



האקדמיה ע"ש פולונסקי  
The Polonsky Academy  
الأكاديمية على اسم بولونسي



מכון ון ליר בירושלים  
THE VAN LEER JERUSALEM INSTITUTE  
معهد فان لير في القدس

Seminar with **Dr. Marco Ferrante**

# To Omniscience through Language: Bhartrhari on Epistemology, Soteriology and Grammar

Chairperson: **Prof. Shai Lavi**, Director of the Van Leer Jerusalem Institute

Respondent: **Prof. Yigal Bronner**, Department of Asian Studies, and Director of the Martin Buber Society of Fellows, at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem

**Wednesday, May 10, 2017, 16:30, at the Van Leer Jerusalem Institute**

The question whether an individual might be capable of having extraordinary cognitions (*yogijñāna*, *yogipratyakṣa*) up to the point of knowing everything (omniscience, *sarvajñāna*) is one of the most gripping problems South Asian philosophy has discussed over time. Although the issue is often examined from a purely epistemological perspective, it is easy to see how it also has strong religious and soteriological implications. In the end, accepting the possibility that enlightened persons are able to perceive what is beyond the purview of ordinary people entails their recognition as valid sources of knowledge. It is thus not surprising that in the South Asian context the most zealous defenders of the legitimacy of extraordinary knowledge are the Buddhists and the Jainas, whose doctrines are grounded on the insights of persons to whom extraordinary powers are granted. The situation in the Brahmanical world is, on the other hand, much more nuanced. In it one can find a more or less explicit acceptance of extraordinary cognitions alongside a neat repudiation of them, especially in those cases where the epistemic authority of the Vedic scriptures on transcendent affairs is stressed. The seminar focuses on the way the question is dealt with by the grammarian and philosopher Bhartrhari (5th century CE), who was somehow capable of incorporating extraordinary cognitions into his system without harming the centrality of the Veda as a beginning-less and author-less source of knowledge.

**Marco Ferrante** received his Ph.D. in South Asian Studies. He studied Sanskrit and Indian philosophy at the Sapienza University, Rome. He specializes in the philosophical traditions of South Asia, with particular reference to epistemological, metaphysical and linguistic issues as discussed in the Brahmanical literature. Since 2013 he has held a post-doctoral position at the Austrian Academy of Sciences in Vienna, where he is currently engaged in a wide-ranging project, financed by the Austrian Science Funds (FWF), which aims at evaluating the impact of the grammarian/philosopher Bhartrhari on the thought of the tantric school of the Pratyabhijñā (10–11<sup>th</sup> century CE).

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