

Title: Buddhist and Non-Buddhist Versions of Momentariness

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Abstract: The teaching that everything is momentary is often held to be a unique and defining doctrine of Buddhism. Kamalaśīla went so far as to declare that once momentariness is established, all non-Buddhist teachings—regarding God, Prakṛti, the Veda, etc.—are refuted in a single stroke. But is the matter really that simple? The centuries-long debate between Buddhist philosophers and their non-Buddhist, chiefly Naiyāyika opponents tends to obscure the fact that not all Buddhists upheld the doctrine in its full-blown form. As Alexander von Rospatt has documented in *The Buddhist Doctrine of Momentariness*, the Theravādins taught that external objects endure 17 times as long as each mind-moment; the Vātsīputrīyas held that the majority of material objects are non-momentary; and the *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra* even has the Buddha declare, “Verily, I do not teach the fools [who propound] destruction immediately after origination.”

In this paper I will argue further that Buddhists were not necessarily the only upholders of “momentarism” in India. By clarifying the meaning and scope of the doctrine, we can distinguish in principle between four different versions of momentarism, only one of which corresponds to the classical, full-blown doctrine argued for by Dharmakīrti, Kamalaśīla, Ratnakīrti, and others. The focus of this paper will be on non-classical versions, which might be referred to as “qualified” momentarist positions. I will examine several forms of qualified momentarism, as reflected in passages from the Tathāgatagarbha literature, the Vedantic *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi*, the longer and shorter *Yogavāsiṣṭha*, and the Tantric *Tripurārahasya*. For the sake of comparison, I will conclude with an example of momentarism from early Islamic theology.