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## Philosophy and Vedic exegesis in the Mīmāṃsā

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In *Tradition and Reflection* (p. 31) Professor Halbfass makes the important observation that the Mīmāṃsā school of Vedic exegesis is not, not even in its own self-understanding, an expression or manifestation of Vedic thought and life. He then goes on to ask a number of questions, among them the following: What is the relationship between philosophy and Vedic exegesis and apologetics in the Mīmāṃsā? The remarkable fact is, as Halbfass observes on p. 30, that Śabara, Kumārila, and Prabhākara, the most important thinkers of the school, do not try to derive their teachings on epistemology, ontology, categoriology, and the philosophy of language from the Veda. Apologetics plays therefore a major role in the formulation of many philosophical positions. This is true of the theory of *svataḥprāmānya*, the 'self-sufficient validity', 'self-validating authority' of valid, specifically Vedic, cognition, which, in Halbfass' opinion (p. 32), is obviously motivated by apologetic concerns. Yet Halbfass makes a point of stressing that this and other school positions make an important contribution to the philosophical debate of its time and beyond, especially in the hands of Kumārila, "the most important representative of classical Mīmāṃsā thought and apologetics".

The present article takes up once again the question of the relationship between philosophy and Vedic exegesis in the Mīmāṃsā. It seems possible to go further than Halbfass in this respect, and to show that two of the fundamental tenets of Mīmāṃsā philosophy — Halbfass (p. 30) speaks of "the central and symptomatic notions of the 'self-evidence' or 'self-sufficient validity' (*svataḥprāmānya*) of valid cognition<sup>1</sup> and of the 'authorlessness' (*apauruṣeyatva*) and 'eternity' (*nityatva*) of the Veda" — have an inherent connection with the Mīmāṃsā method of Vedic exegesis. In order to show this, it will be necessary to leave philosophical questions aside for the time being, and to enter into some of the details [360] of the sometimes complicated exegetical discussions of the school. While doing so, we will confine our attention to the basic text of the school, Śabara's *Mīmāṃsābhāṣya*.

Śabara's exegetical efforts do not infrequently concentrate on comparing two different interpretations of a Vedic statement. One of the two is in the end discarded, the other one is retained. The Mīmāṃsā has formulated a number of criteria meant to be of

help in deciding in such situations. These criteria do not interest us in themselves at present. We are more interested in the type of reasoning used to establish those criteria, and to choose between different interpretations in general. Here we find that Śabara sometimes uses the expressions 'nearest meaning' (*saṃnikṛṣṭa artha*) and 'more remote meaning' (*viprakṛṣṭa artha*). Of these two, Śabara always gives preference to the 'nearest meaning'. He follows in this respect the *Mīmāṃsāsūtra* on which he comments. Sūtra 3.3.14<sup>2</sup> enumerates a number of factors that can play a role in the interpretation of a Vedic statement and adds that, in cases where several of these factors apply simultaneously, the ones figuring later in the enumeration are weaker than the earlier ones, **because the meaning obtained with their help is more remote** (*arthaviprakaṣāt*).

Consider, as a concrete example, the injunction "One [must] worship the *gārhapatya* [fire] with the Aindrī".<sup>3</sup> The Aindrī is a sacred formula which begins with the words: *kadā ca na starīr asi nendra saścasi dāśuṣe*.<sup>4</sup> This formula contains the name Indra, which might be taken to indicate that it is to be used in order to worship the god Indra. The injunction, on the other hand, states clearly that the Aindrī must be used to worship the *gārhapatya*, which is a sacrificial fire. In other words, two conflicting interpretations present themselves.

