



APOHA

BUDDHIST NOMINALISM
AND HUMAN COGNITION

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Dignāga's Apoha Theory

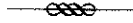
ITS PRESUPPOSITIONS AND MAIN THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS

* Ole Pind *

There is hardly a single aspect of Dignāga's philosophy that has generated as lively a controversy on the Indian philosophical scene as his apoha theory. Although it is possible to form an idea of the nature of this debate through the writings of Uddyotakara, Kumārila, and Mallavādin, who each wrote detailed refutations of Dignāga's views, most of the arguments against the apoha theory remain fairly obscure as long as they are not studied with reference to their proper philosophical context: Dignāga's own writings. Unfortunately, most of his works on epistemology and logic are no longer extant in their original Sanskrit versions, and the few that have survived can only be studied in their Chinese or Tibetan translations and a handful of Sanskrit fragments found scattered in the relevant literature. The loss of the greater part of Dignāga's works may seem paradoxical in view of his seminal influence upon the development of Buddhist epistemology (*pramāṇavāda*). As it is, the only extant Dignāgan work that makes it possible to form a comprehensive view of his epistemology and logic is the *Pramāṇasamuccaya* (PS), of which the fifth chapter is specifically devoted to an exposition of the apoha theory.¹

As the title indicates, Dignāga composed PS as a compendium of his works on epistemology and logic. The main idea was evidently to provide scholars and students with a summary of his theory of the means of knowledge (*pramāṇavāda*), assuming that if needed they would refer to the more detailed expositions of his other works. The PS is thus marked by extreme economy of exposition and tantalizing ellipsis. Although it has been as-

sumed that it records the final stage of development of Dignāga's thought, we cannot a priori exclude the possibility that he composed other works after PS. Whatever may have been the case, the fact remains that the major part of his works is irretrievably lost and that the "Examination of Apoha" (*apohaparīkṣā*) chapter of PS remains the only extant exposition of his philosophy of language.² Before attempting a discussion of the basic theoretical presuppositions of this chapter, it would be interesting to address the question of its sources.



Judging from the numerous parallels between PS and the *Nyāyamukha* (NM), Dignāga appears to have written PS in the form of a patchwork of more or less edited text from works he had written earlier. In the introduction to PS, he mentions NM as one of the sources he exploited, and in the concluding chapter he refers readers who want a more detailed criticism of the doctrines advocated by the philosophical systems of Nyāya, Vaiśeṣika, and Sāṃkhya to three "Examinations" (*parīkṣā*): (1) *Nyāyaparīkṣā*; (2) *Vaiśeṣikaparīkṣā*; and (3) *Sāṃkhyaparīkṣā* (the last of which is also mentioned in NM). It is evident, however, that Dignāga did not exploit only these works. The "Examination of Apoha" chapter is probably largely based upon the *Sāmānyaparīkṣā* (SP), fragments of which are quoted by Siṃhasūri in his commentary, *Nayacakravṛtti* (NCV), on Mallavādin's *Nayakakra* (NC) (v. NCV p. 628, 7–8), thus indicating that Mallavādin, at least to some extent, based his criticism of Dignāga's philosophy of language upon the *Sāmānyaparīkṣā* (SP), as did probably Uddyotakara. It thus seems reasonable to assume that the scope of the problems dealt with in the SP is to a large extent identical with that treated in the "Examination of Apoha." It is possible to form an idea of some of the questions that Dignāga addressed in SP from a reference in Dharmakīrti's *Pramāṇavārttikasvavṛtti* where he deals with the question of whether a term denoting a particular feature (*viśeṣaśabda*) such as "cow" (*go*) at the same time applies to general features like existence (*sattā*), substanceness (*dravyatva*), etc., that are concomitant features of the entity cow. Dharmakīrti answers that this assumption has already been rejected by the Ācārya (*nirloṭhitam caitad ācāryeṇa*; PVSV, ed. Gnoli, 89, 6). According to Kaṇvakagomin, he is referring to *Sāmānyaparīkṣā* and other Dignāgan works.³ As one would expect, Dignāga deals with the same problem in the "Examination of Apoha." The idea is that a term denoting a particular feature only applies to this particular feature. However,

since a word like "cow" denotes an object that is defined by a hierarchy of concomitant general features, the latter are by implication indicated by the former. This analysis is based upon the principle that it is possible to deduce a set of general features from a term denoting a particular feature if they have a well-defined place, according to their extension, in a conceptual hierarchy of terms. Questions relating to taxonomy were of great interest to Dignāga; in fact, a substantial part of PS V is devoted to the analysis of the possible relations between terms denoting the general features of a thing and their subextensions. Another work dealing with the apoha theory is *Dvādaśaśatikā*, which appears to be quoted by Dharmakīrti in the *Pramānavārttikasvavṛtti*.⁴ It is clear from the few quotations ascribed to Dignāga's *Hetumukha* that he also addressed the question of *anyāpoha* in this work. Other Dignāgan works dealing with *apohavāda* are not known.



According to Dignāga's general formulation of the apoha theory at the very beginning of the "Examination of Apoha," any given word (*śabda*) expresses its meaning (*svārtha*) through exclusion of the meanings of other words (*anyāpoha*). In this regard the sign function of the word is said to be analogous to the function of the inferential indicator. Elsewhere Dignāga claims that a word expresses its meaning through exclusion of other words (*śabdāntarāpoha*), thus emphasizing the functional symmetry between the word (*śabda*) itself—formally a configuration of phonemes—and its corresponding reference (*artha*).⁵ Dignāga's apoha theory thus stands out as a unified semantic theory dealing with the word not only in terms of its content (*śabdārtha*), but also in terms of its being an expression (*śabda*) invested with meaning (*vācaka*). Before addressing the problem of the theoretical implications of the apoha theory, it would seem necessary to briefly review a number of features that are fundamental to Dignāga's epistemology.

