

Dharmakīrti and the Mīmāṃsakas in Conflict*

1. INTRODUCTION: DHARMAKĪRTI'S RELATION TO MĪMĀMSĀ

It is well known that Dharmakīrti in his writings is often preoccupied with Mīmāṃsā theories and arguments. Frequently the Mīmāṃsaka is an adversary and target of criticism, but occasionally he may have been a positive stimulus for Dharmakīrti's own thinking. For instance, Dharmakīrti's criticism of the *śeṣavadanumāna*, "inference with a remainder,"¹ as a fallacy at the beginning of *Pramāṇavārttika* 1, seems primarily intended to dispell a stock Mīmāṃsā argument² against the Buddha's omniscience, namely, the Buddha could not have been without desire (hence, he could not have been omniscient; for no omniscient person is possessed of desire), because he spoke.³ Yet at the beginning

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¹ Which includes inferences from cause to effect as well as inferences from effect to cause and other inferences based merely on the non-observation of the *hetu* in the *vipakṣa*. On the *śeṣavadanumāna*, see PV 1.331/PVSV 173,22–26 above, pp. 62–63 nn. 126–127.

² It is implicit in Bhāviveka's presentation of Mīmāṃsā in MHK 9. MHK 9.3ab: *rāgādi-doṣaduṣṭatvāt puruṣasya vaco mṛṣā*. Cf. MHK 9.15 and 16.

³ See PV(SV) 1.12 and 14. I am inclined to resist the suggestion by Kataoka (2003a: 60–62 n. 35) that Dharmakīrti is specifically attacking Kumārila here. In *ŚV codanā* 137, Kumārila only points out that, being without activity, because he is without desire, the teachings of an omniscient person would have to have been composed by others (*deśanā anyapraṇītaiva*). He does not, to my knowledge, appeal to merely *speaking*, which is the reason given by Dharmakīrti PV 1.12c for erroneously inferring that one is possessed of desire (*vacanād rāgītādivat*), as a reason for denying an omniscient being. I think this is a significant difference. At *ŚV codanā* 132, moreover, and in his *Bṛhaṭṭikā* (TS_K 3157/TS_S 3156) Kumārila mentions several

of *Pramāṇavārttika* 2, vv. 10–16, Dharmakīrti points out several fallacies in arguments allegedly proving an eternal creator of the universe that more or less match fallacies identified by Kumāriila in his refutations of arguments for the existence of God in his *Ślokavārttika* – as if Dharmakīrti actually borrowed from Kumāriila.⁴ And perhaps most strikingly, at PV 2.5c Dharmakīrti introduces an alternative definition of *pramāṇa*, *ajñātārthaprakāśo vā*, which is strongly reminiscent of the Mīmāṃsā definition of *pramāṇa* that specifies that it must, among other things, present that which has not been previously grasped (that is, it must be *anadhigatārthaviṣaya* or an *aḡrhitagrāhi*- or *apūrvārthajñāna*, etc.), which requirement may also have been originally introduced by Kumāriila.⁵

It is at the end of *Pramāṇavārttika* 1, however, beginning with verse 224 and extending to the end of the text – about a third of the treatise – where Dharmakīrti launches an all-out attack on Mīmāṃsā, focusing on the central claim of the Mīmāṃsakas that the Veda is eternal and

reasons – *prameyatva* (ŚV *codanā* 132a), *jñeyatva*, *vastutva*, *sattva* (TS_K 3157a2b/TS_S 3156a2b) – but “speaking” or “being a speaker” (*vaktṛtva*; cf. SS 23,11–14) is not among them. Kataoka (forthcoming, n. 2) gives a whole list of passages from Dharmakīrti’s works that, he maintains, “[seem] to presuppose (or criticize) ŚV or TV.” Some of the passages Kataoka has discussed in published articles. As always, the devil is in the details and their interpretation. I would add to Kataoka’s list the passage that begins PV 3.25ff., where Dharmakīrti refutes the reality of universals. Some of the ideas about universals he attacks are strikingly similar to ones that find expression in Kumāriila’s discussions.

⁴ See Krasser 1999.

⁵ Krasser 2001 traces this definition back to a verse quoted by Ratnakīrti that presumably comes from Kumāriila’s *Bṛhaṭṭīkā*: *tatrāpūrvārthavijñānaṃ niścitaṃ bādhavarjitam / aduṣṭakāraṇārabdhaṃ pramāṇaṃ lokasammataṃ //*. It should be noted, however, that the verse mentions four criteria that must be met for a cognition to be a *pramāṇa*, namely, (1) it presents a new object, (2) it is definite, (3) it is free of sublation, and (4) it is produced by non-defective causes, and that only the first of these is alluded to by PV 2.5a. Moreover, it is unlikely, *pace* Krasser 2001: 195, that Dharmakīrti would have proposed this alternative definition “in order to prove to the Mīmāṃsakas that, even according to their own definition when understood properly, not the Veda, but the Buddha is to be regarded as a *pramāṇa*,” since he would have been well aware that the Mīmāṃsakas considered the teachings of the Buddha to have been contradicted by other *pramāṇas* in many respects. (Thus, at the very least, the cognition of the Buddha was not *bādhavarjita*!) And so Dharmakīrti’s motive for introducing this alternative definition remains rather mysterious.

authorless. The passage that is translated in this volume, PV(SV) 1.312–340, represents the culmination of that critique. In this essay I would like to examine certain aspects of Dharmakīrti’s treatment of Mīmāṃsā in this passage.

My main concern will be, How well do Dharmakīrti’s criticisms in our text actually tell against the Mīmāṃsā position of the authorlessness of scripture? This may strike some readers as a rather unusual question to ask. Usually, as historians of Indian philosophy we restrict ourselves to reconstructing the ideas of Indian philosophers and understanding them in their historical context. We do not normally concern ourselves with their validity or cogency. I do believe, however, that this question is of relevance in assessing the depth and sophistication of Dharmakīrti’s knowledge of Mīmāṃsā. Buddhist legends about Dharmakīrti tell us that he was born into a Brahmin family.⁶ If that is true, then he would have received a Brahmin’s education, which very well could have included instruction in, or at least exposure to, Mīmāṃsā. How extensive was his training in Mīmāṃsā? Was he really *steeped* in it – so that perhaps Mīmāṃsā had a more profound influence on his thought than we realize? His preoccupation with mantras, in particular, gives this impression. Or did he have merely a superficial acquaintance with it, just enough to arouse a strong aversion in him toward it and provide him with enough information to be able to devise clever objections against its doctrines?⁷ (As they say, a little knowledge is a dangerous thing.) Or was his expertise in Mīmāṃsā somewhere in between?

⁶ Thus, Tāranātha (GCh 229): “Having a very sharp intellect, he [Dharmakīrti] thoroughly studied from his early childhood the fine arts, the Vedas with all their *aṅgas*, medicine, grammar and all the *tīrthika* philosophies.”

⁷ In my experience in the United States, at least, the most outspoken atheists are those who attended Catholic schools when they were young.

2. DHARMAKĪRTI'S TREATMENT OF MĪMĀṂSĀ

2.1. Overview of Dharmakīrti's critique of Mīmāṃsā, PV(SV)
1.312–340

For the Mīmāṃsaka the validity (*prāmāṇya*) of the Veda is grounded on its authorlessness (*apauruṣeyatva*). Dharmakīrti has the Mīmāṃsaka declare at PV 1.224 that the falsehood of statements can derive only from the defects of the humans who utter them (i.e., principally, their ignorance or dishonesty); an authorless statement therefore cannot be false. Up to the section of the text we have translated Dharmakīrti has already challenged this doctrine on several fronts.⁸ The authorlessness of the Veda would require that there be an eternal connection between word and meaning; but the connection between word and meaning is established by convention; indeed, in general, any relation between independent entities is not real but only mentally constructed.⁹ It would also require that words and sentences are themselves uncreated and permanent; but we know them to be transient, like everything else. (Here, Dharmakīrti presents his *vināśitvānumāna*.)¹⁰ We know, moreover, that humans are capable of devising mantras that are causally efficacious; thus the fact that the Veda contains mantras does not speak against its having a human author, either.¹¹ Nor does the fact that there is no memory of an author of the Veda; for a phenomenon of a certain

⁸ See above, pp. 9–15.

⁹ PV(SV) 1.226–238. See Eltschinger 2007a: 138–142.

¹⁰ PV(SV) 1.269–283ab. Extensive arguments specifically against the eternity of words and the sentence (whether conceived of as a *sphoṭa* or a succession of phonemes, *varṇānupūrvī*) are found at PV(SV) 1.247–268. For detailed summaries see Eltschinger 2007a: Chapters 5 and 6. Much of what Dharmakīrti says in his critique of the Mīmāṃsā doctrine of the eternity of language, starting with PV(SV) 1.225, seems to presuppose ideas of Kumārila. Yet there are at least two very important views of Kumārila that have an obvious bearing on his discussion that, as far as I am able to discern, he ignores: (1) the intrinsic validity (*svataḥprāmāṇya*) of all cognitions and (2) the impossibility of fixing the relation between word and meaning by convention (expounded in ŚV *sambandhākṣepaparihāra*). It is these sorts of lapses (there are others) that still make me reluctant to accept the widely held thesis that when Dharmakīrti is attacking Mīmāṃsā he is specifically attacking Kumārila, despite all the good work done by other scholars to point out evidence for it.

