AUTHORLESS VOICE, TRADITION AND AUTHORITY IN THE MĪMĀṂSĀ: REFLECTIONS IN CROSS-CULTURAL HERMENUETICS

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In my earlier book-length work, *Śabdapramāṇa: Word and Knowledge* (Reidel, 1988), I explored the relationship between knowing and language and considered why and *how* it is possible to derive knowledge from linguistic utterances. The material for analysis was drawn largely from classical Indian philosophy, notably Nyāya and Vedānta. I also gave an analytical account of what would count as adequate 'evidence', i.e. conditions of justification, in (verbal) testimony. The work helped spur a renewed interest in this long-forgotten thesis from classical Indian thought. However, the framework I had adopted for the inquiry took for granted the view that words and objects (things) are quite distinct phenomena and their connection is not unlike the connection of cognition with object, i.e. in a relationship of representation, correctness, descriptive fit, and so on. I have since come to be concerned about language in rather different ways - less in terms of its 'objective' function and more in terms of the totality that language *is*, in the horizon of meaning, its construction, understanding, interpretation, and transmission in history, as well as translation in religio-cultural processes - in short, as a hermeneutical phenomenon.

When we perceive that words continue to operate in the absence of objects and the symbolic form of language is forever extended in myths, metaphor, poetics, rhetoric, arts, legends, the laws, etc. we appreciate that language exceeds the representational function and resists reduction to abstract (grammatical) categories and simple conceptual schemes; likewise, language through memory makes present to our world tradition from the past that has ceased to be (and perhaps also futurity), and it enables participation in the sacred or the 'sacramental', albeit, in some limited sense. What then is the enigmatic power and real object of language? It is simply an instrument of human culture with a distinctive capacity to denote and designate? Might language, in all its plurality and ambiguity, be a mode of making things (existent and non-existent) *present* to consciousness? Might the object of language be *language* itself? Or could language be the 'house of *being*'? Such questions about the complexity of language

have increasingly been raised in the West, more specially since Dilthey and Schleiermacher's efforts at outlining a program for hermeneutics which has been taken further in rather different though interesting ways by thinkers such as Gadamer, Ricoeur among others, or quite independently by Heidegger and later Wittgenstein, making at once a decisive shift away from the "linguistic turn" of the (European) Enlightenment.

To be sure such questions were not absent in Indian (Brāhmaṇic) speculations on language in bygone years. One has only to point to Bhartṛhari's doctrine of *Śabdabrahman* in which he attempts a complete identification of language (through stages of subtler gradation of speech, *vāc*) with the Absolute as Brahman. All speaking and understanding therefore proceeds from this 'unity of word', and (unconsciously) strives to return eventually to this realization.[1] Although this totalizing ontological identification is rejected by most other systems of Indian thought (especially the Buddhist), the basic impulse of grounding language in an ontology or of giving a meta-language account of speech as constitutive yet transcending the conventions and varieties of language, is never far off the thought of much Indian speculations on language, from Ṛg-Veda through Rāmānuja to Radhakrishnan.[2]

I come to the problematic from another perspective, for which I have turned to the rather neglected Mīmāṃsā, broadly identified as the school or system that elected itself to provide rules and principles for interpretation and understanding of the correct procedure for the performance of sacrificial rites (*yajña*) as prescribed in the Veda-the formalized 'canonical' scriptures of Brāhmaṇism (later absorbed into a more diffused Hinduism). True to its name (*mīmāṃsā* in its etymology resonates with *hermeneia*), the Mīmāṃsā evolves a hermeneutical framework for understanding the texts of *Śruti*, 'the voice that is heard' as the Veda is thought to be, by some. It may be noted in passing that while more generally the Veda comprises the Saṃhitās, Brāhmaṇas, Āraṇyakas and Upaniṣads, the Mīmāṃsā was interested only in the Brāhmaṇas, the ritual text. The term 'text' is used here in the widest possible sense of a systematic ordering of words, and is not restricted to the written word, as obviously *Śruti* is initially the word

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[1] See B.K. Matilal, 'On Bhartṛhari's Linguistic Insight', in *Sanskrit and Related Studies Contemporary Researches and Reflections* (B.K. Matilal and P. Bilimoria, eds.) Delhi: Indian Books Centre, 1990, pp. 3-14; a more expanded analysis is in B.K. Matilal, *The Word and the World India's Contribution to the Study of Language*, Delhi/New York: Oxford University Press, 1990, chapters 7,10 and 11.

[2] See Frits J. Staal, 'Sanskrit Philosophy of Language', in Thomas A. Sebock (ed.), *Current Trends in Linguistics*, Vol 5. The Hague: Mouton, 1969.

that is heard and so transmitted, i.e. it has oral life much before it is committed to writing, though its literary texture (*text-analogue* in respect of devices and techniques, such as delimiters, accents, quotations, punctuations, notational markings, etc.) might be said to already prefigure in the reiterated (recited) voice and itself constitutes the condition for its exact transmission. In that regard the oral word might be said to share the textuality (textual fabric) of the written word, or vice versa, and the two modes coincide in the singular 'voice', *śabda*.[3]

Now if it is the case, as Gadamer seems to suggest,[4] that language is the universal medium in which understanding is realized and the mode of this realization is interpretation, or that all understanding is interpretation, and all interpretation takes place in the medium of language, then a clear account of language would seem to mark the beginnings of any hermeneutical task. The theory of language should also have ramifications for thinking on the nature of text, tradition and authority. While basing this brief discussion on the Mīmāṃsā approach, I shall deflect their views on comparable or alternative accounts in recent (Western) hermeneutical speculations, which for the present purposes will be restricted (though not representatively) to Gadamer and Derrida, with a view to engaging them in mutual conversation and critique. Whether the Mīmāṃsā theory coheres with the Veda's own view of its linguistic nature and structure is a question that I will bracket for the present; but then a text, much less the author, is not always the best authority on its origin, meaning, rhetorical tropes, unconscious motivations, etc. (or so scholarship after Plato has lead us to believe).

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[3] See Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method (translation of Wahreit und Methode)*, New York: Crossroad, 1988. pp. 353-4: "Certainly, in relation to language, writing seems a secondary phenomenon. The sign language of writing refers back to the actual language of speech. But that language is capable of being written is by no means incidental to its nature. Rather, this capacity of being written down is based on the fact that spech itself shares in the pure ideality of the meaning that communicates itself in it." Besides, highly literate cultures seem to have felt the need for writing to give stability and a sense of permenence to their cultural codings, accumlated wisdom, rhetorics, as also their excesses, in the way that non-literate cultures (and I am more familiar with the Australian Aboriginals) exploited other avenues for coding their cultural 'secrets', history and ways of dissminating these, such as through songs, painting, markings on earth, carvings, and so on.

For a trenchant criticism of the "tyranny of the written word" see, Lawrence E. Sullivan, 'Seeking and End to the Primary Text' or 'Putting an End to the Text as Primary', in Frank E. Reynolds and Sheryl L. Burkhalter (eds.) *Beyond the Classics? Essays in Religious Studies and Liberal Education*, Scholars Press, 1990, pp. 41-59.

[4] Ibid, pp. 350ff.

