

# Review of: "On possible formal expressions of catuṣkoṭi and Śūnyatā"

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**Potential competing interests:** No potential competing interests to declare.

## Overall Comments

While there is a promise of an insightful analysis of the *catuṣkoṭi* through *apoha* and Roy and Rayudu's Category Theory in section 4, this paper needs much work. Further, the problems you address, as well as your answers, remain opaque.

You need to correct your transliteration of Sanskrit throughout and translate unfamiliar Sanskrit words. For example, it is *Asaṅga* and not *Asaṅga*.

There needs to be a more critical engagement with the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* and a discussion between the so-called negative and positive *catuṣkoṭis*.

My comments on each section appears as follows.

## Introduction

It would be best to have a thesis statement that clarifies the project.

## Section 2

You refer to the *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtras* for *śūnyatā*, but you do not make it clear that you are using the Pali Canon for the *catuṣkoṭi*. These are (at least prima facie) conflicting texts.

Additionally, you make no reference to any *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtras* in section 1. Due to this, it remains unclear what you mean by *śūnya*.

Make it more explicit which Suttas you use in your presentation of the Unanswerable Questions. Provide clear textual evidence from the Suttas (e.g., the *Aggivaṇṇagotta Sutta*, the *Ānanda Sutta*, and potentially the *Cūḷamālukya Sutta*) in which the Buddha explains why he remains silent.

I don't find the rhetorical questions helpful when there is a clear understanding of the Buddha's silence in these Suttas.

Also, it would be best if you pointed out that the *catuṣkoṭi* is presented as the last four unanswerable questions. This pointing out gives clear evidence that Buddhists consider these four possibilities (even if the Buddha rejects them or remains silent).

Does *śūnyatā* not follow from the Buddha's silence or Nāgārjuna's *prasaṅgas*?

To motivate the paraconsistent reading of the *catuṣkoṭī*, you must move to Nāgārjuna's analysis and the supposed division between positive and negative *catuṣkoṭīs*. To do this, you must refer to the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*.

Where does Nāgārjuna raise serious doubts about the possibility of acquiring knowledge? Are you referring to the *Vigrahavyāvartanī*?

The move through Asaṅga and Vasubandhu to Dignāga is too quick. It would help if you addressed why they are included. Do they engage with the *catuṣkoṭī*? Overall, I am confused by the inclusion of these philosophers since you, in this section, do not establish how they relate to the *catuṣkoṭī* or even to *śūnyatā*.

In the introduction, you stated that this section would discuss the relationship between the *catuṣkoṭī* and *śūnyatā*. I did not see a discussion of this relationship. You must deal with Nāgārjuna more seriously to address this relationship.

### Section 3

In addressing both options of the *catuṣkoṭī*, you do not present the dialetheist reading. You should.

Overall, there is a lack of critical engagement with any other formal evaluation of the *catuṣkoṭī*. You should engage with work by scholars such as Jay Garfield, B. K. Matilal, Frits Staal, Dilipkumar Mohanta, Jan Westerhoff, Jenny Hung, Fabien Schang, and Nicholas Jones, to only name a few. This should be done in the text and not in a footnote.

Your discussion of *both* and vague predicates needs to clarify what precisely in *both* functions as a vague predicate. You must make this explicit. It would help to relate this to examples from either the Pali Canon or the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*.

Overall, it needs to be clarified what vague predicates are doing for you. You must explicitly connect it to Roy and Ryudu's account on which you depend.

### Section 4

This section has promise and is reminiscent of Westerhoff's connection between the *catuṣkoṭī* and Dignāga's semantics of *apoha*, but much work needs to be done on clarity.

You must carefully explain Roy and Rayudu's account before extrapolating from it.

The move from the claim "Buddhist philosophy is generically about negative existential propositions" to "the basic issue is to avoid unwarranted metaphysical commitments to non-existent object/entities" is far too quick and requires textual justification. Slow down.

Why not actually start spelling out the formal counterpart? This would greatly help with clarity.

Overall, the major issue with this section is that you treat Indian/Tibetan Madhyakama, Yogācāra, and Chan/Zen as all agreeing on *śūnyatā*. This is simply not the case. Make it clear what you mean by *śūnya* and *śūnyatā* and how your and



other readings of it connect to your formal counterpart.