¹¹ PVS 123,14–124,23 and PV(SV) 1.292–311. See Eltschinger 2001 and 2008.

type – in this case, a linguistic corpus – will always have the same cause as other things of that type, whether or not it is immediately known, just like fire and fuel.¹²

Now, in this final section, beginning with v. 312, Dharmakīrti presents his final *reductio ad absurdum* of the Mīmāṃsā position – as if saving his most devastating criticism for last. Even if the Veda were authorless, he points out, *we could never know what it means!* For the Veda itself does not tell us what it means; humans must *surmise* it. And there is, according to the Mīmāṃsakas' own assumptions, no human qualified to interpret the Veda; for they believe that humans are incapable of knowing the supersensible things of which the Veda speaks.¹³

*artho 'yam nāyam artho na iti śabdā vadanti na /
kalpyo 'yam arthaḥ puruṣais te ca rāgādisamyutāḥ // PV 1.312*

[Vedic] words do not [themselves] declare, "This is our meaning, not this." The meaning [which Vedic words have] must be postulated by humans. The latter are possessed, however, of [moral defects] like desire.

Moreover, it is doubtful that there is any unbroken, uncorrupted tradition of Vedic interpretation. Even if there were an "authorless" tradition of interpretation, we could not be confident we knew what it meant any more than we are in knowing what the Veda means, since it would refer to the same supersensible matters. Finally, mundane usage (*lokavāda, prasiddhi*) cannot be resorted to as a criterion for determining the meaning of Vedic statements, least of all by the Mīmāṃsakas, who like to point out that what ordinary humans say is for the most part untrue – hence, surely, how they commonly employ words cannot serve as any kind of *pramāṇa* – and who also routinely deviate from common usage themselves in their Vedic interpretations.

Dharmakīrti thus presents the spectacle of a community of people diligently following the prescriptions and prohibitions of texts the meaning of which, according to their own teachings, they could not

¹² PV(SV) 1.242; see the entire section PV(SV) 1.239–247.

¹³ MīSū 1.1.4. See ŚV *pratyakṣasūtra*, esp. 17–37; Taber 2005: 51–58.

possibly understand. No wonder that the final statement of his critique is an expression of utter contempt for the pious Brahmin!

*vedaprāmāṇyaṃ kasyacit kartṛvādaḥ
snāne dharmecchā jātivādāvalepaḥ /
santāpārambhaḥ pāpahānāya ceti
dhvastaprajñāne pañca līṅgāni jāḍye // PV 1.340*

[Believing in the] authority of the Veda, claiming something [permanent] to be the agent [of actions], seeking merit in ablutions, taking pride in one's caste¹⁴ and undertaking penance to remove sin – these are the five signs of complete stupidity devoid of any discrimination.

2.2. Dharmakīrti's discussion, PV(SV) 1.319–320ab

Let us look a little more closely at some of the things Dharmakīrti says about “ordinary parlance” (*lokavāda*) or common usage (*prasiddhi*) as a criterion for determining the meaning of Vedic sentences and the possibility of an eternal, authorless tradition of exegesis. He takes up both of these matters together in vv. 319–320ab and his extensive *Sva-vṛtti* thereon. The account that follows is essentially identical to our synopsis of this section of the text. Because of its significance for assessing Dharmakīrti's knowledge of Mīmāṃsā, in particular, it seems worthwhile to highlight it here.

In raising the question of the criterion of common usage Dharmakīrti may have had in mind the principle stated at *Mīmāṃsāsūtra* 1.3.30 that the words of the Veda and ordinary language have the same meanings. In any case, Mīmāṃsakas routinely cite *prasiddhi*, common usage, as a reason for interpreting Vedic passages in certain ways; at other times, however, they justify deviating from common usage.

Is it possible, then, that we needn't rely on anyone with a special gift for knowing the supersensible to interpret for us what the Veda means; rather, we can just construe Vedic sentences ourselves according to the ordinary, everyday meanings of their words? Dharmakīrti immediately points out that, even if we construe Vedic words as ordinary ones, they will still in many instances be polysemic, as indeed ordinary words

¹⁴ Lit., “pride in declaring/speaking about one's caste.”

often are. Who will be able to determine which of the many possible meanings of a word in the Veda is the right one? (v. 319) The ordinary meaning of everyday discourse, moreover, is established by convention, which is accessible to instruction, while the Veda is supposedly eternal. Who could, in the case of words which supposedly have a beginningless, authorless relation with supersensible meanings, be able to tell us what they mean?

If, on the other hand, one held that there is an explanation of the meaning of the Vedic word that is beginningless and authorless as well – that is to say, an exegetical tradition that extends forever back into the past – then the problem is just moved back a step. How is the meaning of this beginningless explanation known? Moreover, how do we know the explanation has never been corrupted? We are aware of various factors that introduce errors into traditions – enmity, pride, and so forth. And why would the Mīmāṃsaka, of all people, put confidence in a supposedly unbroken tradition of explanation, since he is the one who emphasizes that humans afflicted with moral faults are not to be trusted?¹⁵ That, in fact, is his most characteristic point – “the color of his own face” – says Dharmakīrti.

In the continuation of his *Svavṛtti* to v. 319 Dharmakīrti goes further into how we hear of Vedic schools recovering after nearly dying out – even today some have only a few reciters – so that one might suspect that even those schools that have many adherents today could have been nearly extinct at one time but were restored, and that in the process of restoration errors could have crept into the recitation of the Veda in various ways. And the same could be the case for any “beginningless” tradition of Vedic interpretation.

In summary, it would seem that one cannot establish the meaning of the Veda either through a beginningless, authorless explanation or ordinary linguistic practice. Returning to the latter, Dharmakīrti points out that even if the relation of word and meaning weren’t conventional but eternal, ordinary parlance still shows us that words in general are

¹⁵ Thus, Kumāṛila’s famous statement (*ŚV codanā* 144ab), “At all times, humans for the most part speak what is untrue” (*sarvadā cāpi puruṣāḥ prāyeṇāṅṛtavādinaḥ* /). I am not convinced that *anṛtavādin* necessarily means here, or in the Vedic passage cited by Śābara (*ŚBh* II.4.4), *anṛtavādinī vāk*, *intentionally* speaking falsehood, hence lying.

polysemic, so that there would always be doubt about the meanings of Vedic words; indeed, there are lots of Vedic words whose meanings are unknown or known but used in unusual ways. But mainly what ordinary parlance teaches us is that a word can mean *anything*; it is actually only by convention that it is assigned to a specific meaning. So again in the case of Vedic words, it seems that a person capable of knowing supersensible things would be required to tell us the *supersensible* meanings to which they are assigned.

Yet even the Mīmāṃsaka, continues Dharmakīrti in PV(SV) 1.220ab, does not always follow common usage when it comes to explaining the meaning of Vedic words. He offers as examples the words *svarga* and *urvaśī*. *svarga* commonly means “heaven,” but the Mīmāṃsaka construes it as “delight.”¹⁶ *urvaśī*, meanwhile, is usually the name of a nymph who resides in heaven, but typically the Mīmāṃsakas do not interpret proper names in the Veda as referring to individuals – which would impugn its eternality if they were themselves “non-eternal” – but offer etymological analyses instead.¹⁷ Moreover, ritualists referred to the two kindling sticks that are rubbed together to start the fire in the Soma sacrifice as *Urvaśī* (the lower) and *Purūravas* (the upper one), who according to a widespread myth was her consort.¹⁸ (Learned Buddhists who knew the myth and the ritual must have thought this was a fine joke!) The Mīmāṃsaka, moreover, cannot claim that one must sometimes resort to an uncommon meaning because the common one is blocked, i.e., it does not fit the context, for how could one ever know in the case of a Vedic statement, which refers to a supersensible state of affairs, that the common meaning is blocked? And if we accept uncommon meanings in the case of such words as *svarga* and *urvaśī*, how do we know we shouldn’t accept one for *agnihotraṃ juhuyāt svargakāmaḥ*, say, “One should eat dog meat”? The meaning of this sentence cannot be resolved by other Vedic passages, because the meaning of those other passages are in doubt as well – for all we know, the occurrence of *agnihotraṃ juhuyāt svargakāmaḥ* there could also mean “One should eat dog meat”! Thus Dharmakīrti repeats the slur,

¹⁶ See ŚBh V.72,6–7 ad MīSū 4.3.15.

¹⁷ See ŚBh I.121,7–10 ad MīSū 1.1.28 (*pūrvapakṣa*) and I.123,7–124,5 ad 1.1.31 (*sid-dhānta*). For etymological derivations of *urvaśī* see Nir 5.14.

¹⁸ See TaitS 1.3.7.1 and 6.3.5.2–3; for versions of the myth see RV 10.95 and ŚB 11.5.1.

made initially in v. 318, for which this part of *Pramāṇavārttika* 1 is famous.

The criticisms that Dharmakīrti directs against Mīmāṃsā interpretive practices in our text, and especially in PV(SV) 1.319–320ab, reflect a knowledge of Mīmāṃsā that goes considerably beyond just the awareness that the Mīmāṃsakas held the Veda to be authorless, that even the relation between word and meaning is authorless, and that humans are incapable of cognizing the supersensible, because they are corrupted by desire, etc. They refer to specific exegetical principles, such as that the meaning of the words of the Veda and those of ordinary parlance are (for the most part) the same, that nevertheless in certain circumstances the common meaning must be abandoned, and that in many instances other passages of the Veda itself clarify what a particularly problematic passage means. And, also quite significantly, they allude to the Mīmāṃsā belief that recensions of the Veda are liable to extinction or at least periodic decline. Kumārila appeals in his *Tantravārttika* to lost Vedic texts as the basis of the authority of the *dharmaśāstras*.¹⁹ Do these references indicate that Dharmakīrti had a really in-depth knowledge of Mīmāṃsā, indeed, that perhaps at one point in time he had even been trained in Mīmāṃsā?