Śabara's *Bhāṣya* discusses this question at length under sūtra 3.3.14. The position finally accepted is as follows. The injunction to worship the *gārhapatya* fire is explicit (*pratyakṣa*) and constitutes for this reason the closest interpretation. The formula *kadā ca na* etc. does not state explicitly that Indra is to be worshipped with it; this latter interpretation is therefore more remote and must be discarded.<sup>5</sup>

Consider next the sacred formula: *syonaṃ te sadanaṃ kṛṇomi ghṛtasya dhārayā suśevaṃ kalpayāmi; tasmin sīdāmṛte pratīṣṭha vrīhīṇāṃ medha sumanasyamānaḥ* "I make your seat agreeable, with a stream of clarified butter I make it very dear. Sit on it, establish yourself in the nectar of immortality, oh oblation of rice, being favourably disposed."<sup>6</sup> Unlike the formula studied above, there is in this case no [361] injunction which specifies the context in which this formula is to be used. One must therefore be guided by its contents. But here there is a difficulty. The formula has two parts: the first part concerns the preparation of the seat, the second the placing of the sacrificial cake. Should the whole formula be used at both these occasions? Or should one use the first

<sup>1</sup> Taber (1992, p. 218 f.) argues "that *svataḥ prāmāṇya* lies at the very heart of Mīmāṃsā thought."

<sup>2</sup> MiS 3.3.14: *śruti-liṅga-vākya-prakaraṇa-sthāna-samākhyānāṃ samavāye pāradaurbal-yam arthaviprakaṣāt*.

<sup>3</sup> MS 3.2.4 (ed. v. Schroeder p. 20 l. 13): *aindryā gārhapatyam upatiṣṭhate*.

<sup>4</sup> MS 1.3.26; RV 8.51.7; etc. Geldner (1951: 374) translates: "Auch nicht einmal bist du eine unfruchtbare Kuh, nie stehst du für den Opferwilligen trocken." This translation skips the crucial word *indra*.

<sup>5</sup> A similar reasoning is presented under sūtra 5.4.1.

<sup>6</sup> TB 3.7.5.2-3, which has *karomi* instead of *kṛṇomi*. With *kṛṇomi* this formula is found MŚS 1.2.6.19.

half during the preparation of the seat, the second half while the sacrificial cake is placed on it? Here, too, the answer depends on the relative 'proximity' of the different interpretations. The 'nearest' interpretation will eliminate the others. Which is the nearest interpretation in this case? For Śābara there is no doubt.<sup>7</sup> The connection between the second half of the formula and the placing of the sacrificial cake is direct, more direct at any rate than the link between the first half of the formula and this activity. The second half refers to the placing of the cake, whereas the first half is syntactically connected with the second half, which in its turn refers to that activity. A similar reasoning applies to the relationship of the two halves to the preparation of the seat.<sup>8</sup>

The *Bhāṣya* under sūtra 3.3.14 contains a number of further discussions relating to the relative priority of one out of two possible interpretations of a Vedic statement. This sūtra establishes, as a matter of fact, a number of principles of priority which are used throughout the *Bhāṣya*. All these discussions have in common that one of two interpretations is discarded because it is less 'near' than its competitor. We shall not here study all these cases. The two examples which we have considered suffice to reveal a general exegetical principle of the Mīmāṃsā: the correct interpretation of a Vedic statement is its most direct interpretation. The direct interpretation, we further learn, follows as far as possible what the text states explicitly, and avoids inferential and multi-layered arguments.

There is an obvious 'psychological' or 'epistemological' dimension to these discussions, which however rarely becomes explicit. But sometimes Śābara gives a hint that he is aware of it. So at the end of his discussion of sūtra 3.3.14. Here we learn that in the case of competing interpretations, different **notions** are in competition. The difference between a correct and an incorrect notion is that the latter is followed by another notion to the extent that it is incorrect, whereas the former is not.

The principle that the most direct interpretation is the correct one pervades many other discussions in Śābara's *Bhāṣya*. For one thing, if we are to find the most direct interpretation of a Vedic statement, it must [362] exist and be unambiguous. This is not however evident in all cases. Take the meanings of individual Sanskrit words. Almost any Sanskrit word, as is testified by the dictionaries, has various meanings.<sup>9</sup> Which is the 'direct' interpretation that we must choose? The Mīmāṃsā takes a categorical position in this matter: each word has but one primary sense; the other meanings are derived from this primary sense. The primary sense is known from the word alone;

<sup>7</sup> On MiS 3.3.14 (p. 255 f.).

<sup>8</sup> Under MiS 2.1.46 Śābara shows that this one sacred formula (*mantra*) consists of two sentences.