Dignāga's thinking evolves, as is well known, from a fundamental dichotomy: the opposition between the realm of particulars (*svalakṣaṇa*) and the realm of universals (*sāmānyalakṣaṇa*). This dichotomy constitutes the basic theoretical presupposition of his epistemology, thus defining its nature and scope. The realm of particulars consists of any given object as it is reflected in sensation (*pratyakṣa*). Sensation, as such, is restricted to individual occurrences of any given entity (*svalakṣaṇa*), which, by definition, is beyond linguistic representation and thus inexpressible.⁶ In contrast to the realm of particulars, the realm of universals is exclusively defined in terms

of abstract types. It consists of those generalized objects (*sāmānya*) that are indispensable for making correct inferences (*anumāna*) or—structurally amounting to the same thing—for obtaining knowledge through verbal communication (*śabda*). The sign, whether it is the inferential indicator (*liṅga, hetu*) or the word (*śabda*), does not primarily concern that particular indicator and indicated or that particular word and signified object, but the invariable relationship (*avinābhāva, sahabhāva, sambandha*) that holds between any occurrence of, for example, smoke and fire, or of substance (*dravya*) and existence (*sattā*), or between any occurrence of, for example, the word “cow” (*gośabda*) and the signified object cow (*go*). Thus, the indicator or the word is the type and not the token or occurrence. Things are only definable in relation to their type. The bare individuals, that is, particulars (*svalakṣaṇa*), remain outside the reach of signs.⁷ This means that the word or the inferential indicator cannot convey a concept of the individuals in a form that accounts for their individuality, but it can do so in a general form, that is, through the types that are instantiated through individual occurrences, for example, of smoke and fire or of the word “cow” and the denotation cow. Although types are recognized through their realizations in concrete instances, they are not definable in terms of their realizations: they can only be defined in terms of what they are not, that is, through negation (*nivṛtti, pratishedha*) or exclusion (*apoha, vyavaccheda, vyāvṛtti*) of their complements (*anya*). Thus, the sign function of the word or the logical indicator is constituted by a relation between two generalized types—in the case of the word between the signified object’s generalized type (*arthasāmānya*) and the word’s generalized type (*śabdasāmānya*)—the natures of which are established through exclusion of the other. Dignāga appears to regard *arthasāmānya* as a cognitive image (*ākāra*) having the characteristic of an abstract type, that is, a universal (*sāmānyalakṣaṇa*), being located in the mind. It contrasts with the word’s individual reference (*arthaviśeṣa*), which belongs to the domain of individuals and therefore is, by definition, inexpressible.⁸

Although Dignāga never touches on the question of the properties of the word type (*śabdasāmānya*), we must assume that it is characterized by the same abstract cognitive features as the object type (*arthasāmānya*). The word thus unites two abstract images, that is, an acoustic image and a representational image, which together constitute the sign function, whereas the corresponding relation between individual signified objects (*arthaviśeṣa*) and individual words (*śabdaviśeṣa*) belongs to the domain of individuals and thus cannot constitute a sign function. This is the idea underlying the following verse, which Indian writers on Dignāga’s *apoha*

doctrine often quote when discussing his view on words (*śabda*). It stems from one of his lost works, presumably the *Sāmānyaparīkṣā* (SP):

It is not claimed that there is a signifier-signified relationship between an individual signified object and an individual word (*arthasābdaviśeṣa*) because the [individual signified object and individual word] have not previously been observed [together]; their common feature [i.e., the *arthasāmānya* and the *śabdasāmānya*], however, can be taught.⁹



Although it is not absolutely clear to what extent Dignāga's formulation of the apoha theory is indebted to contemporary schools of philosophy, this much is certain: that it represents Dignāga's solution to the epistemological problems raised by his rejection of the idea that universals (*jāti* or *sāmānya*) are real entities.¹⁰ They were conceived by the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika school as ubiquitous entities inherent in substances (*dravya*), thereby qualifying them (*viśiṣṭa*) as belonging to a certain class of things having certain distinctive features. Indeed, the scope of the apoha theory only becomes fully understandable when we realize that Dignāga used exclusions of others (*anyāpoha*) as a substitute for universals, in contexts where the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika school of philosophy would formulate its own theories with reference to real universals. This hypothesis is confirmed not only by the "Examination of Apoha" chapter itself but also by the writings of Dignāga's main critics. In fact, most of the fifth chapter of PS is concerned with analyzing the theoretical problems that follow from the assumption that the ground of application (*pravṛttinimitta*) of any given word is a universal. Although Dignāga and subsequent Buddhist philosophers could easily show that the assumption that universals are real entities has absurd consequences, it is nonetheless clear that the rejection of universals must have caused a serious epistemological problem, which they were forced to address. However, the moot point is what motivated Dignāga to substitute exclusions of others (*anyāpoha*) for universals.

Commenting upon the introductory verse of the "Examination of Apoha," Dignāga writes,

The word (*śabda*)—which is connected, by virtue of being invariably concomitant (*avinābhāvīva-sambandha*), with some attribute (*aṅga*) of the object (*viśaya*) to which it is applied (*prayujyate*)—indicates (*dyotayati*) this

[attribute] by excluding other signified objects (*arthāntaravyavaccheda*) just as [the inferential indicator] “the quality of being produced” [indicates its proper signified object through exclusion of other signified objects], etc.

This paragraph introduces a number of theoretically important concepts, of which the concept of the word's connection with its signified object in terms of their being invariably concomitant is crucial because a correct understanding of its implications throws light on one of the most important aspects of the apoha theory: the question of how to justify the existence of a universally valid connection between any given word and its reference or any given inferential indicator and the indicated property. As appears from the introductory statement and numerous parallel instances in PS, Dignāga claims that the function of the word is identical with that of the inferential indicator, in the sense that knowledge deriving from verbal communication (*śābda*) is inferential like knowledge stemming from an inference (*anumāna*). The condition of its being correct knowledge, however, is that there be an invariable connection between the sign—the word or the inferential indicator—and the signified. It is among other things this question to which the apoha theory, according to Dignāga, is a solution. If we understand his solution to this problem, it becomes easier to understand other features of the theory.