A way to approach this matter, I think, is to ask, What would a Mīmāṃsaka make of these kinds of criticisms? Would they have seemed adequate, or even be seen as posing a serious challenge, to someone thoroughly trained in Mīmāṃsā? Do they really get at the heart of Mīmāṃsā exegetical practice? Could they have been posed by someone who really knew what Mīmāṃsā was about? Or are they the objections of someone who was brilliant and perhaps much more knowledgeable of Mīmāṃsā than most, but who was fundamentally an outsider? That is what I would like to consider in the rest of my essay. I believe the short answer to the question, What would a Mīmāṃsaka make of these criticisms?, is something like the following. Contrary to what Dharmakīrti claims, *the Veda itself tells us what it means*. Mīmāṃsā, drawing on an ancient tradition of Vedic exegesis, provides us with a system of rules and principles, as clear and objective as the rules of logic, for interpreting it. One need only learn how to apply the proper methodo-

¹⁹ See Kataoka, forthcoming.

logy – which it is in fact one of the main tasks of Mīmāṃsā to elucidate – and the meaning of the Veda will unfold. But the full answer to this question is quite complicated, and I can only begin to give a hint of it here.

3. THE MĪMĀMSĀ SCIENCE OF EXEGESIS

3.1. *The interpretation of arthavādas in Mīmāṃsā*

Pādas 2–4 of the first *adhyāya* of the *Mīmāṃsāsūtra* and its commentaries (to which I shall refer, for the sake of convenience, as the *Mīmāṃsādarśana*) are specifically concerned with the meaning of the Veda – with whether it has any meaning, whether its meaning is coherent, and how to ascertain its meaning. The question of the meaning of Vedic passages is of course a theme that recurs throughout the *Mīmāṃsādarśana*, but it constitutes the main preoccupation of the *adhikaraṇas* that come immediately after the general discussion of the means of knowing Dharma in the *tarkapāda*. In the first *adhikaraṇa* of the second *pāda* (*sūtras* 1–18) the question is raised whether those passages of the Veda that do not directly relate to action are without *artha*.²⁰ Although “without *artha*” (*ānarthakya*) here means without purpose, it is closely related to being without meaning. Certain sentences of the Veda appear not to have a purpose because they cannot be construed as enjoining actions or accessories of actions. Thus, we encounter statements such as “He [Agni, frightened by the Asuras] cried (*arodīt*). That he [viz., Rudra] cried constitutes the rudra-ness of Rudra” (TaitS 1.5.1). This occurs in a Brāhmaṇa passage that discusses the *punar-ādheya*, the rite for rekindling the sacrificial fire. Later in the same *Samhitā*, in a discussion of the *kāmyeṣṭi* for offspring and cattle, we meet with the sentence “Prajāpati cut out his own fat” (TaitS 2.1.1). Now crying, the *pūrvapakṣin* of Śabara’s commentary points out, is not something one can do at will; and having cut out one’s own fat, one could not (presumably, completely incapacitated!) proceed to perform the sacrifice, as specified, “with a hornless goat.”²¹ Construed as injunc-

²⁰ MīSū 1.2.1: *āmnāyasya kriyārthatvād ānarthakyaṃ atadarthānāṃ tasmād anityam ucyate*.

²¹ ŚBh II.3.1–3.

tions, such passages do not make sense. Other passages, meanwhile, are contradicted by scripture itself, or even by perception. Thus, “The mind is a thief, speech is a liar” (MaitS 4.5.2)²² which Śabara associates with a discussion of the *dakṣinā* given to the priests;²³ and “During the day it is only the smoke of the fire that is seen, not its flame, and during the night only the flame of the fire is seen, not the smoke” (parallel: TaitB 2.1.2.10),²⁴ which Śabara connects with the injunction “In the evening one offers [by saying] *agnir jyotir jyotir agniḥ*, in the morning [by saying] *sūryo jyotir jyotiḥ sūryaḥ*” (TaitB 2.1.9.2).²⁵ The first two sentences cannot be injunctions because they are contradicted elsewhere by prohibitions against stealing and lying;²⁶ the last is contradicted by ordinary experience. These kinds of sentences, the *pūrvapakṣin* concludes, “do not effect a permanent purpose,”²⁷ and so may be excluded from consideration in interpreting the Veda. This point may have been raised within Mīmāṃsā or ritualist circles, that is to say, not necessarily by Buddhists or other heterodox skeptics, but by experts in the sacrifice who simply thought that the meaning of certain portions of the Veda may be ignored, or that they may not even be intended as having meaning at all.²⁸

The solution to the apparent purposelessness of such sentences, as developed in the *siddhānta* of the first *adhikaraṇa* (*sūtras* 7ff.), is to interpret them properly as *arthavādas* which praise the actions of the

²² ŚBh II.4.4.

²³ *hiranyaṃ haste bhavaty atha gr̥hṇāti*, parallel to MaitS 4.8.3, which reads *nyati* instead of *gr̥hṇāti* (see Garge 1952: 108). ŚBh II.28,2–3.

²⁴ ŚBh II.5,4–5.

²⁵ ŚBh II.28,9–12.

²⁶ See ŚBh IV.322,3–378,3 ad MīSū 3.4.12–13, where Śabara argues, remarkably, that TaitS 2.5.5.6, *nāṅṛtaṃ vadet*, has as its scope, not human behavior in general, but only the Darśapūrṇamāsa!

²⁷ ŚBh II.3,5–6: *tasmād evaṃjātiyākāni vākyāny anityāny ucyante. yady api ca nityāni tathāpi na nityam arthaṃ kurvantīti*.

²⁸ In the continuation of the passage the *pūrvapakṣin* explains that the objection is not intended to impugn the entire Veda: *sa eṣa vākyaikaśeṣyākṣepo na kṛtsnasya vākyasya* (ŚBh II.3,7–8). Concerns about the meaningfulness of mantras are attributed by Yāska to Kautsa in Nir 1.15, who argues that if the Veda is without meaning then a science of etymology is unnecessary. Renou (1960: 68), meanwhile, notes that a *Prātiśākhya* of the Atharva Veda school is ascribed to a certain Kautsa.

injunctions they are associated with.²⁹ Also in TaitS 2.1.1, for example, the sentence “Vāyu is the swiftest deity” comes immediately after the injunction “One who desires wealth should sacrifice (*ālabheta*) a white [victim] dedicated to Vāyu.” This sentence, then, supports the injunction by eulogizing the god to whom the victim is sacrificed; it is an *arthavāda*. When an *arthavāda* occurs together with an injunction, it motivates the sacrificer to carry out the rite. Yet the connection between *vidhi* and *arthavāda* is not always clear, nor is the manner in which the *arthavāda* supports the *vidhi*. Often an *arthavāda* must be interpreted *figuratively*. When in the same passage it is said, “Prajāpati cut out his own fat,” it is not intended that this ever happened.³⁰ From the story told in this section of the Brāhmaṇa, however – of Prajāpati creating livestock and offspring by cutting out his own fat and placing it in the fire, which moreover can be given a perfectly reasonable sense if one grasps the secondary meanings of its words³¹ – it becomes evident that a praising of the efficacy of the act enjoined, in this instance, the sacrificing of a hornless goat dedicated to Prajāpati by one desiring offspring and cattle, is to be understood.³²

Similarly, the mentioning of tears, which Śābara associates with the injunction not to place silver on the *barhis* for the priest – one should, rather, always give gold! – is to strengthen the prohibition; for, the passage continues, “The tear that was shed became silver; therefore silver is not a suitable gift, for it is born of tears” (TaitS 1.5.1.1–2). The *arthavāda* does not really report that Rudra wept, but connects silver with weeping and unhappiness. And so for the other false statements, e.g., “The mind is a thief, speech is a liar” – this, too, strengthens the injunc-

²⁹ MīSū 1.2.7: *vidhinā tv ekavākyatvāt stutyarthena vidhīnām syuḥ*.

³⁰ For, Śābara explains (ŚBh II.26,11–12), if the mentioning of an actual occurrence (*vṛttāntānvākhyāna*) were asserted (*vidhīyamāna*) then the fault of the Veda’s having a beginning would ensue.

³¹ Śābara (ŚBh II.27,1–4) offers such a reading: “Prajāpati would be some eternal thing – wind, space, or the sun. ‘He cut out his own fat’ [would mean] rain, the wind, a ray of light. ‘He placed it in the fire’ [would mean,] in lightning, the light [of the heavens] [read: *varcasi?*], or the mundane [fire].”

³² ŚBh II.26,1–27,4.

tion to give the priests gold, according to Śābara and Kumārila.³³ The mind is a thief in a secondary sense, “due to its form,”³⁴ because, as Śābara explains, “as thieves have a concealed form so does the mind.”³⁵ Speech is figuratively a liar, “because of what is predominant,” i.e., for the most part people say what is untrue.³⁶

All of these sentences, then, can be given a coherent meaning that associates them with action, first, by construing them together with the appropriate injunctions in the same or other passages³⁷ and, second, by ascertaining their figurative meaning when they have one.³⁸ Mīmāṃsā is largely dedicated to showing how to make such determinations.³⁹

3.2. *The construal of mantras*

The interpretation of *arthavādas* is just one of many areas in which Mīmāṃsā developed a scientific methodology for solving problems of interpretation. Another very important topic in Mīmāṃsā of course is

³³ Kumārila (TV II.28,13–14) explains – rather implausibly – that mind and speech are being deprecated because, though related to the action to be performed, they are of much less significance than the gold: *tadatyantāntaraṅgabhūtayor apy anayor dūreṇa hiraṇyād ūnatvaṃ steyānṛtavādayogād iti*.

³⁴ MīSū 1.2.11: *rūpāt prāyāt*.

³⁵ ŚBh II.28,6–7.

³⁶ See above, p. 125 n. 15.

³⁷ That is, together with which they form “a single sentence” (*ekavākyatā*). See McCrea 2000: 436–7.

³⁸ Some of the most notable cases where one is called upon to resort to figurative meaning are those passages that attribute physical features to deities, as if they were embodied. Mīmāṃsā in general rejects the popular notion of deities as supernatural beings. See MīSū 9.1.6–10 and 10.4.23. According to Garge 1952: 152, “It is clear ... that the Mīmāṃsakas do not regard the Deities as objects of worship nor believe that they exist anywhere except in the words of the Vedic texts. They are only eternal concepts.”

