THE ORIGIN OF MĪMĀṂSĀ AS A SCHOOL OF THOUGHT: A HYPOTHESIS

Johannes Bronkhorst
Lausanne

We owe to Professor Parpola two illuminating articles on the formation of Mīmāṃsā[1] (Parpola 1981; 1994), and at least one further article on this topic is expected from him. In the articles that have so far appeared, Parpola

> argued for the original unity of a single Mīmāṃsāsūtra ..., which was later split into two: the Pūrvamīmāṃsāsūtra ... ascribed to Jaimini, and the Uttaramīmāṃsāsūtra ... ascribed to Bādarāyaṇa. [He] also analysed the teacher quotations of the [Mīmāṃsāsūtra] and [compared] them with the evidence found in the ritual Sūtras of the Veda, [both of] the Black Yajurveda [and] the White Yajurveda. (Parpola 1994: 293.)

These two articles, by their very nature and intent, concentrate on the parallels between the Mīmāṃsāsūtra and the ritual Sūtras, and therefore on the continuity between them.[2] However, Mīmāṃsā – and from now on I will use this expression primarily to refer to the so-called Pūrvamīmāṃsā – is more than merely the outcome of a continuous development of the ideas and concerns which we find in the ritual Sūtras. At some period in its history Mīmāṃsā underwent one or more dramatic breaks with its predecessors, which allowed it to become an independent school of thought.

Two discontinuities in particular deserve attention: (1) The Śrauta Sūtras belong, each of them, to their own Vedic schools, and describe the rituals as carried out in those schools; as against this, Mīmāṃsā claims the unity of ritual practice and the fundamental identity of the ritual acts prescribed in the different schools. (2) Mīmāṃsā further innovates in introducing and elaborating a number of "philosophical" notions, most important among them the belief in the beginninglessness

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1 Parpola speaks of *the* Mīmāṃsā; I will simply speak of Mīmāṃsā.

2 Cf. Parpola 1981: 164: "There can be no doubt that the Mīmāṃsāsūtra directly continues the tradition of the Vedic ritualists ... The formation of the Mīmāṃsāsūtra can certainly be reconstructed to a great extent by comparing it carefully with the existing Kalpasūtras."

(*anāditva*), authorlessness (*apauruṣeyatva*) and self-sufficient validity (*svataḥprāmāṇya*) of the Veda. It seems likely that the attempt at unification that expresses itself in the first discontinuity was the result of an increasingly frequent interaction between at least certain representatives of the different Vedic schools.[3] The second discontinuity – the introduction and elaboration of a number of remarkable "philosophical" notions – may, as I will argue, be accounted for as an attempt to face critical outsiders.

Mīmāṃsā never fully replaced the ritual traditions of the Vedic schools. We know, for example, that Bhartṛhari, a philosopher from the 5th century C.E., though acquainted with Mīmāṃsā, refers for ritual details to the handbooks of his own Vedic school, that of the Mānava-Maitrāyaṇīyas (Bronkhorst 1985; 1989: 105 [375–376]). Other authors explicitly prescribe that sacrificers should adhere to the manuals of their own schools (Deshpande 1999). The Mīmāṃsāsūtra itself (2.4.8–9), finally, first records the position according to which there are differences between the rituals in different Vedic schools, then rejects it. All these passages reveal a certain amount of resistance against Mīmāṃsā that was apparently felt by a number of orthodox Brahmins, presumably from the very beginning.[4]

This is not the place to study in further detail the first discontinuity mentioned above. Instead we turn to the second one: the introduction and elaboration of the three doctrines of the beginninglessness (*anāditva*), authorlessness (*apauruṣeyatva*) and self-sufficient validity (*svataḥprāmāṇya*) of the Veda. In combination they constitute a peculiar set of doctrines, even in the Indian context in which they arose. There is nothing in the contemporary schools of thought, whether Brahminical, Buddhist, or Jaina, corresponding to this set as worked out in Mīmāṃsā. The preceding Vedic tradition itself contains nothing of the kind, either. Indeed, the Vedic Brahmins held – still in the days of Megasthenes[5] – the opposite opinion that the world (and therefore presumably the Veda) does have a beginning in time. The schools of philosophy that arose beside Mīmāṃsā believed in the beginninglessness of the universe, to be sure, but they all accepted, unlike Mīmāṃsā, the periodic destruction and recreation of the world.[6] Why then did Mīmāṃsā invent and accept this strange set of doctrines? What could the Mīmāṃsakas possibly gain by doing

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3 Parpola is of the opinion that Kātyāyana the author of the Kātyāyana Śrauta Sūtra is later than Jaimini (Parpola 1994: 303). He further states (p. 305): "Kātyāyana's work proves that there was a close connection between the Yajurveda and the Sāmaveda (i.e., the Veda to which Jaimini belonged, JB) around the time when the [Mīmāṃsāsūtra] came into being."

4 Parpola (1981: 172) is nevertheless of the opinion that "mīmāṃsā discussion involving two opposing protagonists were a regular institution of each Vedic school in the Sūtra period ... And it is from these discussions that the Mīmāṃsāsūtra has directly grown".

5 Schwanbeck's fragment 41; tr. McCrindle 1877: 101.

6 The Mahābhārata characterises the Veda (besides many other things and beings) as being *sanātana* 'eternal(?)'; e.g. Mhbh 1.1.52.

so? Predictably, none of our sources proposes any answers, for these doctrines are not presented as new inventions but as eternal truths. But we are entitled to ask what benefit these strange doctrines brought with them. What could be the advantage for the Brahmins concerned in accepting them?[7]

These three doctrines, most specifically the first of them, have a consequence of which the Mīmāṃsakas themselves were very much aware: since the Veda has no beginning in time, none of the events recorded in it can ever have taken place. An event must have taken place before it came to be recorded; in the case of the Veda this is impossible, for the Veda does not post-date any event.[8] This consequence is most convenient in the case of Vedic stories and remarks that are totally implausible to begin with, but covers quite generally all Vedic statements about what presumably happened in the past. This is clear from Śabara(-svāmin)'s observations in his Mīmāṃsābhāṣya, some of which we will now consider.

Śabara is aware that Vedic myths are occasionally in contradiction with reality as we know it. He even provides examples. "The trees sat down for a sacrificial session", "The snakes sat down for a sacrificial session" and "The old bull sings mad [songs]", all these statements are in contradiction with our experience.[9] They are, Śabara explains, not to be taken literally. They are there in order to praise the sacrificial activities that are enjoined. Similar reasoning applies to *all* stories in the

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7 Cf. Frauwallner 1968: 107: "eine philosophische Lehre [gewinnt] für uns erst Leben und Bedeutung ..., wenn wir verstehen, warum sie geschaffen wurde, welche Probleme sie lösen sollte und warum gerade diese Lösung gewählt wurde ..."