I. SALIENT FEATURES OF THE MĪMĀMSĀ THEORY OF LANGUAGE: *APAURUṢEYA*

The starting point of the Mīmāmsā theory of language is the proposition that ultimately language is without origin. Although this proposition of non-origination is first stated in respect of the authorlessness - *apauruṣeyatva* - of the Veda,[5] the thesis is generalized for language per se. What the authorless thesis basically entails is a rejection of an absolute or Transcendental Origin whose 'voice' ("logos") as the transcendental signifier is thought to be proximate, possibly even identical, with itself as the pro-Genitor, (*Pater*, God). Let us first consider briefly the claim of the authorlessness of the Veda (*vedā-pauruṣeyetva*).

We are tempted to say that this sounds like a preposterous idea: for the Veda must have had some author, as with any utterance or text. But as far as the Mīmāmsā is concerned the author of the Veda, whether thought to be omniscient, divine, supremely transcendent, or of lesser ilk, is simply absent. Could the Mīmāmsā possibly mean that the author of the Veda vanished (or withdrew for other purposes, like the Kabbalist author in the doctrine of *Zimzum*)? Or perhaps he fall into a deep cosmic sleep (like Viṣṇu-on-Śeṣa)? His (or her) presence is then in the absence. Besides, the authors are named in the Veda. To this the Mīmāmsā reply that these names are either fictitious or they belong to those who recited the text, or that they refer to evanescent deities that arise instantaneously with sacrifices.[6]

So the actual authors are not known or have been forgotten? What about the view regarded highly in some circles that the ṛsis or primeval seers 'woke up' beholding the Vedas in their visions? This suggestion is also dismissed by the Mīmāmsā for no other reason than that the Veda is *Śruti* 'what is heard', not what is 'seen', although it might be admitted that at the beginning of each new world-issuing (*sṛṣṭiprapañca*), the seers have a recollection of the original Veda.[7] The author does not exist at all: is that the Mīmāmsā contention? This certainly seems to be the position; indeed, the Mīmāmsā is known for its vehement rejection of a supreme Creator (*Prajāpati*), or a divine

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[5] *apauruṣeyaṃ vākyaṃ vedaḥ*; *Arthasaṃgraha* of Laugākṣi Bhāskara, ed. by A.B. Gajendragadkar & R.D. Karmarkar. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1984. #10, p. 7.

[6] Kumārila Bhaṭṭa, *Ślokavārttika* (=ŚV) *vedanityādhikāra* #4-12 (ŚV with *Nyāyaratnākara* of Pārthasārathi Miśra, ed. by Svāmī Dvārkadāsaśāstri, Vārānasī: Tātā Publications), pp. 670-672; also *Śabarabhāṣya* VI. 1. 2, VI. 3. 18, X. 4. 23.

[7] Pārthasārathi Miśra, *Śāstradīpikā* (=ŚD) (*tarkapāda*) #87, #123 (ed. by Rāmamiśraśāstri, Kāshī c. 1949; also edn. by Pandit Laxman Shastri Dravida, Chowkhamba Sanskrit Series, no. 188, vol. 43, 1916.)

transcendent being (*Īśvara*). Eleswherer I have a given detailed account of the Mīmāṃsā arguments for this suspicion (or perhaps agnosticism).[8]

But even if the Mīmāṃsā were to be persuaded to take seriously the possibility of a transcendent/omniscient being, there is good reason to suppose that the Mīmāṃsā would not condescend to attribute the origin of the Veda to this magnificent being, for it is an unshakeable Mīmāṃsā conviction that all *personal* authority is open to error: the more a-personal a source of authority the less likely it is to be in error and the more credible it is. This must, the Mīmāṃsā insists, be the ultimate criterion for any valid grounding of knowledge. (In some ways this echoes a modern conviction in the impersonal propositions of mathematics and legal jurisprudence.)

The Veda then has no 'revealer' (even though it is often misleadingly referred to as 'revelation', or paradoxically denied to be a 'revelation' because it lacks the assertion of a 'revelation' - both moves being redolent of positive and negative apologetics respectively.) I shall not pause to consider other alternative candidates and possible scenarios proposed by the adversaries (*pūrvapakṣakas*) and commentators to account for the Mīmāṃsā denial of the author of the Veda, but will move now to consider the Mīmāṃsā account and argument itself - though later I shall suggest a possible re-interpretation of this particular hermeneutic strategy.

Autpattika

The Mīmāṃsā finds an inexorable basis for the authorless claim in a linguistic thesis called *autpattika*, which basically claims an 'originary' union of signified (meaning) with signifier (word) in a relation of difference such that there is never a need to posit a 'transcendental signified' as the originating factor. Jaimini's famous *sūtra* [*Jaimini-mīmāṃsāsūtra* I.15] states this thus: *autpattikas tu śabdasyārthena sambandhas tasya jñānam upadeśo 'vyatirekaś cārthe anupalabdhe, tat pramāṇam bādarāyaṇasyānapekṣatvāt:*[9] "But the relation (*sambandha*) of word (*śabda*) with its meaning (*artha*) is originary (*autpattika*); instruction is the (means of) knowledge of that (*dharma*, etc), and it is faultless (reliable) (even) in regard to thing(s) non-apprehended

[8] P. Bilimoria, 'Hindu Doubts About God - Towards a Mīmāṃsā Deconstruction', in *International Philosophical Quarterly* (Fordham), December 1990, vol. 30, no. 4, pp. 481-499. P. Bilimoria 'On the Idea of Authorless Revelation (*Apauruṣeya*)', in R.W. Perrett (ed.), *Indian Philosophy of Religion*, Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers. 1989, pp. 143-166.

[9] *Mīmāṃsādarśanam*. Ānandāśrama Sanskrit Series no. 97. Poona, 1973-84. I.1.5 (my translation).

(empirically), its authority, for Bādarāyaṇa (too), rests in being self-evident (i.e. independent of other sources)."

What is important for us to note here is the first statement: *autpattikaḥ śabdasyārthena sambandhaḥ*. What does this mean? The standard practice has been to render *autpattikaḥ* as 'eternal', largely because that is the sense Śabara seems to have given it when he commented: *autpattikaḥ iti nityaṃ brumaḥ*.[10] But, *autpattikaḥ* is constructed from *utpattiḥ* + (*dhak*) = "origin", which could mean "originating or arising instantaneously, inseparably, or without interruption". Hence Jaimini's use of the term *autpattikaḥ* in the above may be read as "the relation between word and meaning is originary", in the sense that the presentment of the word and its meaning is simultaneous, so that there is no moment in which they are separable one from the other. In other words, the word and its meaning arise (upon hearing) *as if* psychically or episodically co-present or coeval. Such is the "founding binary combination" (to borrow an expression from Derrida). I think it is often forgotten that Jaimini is actually referring to the actual instance in linguistic practice in describing this relation and that it is not an abstraction about some primordial origin (*origine*) or *a priori* source of the word. This insight is, in the first instance, psychologically-based, although it is extrapolated by extension through time for the binary combinations of all words and their meanings.

In fact, even in Śabara, despite his use of the term '*śabdanityatva*', this reading is quite clear, for considering what Śabara goes on to say in elucidating on this: *utpattir hi bhāva ucyate lakṣaṇayā/ aviyuktaḥ śabdārthayor bhāvaḥ sambandhaḥ, notpannayoḥ paścāt sambandhaḥ*[11]: "it is *bhāva* (self-presence) that is spoken of metaphorically as *utpattiḥ* ('origin'). The relation between word and meaning is inseparable (*aviyuktaḥ*) by virtue of their (coeval) presence; the relation is not (constituted) after both have arisen, rather it is imminent." In other words, *utpattiḥ* is taken not in the literal sense of 'origin' (*utpanna*), rather in the sense of *svābhāvika* [*bhāvarnāmahi svabhāvāḥ*][12] being by

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[10] *Śabarabhāṣyam* in *Mīmāṃsādarśanam* (Ānandāśrama edn.) on I.1.5.