³⁹ According to Garge 1952: 261, “*arthavāda* passages appear in the Vedic Texts in numerous forms, giving rise to a number of complicated questions regarding their syntactical interpretations. Jaimini composed as many as sixty-four *sūtras* and eleven *adhikaraṇas* in which he exhaustively explains all the principal types in which the *arthavāda* texts appear in Vedic Texts.”

the construal of mantras, the principal question in their case being whether they are meaningful at all. As Śabara poses it,

Now, is it the case that mantras express something intended or do not express something intended? Do they assist the sacrifice by revealing a meaning or by their mere utterance?⁴⁰

The *pūrvapakṣin* notes various mantras that appear to be nonsensical in different ways. They mention things that do not exist (RV 4.58.3 refers to a bull [*vr̥ṣabha*] with four horns, three feet, two heads, and seven hands);⁴¹ they assign purposes to inanimate objects (“O plant, protect this one!” TaitS 1.2.1.b);⁴² they are self-contradictory (“Aditi is the heaven, Aditi is the atmosphere” RV 1.89.10);⁴³ or their meanings are simply unknown (*sṛṇy eva jarbhari turpharītū* RV 10.106.6).⁴⁴ Thus, it would seem that their meanings are not intended, but just the uttering of the (nonsensical) mantra is what is important.

Śabara’s *siddhāntin* responds, however, that the meanings of mantras are fully intended and that they are purposeful in that they “bring to light the subsidiary parts of the sacrifice during the sacrifice,”⁴⁵ that is, as later treatises will explain, they serve as a kind of script for the priest to follow in performing the ritual.⁴⁶ Thus, they are meaningful, but in many instances their meaning is figurative. The mantra mention-

⁴⁰ ŚBh II.49,1–2. See Taber 1989.

⁴¹ MīSū 1.2.31a: *avidyamānatvāt*.

⁴² MīSū 1.2.31b: *acetane ’rthe khalv arthaṃ nibandhanāt*.

⁴³ MīSū 1.2.31c: *arthavipratīṣedhāt*.

⁴⁴ MīSū 1.2.31e: *avijñeyāt*. In the Joṣī edition of *Mīmāṃsādarśana* 1.2–2.1 MīSū 1.2.31 is broken into nine parts, numbered 31–39, “for ease of explanation” (p. 48, note). The beginning of the *siddhānta*, *aviśiṣṭas tu vākyaṛthaḥ*, however, restarts the numbering with 32. Jha’s translation also breaks up *sūtra* 1.2.31 but begins the *siddhānta* with number 40! All of Śabara’s examples of unintelligible R̥gvedic mantras in his discussion of this reason appear to be taken from Yaska’s *Nirukta*. See Nir 13.5 for an explanation of RV 10.106.6; Nir 6.15 for an explanation of *amyak* (in RV 1.169.3: *amyak sā*); and Nir 5.11 for *kāṇukā* (in RV 8.77.4: *indraḥ somasya kāṇukā*). See Garge 1952: 143–144.

⁴⁵ ŚBh II.57,12–15: *yajñe yajñāṅgaprakāśanam eva prayojanam ... na hy aprakāśite yajñe yajñāṅge ca yāgaḥ śakyo ’bhinirvartayitum*.

⁴⁶ See AS 17: *prayogasamavetārthasmārakā mantrāḥ. teṣāṃ ca tādr̥śārthasmārakatve-naivārthavattvam*. See Taber 1989: 149–50.

ing a bull with four horns, etc., Śābara explains, should be taken as an *arthavāda*, construed figuratively as follows: the four horns are the *hotṛs*; the three feet are the *savanas*; the two heads are the sacrificer and his wife; the seven hands the meters; the bull is the sacrifice, and so on. It is like describing a river by saying, “It has Cakravāka birds as its breasts, a row of swans as its teeth, reeds as its clothes, and mosses as its hair.”⁴⁷ “Aditi is heaven, Aditi is the atmosphere,” similarly, should not be taken literally. It is like saying, “You are my mother, you are my father.”⁴⁸

In fact, a meaning always exists for a mantra, but it may not be evident to everyone.⁴⁹ In difficult cases, Śābara explains, the meaning must be determined “from the roots of words by means of illustrative passages, etymology, and grammar.”⁵⁰ Kumārila expands this list to include the purpose (*artha*) of the mantra, i.e., its application to a particular ritual action; its context (*prakaraṇa*), i.e., all the relevant passages specifying the various factors of the sacrifice to which it belongs; the hymn in which it occurs; the deity to whom it is addressed; and the *ṛṣi* to whom it is attributed⁵¹ – Kumārila of course explains that this means, not the *ṛṣi* who *composed* the mantra, but the *ṛṣi* who, according to legend, employed it on an important occasion.⁵² And he goes on to

⁴⁷ ŚBh II.64,6–12.

⁴⁸ ŚBh II.65,7–8. Cf. Nir 4.23. Indeed, ṚV 1.89.10 reads in its entirety: *aditir dyaure aditir antarikṣam aditir mātā sa pitā sa putraḥ / viśve devā aditiḥ pañca janā aditir jātām aditir janitvam*.

⁴⁹ MiSū 1.2.41: *sataḥ param avijñānam*.

⁵⁰ ŚBh II.66,1–67,1: *nigamaniruktavyākaraṇavaśena dhātuto 'rthaḥ kalpayitavyaḥ*. The Vedic passages cited in the *Nirukta*, e.g., as revealing the meanings of words are called *nigamas*. As suggested by Kullūkabhaṭṭa ad MS 4.19 (*paryāyakathanena vedārthabodhakān nigamākhyāṃś ca granthān*), compilations of such examples with explanations may have existed. Kumārila and Śābara generally recommend resorting to etymology in explaining unknown Vedic words, yet they also recognize the principle that the established conventional meaning (*rūḍhārtha*), when it is known, is more authoritative. See, e.g., TV II.149,2–154,4 ad MiSū 1.3.10. As for grammar, the eighth *adhikaraṇa* of the *Mīmāṃsādarśana*, MiSū 1.3.24–29, is devoted to establishing its importance for Vedic study. See below, p. 141–143 nn. 86–87.

⁵¹ TV II.66,2–3: *tatra cārthaprakaraṇasūktadevatārṣanigamaniruktavyākaraṇajñānāny adhiḡamopāyāḥ, teṣāṃ hy evamartham eva paripālanam*.

⁵² TV II.66,10–14.

offer detailed explanations of the *pūrvapakṣin's* examples of mantras whose meaning is unknown.⁵³ Note that Śabara and Kumārila do not appeal here to an “authorless explanation that has come down through an unbroken tradition,” as Dharmakīrti has his Mīmāṃsaka suggest,⁵⁴ not to mention expositors endowed with a special capacity for perceiving supersensible things! Although we may recognize certain authorities, they are simply those who have proven themselves the most skilled in applying the above-mentioned considerations.⁵⁵

3.3. The determination of figurative meaning

As we have seen, one must often resort to figurative or secondary meaning in order to make sense of *arthavādas* and mantras, yet there is a method for doing that, as well.⁵⁶ MīSū 1.4.23⁵⁷ gives the grounds for construing a word figuratively – literally, as a “statement of a secondary aspect or feature” (*guṇavāda*) – when its primary meaning is blocked. As Śabara and Kumārila explain at length, a word can be employed in a secondary sense when it refers to a quality related to its primary meaning.⁵⁸ (The Mīmāṃsā theory of metaphor is quite

⁵³ E.g., of *ṣṛṇy eva jarbharī turpharītū* (RV 10.106.6), TV II.66,18–67,9. Cf. Nir 13.5. Cf. Sāyaṇa's explanation (RVBh 4.695), which is quite similar. See Garge 1941–42.

⁵⁴ See PVSV 168,15–16 above, pp. 45–46. But see also below, pp. 141–142 n. 86.

⁵⁵ Kumārila (TV II.67,25–27) concludes his discussion of MīSū 1.2.41: *tad evaṃ sarvatra kenacit prakāreṇābhīyuktānām arthotprekṣopapatteḥ prasiddhatarārthābhāve 'pi vedasya tadabhyupagamāt siddham arthavattvam*. “Thus, in this way, since it is possible in every case for those who are versed in [the Veda] to reflect on its meaning in some way, it is established that the Veda is meaningful, even though a commonly known meaning is absent, because [those experts] accept this [?].”

⁵⁶ Cf. the complaint of the *pūrvapakṣin* at the beginning of the discussion of *arthavādas*, TV II.2,7–14.

⁵⁷ Taken as one *sūtra* in the Joṣī edition of *Mīmāṃsādarśana* 1.2–2.1: *tatsiddhir jātiḥ sārūpyam praśaṃsā bhūmā līngasamavāyah*. Jha breaks it into six *sūtras*, 1.4.23–28.

⁵⁸ ŚBh II.315,5–321,2 and TV ad loc. The word “lion,” e.g., indicates as its primary meaning something in which courage predominates. One uses “lion” figuratively when one intends to refer to the *quality* of courage in something, e.g., a man, which is related to the primary meaning of the word. Śabara (ŚBh II.315,5) formally etymologizes *guṇavāda* as *guṇād eṣa vādaḥ*, “This statement is due to a quality.” Nevertheless, he uses the expression in his discussion as meaning “the statement of a quality/secondary aspect” (e.g., ŚBh II.315,6: *katham aguṇavacano guṇam brūyāt*).

sophisticated and merits detailed treatment by someone.) The quality in question can be “accomplishing that [function]” (*tatsiddhi*), as when it is said, “The grass bundle (*prastara*) is the sacrificer” (TaitS 2.6.5.3). The sacrificer is the most important of all the factors of the sacrifice; when the *prastara* is placed upon the *barhis*⁵⁹ and thereby, as it were, given a place of honor, it assumes a role similar to that of the sacrificer; it accomplishes the same function.⁶⁰ Or the quality in question may be that of “origin” (*jāti*) – that is to say, having the same origin – as in the case of the sentence “The Brahmin is of fire” (TaitB 2.7.3.1); for both the Brahmin and fire are said to have come out of the mouth of Prajāpati. Or it can be visual similarity (*sārūpya*), as in the case of the sentence “The post is the sacrificer” (par. ŚB 13.2.6.9); for both stand erect. And so on. In sum, the determination of figurative meaning in Mīmāṃsā is not a subjective matter, either, but follows established rules.