8 Cf. Śabara on MīS 1.1.28 and 31: *jananamaraṇavantaś ca vedārthāḥ śrūyante | "babaraḥ prāvāhaṇir akāmayata", "kusuruvinda auddālakir akāmayata" ity evamādayaḥ | uddālakasyāpatyaṃ gamyata auddālakiḥ | yady evaṃ prāg auddālakijanmano nāyaṃ grantho bhūtapūrvaḥ | evam apy anityatā || ... yac ca prāvāhaṇir iti | tan na | pravāhaṇasya puruṣasyāsiddhatvān na pravāhaṇasyāpatyaṃ prāvāhaṇiḥ | praśabdaḥ prakarṣe siddho vahatiś ca prāpaṇe | na tv asya samudāyaḥ kvacit siddhaḥ | ikāras tu yathaivāpatye siddhas tathā kriyāyām api kartari | tasmād yaḥ pravāhayati sa prāvāhaṇiḥ | babara iti śabdānukṛtiḥ | tena yo nityārthas tam evaitau śabdau vadiṣyataḥ.* '[Objection:] Objects are recorded in the Veda that are subject to birth and death. For example: "Babara Prāvāhaṇi (= son of Pravāhaṇa) desired", "Kusuruvinda Auddālaki (= son of Uddālaka) desired". Auddālaki is understood to be the son of Uddālaka. In that case, this book (i.e., the Veda) [can] not have existed prior to the birth of Auddālaki. In this way, too, [the Veda must be] non-eternal. ... [Reply:] What [has been said] with regard to Prāvāhaṇi is not [correct]. Prāvāhaṇi is not the son of Pravāhaṇa, because no such man [called] Pravāhaṇa is known [to have existed]. The linguistic element *pra* is known as signifying 'excellence', and [the verbal root] *vah* as signifying 'conveying'. But its combination is not known to signify anything. The sound *i* [in *prāvāhaṇi*], on the other hand, is known to signify 'son of' as well as the agent of an activity. For that reason *prāvāhaṇi* means 'that which carries in an excellent manner'. *Babara* imitates the sound [of wind (?)]. Therefore these two words (*babara* and *prāvāhaṇi*) will refer to something eternal.' The two quotations occur at TaitS 7.1.10.2 and 7.2.2.1 respectively.

9 Śabara on MīS 1.1.32: *vanaspatayaḥ sattram āsata; sarpāḥ sattram āsata; jaradgavo gāyati mattakāni.* None of these three citations seems traceable in the Veda as we know it.

Veda, to *all* Vedic myths; all the passages that contain them are either *arthavāda* or *mantra*, neither of which is to be taken literally.

These and similar remarks deny the validity of all Vedic myths. None are to be taken literally, all of them have only one function, viz. to encourage, or discourage, people to carry out certain actions. But not only myths are discarded. Śabara goes further, and reduces the deities, presumably the recipients of the sacrifices that must be carried out, to mere names that possess no power and have no anthropomorphic features. His Bhāṣya on Mīmāṃsāsūtra 9.1.9, for example, argues in detail against the notion that deities have bodies and eat. On Mīmāṃsāsūtra 10.4.23, having first rejected the proposal that deities are the beings living in heaven that are described in traditional stories of the type *itihāsa* and *purāṇa*, he goes as far as to agree that deities may be nothing but words: "This [position, according to which deities are nothing but words,] will not be refuted by us, for this [position], when expressed, is not in conflict with our view."[10]

It will be clear that Śabara discards here, in one fell swoop, all contents of the Veda. The only exceptions are the injunctions, because these cannot be in conflict with other sources of information (Bronkhorst 1997: 367–368; cf. Devasthali 1959: 15). But what could be the point of discarding the contents of the literary corpus which the Brahmins, including the Mīmāṃsakas, make such a major effort to preserve?

Two possible answers come to mind. The first is as follows. The religious convictions of the Vedic Brahmins are likely to have changed profoundly since Vedic times, so much so that the contents of the Veda no longer agreed with the beliefs they actually held. Mīmāṃsā philosophy offered an elegant way out: the Brahmins could henceforth reject the conceptual side of Vedic religion while remaining guardians of the Veda and continuing Vedic ritual, thus illustrating the observation that ritual traditions can be far more persistent than belief systems (Staal 1985). Unfortunately there is little textual evidence to support this position. It is no doubt significant and in any case highly suggestive that the Mīmāṃsaka Kumārila Bhaṭṭa (7th cent. C.E.) begins his Ślokavārttika with a dedicatory stanza to Śiva.[11] It may be no less significant that his commentator Pārthasārathi Miśra makes an attempt to explain this away.[12]

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10 Śabara on MīS 10.4.23: *nanv evaṃ śabda eva devatā prāpnoti | atrocyate | naitad asmābhiḥ parihartavyam | na hīdam ucyamānam asmatpakṣaṃ bādhate.*

11 Ślokavārttika, Pratijñādhikaraṇa 1: *viśuddhajñānadehāya trivedīdivyacakṣuṣe | śreyaḥprāptinimittāya namaḥ somārdhadhāriṇe.* There are further indications suggesting that Kumārila may have been concerned to integrate "Hinduistic" elements, such as his acceptance of the idea of liberation (see Mesquita 1994; there is no reason to think that earlier Mīmāṃsakas had accepted this idea, cf. Bronkhorst 2000: 100). See further below.

12 Cf. Biardeau 1964: 145: "Est-ce ... que la Mīmāṃsā épuise la croyance religieuse des brahmanes qui l'enseignent ou qu'elle l'ait jamais épuisée? Pour l'époque contemporaine, il est

There is another possible reason why the Mīmāṃsakas explicitly rejected the contents of the very texts whose guardians they were. To appreciate it one should recall that early in the first millennium C.E. (or even earlier) a tradition of rational debate had established itself in India which came to exert a determining influence on the development of speculative thought. It is not at all clear why and how, and even when exactly, this tradition made its appearance, but once it had appeared, Indian philosophy was never to be the same again; it might even be argued that this tradition allowed classical Indian philosophy to come into existence. Thinkers, it appears, were henceforth obliged to defend their positions against the attacks of outsiders who felt no sympathy for them, and victory in the debates that took place was apparently considered so important that participants modified their positions where necessary so as to make them more coherent and therefore more defensible. The challenges resulting from these confrontations are responsible for much of what might be called the history of Indian philosophy: positions were polished and improved, new ideas introduced, arguments analysed and sharpened.