[11] *Ibid.* (my translation)

[12] Pārthasārathi Miśra uses the term *svābhāvika* in explaining *bhāva* in his commentary on the *autpattikasūtra*, I.1.5, (5). (*Śāstradīpikā*, Chowkhamba edn. 1916, p. 121)(1949 edn. p. 28). Other commentators follow suit. Pārthasārathi refers to *autpattikatva*, and *nitya* of *sambandha* again in opening #88, pp. 67-8.

Apart from the Mīmāṃsā some other dārśanikas entertained a similar thesis of a differential yet inseparable relation of word and meaning. E. g. Patañjali in *Yogasūtra* (I.9,42) observes that in ordinary discourse the presence of the word brings about the meaning or conceptual image. The Grammarian view the relation between the name and the nameable to be *anādiyogyatā* (a beginningless capacity), see Gopinath Kavirāja, *Aspects of Indian Thought*, University of

nature in co-presence. This relation is *sui generis*, natural and with a sense of permanency about it, for it is in the self-nature of the word and its meaning to be so, and thus this triad is not created, nor is it constructed. It is to be noted, however, that there can only be such a relation if the two parts are in certain fundamental ways distinct from one another. There being no possibility of the complete identity other than their unity in 'voice', their difference, which is marked by the *vṛtti* of their *sambandha* or coeval relation, is also fundamental to their nature. Their 'eternity', if one continues to speak in these terms, may be more appropriately in respect of their *difference* than in respect of their pairing,for it is this difference that also preserves their continuity in discourse without the risk of their sedimenting into a unifying whole, the One Brahman, logos, and so on.

Nevertheless, *nityatva* does have the more general connotation of "eternity", "outside time", "beginningless". But, again, in the context in question the term "*nitya(tva)*", as Madelaine Biardeau rightly points out, "does not connote eternity nor does it even specifically refer to permanence"; rather it has the sense of an "internal exigency" (*svābhāvika*)[13]. And for this there is no dependency on any kind of extrinsic appropriation, such as a qualification of existence in terms of time or its exclusion, or substance by quality, or the sender. It essentially defines a relational structure that belongs to the very nature of *śabda* and *artha*. The emphatic stress is on the constancy of the relation: "*śabda* is never outside of or apart from the *autpattika* relation."[14] In this sense it is "originary", which I believe is better nuanced in the French "*originaire*" and "*originel*" (native, primordially prefigured), than in the English "original" (first, novel, originating).[15] Thus, I find it more instructive to render *autpattika* as "preeminently given" or "prefigured" in the sense of the inseparability of one from the other, read within a synchronic-structural matrix more than in some presumed diachronic time-frame (with or without a beginning). It is a corollary of this thesis that word and meaning also enjoy the status of

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Burdwan, 1984, pp. 14-17; Bhāmaha's definition of *kāvya* also echos something of this unity, for whom "expression and meaning is combined" (*śabdārthau sahitau*) -- *Kāvyālaṃkāra* I. 16 see A.K. Warder, *The Science of Criticism in India*, (Adyar, 1978) p. 31.

[13] M. Biardeau, *Théorie de la Connaissance et Philosophie de la Parole dans le brahmanisme classique*. Paris: Mouton, 1964. pp. 156-157. See also discussion Othmar Gachter, *Hermeneutics and Language in Pūrvamīmāṃsā: A Study in Śabara Bhāṣya*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1983, p. 44; and Staal (*op. cit.*).

[14] *Ibid.*

[15] Which is exemplified best in M. Heidegger, "The Origins of the Work of Art", in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, (Trans Hofstadter), NY: Harper & Row, 1975, p. 17, pp. 132ff; Heidegger, *Being and Time*, (trans. John Macquarie) NY; Harper & Row, 1962, p. 209; *On the Way to Language* (trans. Peter Hertz), NY; Harper, 1982, 124ff.

being permanent fixtures of the linguistic cosmos, for without this assumption talk of the permanency of the relation will not be logically tenable. In this sense Śabara characterizes the relation as "*apauruṣeyaḥ* [*śabdārthena sambandha*]", and all the Mīmāṃsakas after him followed in using *autpattika, apauruṣeya* and *nitya* as being more or less synonymous.[16]

Śabara outlines the function of this relation in its linguistic manifestation, in responding to the question why is it that upon uttering the word "razor" the speaker does not have his mouth slit open? Because, he says, the relation is to be characterized as that of *pratyāyaka and pratyāyya*, i.e. (as I would like to render them) signifier and signified respectively. Śabara further describes their function in speech in terms of the name (*saṃjñā*) and the named (*saṃjñin*)[17], which in broad terms corresponds to the *vācaka/vācya* or meaning/expression relation. We may note, again, that 'difference' is already at work in this formulation: the naming of the object or reference (the 'referent') is deferred, and a distinction is made within the sign, the word (*śabda* as a unit of speech) between the signifier and the signified (which I indicate by placing a bar between *vācaka/vācya*), and since there is *ākāṅkṣā* or expectancy between them they are said to be binary (and not all binaries are oppositional, some are complementary).

It is by virtue of this intrinsic relation that the word comes to have this significative or denotative character (*pratyāyakatva*); and so the word conveys its meaning (in other uses as well) independently of other relations, such as of sense-organ contact or that involved in inference, or that requiring the speaker's intention.[18] And there is nothing artificial or plastic about this relation which again characterized as *saṃjñā-saṃjñin*, nominans-nomen.[19] One might compare this with Gadamer's linking of language with 'naming' and the expression of concrete experience. In his words: "The word is not merely a sign. In a sense that is hard to grasp it is also something like an image" or name manifesting experiential content.[20] For Gadamer the word has a

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[16] Discussion in P. Bilimoria, "*Apauruṣeya*" (*op. cit.*), p. 159; and others in note 13 above.

[17] *Śābarabhāṣya* on I.1.5,; cf. *yat śabde vijñāte'rtho vijñāyate.*

Śabara had considered the relation (as well as the word and its meaning) to be the same in both (*empirical*) *laukika-* and (*scriptural*) *vedavacanam*, though he reserved the term *śabdapramāṇa* specifically for *codanās* (injunctive expressions) to cover *vidhis* and *arthavādas;* only with Bhāṭṭas *śabdapramāṇa* gets extended to *laukikavacanam* as well, with *codanā* as the limiting case for the *vijñāna* of *dharma;* admitting that certain words in the Veda do not occur in ordinary discourse: so how is their relation fixed? For discussion see, Francis X. D'Sa, *Śabdaprāmāṇyam in Śabara and Kumārila.* Vienna: de Nobili Research Library. 1980. p. 46.

[18] *pratyāyyapratyāyakatvalakṣaṇo'satyeva sambandhāntare svabhāvata*, #89, ŚD p. 68 (1949 edn.)

[19] See Robert Magliola, *Derrida on the Mend.* Purdue Press, 1984, p. 13.

[20] *Truth and Method* p. 377.