<sup>9</sup> One is here reminded of the following observation by Doniger and Smith, 1991: xxiii: "it has been said that every word in Sanskrit designates its basic meaning, the opposite of that, a word for an elephant, a name of God, and a position in sexual intercourse."

secondary meanings are understood because of some connection with the primary sense which is understood first.<sup>10</sup>

In concrete cases it is not always easy to decide which of two known senses is primary, which one secondary. Where there are Vedic passages that clearly use the term concerned in one of the two meanings, there is no difficulty. The word *yava*, for example, can refer to barley and to long pepper. The Vedic sentence "Where other plants wither, these [*yava* plants] stand up happily, as it were" shows that the meaning 'barley' is primary in the Veda.<sup>11</sup> Sometimes the Veda does not help to make the choice. Take the example of the word *parvan*. It is known right from the Himālaya down to Cape Comorin,<sup>12</sup> Śābara reminds us, that this word is used in the sense 'time' and 'combination'. Which of these is the primary sense? Etymological reflections point to 'combination' as the primary sense. The meaning 'time' can be obtained from this primary sense.<sup>13</sup> Different reasons are adduced to choose between the two meanings of the term *caru*, 'vessel' and 'oblation of rice', both of them "known from the Himālaya down to Cape Comorin". The details, and the outcome, of this discussion do not interest us at present.<sup>14</sup> The presupposition which expresses itself in them interests us all the more: it is the principle that Vedic statements allow of an unambiguous and direct interpretation.

Śābara's Bhāṣya on MīS 1.3.30-35 contains an interesting discussion on what exactly is denoted by words. Is it the shape (*ākṛti*) shared in common by all individuals designated by that word? Or is it an individual (*vyakti*) thus designated? Both are understood when a word (and Śābara obviously thinks here in the first place of generic terms, such as 'cow') is pronounced, but both cannot be designated (no doubt for the same reason as above, viz., that a word cannot have two 'meanings'). Only the shape is directly expressed. Śābara explains why in the following passage: "It is self-evident that an individual is understood when a word is pronounced. The distinction whether [the individual is understood directly] from the word or from the shape is not evident [to everyone]."<sup>15</sup> [363] Śābara subsequently establishes that the individual is understood from the shape rather than from the word, by showing that an individual is known from the shape, even when no word is uttered; and where a word is uttered but the relevant shape is not understood, there no individual is understood either. In other words, what

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Śābara on MīS 3.2.1: *yaḥ śabdād evāvagamyaṭe, sa prathamō 'rtho mukhyaḥ/ mukham iva bhavatīti mukhya ity ucyate/ yas tu khalu pratīd arthāt kenacit sambandhena gamyaṭe, sa paścādbhāvāj jaghanam iva bhavatīti jaghanyaḥ/ guṇasambandhāc ca gauṇa iti/*

<sup>11</sup> Śābara on MīS 1.3.9.

<sup>12</sup> Or "up to the Himālaya and up to Cape Comorin", as Wezler (1992: 472) prefers to translate this expression.

<sup>13</sup> Śābara on MīS 9.2.51-53.

<sup>14</sup> See Śābara on MīS 10.1.34-44.

<sup>15</sup> Śābara on MīS 1.3.33: *tad etad ātmapratyakṣaṃ yac chabda uccarite vyaktiḥ pratīyata iti/ kiṃ śabdād utākṛter iti vibhāgo na pratyakṣaḥ/*

we understand directly from the word is the shape. This shape, in its turn, can bring to our mind an individual characterised by it. This means that the shape, rather than any individual, comes most immediately to our mind when hearing a word. And this means, in view of the principle under discussion, that words denote shapes rather than individuals.<sup>16</sup>

Elsewhere in Śabara's *Bhāṣya* a different answer is considered to the question as to which is the notion most directly communicated by words. According to an opponent, it is the notion of mere sound devoid of meaning. This position is clearly inspired by the principle we are studying. Words first communicate the notion of sound; the meaning which we understand from a word arises as a result of recognising the sound first. Ergo, words primarily communicate the notion of sound. It is obvious that this conclusion, though close to the general principle of exegesis of the Mīmāṃsā, cannot be acceptable. Both the *Mīmāṃsāsūtra* (7.2.5) and Śabara's *Bhāṣya* reject it by stating that the connection between words and meanings is natural (*autpattika*). In other words, no extra step is required to get from hearing the sound to understanding its meaning. This way the exegetical principle of the Mīmāṃsā is saved. One could also say that the belief that the words and meanings of the Sanskrit language have an inherent connection, is a consequence of the dogma that Vedic statements can be correctly and unambiguously interpreted by choosing the 'most direct' interpretation, that is, the interpretation which involves the minimum of mental or epistemological stages.