How is such an invariable connection established? There is good reason to believe that the tradition that Dignāga opposed referred to universals as a means of establishing such connections. It appears indirectly from a revealing passage in the *vṛtti* ad PS II 16, in which Dignāga shows the absurd consequences of the assumption that universals are real entities, that certain philosophers attempted to solve the problem of how to justify the existence of universally valid connections between properties (e.g., between smokeness and fireness) by claiming that knowing a universal to be resident in a single substratum is equivalent to knowing it to be resident in all.¹¹ This claim is only understandable in a philosophical context in which it was assumed that universals always instantiate in the same way. Hence, they could serve as a means of establishing universally valid connections of the kind that were required by the logical theory of the period. However, if one rejects the idea of the universal as untenable, one is left with

the problem of accounting for the possibility of universally valid connections. Dignāga evidently solved this fundamental epistemological problem by relying upon exclusion of others (*anyāpoha*). In the context of Dignāga's *reductio ad absurdum* of the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika and Sāṃkhya view of what constitutes a universal, it is interesting to notice that he rejects, in the immediately preceding paragraph, the possibility of affirmation (*vidhi*)—as opposed to negation (*pratiṣedha*) or exclusion (*apoha*)—which would seem to indicate that the question of affirmation traditionally was linked up with the assumption of real universals.¹² The reason why affirmation is impossible is, as Dignāga explains in the commentary ad PS II.15,¹³ that individual occurrences are always context bound and therefore cannot assume the role of being a type. If one were to establish an invariable connection between, for example, smoke and fire, on the basis of their individual occurrences, it would never be universally valid, since its form would be restricted to the perception of the properties of that particular smoke and that particular fire, in the same way that sensation (*pratyakṣa*) by necessity is restricted to individual objects. Therefore, he concludes that such relations cannot be formulated in an affirmative form that is universally valid (*vidhi*)—which by implication involves the joint presence (*anvaya*), that is, concordance, of indicator and indicated and therefore is restricted to individual occurrences of things—but they can be formulated in terms of exclusion of other, which basically generalizes joint absence, or difference (*vyatireka*). Thus, concordance and difference do not have the same force, as noted by a number of Dignāga's critics: difference is primary (*pradhāna*).

In PS V.34 (q.v.)¹⁴ he addresses in greater detail the epistemological question of what constitutes exclusion of other:

Since it is not observed [to apply] to the signified objects of other words, and since, moreover (*api*), it is observed [to apply] to a member (*aṃśa*) of [the class of] its own signified objects, the word's connection [with its signified object] is easy to make (*sambandhasaukarya*) and there is no uncertainty (*vyabhicāritā*). (34)

For (*hi*) *anvaya* ("concordance," "joint presence") and *vyatireka* ("difference," "joint absence") are what enables a word to denote its signified objects. And these two are: its occurrence (*vṛtti*) in the homologous cases (*tulya*) and its nonoccurrence (*avṛtti*) in the heterologous cases (*atulya*). Now, its occurrence in the homologous cases certainly cannot (*nāvaśyam*) be stated (*ākhyeyā*) for all (*sarvatra*) [the homologous cases], but [it can be stated] for some (*kvaśid*), because, as the [number of] signi-

fied objects (*artha*) is infinite (*ānanta*), such a statement is impossible (*ākhyānāsambhava*). It is possible, however, to indicate its nonoccurrence in the heterologous, even though they are infinite, merely through its not being observed [(*adarśanamātra*) in the heterologous]. And precisely therefore (*ata eva*) it is explained that since it is not observed [to occur] in any other cases (*anyatra*) but its proper relata (*svasambandhin*), the fact that [a word] denotes its own signified object is an inference based on its exclusion of those [other cases] (*tadvyavacchedānumāna*). Indeed, if the inference were by means of concordance (*anvayadvāreṇa*), the word "tree" (*vrkṣaśabda*) would not lead to any doubts about whether the same (*ekasmin*) entity (*vastuni*) is a "Śiṃśapā" [tree] or the like. Just like that doubt (*saṃśayavat*), there would also be doubts about whether it has earthenness (*pārthivatva*) and substanceness (*dravyatva*), etc. However, since the word "tree" is not observed [to apply] to things that are nonearthen (*apārthiva*), etc., the inference is only through difference (*vyatireka*).

This passage contains Dignāga's answer to the problem of how to justify a valid connection between types. The idea is that to establish a connection between the word and its denotation, one has to proceed by way of induction, which in the Indian philosophical context means through the observation of concordance (*anvaya*) and difference (*vyatireka*) of the two objects—the word and its signified object or the inferential indicator and the indicated—through which the types are realized. This procedure entails a division of things into two sets: a set of similar things (*tulya*) and a set of dissimilar things (*atulya*). Thus, for instance, the word "tree" is only observed to apply to any member of the set of trees, whereas it never applies to things that are members of the dissimilar set, that is, nontrees. Complete induction through *anvaya*, however, is ruled out a priori because it is not possible to observe the connection, in time and space, between all individual occurrences of, for example, the word "tree" and individual trees because they are infinite. Dignāga therefore suggests that one can establish a connection with reference to the mere fact that the word "tree" is not observed to apply to what is not a tree. The mere fact that the word is not observed (*adarśanamātra*) to apply to things that are dissimilar to the things through which its meaning is realized can be generalized so as to hold for everything dissimilar to the object to which the word "tree" is applied. The meaning of a term thus becomes equivalent to an inference based upon the exclusion from its scope of what it does not denote (*vyavacchedānumāna*). Dignāga illustrates his point by recalling the fact that if the meaning of the word "tree" were established through concordance (*anvaya*) there would be no doubt about the mental image (*ākāra*) it would evoke in a given case.