"mysterious connection with what it represents, a quality of belonging to its being". And he points out that a word is not a sign that one makes or gives to another, nor an existent thing that one takes up in order to make something else - not least an ideal meaning - visible through it, rather "the ideality of meaning lies in the word itself; it is meaningful already".[21]

The point I want to underscore at this juncture is that in so far as *autpattika* marks the difference of *śabda* (word) and *artha* (meaning) as also their integral connection, as a notion it exudes a profound psychological insight into the linguistic process; but the Mīmāṃsā, as I just hinted, go a step further and move this phenomenological insight into the domain of metalinguistic speculation and utilize it for their hermeneutical praxis. And here I discern a parallel with modern semiological insights, particularly those of de Saussure in his seminal text, *The Course of General Linguistics*, and their extension in Derrida. Let us explore this parallel.

Semiological model

In very general terms, de Saussure's semiological thesis postulates that a sign [*signe*], which he uses to designate a whole, comprises an integral union of signified (*signifié*) and signifier (*signifiant*). The signifier is the psychological trace or impression of a sound, which is a *phoné* or phoneme (the sound-image), and the signified is an idea or concept (the meaning); the linguistic sign for Saussure is a two-fold entity, a Janus-faced thing, both sides of which are absolutely necessary for it to function as a sing, as with any set of binary pairs: to invoke one is to invoke the other.[22] The linguistic sign unites or is a binary, not a thing or object and a name, but a concept and a sound-image, as the signified and the signifier respectively. The two elements are intimately united, and each recalls the other, or creates a tension of mutual expectancy. This theory of signification comports a sense (an idea acting as signified) and a 'voice' (acting as the signifier). This indissoluble union of the two primordial ("originary") components is the only essential thing in language, according to this model, which has been represented variously as:

[21] *Ibid.*

[22] Ferdinand de Saussure *Cours de linguistic générale*; trans. Wade Buskin as Course in General Linguistics, Glasgow: Collins/Fontana, 1974; especially "The Linguistic Sign", reprinted in Robert E. Innes (ed.) *Semiotics: An Introductory Anthology*. Bloomington: Indian Universty Press, 1985, pp. 28-46.

Sr

S ——————————— (signification) ——————— tree

Sd   'tree'

Sr/Sd   signifier ◀— ⇒ signified (◀— ⇒   = binary)
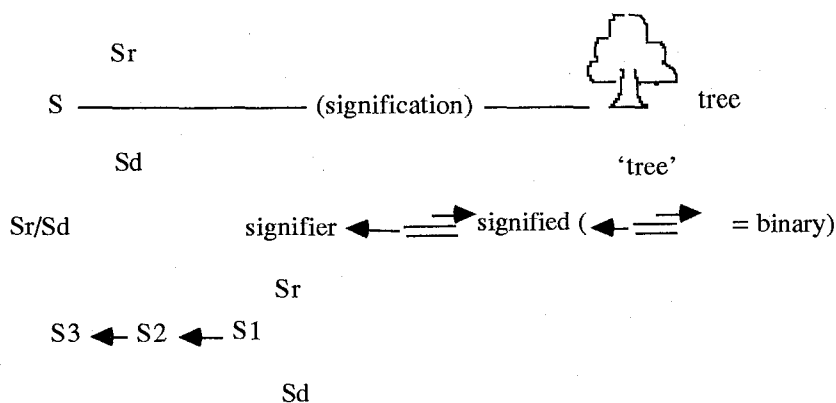
Sr

S3 ◀— S2 ◀— S1

Sd

Figure 1

What is important to note for our purposes is the fundamental unity of the signified and the signifier, albeit in a relation of mutual tension, and this is what makes it possible for the signifier, by becoming transparent, to allow the meaning to present itself; referring to nothing other than its presence. Saussure, it seems, wants to say that there is something of a *natural* bond between the *order* of signified *in general* and the order of phonic signifiers *in general*, as though the need to express meaning through sound was built into mankind's very mode of being. However, in respect of the more specific of particularized expressions Saussure was emphatic that in any given language the relation between the signified and the signifier is entirely *arbitrary*.[23] That is to say, in speech the bond is constituted by conventions accepted by the language-community, and the signs are artificially produced. Furthermore, the signs in themselves do not have signification, linguistic value, but only achieve this in interrelation with other signs or a chain of signifiers in a system, i.e. in language. Nevertheless, Saussure does mean to say that there is no "motivation" on the part of the individual to form such a bond or even to change it; although he attempts to ground the process in an extended but complex social matrix, dispersed in the history of the speech-community, and is also suggestive of its indefiniteness. In other words, there is something of a "fixity" about the signified-signifier relation, certainly in terms of *la langue* (system) but as well in *la parole* (use); yet, paradoxically, there is no real "origin" of it other than the conditions which make it possible, which is *discourse* itself.[24]

But how can language be prior to the constituents that are supposed to make up language? Saussurean semiological model has been taken

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[23] *Ibid.*

[24] Cf. Emile Benveniste, *Probléme de linguistique générale.* Paris: Gallimard, 1966.

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up and developed in different ways by poststructuralists. There has, though, been a tendency to understand signified and signifier in radically non-psychological terms, i.e. not simply related to the senses, such as hearing, but in purely material or entitive terms.

Jacques Derrida, who takes the Saussurean model as his starting point, focuses on the separation, the difference, the indissoluble disunity that marks the signified-signifier relation as well as distinguishing one sign from other signs. To press this point he coined the neologism *différance* (from *différer*), which has the dual sense of differentiating and deferring, often indicated by a "\" (bar).[25] The fixing of the relation which Saussure had located in a social matrix Derrida places or rather locates it within textuality (understood in the broadest possible sense as discourse). He decenters the subject as author and makes the *text* the context that accomplishes this inter-play of signs, their split and their dissemination. He even goes as far as to suggest that there is no life to signs outside of the text: *il n'y a pas de hors-texte.*[26] Derrida makes the 'interval' that marks the distinction between the Sd/Sr as the most significant part of the Saussurean insight. Even more, he is of the view that there is no ultimate concept -- the "transcendental signified" *sacra, arché, logos,* much searched for in metaphysics -- independent of language that accounts for the 'origin' of the relations (*relata*) in language. He is also concerned about the way and extent to which the signifier in its phonetic image (*phoné*) is privileged as a mode of expression over the written (*graphé*); which is not to say that for Derrida speech is opposed to writing (*l'ecriture*) for speech is forever writing.[27] In Derrida's work on Husserl's *Origin of Geometry* there is the same fascination for the relation between eternal objects of geometry as the Mīmāṃsā had for the relation between word and meaning (the objects of language). However, the deconstructive turn hinges in the final analysis just on the recognition of the utter "conventionality" of language.[28]

As to the question of origin, the classics had identified the signified as the originating factor of the signifier (voice), e.g. God the Father

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[25] See Jacques Derrida, "Structure, Sign and Play", in *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass. Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1968, p. xv, p. 12, p. 202, p. 280. also, *Speech and Phenomena*, trans. D.B. Allison. Evanston: Northwestern UP, 1973. La Dissémination (Paris: Minuit, 1972).

[26] Of Grammatology (translated by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak), Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 1975; pp. 8-9.

[27] Derrida, *Positions*, p. 30. Also *Speech and Phenomena; La Dissémination*. Paris: Minuit, 1972.