This development did not affect all those who held views and opinions. The mathematical sciences were not affected until late (Bronkhorst, forthcoming). In philosophy itself it appears that Jainism joined the debate rather late, and Kashmir Śaivism only did so until almost a millennium after its initiation. Others may have avoided these debates. Many sacrificing Brahmins may have belonged to this category. They adhered to their traditions, which they did not need to defend, at least not in debates, and continued as much as possible as before. They had no need for verbal confrontations with outsiders, nor indeed for the systematizations of Mīmāṃsā.

However, sacrificing Brahmins, too, needed royal support, which may occasionally have been contingent upon their skill in defending their positions in confrontations with others, at the royal court or elsewhere. Circumstances of this kind may account for the fact that a number of sacrificing Brahmins joined the tradition of critical debate. This involved exposing themselves to often severe criticism from unsympathetic outsiders. The outsiders concerned were first of all, no doubt, Buddhists, very active participants in the debates of that early period; Buddhists may indeed have played a major role in establishing the tradition of critical debate (cf. Bronkhorst 1999). What would those Buddhists criticize above all in conservative Brahmins who spent their lives reciting the Veda and carrying out complicated rites? Primarily, one would think, the contents of the Veda. The Vedic Brahmins, whether they liked it or not, could in this way be held accountable for myths that were often highly improbable and which they themselves may have long since ceased to take seriously. And yet, the Brahmins would not be able to reject

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certain que non: les rares Mīmāṃsaka d'aujourd'hui se disent généralement *smārta* et se rattachent donc aux disciples de Śankara."

these myths without damaging their own credibility. Once again, the Mīmāṃsā philosophy offered a way out. The Brahmins who adopted this philosophy did not believe these myths, to be sure. The reason was not however that they were lax, or ignorant about their own tradition, nor that their attachment to the Veda was a mere facade; quite the opposite, they did not believe these myths because they knew, better than their critics, how to interpret the Veda. These myths were not meant to be believed, and those who thought otherwise displayed their own ignorance in doing so.

Seen in this way, Mīmāṃsā as a system of thought owed its origin, at least in part, to the need to defend the Vedic tradition against outsiders. The doctrine of the beginninglessness of the Veda, along with its corrollary of authorlessness, have as a consequence that all but the "timeless" parts of the Veda no longer have to be interpreted literally. The third fundamental principle of classical Mīmāṃsā, the Veda's self-sufficient validity (*svataḥprāmāṇya*) along with "proximity" as interpretative principle (Bronkhorst 1997) was a doctrinal extension guiding the practice of interpretation. If, then, we recall that the Veda's beginninglessness (*anāditva*), authorlessness (*apauruṣeyatva*) and self-sufficient validity (*svataḥprāmāṇya*) constitute the three pillars of classical Mīmāṃsā as a system of thought, it can be seen that this whole theoretical construction may find its *raison d'être* in the need to preserve the Vedic way of life – i.e. the sacrificial tradition – without being bound by most of the contents of this body of literature.

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What reason is there to think that the traditional Brahmins may have been criticized for the myths they presumably believed in? Most of the surviving philosophical discussions of classical India concern philosophical problems, and rarely do we come across attacks on the personal beliefs of the participants. This, however, may be due to the fact that most of the surviving philosophical literature of India dates from a time when the participants in the debates had developed a public image far removed from popular beliefs. Yet there are clear traces of evidence to show that the Buddhists, at any rate, had been critical of Brahmanical myths from an early date onward. We will briefly review the Buddhist criticism of one particularly important Brahmanical myth, a myth invoked by the Brahmins to justify their division of society into different castes, *varṇa*s, an idea which the Buddhists did not share.[13]

The myth concerned finds its classic, and probably earliest, exposition in the Puruṣasūkta of the Ṛgveda (RV 10.90), but important parts of it recur in many later

13 Some further texts critical of Brahmanical and Hindu mythology, from the side of Jainas and Buddhists respectively, are discussed in Osier 2000 and Masset 2000.

texts. It recounts how the world and its inhabitants came about as a result of a sacrifice in which the primordial giant, Puruṣa, is dismembered. The most important parts for us read, in the (slightly adjusted) translation of Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty (1983: 30–31):

> The Man has a thousand heads, a thousand eyes, a thousand feet. He pervaded the earth on all sides and extended beyond it as far as ten fingers. (1)
> It is the Man who is all this, whatever has been and whatever is to be. He is the ruler of immortality, when he grows beyond everything through food. (2) ...
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> When the gods spread the sacrifice with the Man as the offering, spring was the clarified butter, summer the fuel, autumn the oblation. (6) ...
>
> When they divided the Man, into how many parts did they apportion him? What do they call his mouth, his two arms and thighs and feet? (11)
> His mouth became the Brahmin; his arms were made into the Warrior, his thighs the Common man, and from his feet the Servant was born. (12)

The hymn to Puruṣa is, in the words of Louis Renou (1965: 8), "the major source of cosmogonic thought in ancient India"; elsewhere he says:

> Il n'y a guère de poème cosmologique de l'Atharvaveda où l'on ne retrouve quelque allusion voilée au mythe du Géant sacrifié et au schéma évolutif qui en résulte ... C'est encore le thème du Géant qui sous les traits de Prajāpati 'le seigneur des Créatures' ressurgit dans les Brāhmaṇa et en commande la plupart des avenues. (Renou 1956: 12.)

Jan Gonda (1968: 101) calls it "the foundation stone of Viṣṇuite philosophy".[14] Especially the part concerning the creation of the four main divisions of society, the four *varṇa*s, has been taken over in numerous texts belonging both to the Vedic and to the classical period. We find it, for example, in the Taittirīya Saṃhitā (7.1.1.4–6), the Rāmāyaṇa (3.13.29–30), but also in the first chapter of the Manu Smṛti. The Lord, we read there, created, "so that the worlds and people would prosper and increase, from his mouth the Brahmin, from his arms the Kṣatriya, from his thighs the Vaiśya, and from his feet the Śūdra."[15] Elsewhere the same text refers to this myth as common background knowledge, and as an alternative way of speaking about the four *varṇas*.[16]

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14 It is open to question to what extent the Puruṣasūkta is representative of Ṛgvedic religion; Staal (1995: 30) calls it "an atypical, late and isolated composition".

15 Manu 1.31: *lokānāṃ tu vivṛddhyarthaṃ mukhabāhūrupādataḥ | brāhmaṇaṃ kṣatriyaṃ vaiśyaṃ śūdraṃ ca niravartayat*. The translation follows, with modifications, Doniger & Smith 1991. The Bhaviṣya Purāṇa has the same verse (Lásló 1971: 117).