There is doubt, however, because the usage of the word "tree" does not evoke an image of a particular kind of tree, it only conveys a general notion of *treeness* that applies to all kinds of trees. However, since the word "tree" applies to an entity that is defined by concomitant features like *existence* (*sattā*), *substanteness* (*dravyatva*), *earthenness* (*pārthivatva*), etc.—its so-called *relata* (*sambandhin*) or *adjuncts* (*anubandhin*)—it is clear that they are indicated as well, provided that they have a well-defined place in the hierarchy of terms defining the entity in question. Thus, for instance, *earthenness* (*pārthivatva*), which is a subextension of *substanteness* (*dravyatva*), indicates the latter, which in turn indicates *existence* (*sattā*) because whatever is earthen (*pārthiva*) is also a substance (*dravya*), and whatever is a substance is also existent (*sat*). The underlying idea is that if the terms in a systematic hierarchy giving the essential attributes of a certain entity are all coreferential, they are logically related according to their extension, so that it is possible to infer other attributes from any given term denoting one of their subextensions. It is this fact to which Dignāga refers in the introductory paragraph of the "Examination of Apoha" where he introduces the term *aṅga*, the Dignāgan term for any given attribute. It is obvious that Dharmakīrti's concept of reasons that are essential properties (*svabhāvahetu*) is indebted to Dignāga on this point. In fact, the whole question of *svabhāvahetu* centers on the coreferentiality (*sāmānādhikaraṇya*) of a systematic hierarchy of terms defining a particular entity, in other words, their nondifference (*abheda*), that is, their syntactical agreement.¹⁵

Dignāga's view that mere nonobservation (*adarśanamātra*) is constitutive of the invariable connection between the indicator and the indicated or of the connection between the word and its reference raises a number of complicated epistemological issues. These can be followed from Pāṇini's definition of elision (*adarśanaḥ lopah*; Astdh I.1.60) through Dignāga's alleged pupil Īśvarasena's theory of mere absence of perception (*upalambhābhāvamātra*)¹⁶ to Dharmakīrti's theory of nonperception (*anupalabdhi*). Dharmakīrti, however, breaks with the Dignāgan tradition, because in contrast to Dignāga, who for theoretical reasons takes difference (*vyatireka*, i.e., "joint absence") to be the principal factor in establishing the universal concomitance, Dharmakīrti clearly regards concordance (*anvaya*, i.e., "joint presence") and difference (*vyatireka*) as having the same force.¹⁷



It is obvious that Dignāga's treatment of the problem of the feasibility of establishing an invariable connection between the word and its signified

object is indebted to his logical theory. Indeed, the way in which he deals with this vital problem is analogous to his treatment of the second and third members of the logical canon: the so-called triply characterized logical reason (*trilaksanahetu*). In the context of Dignāga's logical theory, the question of the invariable connection naturally belongs in the context of the exemplification (*dr̥ṣṭānta*), the so-called elucidation (*pradarśana*), which was used for stating the invariable connection. It is therefore not at all surprising to find that Dignāga claims in the fourth chapter of PS, which is devoted to a discussion of the nature of the exemplification, that pervasion (*vyāpti*) can only be stated in terms of exclusion of other (Kitagawa 1973, 518). In fact, the Dignāgan use of the delimitative particle *eva* as a means of clarifying the character of the formulation of the triply characterized reason is clearly a corollary of exclusion. This is confirmed by the concise but highly interesting *vṛtti* on 38c-d of the "Examination of Apoha," where Dignāga discusses the relationship between concordance and difference:

Again, if the word were to denote its signified object without relying upon (*anapeksya*) a negation of other signified objects (*arthāntaranivṛtti*), in that case

it would be established exclusively (*eva*) through *anvaya* ("concordance," "joint presence") [with its signified object]. (38c)

Rather when a word denotes its signified object, it would not be through *anvaya* as well as *vyatireka* ("difference," "joint absence"). Now, this is claimed to be the case. However, since the denotation (*abhidhāna*) works by restricting either [a word] or both [words in a proposition] (*anyatarobhayāvadhāraṇa*), denotation of a signified object (*arthābhidhāna*) is also by means of *vyatireka*, as, for instance, [in Pāṇini's Asth I.4.49]: "That which the agent (*kartr*) wants to obtain most of all (*īpsitatama*) is termed *karman* (i.e., 'direct object')."

Suppose, however, that the word's signified object is merely exclusion of other [signified objects] (*anyāpohamātra*), it would then denote its signified object (*arthābhidhāna*) exclusively (*eva*) through *vyatireka*.

This would be the case if we did not accept *anvaya*. However, (*tu*),

I do not claim that [the word's] pervasion [(*vyāpti*) of its signified objects] is with the principal (*mukhyena*) (38d),

entity (*bhāvena*). For (*hi*) it is impossible, as I have already explained [in PS II.16], that there be universals in things, whether they are distinct (*bhinna*)

or not (*abhinna*) from [their substrata]. But let us grant that the signified object is qualified by the exclusion of other objects (*arthāntarapohaviśiṣṭe 'rthe*) without there being any [real] general property, in accordance with [PS V.34a] "since it is not observed amongst the signified objects of other words (*adṛṣter anyasābdārthe*)." Then the *anvaya* ("joint presence") of the word [and its object] and the *vyatireka* ("joint absence") do not pertain to different objects.