This same principle allows us to understand other discussions in Śabara's *Bhāṣya*, too. Some words express a meaning different from the one suggested by their parts. The word *kuśala* is an example. The parts *kuśa* + *la* explain the word as "he who cuts (*lāti*) *kuśa* grass". Yet *kuśala* expresses the meaning 'skilful'. Śabara admits that the meaning 'skilful' can be explained as a derivative of the meaning 'who cuts grass'. Yet the meaning 'skilful' must be preferred, precisely because we understand the word in that sense. In other words, we arrive more directly at the meaning 'skilful'.<sup>17</sup> This same type of reasoning applies even to words that are only used by barbarians.<sup>18</sup>

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Direct interpretation determines what analysis to apply to the compound *niṣādasthapati*. At first sight two interpretations seem possible: "leader (*sthapati*) of the Niṣādas", or "leader who is a Niṣāda". The Niṣādas constitute a non-Aryan tribe, who are not, therefore, allowed to participate in Vedic rites. Yet the *niṣādasthapati* is mentioned in the context of a Vedic sacrifice. The question is unavoidable whether this

<sup>16</sup> For an assessment of Śabara's argument, see Scharf, 1993.

<sup>17</sup> See Śabara on MiS 6.7.22.

<sup>18</sup> Śabara on MiS 1.3.10.

leader is himself a Niṣāda. The second analysis designates him as one, whereas the first analysis leaves the possibility open that he isn't. Śabara prefers none-the-less the second analysis. His reasoning is as follows: The part *niṣāda-* in *niṣādashapati* means primarily, and therefore most directly, 'Niṣāda'. The meaning 'of the Niṣādas', which appears in the first interpretation, can only be arrived at secondarily.<sup>19</sup> The exegetical principle that the most direct interpretation is to be accepted, decides therefore in favour of the meaning 'leader who is a Niṣāda', and this in spite of the problems this interpretation brings about.

It is easy to see that this same principle can be used to justify the belief that words in the Veda have the same meanings as in ordinary life. The very first sentences of Śabara's *Bhāṣya* present this line of reasoning in connection with the interpretation of sūtras, but it is clear that the same applies to the interpretation of Vedic statements. The main weakness of any other position is that it entails superfluous effort (*yatnagaurava*). This argument derives its strength from the principle which we now know, and according to which the best and only acceptable interpretation is the most direct one, which is the one that implies minimal mental effort. Śabara on MiS 1.3.30 states simply that there is no difference between words in the Veda and in ordinary life, because we do not notice a difference between them.<sup>20</sup>

Attention has already been drawn to the psychological/epistemological dimension of many of the exegetical arguments. This dimension is rarely made explicit. An exception is the discussion of the injunction "one should perform the Darśa and the Pūrṇamāsa sacrifices" (*darśapūrṇamāsābhyāṃ yajeta*).<sup>21</sup> This injunction is incomplete: it does not specify how these sacrifices are to be performed. Indeed, Śabara calls this injunction "the beginning of an injunction" (*vidhyādī*), which needs an end. The required information is found in the section which prescribes adding fuel to the fire, etc. (*agnyanvādhānādividhānakāṇḍa*). The injunction forms one single statement with this section, which has been put next to it **in the mind**; the resulting single statement is of the form "One should **in this manner** perform the Darśa and the Pūrṇamāsa sacrifices".<sup>22</sup>

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This proximity in the mind has to be treated with much caution, as we can learn from Śabara's discussion under sūtra 3.1.21. This discussion concerns the sections (*anuvāka*) 7 to 11 of *Taittirīya Saṃhitā* 2.5. Sections 7 and 8 deal with the mantras called *Sāmidhenī*; section 9 deals with the *Nivids*; section 10 continues the discussion

<sup>19</sup> Śabara on MiS 6.1.51.