3.4. The appeal to common usage (*lokaprasiddhi*)

Of course, the main guiding principle for determining the meanings of Vedic words is the fact, as Mīmāṃsā sees it, that the words of the Veda are the same as the words of ordinary parlance and have the same meanings. As I mentioned above, this principle is stated in MīSū 1.3.30 and developed in the commentaries thereto.⁶¹ Dharmakīrti criticizes the Mīmāṃsakas, in PV(SV) 1.319–324, for employing this principle arbitrarily. They insist on it, he implies, when it suits their purposes and abandon it when it doesn’t. The *Mīmāṃsādarśana*, however – though actual practice of course may have been different – is always careful to justify when it applies and when it doesn’t.

On the face of it, according to Śabara’s *pūrvapakṣin* in ŚBh 1.3.30, the words of the Veda and ordinary parlance seem to be different. We have such sentences as “The cows of the gods move on their backs” (ĀpŚSū 11.7.6) and “May Agni kill the Vṛtras (*vṛtrāṇi*)” (par. ṚV

⁵⁹ Namely, in the course of the Darśapūrṇamāsa sacrifice. See TaitS 1.1.11.

⁶⁰ TV II.315,21. Cf. however McCrea 2000: 438, who offers a different analysis.

⁶¹ Again, the basic idea is already found articulated by Yāska, Nir 1.16: *arthavantaḥ [mantrāḥ] śabdāsāmānyāt*. Cf. MīSū 1.2.32 (*aviśiṣṭas tu vākyaṛthaḥ*) in the discussion of the meaningfulness of mantras, and ŚBh (ad loc.) II.57,5: *aviśiṣṭas tu loke prapuyyamānānām vede ca padānām arthaḥ*.

6.16.34). Whatever “cows” and “Agni” refer to in these sentences, they cannot be the same things we mean when we use those words in common speech.⁶² But the *siddhāntin* insists that we recognize the words themselves as familiar; we don’t perceive any difference between them and common words.⁶³ It is just a question of how they are being employed in these sentences. The word “cows” in the above mantra, e.g., is used to refer to *divine* cows, and we would expect divine cows to have rather different properties from ordinary ones.⁶⁴ But the core meaning of the word is the same. As Kumārila puts it, just as men with snub noses and hooded ears (? *karnaṅprāvaraṅa*) are no less men, so cows with different properties from ordinary ones, e.g., dwarf cows, are still cows.⁶⁵ The cows that are referred to in Vedic texts, moreover, often *are* just ordinary ones, especially when it is a matter of the *dakṣiṅā* to be given to priests! In any case, when we proceed on the assumption that the meanings of words are the same as those of ordinary parlance, from which they are in fact phonetically indistinguishable, then the Veda for the most part makes sense; it consists of intelligible injunctions, and the application of its mantras to ritual acts is clear.⁶⁶

⁶² In the case of Agni, it is well known that Indra, not Agni, is the slayer of the Vṛtras. Meanwhile, *vṛtra* in common parlance is masculine, not neuter. See the various other reasons for holding Vedic words to be different cited by Kumārila, TV II.231,15–19.

⁶³ ŚBh II.232,5: *na teṣāṃ eṣāṃ ca vibhāgam upalabhāmahe*. See TV II.233,21–25 for Kumārila’s expansion of this point.

⁶⁴ TV II.233,8–9: *yathāśrutagavādīnāṃ yāpi vācyāntare śrutiḥ / arthaiikatvāvirodhena guṇamātrānyatāparā //*. Or else, as Kumārila suggests (TV II.233,23–234,1), the sentence could mean that from the perspective of the gods in heaven cows on earth appear to be moving on their backs!

⁶⁵ TV II.233,10–13.

⁶⁶ This seems to be the point being made by MīSū 1.3.30 itself: *prayogacodanābhāvād arthaiikatvam avibhāgāt*. “There is sameness of meaning [of Vedic and ordinary words], because there is [the comprehension of] injunctions and applications, because there is no [perceived] difference.” Śabara and Kumārila interpret the two ablatives of the *sūtra* as providing separate reasons. The first reason for sameness of meaning – thereby, implicitly, sameness of the words themselves, Kumārila clarifies (TV II.232,18–19) – is that it makes possible the comprehension of injunctions from the Veda and the applications of its mantras. Śabara and Kumārila, however, both consider this an inadequate response, since it indicates merely a *prajojana* for considering the words and meanings the same, not a reason why they

In fact, the vast majority of words in the Veda are words we recognize. It is because we are confident that *uttānā vahanti* means “move on their backs” that we suspect that *gavāḥ*, “cows,” is being used in an unusual sense. When we hear the sentence *agnihotraṃ juhuyāt svargakāmaḥ*,⁶⁷ the words *juhuyāt* and *svargakāmaḥ*, at least, are already quite familiar to us. We know that someone desirous of heaven is being told to make some sacrifice. The only real question can be, what exactly does *agnihotra* mean? Yet even then, the various possibilities for analyzing the word etymologically are clearly given. Those are to be weighed, moreover, in light of the fact that it is not just the Vedic texts that have been handed down, but also all the rituals that go with them, and the associations of certain rituals with certain texts.

Indeed, the pertinent question in regard to *agnihotraṃ juhuyāt svargakāmaḥ* for the Mīmāṃsaka is not, Could it mean something completely different from what scholars versed in the Veda have always taken it to mean? Such a suggestion, for those who are otherwise able to follow the Veda as a coherent body of prescriptions and prohibitions, would be simply absurd. The pertinent question is rather, according to MīSū 1.4.4 and the commentaries thereon, Does the word *agnihotra* enjoin a *guṇa*, an accessory of the sacrifice – that is to say, one of the complex of items that comprise the sacrificial act: the substance offered, the instrument used to offer it, the deity to whom it is offered, and so forth – or is it merely the *name* of a sacrifice?

The answer to this question is provided, then, according to the Mīmāṃsā method of analysis, as follows. If we take *agnihotra* as a *bahuvrīhi* meaning that in which an offering (*hotra*) is made to Agni (*agnaye*

must be so considered (ŚBh II.232,3–5: *ucyate prayojanam idam. hetur vyapadiśyātām iti. tato hetur ucyate. avibhāgād iti*). A second reason for sameness of meaning is therefore required: namely, essentially, because we recognize the words as being the same. It does seem possible, however, to read the two ablatives as nested: the meanings of Vedic and ordinary words must be the same, because we comprehend coherent injunctions from the Veda, due to the fact that we recognize the words themselves as the same.

⁶⁷ Which, however, is not precisely matched by any Vedic text. The texts that come closest to it are TaitS 1.5.9.1: *agnihotraṃ juhoti*; KāṭhS 6.3: *payasāgnihotraṃ juhoti*; and MaitS 1.8.6: *ya evaṃ vidvān aghihotraṃ juhoti*. Garge takes the Kāṭhaka and Maitrāyaṇīya passages as providing the originative injunctions for the *agnihotra*; see Garge 1952: 102 and 266. See also above, p. 40 n. 35.

hotram asminn iti), maintains the *pūrvapakṣin*, then it would appear to enjoin one of the accessories of the sacrifice, specifically, the *deity* for whom it is intended. “In this way,” Śabara states, “common usage will be upheld.”⁶⁸ The *siddhāntin*, however, points out that the deity of the *agnihotra* is already indicated by another text.⁶⁹ Since an injunction can enjoin only that which is previously unknown,⁷⁰ the mentioning of *agnihotra* in *agnihotraṃ juhuyāt svargakāmaḥ* could not have injunctive force in reference to the deity. It must therefore function merely as the name of a sacrifice to be offered to Agni; i.e., the sentence should be taken to be enjoining the sacrifice itself, not one of its accessories. Thus, the correct analysis of the word, still as a *bahuvrīhi*, will draw attention to the *action* to which it refers: “that in which there is an offering to Agni, which is a sacrifice (*homa*), that is an *agnihotra*.”⁷¹ Kumārila even argues that the compound that is the basis of the *bahuvrīhi* should be read, not as a dative *tatpuruṣa* – which would directly enjoin an offering *for* Agni – but as a genitive *tatpuruṣa*, which merely *mentions* Agni (“an offering of Agni”).⁷²

In the cases of other names of sacrifices, discussed in other *adhikaraṇas* in the first part of MīSū 1.4, one must diverge even further from common usage. In the injunction *citrayā yajeta paśukāmaḥ* (TaitS 2.4.6.1) one would normally assume *citrayā* to refer to a speckled cow;⁷³ thus, the injunction should be taken as enjoining a particular kind of victim. But this would entail a “syntactic split” (*vākyabheda*) –

⁶⁸ ŚBh II.285,4–5: *prasiddhir evam anugrahīṣyate*.

⁶⁹ Namely, *yad agnaye prajāpataye ca sāyaṃ juhoti*, par. MaitS 1.8.7.

⁷⁰ ŚBh II.285,12–13: *aviditavedanaṃ ca vidhir ity ucyate*. See Kataoka 2003b. Kataoka argues that the idea that a *vidhi* can only enjoin something not previously known was the basis for the well-known Mīmāṃsā doctrine that a *pramāṇa* is “the apprehension of an unapprehended object” (*agrhitārthagrahaṇa*). His thesis is plausible, but I do not think one can exclude the possibility that the derivation went in the other direction.

⁷¹ ŚBh II.286,1–2: *yasminn agnaye hotraṃ homo bhavati tad agnihotraṃ*.

⁷² Similarly, we speak of *aśvaghāsa*, “grass of horses” (TV II.287,23–288,11).