There is thus no doubt that the restrictive/delimitative value ascribed by Dignāga to the particle *eva* is equivalent to the value of *apoha*. This is also made abundantly clear from Dignāga's treatment of the distribution of the restrictive (*avadhāraṇa*) *eva* elsewhere in PS. Apart from the fact that *eva* and *apoha* belong in the same context, there is a direct line of development from Dignāga's statement in 38c to Dharmakīrti's expression "a statement results in an exclusion" (*vyavacchedaphalaḥ vākyah*) in *Pramāṇavārttika* IV.192 (= *Pramāṇaviniścaya* II.11) and his description of the use of *eva*. (Indeed, one only has to refer to the examples "Caitro dhanurdharah" and "Pārtho dhanurdharah, nīlaḥ sarojaḥ"¹⁸ used by Dharmakīrti [PV IV.192] to illustrate the use of *eva* in order to understand the scope of Dignāga's remarks and thus to interpret the quotation from Pāṇini, distributing the restriction [*avadhāraṇa*] accordingly.) The succeeding paragraph (38d) would seem to corroborate the hypothesis that originally the problem of pervasion (*vyāpti*) was addressed in the context of the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika theory of universals. Dignāga, however, denies the possibility of substantial pervasion, that is, pervasion that implies the assumption of the pervaded being real universals qualifying their proper substrata, for in Dignāga's view it is not inherent universals that qualify things, but rather the fact that words define things as excluded from what they are not.



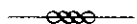
Dignāga's non-Buddhist critics directed a substantial part of their criticism of the *apoha* theory against the assumption that an absence as such could have a qualifying force, and in this connection they also addressed the question of the value of the excluded. Since this side of the *apoha* doctrine is among its more controversial aspects, it would seem natural to address these criticisms in this connection. Dignāga does not discuss the role of *apoha* as a qualifier in PS, but merely restricts himself to ascribing to the *apoha*, in a well-known passage in PS, the value of the

Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika universal.¹⁹ There is, however, an interesting Sanskrit fragment ascribed to Dignāga in which he deals with this question in some detail, although one cannot say that it throws light on all aspects of this idea. It was known to all post-Dignāga scholars discussing the apoha theory, and there is reason to believe that it stems from the *Sāmānyaparīkṣā* (SD). The largest portion of this text is found in *Tattvārthabhāṣyavyākhyā* V.24. It reads:

For the word is said to designate [its signified object] while effecting, for the sake of its own signified object (*svārtha*), its exclusion from other signified objects (*arthāntarāpoha*). (The word "for" is used in the sense of "because.") For instance, the word "tree," while effecting, for the sake of its own signified object, the negation of the word "nontree" (*avṛkṣaśabdānivr̥tti*), indicates that its own signified object is characterized as tree (*vṛkṣalakṣaṇa*). And thus the word's signified object is a thing qualified by negation (*nivr̥ttivīṣṭa*), but it is not mere negation (*nivr̥ttimātra*), for mere negation would be completely indefinable (*alaksanīya*) because it is a nonentity (*avastutva*), like, for instance, descriptions of such things as horns of an ass, and blunt sharpness.²⁰

Textual evidence thus seems to indicate that Dignāga conceived of the opposition between the excluded nontree and the thing being qualified by the negation of nontree, that is, tree, in terms of a privative opposition between tree and nontree. Thus, the word "tree" expresses the presence of a particular distinctive feature, whereas nontree expresses its absence. Paraphrasing Dignāga's statement, we may say that the word functions as a limitation operator in that it delimits its own signified object from other signified objects by establishing a boundary between its own referent, tree, and its nonreferent, nontree. This boundary is the result of a conjunction of the presence and absence of a particular distinctive feature. However, according to Dignāga the negation of nontree is the qualifying property of tree, and this entails a peculiar logico-semiotic aporia which all Dignāga's critics, and first of all Kumārila, did not hesitate to point out: if any given word and its signified object are defined in terms of a privative opposition in which the presence of a term of the type *A* necessarily implies the absence of a term of the type non-*A* and vice versa, the implication becomes tautological. Hence, we may conclude that within the structure of the privative opposition the distinctive feature coincides with the opposition itself: the term *A* at the same time identifies its signified object as *A* and differentiates or excludes it from non-*A*. There is reason to believe that this

is what Dignāga had in mind when talking about negation of other as the qualifier of any given signified object, although the formulation as such is analogous to the idea that Dignāga rejects, namely, that a thing is qualified by the universal inherent in it.



It is obvious that Dignāga did not consider a term of the type non-A to be without content: it denotes in a general form the absence of the particular distinctive feature that determines the signified object of the positive term A. He addresses the question of the type non-A in PS 43b, introducing the crucial notion of the "single property" (*ekadharman*), which Kumārila made subject to a detailed discussion in *Śloka-vārttika*. (Apoḥavāda 61ff.). Dignāga writes:

Nor is the objection that no cognition can occur justified,

because [the word] excludes by means of [the single] general feature (*sāmānya*). (43b)

For (*hi*) it does not exclude a different universal (*jāti*) for each individual substance (*pratidṛavyam*), but rather (*kiṃ tarhi*), [it excludes] with the single property of their general feature (*sāmānya*) due to the intention of expressing the [objects] to be excluded (*vyavacchedyavivakṣayā*). And on this point (*atra*) we have explained that [the signified object] is inferred merely through [its] not being observed in the heterologous [instances] (*vijātiye adarśanamātrenānumānam*). Yet, this problem (*doṣa*) [that no cognition can occur] concerns only (*eva*) you; for if [the word] were to apply (*varteta*) by universally pervading (*vyāptyā*) its proper homologous [objects] (*svasajātīya*), the pervaded (*vyāpya*) would be infinite (*ānantya*). Therefore, as in the statement "it is a nonhorse because it is horned" (*viśāṇitvād anaśva iti*), the inference is an exclusion of this [namely, horse] (*tadvyavacchedānumānam*)²¹ because of not observing hornedness in a horse (*aśve viśāṇitvādarśanena*), but [hornedness] does not exclude the white mares, etc. (*karkādīn*), each separately (*pratyekam*), nor does it apply to every single cow individually, etc. (*ekaikeṣu gavādiṣu*). Also you maintain a theory of cognition based upon concordance and difference (*vyāvṛtṭyan uvṛttibuddhimatam*). And the principle (*nyāya*) is the same in this context.

