



## "Modern scholars and tradition on the place of the absolute in Yogācāra Buddhism"

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This paper focusses on Louis de La Vallée Poussin and Theodore Stcherbatsky, two great early 20th century Buddhologists. The two scholars envisaged Buddhism differently: La Vallée Poussin, a Belgian Catholic, understood Buddhism primarily as "religion" and saw philosophic method and logical enquiry as ultimately subsumed in the religious experience of salvation; Stcherbatsky, coming from the Russian school, which had direct contact with Tibetan Buddhist scholasticism, saw Buddhism primarily as "philosophy" and emphasized critical enquiry and logical consistency. The respective approaches of the two scholars resulted in a protracted debate concerning the nature of the absolute and salvation in Buddhism. One area of this debate, the debate about nirvāṇa, is relatively well known; less well known is their disagreement about the place of the absolute in Yogācāra Buddhism and their assessment of that tradition. Central issues in this were the relation of Yogācāra and Madhyamaka, whether early Yogācāra could be characterised as absolute idealism, and how nihilism can be avoided in the tradition. After exploring these issues and how the respective orientations of the two scholars led them to certain interpretations (and revisions) the paper will reflect on the diversity of interpretations in Tibetan Buddhist doxography and modern scholarship and how differences found in these can be related to differences in the approach of these two great European scholars.