

Kamalaśīla on Scripture and Reason:
The Limits and Extent of ‘Practical Rationality’ in the *Tattvasaṃgrahapañjikā*

Sara L. McClintock
Emory University, Atlanta

Building on the recent work of Vincent Eltschinger and others, this paper examines a number of passages from Kamalaśīla’s *Tattvasaṃgrahapañjikā* to determine how his commitment to ‘practical rationality’ plays out in relation to the problem of scripturally based inference (*āgamāśrayānumāna*). The investigation will consider the problem from two angles. First, we will examine passages in which Kamalaśīla refers to doctrines from Buddhist scriptures (*āgama*) concerning epistemically extremely remote affairs (*atyantaparokṣadharmā*) when engaged in argumentation concerning another topic. An example is his reference to the Buddhist doctrine of the cyclic destruction of the universe (*pralaya*) which he raises in the context of the refutation of the eternity of the Veda. The goal here will be to determine the rhetorical principles guiding his use of such scriptural references, and we will see that Kamalaśīla places strict limits on the contexts in which scriptures are an acceptable form of testimony. Second, we will also consider passages in which Kamalaśīla directly discusses questions of faith (*śraddhā*) and scripture. Here, we encounter some surprising elements, such as his assertion that it might be acceptable to hold that the Buddha’s authorship of the Buddhist scriptures is mere ‘propaganda’ (*arthavāda*). At the same time, we will see that it remains difficult for Kamalaśīla to defend the rationality of some of the more counterintuitive claims of his tradition, such as the notion that the Buddha teaches without effort and without concepts. Here, rather than confronting the problematic aspects of the doctrine directly, Kamalaśīla resorts to a technical quibble in which he contends that his opponents do not understand how to use a *reductio ad absurdum* style argument (*prasaṅga*). The paper concludes with a summation of the extent and limits of Kamalaśīla’s practical rationality in relation to scriptures and scripturally based inference, arguing that his commitment to practical rationality is, on the one hand, ground-breaking and extraordinary, and, on the other hand, nonetheless still constrained by the Buddhist tradition from within which he writes.