The problem that Dignāga addresses in this text is the objection that each exclusion would seem to imply the exclusion of innumerable entities. Consequently, definite knowledge would seem to be impossible. However, as Dignāga explains, entities are not excluded each individually, but rather they are excluded collectively, according to the general theory of exclusion, as instantiating an absence of the single distinctive feature defining the excluding term. The fact that the excluded term is defined by the absence of a single distinctive feature—the Dignāgan “single property” (*ekadharman*)—does not mean that it is without reference and thus not interpretable; it is merely used to define collectively all those entities in which a particular feature is absent. Thus, for instance, the term “nonhorse” (*anaśva*) of the inference “it is a nonhorse because it is horned” only conveys the idea of a horned animal that is not a horse, without reference to the specific nature of the animal that is denoted by the term “nonhorse.”²² Dignāga’s final reference to the fact that the opponent also agrees that cognition proceeds by concordance and difference (*vyāvṛtṭyanuvṛtṭibuddhi*) is interesting because it gives us a hint of the ideas that he attempted to amalgamate, which thus become important for the assessment of the historical background against which Dignāga worked out his own apoha doctrine. I shall return to this point.

One of the most remarkable features of the apoha theory is the fact that Dignāga, according to a *prima facie* reading of his description of the inferential character of apoha, would seem to consider verbal knowledge equivalent to an inference from difference (*vyatireka*). His critics were not slow in pointing out this apparent violation of the canonical rule of the triply characterized reason (*trilakṣaṇahetu*), which does not admit of this type of inference. Kumārila, for instance, closes his criticism of the apoha theory by criticizing inferences based upon difference. The target of his criticism is probably Uddyotakara and his school, whom Kumārila apparently accuses of not having the right to reject Dignāga’s view because they accept inferences through difference (cf. also NC[V] p. 666, 12ff.). This controversy thus shows that Dignāga’s contemporary critics took his remarks about inference based upon exclusion (*vyavacchedānumāna*) to be equivalent to an inference from difference. It is difficult not to agree with Dignāga’s critics, and this apparent theoretical inconsistency perhaps explains why Dharmakīrti seems to consciously avoid the issue: he prefers to reinterpret the Dignāgan doctrine about the inferential nature of verbal knowledge (*śābda*) by taking it to mean that *śābda* indicates the presence of intention (*vivakṣā*) in the speaker, rather than interpreting it along

the lines of Dignāga's own theory. In this regard he seems to fall back on Bhartṛhari's view that spoken words manifest the intentions (*vivakṣā*) of the speaker.



The invariable concomitance between word and object naturally presupposes learning the scope of the word in question, in other words, the word-meaning connection, that is, the *vyutpatti*. Dignāga deals with this question in an interesting paragraph ad k. 50b toward the end of the "Examination of Apoha." He writes:

But how can the knowledge of the signified object (*arthapratipatti*) that someone who has not yet been shown [the word's] connection [with its signified object (*akṛtasambandha*)] gets from a word be an inference (*anumāna*), as, for instance, the one that is expressed [in the proposition]: "this is a breadfruit tree" (*ayam panasaḥ*)?

In this case there is no knowledge of the signified object through the word *panasa*. Why?

Because the signified object is shown by someone to whom [the connection] is known. (50b)

Since a [word's] signified object is established by an authority (*vrddha*) to whom the connection [of the word with its signified object] is well known (*prasiddhasambandha*) via the demonstrative pronoun "this" (*ayamśabda*) and ostension (*hastasamjñā*), there is no knowledge of the signified object through the word *panasa*, but it is rather (*kim tarhi*) the scope of the name (*saṃjñāvyutpatti*) ["*panasa*" that is taught]. On the other hand, coreference (*sāmānādhikaranyam*) between this [that is, the word "*panasa*"]—whose purpose is [to teach] a name—and the demonstrative pronoun "this" serves to show the connection (*sambandhapradarśanārtham*), the assumption being (*iti kṛtvā*) that the [connection] is what is expressed by (*abhidheya*) both [terms]. And since the word *panasa* does not [yet] have this [namely, the breadfruit tree] as its signified object, its purpose is that of [teaching] a name.

Dignāga thus assumes that ostensive definition is at the basis of the learning of the connection between the word and its signified object. This

view, of course, should be interpreted from the perspective of his statement about concordance (*anvaya*) and difference (*vyatireka*), which shows that in Dignāga there is no inductive assumption in the proper sense of that word: the connection between word and its signified object (*artha*) or between the logical indicator and the indicated is taken to be invariable as long as it is possible to claim that the word or the indicator excludes everything in which the particular feature expressed by the excluding term is absent. Thus, the excluded represents nothing but a generalized, hypothetically posited absence of the feature that defines the scope of the excluding term.

In the immediately following paragraph (ad k. 50c), Dignāga discusses the nature of the connection, which he claims is only due to representations, that is, imaginary, depending on the connection made by the mind between the word and its signified object. The connection is not an object of knowledge conveyed by the word in question.

[Objection:] Then it is precisely the connection that will be the word's object of knowledge (*prameya*).

The connection is not [the word's object of knowledge] because it is imagined (*vikalpitāt*). (50c)

For (*hi*) the connection is imagined when the signified object and the word *Panasa*, after having been apprehended (*upalabhya*) through separate instruments of knowledge (*pramāṇa*), are connected (*sambaddha*) by the mind (*manasā*) that thinks: "this [word denotes] this [signified object]" (*ayam asyeti*), in the same way as the inference-inferendum connection (*anumānānumeyasambandhavat*). Therefore, verbal knowledge (*śābda*) is not a separate instrument of knowledge.