<sup>20</sup> Śabara on MiS 1.3.30: *na teṣāṃ eṣāṃ ca vibhāgam upalabhāmahe*.

<sup>21</sup> The origin of this quotation is obscure. See Garge, 1952: 125, 128, 136.

<sup>22</sup> Śabara on MiS 8.1.2: *... vidhyādīḥ ... agnyanvādhānādividhānakāṇḍena ... buddhau saṃnihitenaikavākyatāṃ yāti darśapūrṇamāsābhyāṃ yajetatham iti*.

of certain *Sāmidhenīs*. The question presents itself whether the sections that deal with the *Sāmidhenīs* can be understood together, thus constituting the context (*prakaraṇa*) for section 11. The idea is launched that sections 7, 8 and 10 can be understood "as a single statement" (*ekavākyatā*) because the sections 7 and 8 come together with section 10 **in the mind**. This idea is rejected with the argument that these sections are separated from each other by another section which deals with a different subject. Where another subject is introduced, the earlier subject is no longer present in the mind. Here the opponent persists, and observes that one can recall the earlier subject through mental effort (*dhyāna*), etc. Śabara's reply is important: In that case the result is due to human understanding, and is no longer Vedic.<sup>23</sup>

This last remark is very significant. It identifies the mind as a potential source of error in the correct interpretation of a Vedic statement. The correct interpretation must therefore involve an absolute minimum of participation of the mind. In fact, the most direct interpretation is precisely the one which involves the least participation of the mind. It is of course axiomatic for the Mīmāṃsā that the perfect interpretation of a Vedic statement exists, and can be found. In other words, it is possible to reduce the participation of the mind to an absolute minimum.

It is easy to see how this position can be extended so as to cover all forms of valid cognition. It then states that all forms of cognition are right, unless they have been interfered with. This, of course, is what came to be known under the name *svataḥprāmānya*. Schmithausen (1965: 158-59), while presenting the position of the Vṛttikāra (whose comments on MiS 1.1.4-5 are included in Śabara's Bhāṣya; see Frauwallner, 1968: 24 ff.), observes correctly:

Die wahre Erkenntnis ist also der **Normalfall**, der Irrtum aber das **Abnorme**, da er durch ein **zusätzliches** Moment, die Störung, bewirkt ist. D.h. alle Erkenntnis ist **grundsätzlich wahr**, kann jedoch **ausnahmsweise** durch Störungen **verdorben** werden.

These disturbances (*Störungen; doṣa*) can very well come from the mind. Correct perception, the Vṛttikāra observes, can fail to come about [366] because the mind is disturbed by hunger etc., or the sense-organ by the eye disease called *timira* etc., or the outer object by minuteness and the like.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Śabara on MiS 3.1.21: *avaidikaḥ sa puruṣabuddhipūrvako vākyārtho bhavet*. A parallel situation is discussed under MiS 2.1.49. Of a sequence of three mantras only the first one has a verbal form; number two requires (but does not have) another verbal form; and number three requires the same verbal form as number one. According to Śabara, this verbal form can be supplied to the third mantra, but it is not the Vedic word that is supplied, but the identical secular word.

<sup>24</sup> Frauwallner, 1968: 26 l. 12-14: *yadā kṣudādibhir upahataṃ mano bhavati, indriyaṃ vā timirādibhiḥ, sauṣmyādibhir vā bāhyo viṣayas, tato mithyājñānam, anupahateṣu samyagjñānam*.

It will be clear that the notion of self-sufficient validity of valid cognition (*svataḥprāmāṇya*) and the exegetical principle identified in the preceding pages are closely related. Both try to identify, then to exclude disturbing influences from the process leading to valid cognition, and both start from the assumption that such identification and exclusion are indeed possible. Perception that arises from a causal complex which is free from disturbing factors is necessarily correct. In the same way, Vedic statements naturally (*svataḥ*) (i.e., when there are no disturbances by more than basic human mental activity) give rise to an interpretation (i.e., understanding, cognition) that is as a result necessarily correct. The proclamation that this interpretation of a Vedic statement — i.e., the one in the production of which no disturbances play a role — is necessarily correct serves, no doubt, apologetic concerns. The belief, on the other hand, that an interpretation can — and should — be found that has arisen without disturbances, is a programmatic principle which determines how to interpret Vedic statements. Interpreting the Veda means identifying disturbing factors — such as the more than basic activity of the human mind — and eliminating them. Any interpretation that requires more participation of the mind than is strictly necessary, is no longer Vedic, it is due to human understanding.