[28] See Roland Barthes, *Writing Degree Zero and Elements of Semiology*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1953.

begets the Son, the Son in turn reflects the Father, and a chain of signifiers is set up *and* disseminated infinitely. But Derrida rejects the possibility of an ultimate ground, transcendental or metaphysical, as the originating factor of the signified and the "founding binary combination", rather, he believes, and tries to show through a series of complicated arguments, that there are really only signifiers, which form an indefinite link chain *in reverso modo*. There is for him no *logocenter* which originates the sign; indeed, the absolute identification of language and ontology is resisted here with the device of *différance*. Saussure's suggestion about the arbitrariness of the relation is exploited by Derrida to its logical limit in that he questions Saussure's insistence on the natural bond between the two general "orders" of sound and meaning in the interiority of spoken language in contradiction to the arbitrariness (merely) of written notation. Derrida contends that, not only the binary combination, but the sum total of the phonic signifiers, that is each and every one of them, is arbitrary.

Secondly, while in conventional representation we have the signified being mirrored in the signifier, with Derrida, it is the signified which mirrors the signifier, and by a doubling back effect (*dédoublement*) the signifier become a signified, changes itself, and attaches itself to another signifier; this process could repeat itself setting up a chain link of signifiers, of which none has any independent or 'natural' signified attached to it. The *n*th signifier would have to transgress a whole series of signifiers to return to the 'original' signified, which however itself might have been simply another signifier, and so on *ad infinitum!* The so-called signs can only be pure signifiers, through and through. An infinite number of signs come into play.[29] This dissemination of the signifier, then, also marks the dissemination of the sign, which is not unlike the Mīmāṃsā idea of *anādivyavahāratvam*, beginningless convention.

Although Derrida dismisses any radical and absolute grounds for the inherited difference or opposition between signifier and signified, he does not think that therefore it has no function or relevance; in fact, the relation might even be indispensable within certain limits -- "very wide limits".[30] The fixed locus is abandoned for the function. One might retort that Derrida has made his *différance* the originating principle, the source of it all. No. Because "[T]o say that différance is originary is simultaneously to erase the myth of a present origin. Which is why "originaly" must be understood as having been *crossed out*, without which *différance* would be derived from an original plenitude. It is

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[29] Derrida,*Writing and Difference*, translator's Preface, p. xv; cf. pp. 12, 280.

[30] *Ibid*, p. xv, *Positions*, p. 31.

non-origin which is originary".[31] "The absence of the transcendental signified extends the domain and the play of signification infinitely".[32] The *autpattika* principle could perhaps be read in similar terms, as being originary without having an origin, or as we earlier heard Śabara say, the term "origin" is simply a metaphor here: for what? we might say, for a presence which no sooner that it arises "crosses out itself", for another presence, its absence, and so on.

What Derrida intends is to simply expel the signifier by substituting it with the signified, or with concept.The sign remains deeply paradoxical, poised in opposition, and this says Derrida is true for all sentences.

I have labored on this deconstructionist thesis in order to highlight the conceded possibility that the quest for the origin of the signifier (and the signified, regardless of how their relation is conceptualized) can recede infinitely backwards "effacing itself in its own production". Indeed, this idea of an infinitely transmissible tradition [i.e. a discourse about the world produced *within* the world texted by a system] is Derrida's cherished project.[33] While the same end of an infinitely transmissible tradition is reached in both the Mīmāṃsā and Derridean accounts by wedging a differential mark between the signifier (word) and signified (meaning), the routes traversed by each are also radically different. While for Derrida, as we noted, the signifier-signified relation is fundamentally arbitrary, artificial and plastic, for Mīmāṃsā the relation is not arbitrary but preeminently fixed and is true for all history, or rather that it acquires an ahistorical and atemporal dimension - indeed, there is something 'sacred' about this marriage; while Derrida jettisons the signifier and retains only its traces in nebulous, even chaotic, chain of graphic signs virtually devoid of materiality in a system bound within itself, Mīmāṃsā gives equal weight to the *signifier*, which is linked to a subtler non-visible medium of 'phonemes' (*varṇas* = "letters") which in turn as a collective ('morpheme') is recalled/illuminated (*abhivyañgya*) by the traces (*saṃskāras*) left behind by the sound-image (*dhvani*)[34] or, secondarily, by the graphic image (*lipi*) and other modes of materiality which awaken the meanings by this supplementary process. *Varṇasamūhaḥ* or combination of 'letters' give us words related to their respective semantic contents; combination of words (and related word-meanings)

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[31] *Writing and Difference*, p. 203.

[32] *Ibid*, p. 280, *et passim*.

[33] *Ibid, passim*.

[34] *pūrvavarṇajanita saṃskāra sahito vā vākyāntyavarṇo vā niravayavo vākyasphoṭaḥ*. ŚD p. 126. (1949 edn.) See *Ślokavārttika* (16=*sphoṭavāda* #69).

in a syntactical order (*pada/padārthasamūhaḥ*) give us sentences (*vākya*), and the combination of sentences produces text. Since the meanings arrive as it were with the words, their combination in a syntactical formation yields sentence-meaning (*vakyārtha*), which is a composite sense (*ekavākyatā*), and may require for its fulfillment various conditions, grammatical rules, metaphorical transfiguration, intentional re-arrangement, and so on.[35]

Furthermore, it is the overall signified (in a more composite expression) that governs the performative function of speech. Curiously one does not have to be kept waiting for the textual cipher: an urge or impulse (*bhāvanā*) towards a potential signified may be enough to propel one to action (provided one has understood correctly the task at hand).

To illustrate this remark, suppose we take the injunctive expression (*vidhi*) "Whoever desire *svarga* ['heaven'] should perform sacrifice [x]". Without concerning ourselves with questions of syntax, we notice here a string of signs, which breaks up into the signifiers, basically, as the *liṅ+dhātu*, *svargaśabda*, *kāraka* (which is neutral in the instrumental) etc, and the signifieds as the two-fold *bhāvanās* or impulses (efficiencies), namely, 'performative action' and 'the *phala* (*svarga*, etc)'. But the *phala* is not actually observed or is not forthcoming in the sacrifice, for it is deferred or postponed; which means that the two *bhāvanās* in turn become signifiers portending a third signified: namely the *apūrva* (an 'unprecedented' efficiency), this is the "transcendental signified" (*adrṣṭārtha*, literally, "unseen effect or entity").

However, the *apūrva* is "transcendental" (*kūṭastha*) only in a provisional and operational sense, for its significance is not so much in its being *adrṣṭatva* (as Verpoorten rightly points out[36]) as in being a mysterious result "which has nothing before it" or being without a preceding instance, i.e. in its novelty and prior unknownness, and so also in its near-empirical givenness for it retains the phenomenality of the *almost certain phala* (result), and further it will erase itself the moment the *phala* has matured. Hence, once again, the result or *phala* (actually a signified) functions as the signifier for the deferred but now-imminent signified, namely, *svarga* ['heaven'], and which too, like the *devatās* (gods), has no ultimate or absolute ontological status in Mīmāṃsā worldview, being possibly a signifier for an inner state of happiness in another birth, or something to be consumed, and so its

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[35] *Ibid. agṛhītasaṃbandhatvād eva ca padasaṃghāta vākya padārthānām api na sambhavati pratyāyakatvam.* ŚD p. 126.