Dignāga's epistemology, logic, and philosophy of language are no doubt indebted to his contemporaries, although it is far from clear to what extent they influenced him. One sometimes gets the impression that he tried to amalgamate ideas that would seem at least *prima facie* to be incompatible. The influence of Bhartṛhari on Dignāga is one instance. Thus, for example, it is not entirely clear, in spite of Dignāga's unusually explicit exposition in the "Examination of Apoha," how he would defend adopting Bhartṛhari's view of the sentence as the primary source of verbal knowledge and still

remain consistent with the apoha doctrine, which basically is an extension of his logic.

There is one aspect of Dignāga's apoha doctrine that seems to point toward another possible inspiration and probably the most important one. The fact is that Dignāga worked out the apoha theory on the basis of a conceptual tree that ultimately stems from Vaiśeṣika taxonomy. This explains his claim that exclusion is not a universally pervasive feature, but only operates under certain conditions. If we take our point of departure in the conceptual tree that he received from the Vaiśeṣika tradition, the point in question becomes clear. The Vaiśeṣika tree is basically constituted by the supreme universal (*sāmānya*) existence (*sattā*) and its subextensions, the particular universals (*sāmānyaviśeṣa*) substance (*dravya*), quality (*guṇa*), and action (*karman*), which each ramifies into innumerable subextensions on various levels. According to Dignāga the particular universals exclude each other, whereas the supreme universal *sattā* only excludes *asattā* (cf. the interesting quotation from *Hetumukha* concerning the use of the term *asat*), but not the particular universals with which there is concordance. The same principle is extended to, and remains in force for, all the different subextensions: they exclude each other provided that they belong to the same level in the hierarchy, but they do not exclude their possible subextensions, just as they are not excluded by the relevant term in the hierarchy whose subextensions they are. To generalize: there is concordance in the tree *vertically*, but exclusion *horizontally*. In short, the principle is a Dignāgan version of the type of tree that is delineated briefly in *Praśaṣṭapādabhāṣya* 7, which describes the relationship between the terms constituting the tree in terms of compliance (*anuvṛtti*) vertically and distinction (*vyāvṛtti*) horizontally. It seems obvious that Dignāga has adopted the same principle of analysis (cf. his reference *supra* to *anuvṛtti* and *vyāvṛtti*). This general principle, of course, becomes ontologically untenable under certain circumstances where mutually exclusive terms go together in defining a single entity, which thus would seem to be in internal contradiction with itself. Dignāga addresses this problem in a fairly complicated way that can only be described as a politics of terms, individual terms allying themselves with other terms in much the same way as kings ally themselves with other kings according to the rule of the *cakras* laid down in a political treatise like Kauṭilya's *Arthasāstra*. Ultimately, this part of the apoha theory would only make sense if we assume that it represents a Dignāgan version of problems entailed by Vaiśeṣika taxonomy. If this assumption is true, it also becomes understandable why Dignāga would name the fifth chapter of PS "Examination of Apoha." In the perspective of his

other “Examinations” (*parīkṣā*), this is only understandable as an indication that he is subjecting current views on exclusion to a critical analysis while arguing at the same time for the necessity of his own view: the Dignāgan theory of exclusion. The chapter as a whole would seem to corroborate this assumption, and it would thus seem necessary to reconsider the historical background of Dignāga’s theory of the means of knowledge.

Notes

1. The bulk of this paper was written in 1991 at a time when the Sanskrit version of Jinendrabuddhi’s PST had not yet become accessible. For the Sanskrit text of PST, chapter 1, as well as a description and history of the manuscripts, see Steinkellner et al. 2005. Readers are kindly referred to my forthcoming Sanskrit restoration and annotated English translation of PSV V, including an edition and English translation of substantial parts of PST V.
2. Dignāga himself probably did not call the chapters of his PS “Examinations” (*parīkṣā*), but just numbered them as first, second, third, etc. The addition of “Examination” may have been made by a scribe. For one thing, the term usually suggests a critique or refutation, and clearly Dignāga is not doing that in the apoha chapter of PS. For more details, see the introduction to my forthcoming translation and study of PS V.
3. Cf. PVSVT 337, 13–14: “nirloṭhitam caitad ācāryeṇa Dīnāgena sāmānyaparīkṣādayathā viśeṣaśabdānām sāmānye vṛttir iti.”
4. Cf. PVS V I 62, 26: “arthāntaravyāvṛtṭyā tasya vastunaḥ kaścid bhāgo gamyate”: cf. Siddhasenagaṇin’s *Tattvārthabhāṣyavyākhyā* V 24 (quoted in NCV 548, 24–25): “yathā Dvādaśaśatikāyām—yady apy uktam aprasaktasya kim artham pratishedhaḥ? iti nāivāitat pratishedhamātram ucyate, kin tu tasya vastunaḥ kaścid bhāgo ‘rthāntaravyāvṛtṭyā loke gamyate yathā viśānitvād anaśvāh iti”
5. For a study of this feature of Dignāga’s apoha theory, see Pind 1991.
6. The idea that individuals are inexpressible is also presupposed by the objection quoted in Bhartṛhari’s alleged commentary on VP I.69: “pratiniyatasvarūpabhedā vyaktayaḥ, na hy asaṃvedyam avyapadeśyam avidyamānam vā vyaktīnam rūpam.” It probably represents a view, that is, the so-called *tadvatpakṣa*, that was current among contemporary grammarians and Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika philosophers. They held that the signified object of a word is the particular thing as endowed with a universal (*jātivān arthaḥ*).
7. As is well known, the realm of particulars is exclusively accessible to sensation (*pratyakṣa*), which by definition is devoid of representation (*kalpanā*). The scope of universals, however, is defined by the sign function, whether it be the linguistic (*śabda*) or the inferential (*liṅga*) sign, and is thus characterized by representation.
8. Cf., for example, PS II.3: cf. Kitagawa 1973. 450; for an English translation, see Hayes 1980, 248–249
9. “nārthaśabdaviśeṣasya vācyavācākaśyate / tasya pūrvam adṛṣṭatvāt; sāmānyam rūpadekṣyate.” The verse is inter alia quoted in NCV 615. 12–13: cf. TSP ad TS 961

(= ŚV Apohavāda 102). For an analysis of the implications of this verse, see Pind 1991.