The purity of the Veda, then, is endangered by the activity of the human, or any other, mind. This conviction expresses itself in another fundamental dogma of the Mīmāṃsā, too. For mental activity does not only threaten to play a role in the arising of the interpretation of a text; mental activity normally plays a role in its composition, too. The Mīmāṃsā avoids this danger by denying that the Veda has been composed at all. The Veda has no author, and this is possible because it has no beginning in time. Eternality and authorlessness are therefore two sides of the same position. And this position is ultimately based on the belief that the purity of the Veda is endangered by contact with any mind, be it human or divine.

In order to justify this position, the Mīmāṃsā presents a theory of the inherent correctness of the word by itself, which can however be lost on account of the use made of it by human beings. The following passage explains this:

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It is a contradiction to say '[the Vedic word] states' and 'incorrectly'. When one says 'it states', this means 'it makes known', that it is the cause that [the thing] is known. ... If, then, it is understood on the basis of an injunction that the Agnihotra results in heaven, how can one say that it is not like that? And if it is not like that, how can it be known? It is contradictory to know a thing that does not exist. ... With regard to a statement made by a human being, on the other hand, if it comes from a person who is trustworthy, or if it refers to the realm of the senses, it is not incorrect. But if it comes from an untrustworthy person, or if

it does not refer to the realm of the senses, then it is produced by the human understanding [only] and is not a means of valid knowledge.<sup>25</sup>

It goes without saying that the dogma of the authorlessness of the Veda, too, like the principle of interpretation discussed earlier, influences the way Vedic statements are interpreted. A text without beginning cannot, of course, refer to events that happened at any particular time.<sup>26</sup> Śābara is aware of this, and explicitly refers to it at some places. There is, for example, a Vedic statement which says that the god Prajāpati extracted his omentum.<sup>27</sup> Śābara discusses this statement and observes: "If a historical event were to be referred to, the Veda would be open to the charge of having a beginning."<sup>28</sup> Similarly, the Vedic statement "We grasped your right hand, o Indra"<sup>29</sup>, if taken literally, would be open to the same charge.<sup>30</sup> Elsewhere (1.1.31) Śābara is obliged to give different interpretations to expressions such as *prāvāhaṇi* and *auddālaki*, which normally signify 'son of Pravāhaṇa' and 'son of Uddālaka'.<sup>31</sup>

In cases like these the principle of the most direct interpretation and the dogma of the beginninglessness of the Veda are in conflict. For clearly, the most direct interpretation of the statement "Prajāpati extracted his omentum" is that Prajāpati, at some point of time, extracted his omentum. The principle of the most direct interpretation meets with difficulties in other situations, too. Some Vedic statements do not agree with our experience. Śābara gives the following examples: "The trees sat down for a sacrificial session"; "The snakes sat down for a sacrificial session"; "The old bull sings mad [songs]".<sup>32</sup> Cases like these serve as justification to deviate in numerous cases from the most direct interpretation, and resort to a secondary interpretation instead. Secondary interpretations play a major role in Mīmāṃsā.<sup>33</sup> In the end most of the Veda is interpreted in this way by this school. This does not, however, change the fact that a secondary interpretation is only allowed in cases where the primary

<sup>25</sup> ŚBh 1.1.2 (Frauwallner, 1968: p. 161. 15 - p. 181. 5): *vipratīśiddham idam abhidhīya-te 'bravīti ca vitatham ca' iti/ bravīti ity ucyate 'vabodhayati, budhyamānasya nimittam bha-vati iti/.../ yadi ca codanāyām satyām 'agnihotrāt svargo bhavati' ity avagamyate, katham ucyate 'na tathā bhavati' iti/ atha na tathā bhavati, katham avabudhyate/ asantam artham avabudhyata iti vipratīśiddham/.../ yat tu laukikam vacanam, tac cet pratyayitāt puruṣād indriyaviṣayam vā, avitatham eva tat/ athāpratyayitāt puruṣād anindriyaviṣayam vā, tat pu-ruṣabuddhiprabhavam apramānam/.*

<sup>26</sup> Strangely enough, the rabbinical interpretation of the Hebrew canon does not seem to accept this inference: even though the scriptures are timeless, they do refer to historical events. See Böhl, 1991: 162.