⁷³ For a discussion of the problems associated with this citation, see Garge 1952: 29–30, 83.

more than one thing would be enjoined in a single statement.⁷⁴ Thus, in this instance, too, we must interpret *citrā* as the name of the sacrifice. Similarly, for *udbhidā yajeta* (*Tāṇḍya Brāhmaṇa* 19.7.2⁷⁵), one would normally, on the basis of the known meanings of the components of the word *udbhid*, take it to be referring to the axe.⁷⁶ In that case, however, since *yajeta* actually means, according to the Mīmāṃsā analysis of optative verbs, *yāgena kuryāt*, one would have to construe *udbhidā* figuratively as *udbhidvatā*; that is to say, one would read the sentence as *udbhidvatā yāgena kuryāt*. But it is preferable to avoid resorting to a secondary meaning whenever possible – another basic Mīmāṃsā rule. Therefore, one should take *udbhid* as the name of the sacrifice being enjoined. The sentence, then, is a primary injunction of a certain sacrifice.⁷⁷

In sum, although the meaning of the word in ordinary parlance is in most cases the key to understanding a Vedic word, there are circumstances where it has to be abandoned. Yet this is never to be done arbitrarily, without concrete justification, as Dharmakīrti seems to suggest.⁷⁸ One of the main purposes of Mīmāṃsā, especially in the section

⁷⁴ If *citrā* referred to a property of the victim, then the sentence would specify that a sacrifice previously mentioned should be carried out by means of a cow that is female and speckled, and that the sacrifice will have cattle as its result. All that cannot be enjoined by a single sentence! (ŚBh II.280,1–281,1 ad MiSū 1.4.3). Cf., however, the treatment of *aruṇayā piṅgākṣyā ekahāyanyā somaṃ krīṇāti* (par. TaitS 6.1.6.7) in ŚBh IV.33,2–35,5 ad 3.1.12, which one would expect to be parallel, but which differs for subtle reasons. See McCrea 2000: 442–446.

⁷⁵ According to Jha; not confirmed by Garge 1952.

⁷⁶ TV II.271,5–8.

⁷⁷ ŚBh II.274,5–277,1 ad MiSū 1.4.2.

⁷⁸ Even when it comes to *svarga*, one of Dharmakīrti's examples of a word that Mīmāṃsakas do not construe according to *prasiddhi*, Śābara offers an elaborate justification, ad MiSū 6.1.1–3 (ŚBh V.173,13–184,4), for why it is not to be taken in its customary sense. There, the topic of the *adhikaraṇa* is whether *svarga*, in injunctions such as *darśapūrṇamāsābhyāṃ svargakāmo yajeta*, "One who desires heaven should sacrifice with the new and full moon ceremonies," refers to the principal factor (*pradhāna*) of the ritual or to a secondary element (*guṇa*), with the implication that if it refers to the latter, then the purport of the injunction is that only one who desires heaven is qualified to carry out the sacrifice (the full argument is too complex to relate here). Such a view is maintained by the *pūrvapakṣin*, who supports it by alleging that according to ordinary usage (*laukikaḥ prayogaḥ*), heaven is a sub-

of the *Mīmāṃsādarśana* under discussion (MīSū 1.2–1.4), is to provide guidelines for when it is to be abandoned and when not.

3.5. The resolution of polysemy

Yet often words in ordinary parlance are polysemic. Dharmakīrti asks, Who can determine which of several meanings of the ordinary word the Vedic word is supposed to have?⁷⁹ Now, the problem of how to decide between multiple meanings of a word is taken up in the fourth (*Yavavarāha*) *adhikaraṇa* of *Mīmāṃsāsūtra* 1.3 (*sūtras* 8 and 9).⁸⁰ As Śābara introduces the topic, we find the words *yava*, *varāha*, and *vetasa* in the Veda. Yet these words are used differently among different speakers in different locales (*deśa*). In some places *yava* refers to barley (*dīrghaśūka*), in others to mustard seed (*priyaṅgu*); for some speakers *varāha* means a pig, for others, a kind of bird; and in some places *vetasa* means cane (? *vañjula*), in others, the rose-apple tree (*jambu*).⁸¹ How do we decide in which senses these, and other apparently polysemic words, are being used in the Veda? The *pūrvapakṣin* maintains that, since different meanings are established among different communities of speakers in each case, there should be an option.⁸² The

stance (*dravya*) – as we gather when people say, “Fine silken clothes are heaven,” “Sixteen-year-old girls are heaven,” etc. – in general, “a substance that yields delight (*prītimad dravyam*)” (ŚBh V.176,4). He rejects the common employment of *svarga* for a certain place, since there is no evidence for the existence of such a place (ŚBh V.177,9–16)! Since substances are commonly intended as being *for the purpose of actions*, hence as subordinate factors, heaven would therefore be a subordinate factor. In the end this interpretation is rejected by the *siddhāntin*, who argues for deviating from the common usage cited by the *pūrvapakṣin*, yet apparently agreeing with him that we should not take *svarga* as referring to a particular place, and interpreting heaven rather simply as “delight” or “happiness” (*prīti*), i.e., the principal thing to be brought about by such sacrifices.

⁷⁹ See PV(SV) 1.319cd and 323 above, pp. 44 and 54–55.

⁸⁰ This is the *fifth* *adhikaraṇa* in Jha’s translations of the *Śābarabhāṣya* and *Tantra-vārttika*.

⁸¹ ŚBh II.139,2–140,2.

⁸² MīSū 1.3.8: *teṣv adarśanād virodhasya samā vipratipattiḥ*. “Because of not seeing any opposition in their case, a different view is equal in force.” Kumārila (TV II.140,7–10) presents the leading idea of the *pūrvapakṣa* as follows: *yatra deśe hi yaḥ śabdo yasminn arthe prayujyate / śaktis tadgocarā tasya vācikākhyā pramīyate // tasyāś ca*

siddhānta, however, as stated by MīSū 1.3.9, is that “[those meanings], rather, which are based on scripture [are to be chosen]; for that is the basis [of Dharma].”⁸³ Or, as Śabara somewhat freely explains the *sūtra*, “The meaning of a word [in the Veda] is what it is for those who base themselves on scripture,”⁸⁴ i.e., those “learned” (*śiṣṭa*) in the Veda. Indeed, *they* are the basis (*nimitta*) for ascertaining *śruti* and *smṛti*.⁸⁵ What this means, once again, is not that such people have some capacity others lack, or access to an eternal, authorless tradition of exegesis, even though Śabara speaks of their commanding “an unbroken memory of words and the Veda.”⁸⁶ It means, rather – as I understand it –

sarvagāmitvaṃ tannīyātvāt pramīyate / naikeṣāṃ eva sā hy asti keṣāṃ cid vā na vidyate //. “If a word is used in a particular meaning in a particular place, it is cognized that it has a *śakti*, called expressive, which has that [meaning] as its scope. And it is cognized that that [*śakti*] pervades everywhere, since it is suitable for that. Indeed, it does not exist for only some people but not exist for others.”

⁸³ MīSū 1.3.9: *śāstrasthā vā tannimittatvāt*.

⁸⁴ ŚBh II.141,4: *yaḥ śāstrasthānām sa śabdārthaḥ*.

⁸⁵ ŚBh II.141,5–142,1: *śiṣṭa nimittaṃ śrutismṛtyavadhāraṇe*. I take *śiṣṭa* as having a stronger connotation than merely “cultured,” which it seems to have, e.g., in the Dharmaśāstras.

⁸⁶ ŚBh II.141,5: *teṣāṃ avicchinnā smṛtiḥ śabdeṣu vedeṣu ca*. We encounter other locutions like this in the *pūrvapakṣa* of the eighth *adhikaraṇa* (1.3.24–29) of Kumārila’s TV. This *adhikaraṇa* concerns whether the Veda makes any restriction regarding the correct use of words, hence, whether the study of the grammatical *smṛti* texts (such as Pāṇini) pertains to Dharma. (The Grammarian tradition of course held that the study of *vyākaraṇa* does pertain to Dharma; see, e.g., MBh I.8,3–22.) The *pūrvapakṣin* argues to the contrary that grammar is of no relevance, maintaining at one juncture in his long discourse (TV II.200,3–202,14) that it is not necessary or even helpful in resolving doubts about the meaning of the Veda (*asandeha* is one of the purposes of grammar listed by Patañjali, MBh I.13,14); for other means suffice – first and foremost, “the usage of elders” (*vṛddhavyavahāra*), but also *nigama*, *nirukta*, *kalpasūtra*, and *tarka*. See TV II.200,3–6: *asandehaś ca vedārthe yad apy prayojanam / tad apy asad yato nāsmāt padavākyārthanirṇayau // yataḥ padārthasandehās tāvad bahavo vṛddhavyavahārād eva nivartante. śeṣāś ca nigamaniruktakalpasūtra-tarkābhīyuktebhyaḥ sarveṣāṃ arthapratipādanaparatvāt*. Yet in this passage the *pūrvapakṣin* also refers to “the tradition of knowers of the meaning of the Veda” (*vedārthavitparamparā*) and “the tradition of expositors” (*vyākhyātrparamparā*), and even suggests at one point that the explanation of the Veda is as eternal as the Veda itself (TV II.201,18–21): *na cāgrhītaśabdārthaiḥ kaiś cid vyākaraṇāśrayaṇāt / vyākhyātuṃ śakyate vedo yataḥ syāt tena nīcayaḥ // yathaiāvasthito vedas tathā vyākhyāpi sarvadā / ataḥ sthūlapṛṣṭyādivyākhyā vyākaraṇād ṛte //*. Kumārila does

that their judgment is informed by lifelong study of the Veda; they are steeped in its meaning. They know, in particular, the entire Veda, the contexts in which words occur and how they are used; they have also studied grammar and the *kalpasūtras*. Just as one would want to consult someone who has devoted his life to studying Dharmakīrti and Buddhist literature when trying to figure out a difficult passage in Dharmakīrti, so would one want to consult one who has devoted his life to studying the Veda and its auxiliary sciences when trying to ascertain the meanings of Vedic words.⁸⁷

not endorse this view in his *siddhānta*, but neither does he explicitly reject it. This passage suggests in any case that there very well could have been *some* Mīmāṃsakas who believed that the meaning of Vedic terms is secured *in part* by an unbroken, authorless tradition of exegesis. It is well known that, elsewhere, Kumārila is decidedly guarded toward any tradition that is not ultimately grounded on the Veda. This pertains especially to heterodox practices, such as those of the Sāṃsāramocakas and the Buddhists (Halbfass 1983: 15–16). But at TV II.75,16–23 he rejects a mere tradition of remembering an injunction to perform the *aṣṭakā* (mentioned MS 4.150), without any Vedic basis, as insufficient for establishing its authority, because it would be like a tradition of the blind (*andhaparamparā*). Cf. ŚBh II.73,1–74,2 (*pūrvapakṣa*).