10. Dignāga's concise refutation of the assumption that universals are real categories is found in PS II 16; cf. Kitagawa 1973, 464–465; for an English translation, see Hayes 1980, 257–258.
11. Cf. Kitagawa 1973, 464: “gal te rten gcig bzung bas kyang thams cad gzung ba yin na ni, de yang rten bzhin du du mar ‘gyur ro” (in Vasudhararakṣita's translation); “ci ste spyi gcig la brten par gzung na yang thams cad gzung ba yin no zhe na ? de la brten bzhin du du mar ‘gyur ro” (in Kanakavarmin's translation); for an English translation of this passage, see Hayes 1980, 258.
12. This assumption seems to be corroborated by Śāntarakṣita, who quotes (in TS 1096) the following short phrase from Dignāga's *Hetumukha* (identified by Kamalaśīla ad loc.): “affirmation is impossible” (asambhavo vidheḥ); Śāntarakṣita then explains that affirmation (*vidhi*) is impossible “because universals, etc., are impossible” (sāmānyāder asambhavāt).
13. For an English translation, see Hayes 1980, 257. Note that Hayes interprets Tib. *sgrub/bsgrub* (cf. Kitagawa 1973, 463, 468ff.) as if it were equivalent to Sanskrit *sādhana*. In this context, however, *sgrub/bsgrub* = *vidhi*, which Kitagawa (1973, 114 [line 23]) accordingly translates “kentei teki na shikata.”
14. For an English translation, see Hayes 1988 ad loc.
15. Cf. the use of *abheda* in the Sanskrit fragment from *Nyāyamukha* (NM) concerning the definition of *pratyakṣa*: “yaj jñānārtharūpādaḥ viśeṣaṇābhidhāyākābhedopacārenāvikalpakaṃ tad akṣaṃ akṣaṃ prati vartate iti pratyakṣaṃ” (quoted in TSP ad TS 1236).
16. See Steinkellner 1966; cf. HB II 154ff.
17. Cf., for example, Dharmakīrti's implicit criticism of Dignāga's reference to *adarśanamātra* as constitutive of *apoha* in PV III *Pratyakṣapariccheda* 172a–c: “anyatrādr̥ṣṭyapekṣatvāt kvacit taddr̥ṣṭyapekṣanāt / śrutau sambadhyate 'poho.” The criticism is implicit in the clause *anyatrādr̥ṣṭyapekṣatvāt*, for which Dignāga would have *sarvatra* (i.e., in the *atulya* in toto); see PVBh p. 264, 30ff. ad loc. cit.; note especially the following reference to Dignāga's view on 265, 23: “anye tu punaḥ sarvato vijātiyād vyāvṛttir kvacid vidheye vṛttim apekṣata iti vyatireke tātparyam anvaye tu neti, vyatireka eva prādhāyena pratyāyate”; see also Kumāri's criticism of Dignāga's view in ŚV, *Anumānapariccheda* 131cd–132: “aśeṣāpekṣitvāc ca saukaryāc cāpy adarśanāt / sādhane yady apīṣṭo vyatireko 'numāṃ prati / tāvatā na hy anaṅgatvaṃ yukti śābde vakṣyate.” Kumāri's reference to *śābda* (i.e., to the chapter on verbal knowledge) is to Apohavāda 75 (q.v.). It is perhaps not a random mistake that Jñānaśrīmitra quotes in his *Apohaprakaraṇa* a slightly edited version of Dharmakīrti's verse, substituting *sarvatra* for *anyatra* (see op. cit. 207, 10–11).
18. This concerns the different scope of the restrictions that are supposedly present in all statements, whether *eva* is explicitly stated or not. To take the first two: “Caitra is an archer,” that is, Caitra is only an archer = Caitra is not a nonarcher and there can be other archers too; “It is Pārtha [alone] who is the archer,” that is, no one other than Pārtha is the archer = Pārtha (i.e., Arjuna) is the only excellent archer among the Pāṇḍava brothers. See Kajiyama 1973; Gillon and Hayes 1982.

19. Cf. the following Sanskrit fragment ad loc. cit.: "Now the qualities of a universal are characterized as oneness, permanence, [and] extension to each [particular]; they are present in the [apoha] alone" (PSV ad 36; "jātidharmāś cāikatvanityatv apratyekaparisamāptilakṣaṇā atraiva tiṣṭhanti"). See Kamalaśīla's version of this passage from the *vṛtti* in TSP 389, 9–11.
20. Cf. the Sanskrit fragment quoted in Nayacakra (NC), ed. Muni Jambuvijaya, vol. II 548, 13–16: "tathā cāha dattakabhikṣur eva: arthāntarāpohaṃ hi svārthe kurvatī śrutiḥ "abhidhatte" ity ucyate. hiśabdo yasmādarthe. yathā vṛkṣaśabdo 'vṛkṣaśabdanivṛttiṃ svārthe kurvan svārthaṃ vṛkṣalakṣaṇaṃ pratyāyayatiṭy ucyate, evaṃ ca nivṛttiviśiṣṭaṃ vastu śabdārthaḥ, na nivṛttimātram, alakṣaṇīyam eva ca syān nivṛttimātram, avastutvāt, kharaviśāṇakunṭhatikṣṇatādivarṇavat."
21. Cf. Jinendrabuddhi's exegesis of the term *tadvyavacchedanumana* at PSV V.34.
22. It is presumably the same problem Dignāga addresses in the only surviving Sanskrit fragment from the *Dvādaśaśatikā*, see note 4 above.