argumentation*, is important in two ways. First, the treatise is the first independent philosophical tract that dealt with logical reasoning. Also, the treatise formulated some rules that are required for a valid logical argument.

In addition to that, because of the teacher-pupil relation between Vasubandhu and the founder of Buddhist logic system, Dignāga, the former is considered as the precursor of Buddhist logical system. Furthermore, through Dignāga's pupil Īśvarasena, there is also a link between Vasubandhu and the other important Buddhist logician – Dharmakīrti.

Treatise: *Vādaśāstra* = *Rules of Argumentation*

Reading suggestions:

If you have read some page of Stcherbatsky's *Buddhist Logic*, in particular volume one, you will notice that there are a lot of topics concerning Buddhist philosophy in general and logic in particular. But while inclusiveness is a good thing, this can be also problematic. For one thing, it is difficult to grasp so many ideas and then synthesize them. So may I suggest you to read as much as you can, in particular those recommended every week. As for other indirectly relevant ideas, you can always read late or when necessary.

For this week, it would be a good idea to review some previously read pages in the introduction. For instance, pages from 27-31 might be reread, with closer attention paid to Asaṅga and Vasubandhu. When you are reviewing the previous readings, please also have a look at the Part I, section 2-7 (pp.62-74), which will give you some idea about knowledge, means of knowledge and reality in Indian philosophical tradition in general and in Buddhist philosophy and logic in particular.

For this week, we need to take a twofold approach: general reading and detailed reading. The general reading means that you just need to have a look at the pages and be familiar with the contents. Detailed reading, on the other hand, should be read word by word and by the end of your reading, have a general understanding of what you have read.

As for the general reading, please have a look at the Part II, Chapter 3: Sense-Perception (pp.146-180), Part III, Chapter 2: Inference (pp. 231-274), and Chapter 3: Syllogism (pp. 275-319).

Please do not be intimidated by those many pages, for we will read them again and again in the forthcoming lectures. At this stage, you only need to be familiar with the contents if some of you have not had a proper look at the 1st volume of our textbook.

As for the detailed reading, please read those pages word by word and if you do not understand, try again until you get the main ideas. Part II, Chapter 3: Sense-Perception, Section 5 (pp.169-175), Part III, Chapter 2: Inference, Sections 2-5 (pp. 233-242), and Chapter 3: Syllogism, Section 1-4 (pp. 275-287). Those underlined pages should be read in detail.

In the abovementioned pages, some ideas, such as inference and syllogism, and the Buddhist logical structure/method, as well as some classical examples are provided. You should read those pages alongside the PPTs and lecture notes. In that way, the most important concepts of Buddhist logical reasoning would be very easy to understand.

Finally, you should read the reference book: *Logic: An Introduction*, whenever you have some spare time. And as recommended, pay particular attention to the exercises at the end of each chapter. It is said that sometimes it is easy to learn by doing it. With learning logic reasoning, certainly some sort of exercising with a pencil and an eraser is highly recommended.