16 Manu 10.45: *mukhabāhūrupajjānāṃ yā loke jātayo bahiḥ | mlecchavācaś cāryavācaḥ sarve te dasyavaḥ smṛtāḥ*. Tr. Doniger & Smith 1991: 241: "All of those castes who are excluded from the world of those who were born from the mouth, arms, thighs, and feet (of the primordial Man) are traditionally regarded as aliens, whether they speak barbarian languages or Aryan languages."

These and many other references[17] to the myth of the Puruṣasūkta do not allow us to decide with certainty whether the authors concerned took this myth literally. Modern authorities have a tendency to suppose that they did not. Ninian Smart, to mention but one example, has the following to say about myths in general and the way they are understood in the present and in the past (Smart 1996: 138):

> [It] seems ... that we are moving out of the age of what may be called "fanciful" myth into that of "factual" myth. I do not mean by this that the more fanciful myths have not been believed in some sense to be factual: describing reality. But now there is a more earthbound understanding of what is factual. So Adam and Eve have to be real persons: or if they are not they have to be symbolic representations of a real human condition that can be described metaphysically or existentially.

And again (Smart 1996: 161):

> As we move towards another century and into it, the divergence, considered phenomenologically, between the old myth and the new history tends to fade away. Legends of Moses and Krishna and the Buddha and Confucius tend to solidify. Since historicity is regarded as a plus, there is a trend towards thinking of the legendary as historically real. In any case, it becomes a problem to distinguish between the two.

These passages suggest that, at least according to Smart, there was a time when myths were not understood to be true in an earthbound factual manner, not historically real. Unfortunately he does not elaborate or clarify this suggestion, and nor does he give any specification as to the date or period during which the important change referred to in these passages has taken place. Moreover, no attempt is made to explain why such a change should take place. What is it exactly that pushes "us" to change our understanding of myths? Are we here presented with a new variant of the now-to-be-discarded distinction between mythical, i.e. pre-logical, and logical thought? If so, some clarifications would have been useful.

Whatever modern authorities may have to say about the question, there is evidence that Indian thinkers, or at least some of them, did take the myth of the creation of the four *varṇa*s out of the initial giant quite seriously, i.e. literally – as being literally true. Part of the story is retold in the Padārthadharmasaṃgraha, also known as Praśastapādabhāṣya, which is the classical surviving treatise of the Vaiśeṣika philosophy, written by Praśasta, alias Praśastapāda. The passage concerned reads:

> When in this way the four composite elements have come into existence, a great egg (*mahad aṇḍam*) is formed, caused solely by God's (*maheśvara*) meditation/volition (*abhidhyāna*), out of atoms of fire with an admixture of atoms of earth (i.e., gold). In it [God] creates Brahmā, with four faces like so many lotuses, the grandfather of all worlds (*sarvalokapitāmahaṃ brahmāṇam*), and all worlds; he then enjoins him with the duty of creating living things. That Brahmā, thus enjoined by God, and endowed

17 For a discussion of the importance of the Puruṣasūkta in later literature and practice, see Shende 1965; Gonda 1977: 98–105 (390–397).

> with abundant knowledge, complete absence of passion and absolute power, knows the effects of the deeds of living beings; he creates the Prajāpatis, his mind-created (*mānasa*) sons, with knowledge, experience and span of life in accordance with their [past] deeds; [he also creates] the Manus, Devas, Ṛṣis and groups of Pitṛs (*pitṛgaṇa*), the **four *varṇas* out of his mouth, arms, thighs and feet (*mukhabāhūrupādataḥ*) [respectively]**, and the other living beings, high and low (*uccāvacāni bhūtāni*); he then connects them with *dharma*, knowledge, absence of passion and power in accordance with their residue of past deeds.[18]

In order to correctly evaluate this passage, it is important to realize that the Padārthadharmasaṃgraha is no book of stories and myths, nor is it meant to be read as literature. On the contrary, it is a very serious treatise about the constitution of reality, of which it presents a coherent and systematic explanation. It is out of the question to read any passage of this serious work, including the one just cited, as not intending to convey reality, and convey it, not in any metaphorical, but in a most literal manner. It is true that the contents of this passage may not have been part of the Vaiśeṣika philosophy during the time preceding Praśasta. There are reasons to believe that the very notion of a creator God may have been introduced into the system by this author, and that he borrowed this notion from the religious current to which he may have belonged, that of the Pāśupatas. This does not, however, mean that this notion is to be taken less seriously than the remainder of the Padārthadharmasaṃgraha.[19]

The explicit mention of the creation of the four *varṇas* out of the mouth, arms, thighs and feet of the creator in a work as serious and reality-oriented as Praśasta's Padārthadharmasaṃgraha shows that at least one participant in the tradition of critical reflection accepted this myth as literally true. It seems likely that many other Brahmanical intellectuals of that period did the same.

As stated above, the Buddhists rejected the fourfold division of human beings, and also rejected the myth that was meant to lend credence to it. A number of Buddhist authors criticize the very same myth which Praśasta (and probably many others with him) explicitly accepted, the myth that the four *varṇas* were originally

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18 WI, p. 11: *evaṃ samutpanneṣu caturṣu mahābhūteṣu maheśvarasyābhidhyānamātrāt taijasebhyo 'ṇubhyaḥ pārthivaparamāṇusahitebhyo* (variants: *pārthivādiparamāṇusahitebhyo, pārthivāṇusahitebhyo*) *mahad aṇḍam ārabhyate* (some editions read *utpadyate*) | *tasmiṃś caturvadanakamalaṃ sarvalokapitāmahaṃ* (variant: *caturvadanakamalasakalalokapitāmahaṃ*) *brahmāṇaṃ sakalabhuvanasahitam utpādya prajāsarge viniyuṅkte* (variant: *niyuṅkte*) | *sa ca maheśvareṇa viniyukto* (variant: *niyukto*) *brahmā 'tiśayajñānavairāgyaiśvaryasampannaḥ prāṇināṃ* (variant: *sarvaprāṇināṃ*) *karmavipākaṃ viditvā karmānurūpajñānabhogāyuṣaḥ sutān prajāpatīn mānasān manudevarṣipitṛgaṇān* (variant: *manūn deva°*) ***mukhabāhūrupādataś caturo varṇān anyāni coccāvacāni bhūtāni*** (variants: *bhūtāni ca*; *anyāni coccāvacāni ca sṛṣṭvā*) ***sṛṣṭvā***, *āśayānurūpair dharmajñānavairāgyaiśvaryaiḥ saṃyojayatīti.*

