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DIGNĀGA, MEINONG AND RUSSELL ON THE PROBLEM OF EMPTY
TERMS: A COMPARATIVE STUDY

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Abstract

The problem of empty terms is one of the most discussed problems in logic and analytic philosophy. Several philosophers from the East and West have tried to solve this problem with their own methodology. In the East, especially the Navya-Nyāya and the Buddhist schools of philosophy have dealt intensively with the problem of empty terms. More recently, Professor Bimal Krishna Matilal also carefully addresses the said problem. On the other hand, in the West, a serious attempt is being made in Aristotelian logic to identify the problem, and many Aristotle scholars believe that empty terms are a real problem in Aristotle's logic. Paolo Crivelli has argued in the *Proceedings of the Boston Area of Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy*, published by Brill, that Aristotle's logic may indeed contain empty terms. In the 20th century Western philosophy, Russell, Frege, and more recently John Searle and Michel Dummett have addressed the problem of empty terms from their own perspective. In this paper, I do not intend to trace the history of philosophical discussions of empty terms. Rather, the first step will be to present the theory of description Russell used to solve the problem of empty terms. In the next step, the methods of paraphrase and *apoha* will be highlighted, which are alternative solutions to the problem of empty terms in Dignāga's philosophical system. Then a comparative study will be made between Russell's theory of description and Dignāga's method of paraphrase, and between Dignāga's theory of *apoha* and Meinong's theory of objects. But before proceeding to the first step, we would briefly look at the notion of empty terms and the philosophical problem associated with it.