[36] JeanMarie Verpoorten, *A History of Indian Literature - Mimamsa*. Wiesbeden: Otto Harrosowitz, 1987, pp. 17-19.

self-identity is eroded. And, of course, *apūrva* can be annulled by taking a wrong step (*bādha*) in the sacrifice. What is interesting is that the *apūrva* has no sign for it in the expression itself, and so it cannot achieve reference to itself, self-reflexively or otherwise; yet the 'hidden' (*avyakta*), unmanifest and "not yet visible", does achieve signification, though at the upper split level, i.e. as the pure signified. But how can this split occur if *autpattikatva* is to be taken literally, i.e. as prefiguring an inseparable relation? We have to say that this occurs through displacing another signifier, or by metonomy, or because the *vācaka* as a syntagm is the signifier in this instance (of perfomative utterance). This interpretation has proceeded, it may be noted, without any reference to the supposed speaker/author of the utterance or a subject's intention other than that of the hearer. And it eschews any attempt to forge a direct, unmediated link between text and ritual, or word and action (as some recent scholars are wont to[37]), as though no meaning-understanding is involved in hearing words that impel one towards this or the other performance.

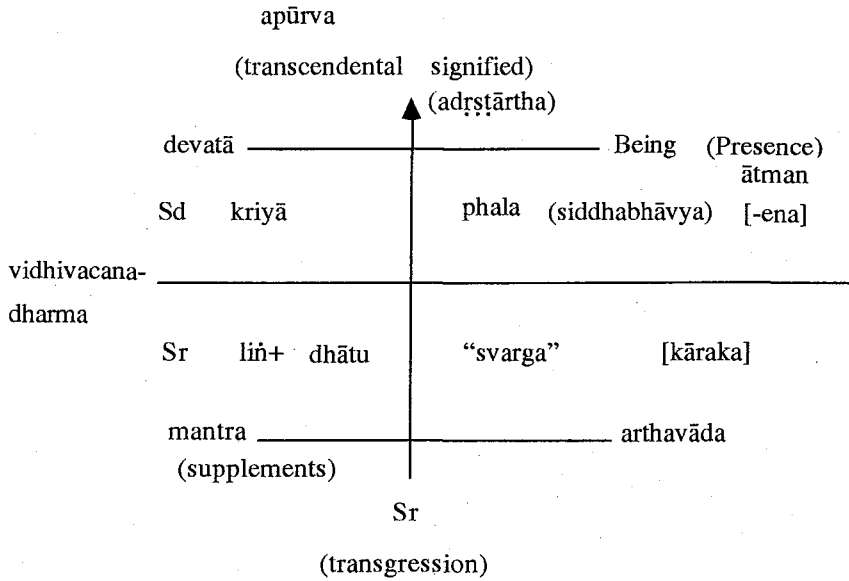Let me represent the foregoing analysis diagrammatically:

apūrva

(transcendental   signified)

↑ (adṛṣṭārtha)

devatā ——————————————————— Being   (Presence)
                                                        ātman

Sd   kriyā   phala   (siddhabhāvya)   [-ena]

vidhivacana-

dharma ————————————————————————————————————

Sr   liṅ+   dhātu   "svarga"   [kāraka]

mantra ———————————————————— arthavāda
(supplements)

Sr

(transgression)

Figure 2

The inter-looping of the binary pairs as represented in the diagram is, I believe, a significant indicator of the differential already impressed in the *autpattika sambandha*, or rather this itself marks another binary held in tension beneath the *śabda-artha* pair, namely, that of difference and naturalness. And this is most important form the point of view of a critique of metaphysics, for by this very recognition the Mīmāṃsā checks the tendency of any self-identification of signifier-signified, as occurs, say, in the Bhartṛhari's *Śabdabrahman* or in the dissolution of all expressions into the Brahman of Advaita Vedānta, or a Being that might unite the opposites, overcome the tension, or a *par-ousia*, as Mahādeva or *Īśvara*, that governs their presence.

II. RAMIFICATIONS FOR THOUGHTS ON TRADITION AND AUTHORITY

The thesis of *autpattika/apauruṣeyatva*, in according primacy to language, may betray the impression that the dimensions of history and convention have no place in language. It might be argued that the *apauruṣeya* doctrine has been devised by the Mīmāṃsā to attach ahistoricity to the textual tradition so that the orthodox could claim the Veda to be atemporal, ahistorical and non-originated.[38] Alternatively, one might argue that the entire authorless idea is a product of what, following Ninian Smart, could be termed "retroflexive amnesia"[39]. The claim is that culture with a vast body of sacredly regarded doctrines, ideas, liturgical prescriptions and moral forebodings, accumulated over a period of unremembered time, fails to maintain a well-defined perspective of its own past: it collectively (or subconsciously, even voluntarily) forgets its historical roots, and retroflexively identifies its accumulated wisdom with an authority that transcends the mundane, emperical processes.

There is of course much wisdom in these charges. However, there is also a sense in which the Mīmāṃsā recognizes the indispensability of history and convention, and this becomes evident in its reliance on the notion of tradition which is intrinsically linked to the doctrine of *apauruṣeya*. This arises in the more concrete consideration of the contexts in which words and their associated meanings are learnt.

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[38] See for instance such claims by Sheldon Pollock, 'Mīmāṃsā and the problem of history in traditional India, *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, Oct- Dec 1989 Vol 109, no. 4, pp. 603-8.

[39] Ninian Smart made this remark (recorded) in response to the writer's paper on '*Śabda and Śruti*: Tradition and Authority', at an Asian and Comparative Philosophy Conference in Honolulu, 1984.

Indeed, the Mīmāṃsā draws on the very factitity of forgotten origins of the oral tradition and turns this to its own advantage. Mīmāṃsā argues that as long as it is humanly possible to recollect, there is no knowledge of the authors of the Veda: all we know is that the text was heard by our fathers, our fathers heard it from their fathers and forefathers, and this line of hearing, goes all the way back to the ancients, who also heard them.[40] Thus there is a historically continuous succession of non-authoring 'hearers' (śrotrīyas). This is why the Veda is called Śruti, or śrautagrantha. It is not self-evident nor is there any real evidence that the Veda began with some one person or group. This indeed is the mystery. Besides, why should the Veda diminish in significance merely because its alleged author appears to be absent, or never did exist. The Veda has existed, and therein lies its significance. What we do know is that the Veda has been preserved and it in turn has nurtured and cultivated the tradition which has taken care to give it continuity. It is not difficult to see that the Mīmāṃsā is appealing to the tradition of learning language in a broader context.

One person learns from other persons or by observing the association of their words with behavior towards the denoted objects. Each generation depends on the communicative praxis or convention of the elders (vṛddhavyavahāra) for transmission, and the elders on their forefathers, and their on the tradition of the ancient (prācina) or learned ones (mahājanas), and this extends indefinitely (making the process anupūrvi or ānādivyavahāra)[41]. This endless line of transmission is often referred to as the śrotra-paramparā, or even as sampradāya, the matrix in which all learning (vidyāprāpti) and therefore understanding occurs, and it assumes an authority all its own. Deferring to tradition is also one way in which the question of origin may be postponed, which is partly what seems to be at stake here. Nevertheless, tradition has an important role to play in the linguistic praxis and the cultural processes in which this takes place.[42] The Mīmāṃsā exploits this insight in the following way.

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[40] Kumārila Bhaṭṭa, ŚV #3, p.670.