19 On the philosophical reasons underlying the introduction of the notion of a creator God into Vaiśeṣika, see Bronkhorst 2000: § 7, esp. pp. 37–38; further Bronkhorst 1996.

created out of the mouth, arms, thighs and feet of the original being. They do so by showing that it is incoherent, in that it has implications which even the Brahmins would be loath to accept.[20]

We already find such criticism in the Aggañña Sutta of the Dīgha Nikāya. The Brahmin Vāseṭṭha here reports the position of his fellow-Brahmins, according to whom "only the Brahmins are the real sons of Brahmā, born from his mouth, born from Brahmā, produced by Brahmā, heirs of Brahmā".[21] The Buddha responds that they maintain this position, "forgetting what is old" (*porāṇaṃ assarantā*). This expression has been variously interpreted by the commentators: some speak of an old tradition,[22] others of ancient history.[23] The context, however, favours a third interpretation: these Brahmins forget the past, that is to say the relatively recent past of their own birth. This is shown by what follows.[24] According to the Buddha it is undeniable that the wives of Brahmins (*brāhmaṇānaṃ brāhmaṇiyo*) have their periods, become pregnant, give birth and feed; in spite of being thus born from a human womb, the Brahmins maintain that they are born from Brahmā.[25] In doing so, these Brahmins insult (*abbhācikkhanti*) Brahmā.[26] This criticism is obviously based on the most literal interpretation of the Brahmanical myth. The claim of the Brahmins to have been born from Brahmā is in conflict with their birth from a human mother. In other words, the Brahmins are credited with the belief that they were born, at the beginning of their present life, from the mouth of Brahmā.

The Vajrasūcī proceeds in a similar manner. Here the following argument is found:

> There is another defect [in your proposition]. If the Brahmin is born from the mouth, where is the Brahmin woman born from? Certainly from the mouth. Alas! Then she is your sister! So, you do not regard the convention of licit and illicit sexual intercourse! But that is extremely repugnant to the people of this world.[27]

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20 Vincent Eltschinger's recent book (2000) has been particularly helpful in writing the following paragraphs. See further Renou 1960: 43.

21 DN III.81: *brāhmaṇā va Brahmuno puttā orasā mukhato jātā Brahma-jā Brahma-nimmitā Brahma-dāyādā*. Cf. Meisig 1988: 80–81 for the Chinese parallels.

22 Walshe 1987: 408 ("ancient tradition"); Rhys Davids & Rhys Davids 1921: 78 ("ancient lore").

23 Sv III, p. 862: *porāṇan ti porāṇakaṃ aggaññaṃ lok'uppattiṃ cariya-vaṃsam*; Franke 1913: 275 ('es ist nicht uralte Erinnerung an eine wirkliche Tatsache').

24 The following remarks also occur in the Assalāyana Sutta (MN II.148).

25 DN III.81–82: *dissanti kho pana Vāseṭṭha brāhmaṇānaṃ brāhmaṇiyo utuniyo pi gabbhiniyo pi vijāyamānā pi pāyamānā pi, te ca brāhmaṇa yonijā va samānā evam āhaṃsu: brāhmaṇā va ... Brahmuno puttā orasā mukhato jātā Brahma-jā Brahma-nimmitā Brahma-dāyādā*. Cf. Meisig 1988: 86–87.

26 This last remark does not occur in the Assalāyana Sutta.

27 Vajrasūcī, ed. Weber (1860), p. 225, ll. 6–8; ed. Mukhopadhyaya (1960), p. 9 [JJ]: *anyac ca dūṣaṇaṃ bhavati | yadi mukhato jāto brāhmaṇo brāhmaṇyāḥ kuta utpattiḥ | mukhād eveti*

The Śārdūlakarṇāvadāna states essentially the same point:

> If this world has been created by Brahmā himself, the Brahmin woman is the sister of the Brahmin, the Kṣatriya woman the sister of the Kṣatriya, the Vaiśya woman [the sister] of the Vaiśya, or the Śūdra woman [the sister] of the Śūdra; if she has been created by Brahmā, [a woman of the same caste], being a sister [of her husband], she will not be a suitable wife.[28]

This is not the place to investigate how the Vaiśeṣikas answered, or might have answered, the criticism of the Buddhists. It must here be sufficient to note that the three classical commentaries on Praśasta's Padārthadharmasaṃgraha – the Vyomavatī, the Nyāyakandalī, and the Kiraṇāvalī – devote long discussions in this connection to the question of the existence of a creator God, but fail to say a word about how this particular myth is to be interpreted so as to avoid contradictions. The discussion stays on a highly abstract, "philosophical", level, where inferences and logical analyses have their place. The details of the myth, on the other hand, do not receive attention.

Perhaps the authors of the Vyomavatī, the Nyāyakandalī, and the Kiraṇāvalī were right in ignoring the tricky challenge posed by the Buddhists. Their task would certainly have been difficult. The position of the Mīmāṃsakas, on the other hand, was simple and straightforward. They, the guardians of the Veda, made no effort whatsoever to justify the historical contents of this corpus, because they denied its accuracy. Not only the Puruṣasūkta, but any historical event seemingly described in the Veda was to be interpreted differently, so as to lose all the historical content it might have seemed to possess. The criticisms uttered by the Buddhists constituted no threat to the Mīmāṃsakas.

* * *

It will be clear that the above-mentioned three doctrines of the beginninglessness (*anāditva*), authorlessness (*apauruṣeyatva*) and self-sufficient validity (*svataḥ-prāmāṇya*) of the Veda constituted a wonderful protection for Brahmins confronted with outsiders intent on making fun of the Veda. The introduction and elaboration of these elements – it would appear – turned a school of Vedic interpretation into a school of thought based on a coherent vision of the unique position of the Veda in the world. Do we know when these changes took place?

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cet hanta tarhi bhavatāṃ bhaginīprasaṅgaḥ syāt | tathā gamyāgamyaṃ na sambhāvyate | tac ca loke 'tyantaviruddham. Tr. Mukhopadhyaya 1960: 20.