⁸⁷ Cf. however, TV II.141,14–15: *rasavīryavipākānām bhedād vaidyair yavādāyāḥ / nir-dhāryāḥ svārthatattvena dharmasiddhyaiva yājñikāiḥ //*. “[The meaning of] *yava* and so forth are ascertained by experts in medicine from differences in taste, strength, and ripening, according to the nature of their meanings [i.e., the things themselves], whereas they are [ascertained] by experts in the sacrifice by virtue of their accomplishing Dharma.” This, however, need not be taken as implying a *supernormal* ability of perceiving Dharma on the part of experts in sacrifice, but a profound knowledge of all aspects of Dharma and its ramifications as defined by the Veda. Thus, Kumārila will say later, in the *siddhānta* of the eighth *adhikaraṇa* (on grammar), that those *thoroughly versed in the rules of grammar* can *perceive* correct and incorrect words (*sādhutvam indriyagrāhyam*) – just as those versed in the Dharmaśāstras can tell if someone is a Brahmin just by looking at him (TV II.217,13–218,4)! There, he will employ the analogy of the expert jeweler (TV II.219,16–21): *yady apy ana-bhiyuktānām prayogo ’sti sasaṅkaraḥ / abhiyuktā vivekṣyante tathāpi brāhmaṇādivat // ... yathā ratnaparīkṣāyām sādhuśādhutvalakṣaṇam / tathā vyākaraṇāt siddham sādhuśabdānirūpaṇam //*. By contrast, other ancient authorities explicitly attributed the ability to directly perceive Dharma to *ṛṣis*, who then in turn taught the mantras to lesser beings who lack any supernormal ability. Thus, Yāska, Nir 1.20: *sākṣātḥkṛtadharmāṇa ṛṣayo babhūvuḥ. te ’varebhyo ’sākṣātḥkṛtadharmabhyā upadeśena mantrān samprāduḥ*. Cf. MBh I.11,11–12. Such statements are conspicuously missing in Kumārila. Indeed, such a view is rejected by Bhartṛhari, VP_R 1.150

Thus, those versed in the Veda will know, in particular, the continuation of the passage (*vākyāśeṣa*), which of itself often clarifies which meaning is intended. They are able to recite (*samāmananti*), for example, the following text which occurs after “vessels full of *yava*” have been enjoined:⁸⁸ “When other plants wither, these still stand, as if rejoicing.”⁸⁹ Since barley matures in early spring when other plants have lost their leaves, this indicates that there is a practice of using *yava* to refer to barley in the Veda. Similarly, there is the text, “Therefore the cows run after the *varāhas*,”⁹⁰ which clarifies that in the Veda *varāha* refers to pigs. Finally, those learned in the Veda will know the text “The *vetasa* is water-born,”⁹¹ which indicates that *vetasa* refers to the *vañjula* plant, which grows in the water. The general principle that applies to all these cases is enunciated at MĪSŪ 1.4.29, “In doubtful cases [the meaning is determined] from the continuation of the passage.”⁹² Dharmakīrti indeed may be alluding to this principle when he says, PVSV 170,5–11, that one cannot resolve the meaning of a problematic Vedic passage by resorting to other Vedic passages, because the meaning of those other passages are in doubt as well.⁹³ This criticism, however, assigns all Vedic sentences to the same level of incomprehensibility and makes no distinction between those the meaning of which is more or less obvious and those whose meaning is obscure indeed.

(Cardona 2007: 697 and n. 25) and, as I interpret him, by Kumārila as well, *ŚV codanā* 143–151.

⁸⁸ ŚBh II.142,1: *yavamayeṣu karambhapātreṣu vihiteṣu*. It is uncertain which Vedic text Śābara is referring to.

⁸⁹ *yatrānyā oṣadhayo mlāyante 'thaithe modamānā ivottiṣṭhanti*. Source unknown. There are of course many passages cited by Śābara that have not been traced. Of approximately 1700 passages cited, from a variety of *śākhās*, less than half have been identified. Śābara only a few times indicates the source of a citation himself. Many passages he quotes inexactly, or deliberately modifies, or combines with other passages. Moreover, he may well have cited from Vedic texts that are now completely lost or used compendia that no longer exist. For a comprehensive discussion see Garge 1952, esp. pp. 39–50.

⁹⁰ ŚB 4.4.3.19.

⁹¹ TaitS 5.3.12.2.

⁹² MĪSŪ 1.4.29: *sandigdheṣu vākyāśeṣāt*.

⁹³ See above, pp. 52–53.

Precisely because the meanings of these words become clear from their context, however, and also disputing that these examples really are polysemic to begin with,⁹⁴ Kumārila suggests another interpretation of the *adhikaraṇa*. How does one decide on the meaning of a word used in the Veda when it has one meaning among Āryas and another among Mlecchas? *pilu*, for example, among the Āryas means a particular tree and among the Mlecchas an elephant. Here, the *pūrvapakṣin* suggests again – rather provocatively, it would seem – that there should be an option; for both words are expressive within the communities that employ them.

Just as there is the notion of the beginninglessness of the connection⁹⁵ for the meaning comprehended by Āryas, so for the meaning comprehended by Mlecchas, for the reason is the same.⁹⁶ For there is no interruption of the use of it among the Mlecchas; and how could one comprehend a difference of beginningless *śaktis*?⁹⁷

The *siddhāntin* responds: The notion that Mleccha words are expressive is erroneous; one is misled by their similarity to Ārya words. “Just as there are corruptions of [the forms of] words due to metaphorical and incorrect employment, etc., so there are corruptions of meanings (*arthāpabhraṃśa*).”⁹⁸ And it is those versed in the *śāstras* who are able to recognize them, “like [false coins] can be distinguished from among both true and false coins by those who are expert in them.”⁹⁹

⁹⁴ TV II.142,16–19.

⁹⁵ Read *sambandhānāditāmatih*, pace TV and TV_H 387,15.

⁹⁶ Namely, there is no memory of the founder of the convention, and so forth.

⁹⁷ TV II.143,16–19: *yathaiva hy āryagamyē 'rthe sambandhānāditāmatih / mlecchagamyē tathaiva syād aviśiṣṭam hi kāraṇam // na prayogāvadhīś tasya mleccheṣv api hi dṛśyate / anādyor arthāśaktyoś ca viśeṣo gamyatām katham //*. Cf. ŚBh II.183,2–5 ad MīSū 1.3.24.

⁹⁸ TV II.144,3: *śabdāpabhraṃśavad eva gauṇabhrāntyādiprayoganimittā arthāpabhraṃśā bhavanti*. A similar point is made by the *pūrvapakṣin* in *adhikaraṇa* 5 ad MīSū 1.3.10 (II.150,22): *dharme cānādarāt teṣām bhraṃśyetārtho 'pi śabdavat*. The *pūrvapakṣin* goes on to explain how Mleccha words only seem to have denotations by virtue of their similarity of Sanskrit words. Kumārila apparently follows the Grammarians in this matter; see VPr 1.175–183.

⁹⁹ TV II.144,4–5: *sādhvasādhukarṣāṇamadyād iva tatparikṣibhir vivektum*.

Thus, *because they are expert in the [various] recensions*, the view of those who reside in Āryāvarta is thought to be valid knowledge (*pramā*) of what is a means of Dharma or the meaning of a word.¹⁰⁰

And those who know more *śāstras* are accorded more authority when it comes to what is the true meaning of a word in the Veda.^{101, 102}

4. SUMMARY AND OBSERVATIONS

This will have to suffice as a very brief and inadequate survey of ways in which Mīmāṃsakas believed they were able to ascertain meaning of

¹⁰⁰TV II.144,7–8: *ataḥ śākhābhīyuktatvād āryāvartanivāsinām / yā matiḥ saiva dharmā-ṅgaśabdārthatvapramā matā //*. My italics, of course, to emphasize that the reason is not “because they can perceive Dharma”!

¹⁰¹TV II.144,10–11: *abhīyuktatārā ye ye bahuśāstrārthavedīnaḥ / te te yatra prayuñjīran so so 'rthas tattvato bhavet //*.