[41] ca padānāṃ vākyārthaviśeṣaiḥ ⋯ sambandhagrahaṇaṃ na asti, na ca sambhavati, anantatvāt ⋯ vākyārthasādhāraṇatvāt. ŚD p. 126. (This fact of an infinite possibility of sentence meaning is important here: anantatvavākyārthasādhāranatvāt (ŚD p. 125f). Useful discussion in John Taber, "The Theory of the Sentence in Pūrva Mīmāṃsā and Western Philpsophy". *Journal of Indian Philosophy.* December 1989. Vol. 17, no. 4, pp. 407-430, 409, 417.

[42] In this context Gadamer's view may be compared: "We must understand properly the nature of the fundamental priority of language ⋯ the critical superiority which we claim over language is not concerned with the conventions of linguistics expression, but with the conventions of meaning that have found their form in language. Thus it says nothing against the essential connection between understanding and language. In fact it confirms this connection" *Truth and Method* p. 362)

Giving an interesting twist to the theory of linguistic learning, the Mīmāṃsā maintains that the learning is chiefly of the *abhidhāśakti* or general expressive power of words and it is later that the particular significance is assimilated. Thus the word 'cow' has the power to designate 'cowness' and when the word 'cow' is the associated with a dew-lapped animal, one understands the animal to possess 'cowness'. Kumārila Bhaṭṭa rejects the Buddhist theory of *apoha*, meaning by elimination, on the grounds that meaning of a word is learnt not by elimination what it is not but rather by the inclusion of the *ākṛti* or general sense in the particular which is the word's reference. The same *abhidhāśakti* that discloses the significance of the word goes through to sentence-meaning, i.e interrelating the signifieds, displacing the general, *sāmānya* with the particular, *viśeṣa*, and through *lakṣanā* or secondary significative capacity, draws out symbolic, metaphorical, figurative, etc. connotations in specific usages of the expression. (I will pass over the more complicated theories of sentence-meaning in the rival Mīmāṃsā schools.[43])

Tradition also sets limits to the extent to which convention determines secondary, metaphorical and other variations or 'play' on the *abhidhāna* or primary significative capacity of words, although the derivations may overtake in ways that there is hardly any recognition of the original intent in the preeminent text of the tradition. But the Mīmāṃsā is quite adamant that while sentences or expressions may re-produce themselves in infinite permutation with unlimited meaning-combinations, words remain constant in their meanings, i.e. they continue their general meaning, and there are only a finite number of words (*loke san niyamāt prayogasannikarṣah syāt, Jaiminisūtra* I.1.26). Tradition also lays down certain practices and applications, and their interpretation, by which the ethical purport especially of the prescriptive utterances of transmitted discourse are realized. This latter is the domain of *vidhis* and *dharma*, as the very second *sūtra* of Jaimini points out. It is precisely this eminence of tradition, without undermining the fundamental priority of language, that the Mīmāṃsā attempts to establish in its efforts towards delineating a hermeneutical exegesis in regard to the utterances of the Vedas.[44]

Indeed, the idea of tradition that emerges from such a reflection has led no less than two contemporary (Indian) thinkers to argue that the Indian concept of *Śruti* aptly represents the view that a culture's self-

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[43] A detailed treatment appears in writer's 'Pārthasārathi Miśra on Sentence Formation and the Infinite Regress Argument', forthcoming in *Alt-Orientalische Forchungen*: (Berlin) (issue for Papers from the VIIIth World Sanskrit Congress, Institut fur Indologie, Universität Wien, 1990.)

[44] Some issues on tradition along these lines were first outlined in the writer's *Śabda-Pramāṇa: World and Knowledge*, chapter 7.

understanding is constituted and transmitted by tradition. M. Hiriyanna, though more in an apologetic tone, explains the idea of the authorless *Sruti* as the limiting case of nothing more or less than a systematized tradition.[45] He takes the doctrine of *apauruṣeya* to be another way of accounting for the immemorial tradition by those who came to distrust appeal to human subjectivity for all its defects, shortcomings and delusions. They looked for another *pramāṇa*, authoritative source of knowledge, and for this they postulated *Sruti* or, in Hiriyanna's words, "revelation", the inviolable and primary authority (*veritas prima*) that tradition has known, preserved and transmitted.[46] Hiriyanna, however, cannot makes sense of an immemorial nonpersonal tradition, and so he moves to reduce *Sruti* to a body of intersubjectively corroborated expressions of primal experiences, "the probability of whose truth has already indicated by reason" (*ibid*). In short, *Sruti* as a tradition is a social product - a "race intuition" - that comes to acquire down the lane of history a non-personal authenticity.

Moving away from the more orthodox (Mīmāṃsā) understanding of tradition but yet seeking to explain the locution of authorless *Sruti* in terms of this renewed understanding, J.N. Mohanty presents an interesting analysis. Although initially reticent to take seriously the doctrine of *śrutiprāmāṇya* (validity of scriptural utterances) because of its apparent antithesis to reason, he concedes the worth of the 'wisdom' of tradition, but only in a self-critical light.[47]

He utilizes a basically Husserlian phenomenological perspective tempered by a Gadamarian insight into the historicity of truth-events (*aletheia*), the happening of truth and untruth, in the life of tradition. Mohanty begins by rejecting "too literal an understanding" of the doctrine in question, for it betrays an insensitivity to the nature of Hindu thought; but he also rejects the equally "muddled cliché" that the scriptures express the spiritual experiences of their presumed authors.[48] Rather, Mohanty prefers to render *Sruti* simply as the "eminent texts of the tradition", and as the self-effacing delimitation of

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[45] Mysore Hiriyanna, *Outlines of Indian Philosophy*. Bombay: Allen & Unwin, 1973, p. 178.

[46] *Ibid*, pp. 179-80, p. 267.

[47] J.N. Mohanty, 'A Critique of Śabdapramāṇa and the concept of tradition', in P. Bilimoria (ed.) *J.N. Mohanty Essays on Indian Philosophy Traditional and Modern*, Delhi/ New York: Oxford University Press, 1992 (in press); see also J.N. Mohanty *Reason and Tradition in Indian Thought*, Oxford University Press (1993/1995).

[48] *Ibid*. See also recent debates in *Journal of the Indian Council for Philosophical Research* notably Som Raj Gupta "The Word that become the absolute: relevance of Śaṅkara's ontology of language' (Vol. II, No. 1, 1989 September-December, pp. 27-41); and reply to it by Ramesh Kumar Sharma, Vol. III, No. 3, 1991 May-August, pp. 127-145, "How not to Damn Language." In the same volume Daya Krishna's letter to Pattabhirama Sastri and his reply.

the horizon within which the Hindu tradition itself, and within which, Hindus understand themselves. To elucidate further this interpretation of tradition he invokes Hegel's notions of *Sittlichikeit* and *Moralität-* in the form Hebermas has developed extensively - as the medium of cultural transmission of values, mores, customs, knowledge, technical reasoning, techné and actions as well as its own self-understanding and critical self-reflection up to that historical moment. And so the discovery of the meaning of a tradition is never ever finished; it is (as Gadamer would say) an infinite process. Thus to claim any degree of finality for the authority of *Śruti* that orthodoxy would seem to want to must, on this account, be deemed to be a misguided understanding of what tradition is.