28 Divy(V) no. 33 verses 76–77, p. 332: *yadi tāvad ayaṃ loko brahmaṇā janitaḥ svayam | brāhmaṇī brāhmaṇasvasā kṣatriyā kṣatriyasvasā || atha vaiśyasya vaiśyā vai śūdrā śūdrasya vā punaḥ | na bhāryā bhaginī yuktā brahmaṇā janitā yadi.*

Some sūtras of the present Mīmāṃsāsūtra support the idea of *apauruṣeyatva* and its consequences, at least in the interpretation of Śabara. Francis X. Clooney (1990: 51) agrees, and points out that "*apauruṣeyatva* finds its roots, through (*sic*; this must no doubt be *though*) not explicit mention, in Jaimini's text". Without saying as much, he probably thinks here of sūtras 1.1.27–32, which he translates as follows (p. 166–167):

1.1.27 *vedāṃś caike saṃnikarṣaṃ puruṣākhyāḥ* |
Some people say that the Vedas are similarly [i.e. like sentences in the ordinary world, JB] composed (*saṃnikarṣa*) because they are named after persons.

1.1.28 *anityadarśanāc ca* |
Also, because we find ephemeral things (mentioned in the Veda).

1.1.29 *uktaṃ tu śabdapūrvatvam* |
But we have already explained that the word is prior (to usage: *śabdapūrvatvam*).

1.1.30 *ākhyā pravacanāt* |
The names (connected with various texts) are due to expounding (and not due to composing) the texts.

1.1.31 *paraṃ tu śrutisāmānyamātram* |
In regard to the latter argument (28), there is merely a similarity of sounds (*śrutisāmānyamātram*).

1.1.32 *kṛte vā viniyogaḥ syāt karmaṇaḥ sambandhāt* |
(In contrast with the words of ordinary language, Vedic words) apply to what has been accomplished; for words are thus related to action.

Śabara and Clooney may be right in their interpretation of these sūtras. If so, we must conclude that two of the above-mentioned three elements – *anāditva* and *apauruṣeyatva*, along with their consequences – were not introduced by Śabara, but well before him. We cannot however conclude with certainty that the notion of *apauruṣeyatva*, along with the consequences which the Mīmāṃsā draws from it, already existed at the time of, and found expression in, the hypothetical original Mīmāṃsāsūtra, the source of the more recent Pūrva- and Uttara-mīmāṃsāsūtras. As already observed by Parpola (1981: 151–152) and others before him, it seems certain that the Mīmāṃsāsūtra as we have it contains interpolated passages.

At this point we must try to refine our understanding of the idea of a Veda without beginning and its consequences. The idea that the Veda is eternal in itself appears to be old, and may have also been current in other circles than only those of the early Mīmāṃsakas. Early (and datable) evidence occurs in the Mahābhāṣya of Patañjali, which may convey a reliable impression of the way in which at least some Brahmins thought about this issue in the 2nd century preceding the common era:

> Has it not been stated that Vedic texts are not made, that Vedic texts are eternal? [True, but] even though their meaning is eternal, the sequence of their sounds is not eternal.

> It is on account of that difference that we have [different recensions of the Veda, such as] the Kāṭhaka, the Kālāpaka, the Maudaka, the Paippalādaka. [29]

Here the idea of an eternal Veda is present, but interpreted in a way which renders it relatively harmless.

There is another way in which the idea of an eternal Veda can be deprived of its most disturbing aspects, and it appears that many orthodox thinkers – with the exception of the Mīmāṃsakas, of course – resorted to it. A beginningless Veda was conceived of as existing in and alongside a world which passes through cycles of creation and destruction without beginning or end.[30] The eternal Veda was believed to be reintroduced after each renewed creation, exactly in the same shape as before. The advantage of this model would be that the Veda, although without beginning, might yet contain information about the world, for the simple reason that the world infinitely repeats itself from beginningless time. We find this position, for example, in the first chapter of the Manusmṛti where it describes how Brahmā milked the triple eternal Veda out of fire, wind and the sun.[31] It seems that this is the position taken in the Uttaramīmāṃsāsūtra and later Vedānta. Uttaramīmāṃsāsūtra 1.3.29 and 30 (as interpreted by Śaṅkara) maintain that the Veda is eternal. Sūtra 1.1.2 informs us that the world is periodically recreated. Sūtra 1.3.28 (as interpreted by Śaṅkara) adds that the world arises out of the Vedic word.[32]

A particularly clear description of this Vedānta position occurs in the much later Vedāntaparibhāṣā. It reads as follows:

> The Mīmāṃsakas who occupy themselves with the sacrifice (i.e. the Pūrvamīmāṃsakas) maintain that the Vedas are valid because they are eternal and therefore free from all human faults. In our opinion (i.e., that of the Vedāntins), on the other hand, the Veda is not eternal, because it has an origin.
>
> [Objection:] The fact that the Vedas have an origin and have been made by God proves that they have an author; such being the case, your position according to which the Vedas have no author is shown to be incorrect.
>
> [Reply:] Not so, for "having an author" does not, to begin with, mean "being uttered by a person". Nor does it mean "having an origin that depends on a person".
>
> To explain: at the beginning of creation God made the Veda in such a way that its composition is identical to the composition of the Veda established during the pre-

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29 Mahā-bh II, p. 315, ll. 13–15 (on P. 4.3.101 vt. 3): *nanu coktaṃ na hi cchandāṃsi kriyante nityāni cchandāṃsīti | yady apy artho nityo yā tv asau varṇānupūrvī sānityā | tadbhedāc caitad bhavati kāṭhakaṃ kālāpakaṃ maudakaṃ paippalādakam iti.*

30 Note that Kumārila (TanVār on sūtra 1.3.7, p. 122–123) is not averse to the idea of world periods.

31 Manu 1.23a-c: *agnivāyuravibhyas tu trayaṃ brahma sanātanam | dudoha* ... Kane (1968–77, II: 352) claims that "[a]ll dharmaśāstra writers proceed on this axiom of the eternity of the Veda", without however giving references in support of this.

32 Śaṅkara explains the words *ataḥ prabhavāt* of sūtra 1.3.28 with the words: *ata eva hi vaidikāc chabdād devādikaṃ jagat prabhavati.*

> vious creation, not a different Veda. The Vedas have, as a result, no author in the sense that they are not the object of an utterance that is independent of a similar utterance (made during an earlier creation). The utterance of the Mahābhārata etc., on the other hand, **is** independent of a similar utterance (during an earlier creation), and therefore these texts do have an author. In this way tradition has been defined as being divided into parts that have and those that do not have an author.[33]

It appears, then, that the idea of a beginningless Veda (and perhaps even that of an authorless Veda) may not have been an invention of early Mīmāṃsā. However, only the Mīmāṃsakas (and this does not include the Vedāntins) drew from it the far-reaching conclusions which turned their school into an impenetrable bastion for those defenders of the Veda who did not wish to identify with its myths. Who did so, and when, remains obscure. Why they did so may have become clearer after the preceding reflections.