¹⁰²Kumārila nevertheless goes on to argue in his interpretation of the fifth *adhikaraṇa* (according to Jośī's enumeration) of MīSū 1.3 (*sūtra* 10) that words that are current *only* among Mlecchas should be construed as they are used conventionally by them and should not be given artificial designations by means of grammar and etymology. Kumārila goes on to consider yet another interpretation of the fourth *adhikaraṇa* according to which it concerns what to do when words have different meanings in ordinary parlance and the Veda (TV II.146,3ff.). For example, *caru* means a dish in ordinary language, but in the Veda it means a kind of porridge, usually of rice (*odana*) which is mixed with curds or milk (despite the phrase cited by Śabara at the beginning of the *adhikaraṇa* ad MīSū 1.3.8 [ŚBh II.139,2]: *yavamayaś caruḥ* [source unknown]). Here too, however, Kumārila is inclined to set aside common usage when the text of the Veda clearly demands construing a word according to a different meaning. This is, as before, generally clear from the entire passage. After it is enjoined, “The *caru* is to be offered to Aditi in the milk,” it is said, “[One pleases] Aditi by cooked rice (*odana*).” Thus, “the word *caru*, by virtue of its *śakti* being excluded from the illogical designation of multiple meanings, is restricted to just one meaning *according to the common usage of the Veda and those versed in sacrifice*, and refers to cooked rice” (TV II.148,11–12: *tathā caruśabdo 'py anyāyānekārthābhīdhānapratibaddhaśaktitvād ekaṭra niyamyamāno yājñikavedaprasiddhibhyām odanaviṣaya eva bhavati*; cf. TV II.146,12: *yājñikānām ca vede ca prasiddhis tv odanam prati //*). From this and other statements one sees that *prasiddhi* evidently means for Kumārila established usage *relative to* a literature or a community. It is not necessarily equivalent to *lokavāda*.

the Veda by objective methods. Many more examples could be given.¹⁰³ These examples show that Mīmāṃsā consists in a system of established rules and procedures, as objective as those of logic, for interpreting scriptural passages. *Starting from the entirely reasonable assumption that most of the words in the Veda are ordinary Sanskrit words*, then resorting to grammatical analysis, etymology, the examination of context, the collation of other occurrences of words and parallel passages, and knowledge of the rituals with which Vedic passages are associated, Mīmāṃsakas were confident that they could come up with plausible hypotheses about the meanings of Vedic words and sentences that are otherwise unknown or obscure. They – or at least the Mīmāṃsakas we have been considering, Śābara and Kumārila – make no appeal to the authority of individual teachers with supernatural ability – such persons are never mentioned, as far as I can tell, though to be sure the existence of *bona fide* experts in Vedic interpretation was acknowledged – or any eternal authorless tradition of interpretation. Indeed, their methods were not altogether unlike the “objective” methods employed by modern philologists today in interpreting Vedic texts.

Thus, when Dharmakīrti asserts, “Vedic words do not cry out, ‘Come, you revered Brahmins, this is to be grasped as our meaning, not something else,’” we can imagine the Mīmāṃsaka responding, “To the contrary, the Veda can be made to yield up its secrets *if one rigorously applies the proper methodology*.” The Mīmāṃsaka would have been just as supremely confident that he could make sense of the Veda as is the modern Vedic scholar Michael Witzel, who writes,

If we follow these rules and use all the other tools mentioned earlier [in discussing the editing of the *Kaṭha Āraṇyaka*], we can achieve in Vedic Studies a certainty that approaches that of the natural sciences. In fact, we can proceed in a similar fashion, by trial and error, and by proposing a theory [about the exact meaning of a text] and actually testing it. Only when the word, concept, or custom is *hapax* or is attested too infrequently to allow a proper investigation of the whole range of meanings,

¹⁰³ For further discussion of rules for interpreting the meaning of words, see Garge 1952: 252–256. Much of the second *kāṇḍa* of Bhartṛhari’s *Vākyapadīya* is devoted to how to determine the meanings of words in their various contexts. See, e.g., VPR 2.303ff.

must we remain content with a merely probable answer, or a mere guess. In all other cases, of course, only after painstaking study, we can conclude that yes the theory was right [, thereby arriving confidently at the meaning of the passage], or no it was not.¹⁰⁴

Of course, the Mīmāṃsaka would never suggest, as Prof. Witzel does, that one is able “to enter the Vedic mind,” i.e., discern “the original intent of the composers of the text.”¹⁰⁵ He would, rather, claim to be able to grasp the “intent” of the Veda itself.¹⁰⁶

It is the appreciation of Mīmāṃsā as a fixed system of rules, indeed, *as a system of “logic” independent of human invention*, which may be applied correctly or incorrectly, that is conspicuously lacking in Dharmakīrti.¹⁰⁷ More specifically: He knows that the Mīmāṃsakas appeal to *prasiddhi* and *vākyaśeṣa*, but he seems not to have any idea what that entails in specific instances, that the application of these concepts is constrained in all kinds of ways. He knows that the Mīmāṃsakas generally distrust what ordinary people say – hence, it would seem, one cannot rely on common usage as a *pramāṇa* in determining the meanings of words; but he ignores the fact that the ordinary meaning of a word is something that is agreed upon by everyone, hence it is evi-

¹⁰⁴ Witzel 1996: 174–5, with bold type removed.

¹⁰⁵ Witzel 1996: 167.

¹⁰⁶ See Yoshimizu 2008.

¹⁰⁷ Indeed, Bhartṛhari refers to a list of exegetical principles in VP_R 1.152 (and *Vṛtti*), similar to the sorts of rules invoked by Śābara in construing problematic Vedic passages, as the kind of “reasoning that is in conformity with Vedic scripture, which [serves as] the eye for those who do not see” (VP_R 1.151ab: *vedaśāstrāvirodhī ca tarkaś caḥsur apaśyatām /*), i.e., for those unable to comprehend the Veda through their own insight. He goes on to state that such “reasoning, which resides in men, is the capacity of the words themselves” (VP_R 1.153ab: *śabdānām eva sā śaktis tarko yaḥ puruṣāśrayaḥ /*); see Cardona 2007: 699–700. That is to say, the principles one follows both in using language to express one’s intention and in interpreting the meaning of an utterance when it is spoken are determined by the reality of language itself – one could say, they are *objective*. “Language alone is the teacher” (*śabda evopadeṣṭā*, VPV 209,1). Cf. Bronkhorst 1997: 368: “[According to Mīmāṃsā] the Veda ... is not produced by a human mind ... 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.” Bronkhorst in that essay argues along much the same lines as I have argued here.

dently not a matter of *opinion* or *judgement* (where the reliability of one's informants would actually come into play).¹⁰⁸ He knows that Mīmāṃsakas interpret certain words in strange ways (*svarga, urvaśī*), yet he seems hardly aware of the extensive roles played by figurative meaning and etymological meaning in Mīmāṃsā discussions. He knows there are problems with polysemic words in the Veda, but he does not appreciate the variety of tools the Mīmāṃsaka has at his disposal for solving them. He knows that the Mīmāṃsakas recognize certain authorities, but does not seem to be aware that their status for the Mīmāṃsakas is based on their learning, not personal charisma – which Mīmāṃsakas are outspokenly suspicious of – or supernormal ability. He knows that the Mīmāṃsakas were aware that the transmission of the Veda was subject to the vicissitudes of time,¹⁰⁹ but he doesn't seem to understand that that would be moot for most Mīmāṃsakas – certainly the ones we have been considering here, Śabara and Kumārila – when it comes to the problem of interpreting the Veda, since they do not appeal to any authorless tradition of Vedic exegesis. He imagines that *agnihotraṃ juhuyāt svargakāmaḥ* might mean “One should eat dog meat,” but he doesn't realize that there was a legitimate question about what kind of injunction it is, and, more generally, he is oblivious to the question of the nature of *vidhi* and all the other issues concerning *vidhi* with which not just Mīmāṃsaka but most other Brahmanical schools as well were deeply preoccupied.

Thus, in the end, we arrive at the not very surprising result that, while Dharmakīrti exhibits broad knowledge of problems of Mīmāṃsā exegesis in PV(SV) 1.312–340, he displays nothing like an expert's command. It is possible he received some training in Mīmāṃsā at an early stage, but it would have been an introductory course. The sorts of criticisms he directs against Mīmāṃsā exegetical practices do not hold up very well, and do not really address the essence of Mīmāṃsā, which is, again, that those practices are dictated by, and in turn testify to – insofar as they *work* – the inherent meaningfulness of the Vedic corpus; it is possible to ascertain the objective meaning of a text. I believe that most modern scholars working on textual materials believe this – that

¹⁰⁸ Cf. ŚV *sambandhākṣepaparihāra* 14cd.

¹⁰⁹ Though, interestingly, he does not mention the fact that Mīmāṃsakas thought that some Vedic texts have been completely lost.

it is possible to get at the meaning of a text, removed from any consideration of the author's intention¹¹⁰ – and so, to that extent, they too are Mīmāṃsakas!

It would have been surprising, however, if matters turned out any differently. Dharmakīrti, after all, is addressing his own community – other Buddhists. He is not trying to convince Mīmāṃsakas or, it would appear, even get at the truth. In general, philosophical debate in classical India was characterized by *jalpa*, “disputation,” not *saṃvāda*, “discussion.” It was acceptable to raise *prima facie* objections to the views of one's adversaries, as a means of protecting one's own position, without necessarily having to represent those views sympathetically or completely accurately, placing the burden on one's opponent to set the record straight; nor did one go very far considering the best responses to one's objections.¹¹¹ In short, a classical Indian philosopher was not obliged to become an expert in the systems he was criticizing, and Dharmakīrti was no exception. I must say, as a philosopher, I find this final stage of his critique of Mīmāṃsā, for all its cleverness, rather disappointing. The real strengths of the Mīmāṃsā position are unappreciated, the deepest issues are not addressed. Even though his criticisms of Mīmāṃsā go farther than those of other Buddhists,¹¹² Dharmakīrti in the end must be seen, in his critique of Mīmāṃsā, as another example of the dominant polemical tendency of classical Indian thought.

¹¹⁰ From Wimsatt and Beardsley to Roland Barthes, Jacques Derrida, and Paul Ricœur, modern critics and philosophers have pointed out various ways in which texts transcend their authors and so must be interpreted without regard to “author's intention.”

¹¹¹ One may contrast Socrates' consideration of the views of Protagoras in Plato's *Theaetetus* 165d–168c.

¹¹² E.g., Bhāviveka, and even his successors Śāntaraṅkṣita, Kamalaśīla, and Śubhagupta, whose critiques of Mīmāṃsā exegesis are not as sophisticated as Dharmakīrti's and were probably derived from his.