<sup>27</sup> TS 2.1.1.4: *sa ātmano vapām udakkhidat.*

<sup>28</sup> Śābara on MiS 1.2.10: *vṛttāntānvākhyāne 'pi vidhīyamāne ādimattādoṣo vedasya prasajyeta.*

<sup>29</sup> RV 10.47.1 etc.: *jaḡrbhmā te dakṣiṇam indra hastam.*

<sup>30</sup> Śābara on MiS 9.1.9: *athāivam ucyate, tasyaitad vacanam yo ḡhītavāms tasya hastam iti/ ucyate/ naitad adhyavaseyam/ ādimattādoṣo vedasya prasajyeta.*

<sup>31</sup> Pollock (1989: 608) refers to this passage in an article that draws attention to the non-historical nature of much of Sanskrit literature, possible in imitation of the Veda.

<sup>32</sup> Śābara on MiS 1.1.32: *vanaspatayaḥ sattram āsata; sarpāḥ sattram āsata; jaradgavo gā-yati mattakāni.* None of these three citations seems traceable in the Veda as we know it.

<sup>33</sup> Not only in the Mīmāṃsā. Fox (1991: 41) observes with regard to Biblical interpretation: "Unerring scripture requires the acceptance of allegory, the belief that a text may appear to say one thing while meaning another."

interpretation is not possible for one reason or other. The statements that remain for direct interpretation are few indeed. Only Vedic statements that are not, and cannot be, in conflict with other [368] sources of knowledge are in the end retained. Such statements are the injunctions. The injunction, Śabara explains, is a part of the Veda which communicates something which is unknown by other means.<sup>34</sup>

But even if, for practical reasons, only a minority of Vedic statements can be strictly interpreted according to the rule of interpretation expounded above, the general principle remains unaffected, according to which each Vedic statement allows of a most direct interpretation, which is independent of the mental activity of the person who "receives" this interpretation.

The Veda, then, is not produced by a human mind (nor by any other mind for that matter), and nor should it be interpreted by a mind. Or rather, only those interpretations which reduce the interference of the mind to a minimum can be accepted as correct. In this way the Veda remains pure, not touched by any mind, both in its composition and in its interpretation. This purity of the Veda, however, is only possible if it is accepted that the Veda is eternal, i.e., without beginning, and secondly, that this corpus allows of a 'direct' interpretation. The first consequence became a central tenet in the Mīmāṃsā world view. The second consequence, as I have tried to show, constituted a point of departure for philosophical developments and elaborations within the school.

Seen in this way, the notions of the 'self-sufficient validity' of valid cognition and that of the 'authorlessness' of the Veda are more than just "motivated by apologetic concerns" (Halbfass p. 32). They find their basis in a fundamental attitude of the Mīmāṃsā, one that is widely present in Śabara's *Bhāṣya*, and which is also discernible in the earlier *Mīmāṃsāsūtra*. These notions are not, it is true, derived from the Veda itself. But given the central position assigned to Vedic injunctions by this school of exegesis, it is hard to see how the Mīmāṃsā could borrow any theoretical notions from the Veda itself. These notions are, however, closely linked to the no doubt sincere concern of the thinkers of the school to maintain the purity of the Veda and to gain access to its true meaning.

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<sup>34</sup> Śabara on MiS 1.4.1: *kaścid asya (= samāmnāyasya) bhāgo vidhir yo 'viditam arthaṃ vedayati yathā somena yajeta iti*.

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## Abbreviations

MiS *Mīmāṃsā Sūtra*

- MS *Maitrāyaṇī Saṃhitā*  
MŚS *Mānava Śrauta Sūtra*  
RV *Ṛg Veda*  
ŚBh *Śābara Bhāṣya*  
TB *Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa*  
TS *Taittirīya Saṃhitā*