With regard to the introduction of the third element, the self-sufficient validity of the Veda (*svataḥprāmāṇya*), we are on firmer ground. Erich Frauwallner (1968: 107ff.) has adduced convincing reasons to show that this doctrine was created by the so-called Vṛttikāra, the anonymous author a long passage of whose work is cited in Śabara's Bhāṣya on sūtras 1.1.4–5. Not only does the Vṛttikāra explain this doctrine in the passage concerned,[34] but there are various indications to show that he introduced this doctrine as a novelty. In view of what has been said earlier in this article, it is significant to note that this Vṛttikāra is very much concerned, and involved in a debate, with Buddhist positions.

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Summarizing the reflections presented so far, it seems likely that Mīmāṃsā – that is to say Pūrvamīmāṃsā, i.e., that which finds expression in the Pūrvamīmāṃsāsūtra and its commentaries – underwent an important modification, and became more than before a "school of thought", through the introduction and elaboration of three doctrinal elements: the claimed beginninglessness (*anāditva*), authorlessness (*apau-*

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33 Text and translation as in Bronkhorst 1998: 12–13: *vedānāṃ nityatvena nirastasamasta-puṃdūṣaṇatayā prāmāṇyam ity adhvaramīmāṃsakāḥ | asmākaṃ tu mate vedo na nityaḥ utpattimattvāt | ... | nanu ... utpattimattvena parameśvarakartṛkatayā pauruṣeyatvasiddhau apauruṣeyatvaṃ vedānām iti tavāpi siddhānto bhajyeta | iti cet na | na hi tāvat puruṣeṇa uccāryamāṇatvaṃ pauruṣeyatvam | ... nāpi puruṣādhīnotpattikatvaṃ [pauruṣeyatvam] | ... kiṃtu sajātīyoccāraṇānapekṣoccāraṇaviṣayatvaṃ pauruṣeyetvam | tathā ca sargādyakāle parameśvaraḥ pūrvasargasiddhavedānupūrvīsamānānupūrvīkaṃ vedaṃ viracitavān | na tu tadvijātīyaṃ vedam | iti na sajātīyoccāraṇānapekṣoccāraṇaviṣayatvaṃ pauruṣeyatvaṃ [vedānām] | [mahā]bhāratādīnāṃ tu sajātīyoccāraṇam anapekṣyaivoccāraṇam iti teṣāṃ pauruṣeyatvam | evaṃ pauruṣeyāpauruṣeyabhedena āgamo dvividho nirūpitaḥ/.* I translate *pauruṣeya* with 'having an author'.

34 For text and translation, see Frauwallner 1968: 24ff.

ruṣeyatva) and self-sufficient validity (*svataḥprāmāṇya*) of the Veda. It seems likely that this modification took place in two steps, presumably connected with two persons: the author of Mīmāṃsāsūtra 1.1.27–32, and the Vṛttikāra cited by Śabara respectively. Together these modifications provided Mīmāṃsā with a global, overarching and coherent vision. This vision is unique in the sense that it is radically different from anything else produced by Indian philosophers,[35] and even from the Vedic thought which this school is supposed to represent and continue. The reasons for the creation of such an extraordinary system of thought – even by contemporary Indian standards – must be sought in the particular circumstances and challenges that accompanied its beginnings. We know little about the beginning of Mīmāṃsā as a system of thought but for the fact that it must have occurred when a tradition of rational debate and criticism had established itself in India, a tradition which came to determine the shape and development of the main schools of philosophy. All schools that participated in this tradition had to make sure that their systems were coherent and defensible in debates with unfriendly critics. Mīmāṃsā in its new garb was coherent and eminently defensible. Even its Achilles heel – the obligation to defend the Veda and therefore its contents, including the many improbable stories it contains – had been properly taken care of: Mīmāṃsā after its transformation no longer had to defend anything found in the Veda except for its injunctions, for it had effectively discarded everything else.

* * *

Having discussed the origin of Mīmāṃsā as a school of thought, I add a few provisional remarks, not about its end, but about the end of the circumstances that gave rise to it. I have suggested that the presence of unfriendly critics, along with the wish or obligation to listen to their criticisms, were responsible for the systematisations resulting in "Mīmāṃsā as a school of thought". Among these critics the Buddhists played a particularly important role. Buddhism, however, was in serious decline in the 7th century of the common era. Chinese pilgrims inform us that Buddhist monasteries were largely deserted, a development which went hand in hand with an increase in the number of Hindu temples ("Deva-temples").[36] In other words, the most redoubtable critics of Brahmanical orthodoxy were losing their position in society, and their criticism – whatever the logical value of their argu-

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35 The Sāṃkhya philosopher called Mādhava must here be mentioned, who, for theoretical reasons, appears to have rejected the idea of world periods followed by renewed creation; cf. Bronkhorst 2000: 61.

36 Eltschinger 1999, which is in this respect based on Joshi 1967, Chapter XII; the Chinese pilgrims are primarily Hsüan-tsang and I-ching, among others.

ments – no longer constituted the threat it once had. What would be the effect on a school like Mīmāṃsā?

Our attention is inevitably drawn to Kumārila Bhaṭṭa, influential Mīmāṃsā author of the 7th century. In another study (Bronkhorst 2000, § 13) I have pointed out that Śabara appears to have made an effort to conceptualise the mechanism of karmic retribution by reducing all the relevant elements of the sacrifice (the sacrifice itself, its result: heaven, the gods) to mental entities. Kumārila, on the other hand, did not do so, leaving karmic retribution essentially unexplained. Is it possible that Śabara, under the perceived pressure of Buddhist critics, felt obliged to offer explanations where Kumārila, no longer under threat, could do without?

Another feature deserves attention. Early "philosophical" Mīmāṃsā was primarily concerned with the validity of the Veda. This does not mean that it was uninterested in non-Vedic texts, texts composed by human authors. A few sūtras deal with the validity of the Smṛti, and Śabara's discussion shows that injunctions – presumably occurring in Kalpa Sūtras and the like – are at stake.[37] Such injunctions are valid if they concern invisible things and are not in contradiction with the Veda; it must indeed be inferred that they are based on Vedic texts that may have been lost. Other injunctions in the Smṛti are valid because they serve a useful purpose.[38] Kumārila extends the list of valid texts so as to include the Vedāṅgas, in particular, all of which are, at least in part, based on Vedic texts.[39] Even the sciences of reasoning (*tarkaśāstra*) are born from worldly experience, *arthavāda*s and Upaniṣads (*lokārthavādopaniṣatprasūta*), whatever that may precisely mean. More important are his remarks elsewhere to the effect that the epics and Purāṇas (?; Kumārila says *bhāratādi* 'the Bhārata etc.' and mentions the authors 'Vālmīki, Dvaipāyana, etc.'), though of human origin, are to be interpreted like the Veda, i.e. in Mīmāṃsā fashion.[40] We find indeed that Dharmaśāstra commentators – among them Kumārila's contemporary Bhāruci[41] – start to use Mīmāṃsā methods in interpreting their Smṛti

