



Against a Hindu God: Buddhist Philosophy of Religion in India

By Parimal G. Patil

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Philosophical arguments for and against the existence of God have been crucial to Euro-American and South Asian philosophers for over a millennium. Critical to the history of philosophy in India, were the centuries-long arguments between Buddhist and Hindu philosophers about the existence of a God-like being called Isvara and the religious epistemology used to support them. By focusing on the work of Ratnakirti, one of the last great Buddhist philosophers of India, and his arguments against his Hindu opponents, Parimal G. Patil illuminates South Asian intellectual practices and the nature of philosophy during the final phase of Buddhism in India.

Based at the famous university of Vikramasila, Ratnakirti brought the full range of Buddhist philosophical resources to bear on his critique of his Hindu opponents' cosmological/design argument. At stake in his critique was nothing less than the nature of inferential reasoning, the metaphysics of epistemology, and the relevance of philosophy to the practice of religion. In developing a proper comparative approach to the philosophy of religion, Patil transcends the disciplinary boundaries of religious studies, philosophy, and South Asian studies and applies the remarkable work of philosophers like Ratnakirti to contemporary issues in philosophy and religion.

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Editorial Review

Review

" Against a Hindu God is a book about the late Indian critiques of Brahmanical conceptions of God. But more than just a study of Buddhist philosophers like Ratnakirti, Parimal G. Patil is interested in what late medieval Indian philosophers have to say to the disciplines of philosophy, theology, religious studies, and South Asian studies. Utilizing the concepts and vocabulary of Sanskrit grammatical theory, Patil constructs a trans-disciplinary space for the comparative philosophy of religion, a vision of the discipline that is both creative and compelling. Scholars routinely note that Buddhist logical and epistemological theories exist in the service of a religious agenda, but few have explained the soteriological dimensions of Buddhist philosophy as clearly as Patil does in this work. A major contribution to the fields of Buddhist and comparative philosophy." --

(Jose Ignacio Cabezon, University of California at Santa Barbara)

A penetrating study.

(Stephen Phillips *H-Buddhism*)

...an inviting introduction to the central concerns of Indian forms of logic and to some of its most excellent epistemology,

(Patrick McAllister *Journal of Hindu Studies*)

This is a brilliant, erudite, formidable, and intricately argued first book, which shows the arrival of an outstanding Indologist and philosopher. The book calls for concentration and an eye for detail, but it amply rewards the reader.

(Chakravarthi Ram-Prasad *Philosophy East and West*)

...a fascinating and important book...

(Michael D. Nichols *Journal of Buddhist Ethics*)

Patil sets a high standard for comparative philosophy. In addition, the work provides a compelling, new interpretation of the place of philosophy on the Buddhist path to liberation.

(Jonathan C. Gold *International Journal of Hindu Studies*)

Review

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(José Ignacio Cabezón, XIVth Dalai Lama Professor of Tibetan Buddhism and Cultural Studies, University of California at Santa Barbara)

This book combines philological erudition and precision, philosophical sophistication and acuity, with subtle methodological and historical reflection. Parimal G. Patil presents a masterful philosophical exposition of Ratnakirti's critique of Nyaya arguments for the existence of God, but he does much more than this. By exploring its philosophical context, he demonstrates the richness of the premodern Indian philosophical scene, the relevance of Buddhist-Nyaya debates for contemporary philosophy, the importance of cross-cultural scholarship for philosophy, and the value of philosophy for understanding the religious traditions of South Asia. This book will be of great interest to scholars of philosophy, religion, and South Asia and to all those interested in the methodology of global scholarship.

(Jay L. Garfield, Doris Silbert Professor in the Humanities, Smith College)

Parimal G. Patil's magisterial study of eleventh-century Indian Buddhist anti-God dialectics offers an authentic glimpse of the highly sophisticated epistemological argumentation between theist Nyaya-Vaisesika and atheist Buddhist philosophers. Not just specialists in Indian, Buddhist, and comparative philosophy, but all serious researchers in epistemology, philosophical theology, and metaphysics will profit from this uncompromisingly rigorous monograph. If this does not demolish the ignorant but popular stereotype of Indian philosophy as mushy logic-shunning spiritual wisdom, then nothing ever will.

(Arindam Chakrabarti, professor of philosophy, University of Hawaii and the National Institute of Advanced Studies, Bangalore)

About the Author

Parimal G. Patil is John L. Loeb Associate Professor of the Humanities at Harvard University.

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