37 Agrawal (1985: 25) traces Śabara's quotation *aṣṭakāḥ kartavyāḥ* to Āśvalāyana Gṛhyasūtra 2.4.1; *gurur anugantavyaḥ* to Vasiṣṭhasmṛti 8.9; *taḍāgaṃ khanitavyam* to Manusmṛti 8.264; *prapā pravartayitavyā* to Vasiṣṭhasmṛti 2.38; *śikhākarma kartavyam* to Vārāha Gṛhyasūtra 4.24; *audumbaryāḥ sarvaveṣṭanam* to Lāṭyāyana Śrautasūtra 2.6.2; *aṣṭācatvāriṃśad varṣāṇi vedabrahmacaryacaraṇam* to Gautama Dharmasūtra 1.2.51–53; *krītarājako* [']*bhojyānnaḥ* to Bharadvāja Śrautasūtra 10.9.3.4. See however Garge 1952: 245–246; 248–249.

38 Śabara on sūtras 1.3.1–4. Cf. Kane 1968–77, III: 827–828 and V: 1260–1261.

39 TanVār on sūtra 1.3.2, pp. 79–80. Cf. Ayyar 1952: 43–44; Jhā 1903: 119–120.

40 TanVār on sūtra 1.2.7, p. 14 l. 20 – p. 15 l. 13. Cf. Eltschinger 1999; Ayyar 1952: 40–41; Jhā 1903: 25–26.

41 Derrett (1975, I: 14) proposes "between A.D. 600 and 650" as "conservative" dates for this author. Derrett (1973: 15) mentions Bhāruci's Vivaraṇa on the Manusmṛti, Viśvarūpa's Bālakrīḍā on the Yājñavalkyasmṛti and Maskarin's bhāṣya on the Gautama Dharmasūtra as constituting the earliest group of commentaries in Dharmaśāstra, all of which must have been composed before the end of the 7th century.

texts.[42] Treating Smṛti texts like the Veda implies, among other things, accepting their prescriptions without needing to justify them,[43] or to worry about the intentions of their authors.[44] Bhāruci's way of interpreting the Manusmṛti illustrates this. Not only does he account for every statement in the Manusmṛti as being *vidhi*, *niyama*, *parisaṃkhyā* or *arthavāda* (Derrett 1975, I: 25), as would a Mīmāṃsaka when dealing with a Vedic text, but also no reasons are given to justify the contents of those statements. What is more, passages where Manu himself gives reasons embarrass the commentator. Rather than taking them as reasons, Bhāruci sees them as *arthavādas*, "whereupon they cease to embarrass" (Derrett 1975, I: 27).[45] An example is Manu 11.12(13): "He may take three or two things at his pleasure from the dwelling of a Śūdra [for the success of the sacrifice], for the Śūdra has no business with sacrifices."[46] The second half of this verse would seem to give a reason for the first half, but Bhāruci explains it otherwise: it is an *arthavāda*. Still on the same verse, Bhāruci points out that Manu elsewhere forbids asking property from a Śūdra for a sacrifice, and obviously anticipates surprise that one can take what one cannot ask for. His response: "There is nothing which is too heavy for a text, for our *śāstra* is concerned to teach us."[47] Derrett explains in a note: "It seems unreasonable that a Śūdra's property should be forbidden if it is asked for, but suitable if purloined. But if that is what the text requires, we must accept it."

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42 It seems that the importance of Mīmāṃsā in earlier Dharmaśāstra is sometimes exaggerated. Lingat 1973: 148 (similarly Keith 1921: 97) writes: "Vasiṣṭha (III.20), Baudhāyana (I.1.1.8), and Manu (XII.111) call a *mīmāṃsaka* to sit in the *pariṣads* which are given the role of resolving controversial questions. It seems that very early the Mīmāṃsā was regarded as an indispensable science for the interpreter." None of these passages uses the term *mīmāṃsaka*. Manu 12.111, for example, has the word *tarkī* which some later commentators – but not Bhāruci and Medhātithi, the earliest ones – associate with Mīmāṃsā. The fact that the Yājñavalkya Smṛti (1.3) ranks the Mīmāṃsā amongst the bases (*sthāna*) of the knowledge of dharma, along with Nyāya and the Vedāṅgas, does not at all need to imply that Mīmāṃsā is to be used in interpreting Dharmaśāstra texts (such as the Yājñavalkya Smṛti itself).

43 Cf. Lingat 1973: 107: "In [the time of the commentators] the human origin of [the *dharmaśāstras*] had ... been completely obliterated. It was an article of faith that the precepts which they contained derived from Sages of the remotest antiquity, and their authority was accordingly beyond dispute. They appeared as if they were scripture, timeless, eternal; the whole of them, along with the epics and the *purāṇas*, brought to men the voice of a tradition which was both holy and in conformity with the order of nature. The commentators and authors of juridical treatises could not imagine their role as anything other than that of *interpreters*, concerned only to explain the meaning of texts whose authenticity and religious importance they did not doubt for one moment."

44 On Medhātithi's ideas about the role of Manu, see Wezler 1998.

45 For the way reasons are dealt with, see further Lingat 1973: 154–155.

46 Derrett 1975, I: 234: *āharet trīṇi vā dve vā kāmaṃ śūdrasya veśmanaḥ | na hi śūdrasya yajñeṣu kaścid asti parigrahaḥ*. Tr. Derrett 1975, II: 345–346.

47 Derrett 1975, I: 234: *na vacanasyātibhāro 'sty upadeśaparatvāc chāstrasya*. Tr. Derrett 1975, II: 346.

If then, as was argued above, "philosophical" Mīmāṃsā developed its views and methods in order to defend its "way of life" against unfriendly critics, these same views and methods came to play an altogether different role by the time the unfriendliest of critics, the Buddhists, were losing influence. They became a way of (and an excuse for) explaining all traditional texts without ever needing to look for justifications. In this way the whole of traditional literature was excluded from critical debate, and the question whether this or that aspect of it could stand up to criticism lost its importance. Mīmāṃsā thus came to contribute, not so much to the preservation of Vedic sacrificial activities, as to "the myth that all norms emanated from a superhuman source" and to the assumption "that innovation was decay, and that change must be, not merely for the worse, but an infringement of the natural order of things" (Derrett 1973: 27).[48]

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