The task of understanding a tradition, it follows, may present other kinds of challenges, particularly when "the older ways of under-standing and practice, even experience itself, no longer seem to work"; we find ourselves "distanced from earlier ways", and what was once ground for radical stability or permanence has given way to radical impermanence or excess.[49] Yet the paradox is that there is no possibility of escape from preumderstandings, conscious and preconscious, of tradition, which we each come with; we are formed by traditions whose power impinges upon us both consciously and preconsciously. And we might even be confused by the plurality and ambiguity of our traditions, and by their bewitching 'game-like' languages.

Thus to try one's best to understand or assimilate oneself to a tradition does not entail that one cannot be a critic also of that tradition; although, in order to be a critic of one's own tradition, admittedly, one needs, in some measure, to transcend it -- while, still, as a person belonging to it. What one needs to find is 'an archimedean point' outside of it. But as Gadamer has rightly insisted there is no 'archimedean point' and no such thing as a *given'* unaltered and unalterable or immutable tradition (unless it is utterly static and fossilized), for a tradition is both the medium of interpretation and self-understanding of a community as well as the anonymous sedimentation of the on-going interpretation. In other words, tradition is the ground of the interpretations but it is also *constituted* in the process of these interpretations. Admittedly, what stands between the text from the past and the estranged contemporary reader is tradition itself; tradition which bears the text to the present, but not without carrying into its convention prejudices, not least in the way the text is to be approached and read. Prejudices are inevitable, and while the Enlightenment may

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[49] Tracy, p. 7.

have been a trifle too hasty in overcoming all prejudices, phenomenological hermeneutics is less sanguine and indeed less concerned about this prospect. But this awareness of the 'inevitabillity of prejudices' also keeps one on guard and compels the reader to be vigilantly self-reflective and self-critical.[50]

Thus, to interpret, to understand, to critique a tradition, is not simply achieved by gazing upon it as though it were an objective artefact, or a monument preserved from the past, but rather one has to be 'in it' and 'out of it', while recognizing that one's own interpretation, whether it be prejudice, prejudgment, open or anonymous judgement, contributes to the continuous formation, re-articulation, perhaps even reinventing (as with the 19th century romanticism in India) of that very tradition.[51]

The power over our attitudes is also seen to be grounded and transmitted through tradition. But the task of the hermeneutical enterprise is not necessarily to return us to the past, rather it should make the past itself become present to us by communicating and expressing its memory directly to us; and this, Gadamer claims, is best achieved through a linguistic (literary) tradition, the absence of which leaves us with unsure and fragmentary 'dumb monuments'.[52] In other words, to understand a text "does not mean primarily to reason one's way back into the past, but to have a present involvement in what is said. It is not really about a relationship between persons, between the reader and the author (who is perhaps quite unknown), but about sharing in the communication that the text gives us. This meaning of what is said, when we understand it, quite independent of whether we can gain from the tradition a picture of the author and of whether or not the historical interpretation of the tradition as a literary tradition is our concern".[53] Such a trajectory of tradition is not entirely alien to Indian hermeneutics, at least in the non-dogmatic reading that I have proffered of the Mīmāṃsā.

Gadamer's thesis of tradition has been rather influential of late and I wish therefore to dwell on it a little as we explore the connection of tradition with authority. According to Gadamer a culture's self-understanding occurs in the background of tradition; tradition remains

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[50] Cf. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, pp. 244-47.

[51] Some of the discussion here is cribbed from writer's introductory essay 'Fusion of Disparate Horizon' to *J.N. Mohanty Essays* (note 51 supra).

[52] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 352.

[53] *Ibid.* p. 353. Gadamer has been criticized, particularly by Habermas, for comprising reason or instrumental rationality in the effort to retrieve the experience of the past, without as it were throwing history a little forward to see if it meets the criteria of adequacy in all respects that we have learnt to date,. For discussion see, for instance, Georgia Warnke, *Gadamer, Hermeneutics, Tradition and Reason* (1987).

'unsurpassable'. In a telling passage, Gadamer makes a following bold claim about the "indispensability of tradition", which I believe is instructive to cite in full[54]:

"That which has been sanctioned by tradition and custom has an authority that is nameless, and our finite historical being is marked by the fact that always the authority of what has been transmitted --- and not only what is clearly grounded --- has power over our attitudes and behavior. All education depends on this ··· The validity of morals, for example, is based on tradition. They are taken over, but by no means created by a free insight or justified by themselves. This is precisely what we call tradition: the ground of their validity ··· tradition has a justification that is outside the arguments of reason and in large measure determines our institutions and our attitudes."

Authority however has gained a derogatory name since the Enlightenment cultural sciences, much as the Buddhists criticized the Mīmāṃsā reliance on āgama or the authority of texts and on the utterances of trustworthy sources (āptavacana): authority, it is claimed, robs one of freedom and it goes against the grain of reason. But as Gadamer rightly points, and as the Naiyāyikas did much before him[55], this is not the essence of authority: "··· authority of persons is based ultimately, not on the subjection and abdication of reason, but on recognition and knowledge -- knowledge, namely, that the other is superior to oneself in judgment and insight and for this reason his judgment takes precedence, i.e., it has priority over one's own. This is connected with the fact that authority cannot actually be bestowed, but is acquired and must be acquired, if someone is to lay claim to it. It rests on the recognition and hence on an act of reason itself which, aware of its own limitations, accepts that others have better understanding. Authority in this sense, properly understood, has nothing to do with obedience, but rather with knowledge."[56] The symmetrical relation between authority and knowledge is precisely what the Indian philosophers attempted to establish in the doctrine of Śabdapramāṇa, which I mentioned in the opening sentence to this discussion. The extension of this doctrine to the statements of the Veda via the trajectory of tradition was the particular concern, controversial as it has proved to be, of the Mīmāṃsā. It is clear that the Mīmāṃsā wanted to give due weight to the idea of authority. It may also be noted here that in locating the authority of scripture outside the purview of both reason and a supremely ultimate being (eminent

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[54] Gadamer, *Ibid*, p. 249.

[55] See again writer's *Śabda-Pramāṇa*, pp. 281, 292-309.

[56] *Truth and Method*, p. 248.

person, or God), the Mīmāṃsā lays itself open to the charge (from Enlightened Protestant theologians) of committing the grave sin of undermining or corrupting the very notion of 'author-ity', for by placing scripture, the *word*, over God and reason, the Mīmāṃsā has transgressed the very source(s) of authority. Indeed, such charges were brought against the Mīmāṃsā by the Nyāya, which the Mīmāṃsā scholastic writers were able to fend off with forceful counterarguments.[57]

Gadamer has likewise been criticized for returning to another kind of foundationalism in the guise of traditionalism. But by the same token, and unlike Hegel, Gadamer welcomes a plurality of forms historically different and concretely situated traditions. In this regard Gadamer's notion is open-ended, and non-totalizable or 'objectifiable', and it not as chaotic, discontinuous, haphazard, unbounded, and bewitching as Derrida's negative view of tradition belies. (For Derrida the supposed wholeness and coherence of tradition is an unwarranted "axiomatic structure of metaphysics" like that of the theory of language it undergirds.)

It follows from the picture of authority presented here that not all authority is bad or wrong, or corrupt and totalizing; that there is an implicit 'method' in tradition; that the way to handle the issue of tradition is not to reduce it univocally to a set of antiquated and antiquated and anachronistic beliefs, nor to blindly regurgitate its apparently receding spirituality, but rather to enter it, empathetically interact with it and in this dialectic allow a fresh understanding to emerge. Indeed, the distance -- *difference* -- that time and history (diachronic and synchronic) creates between a thinker or interpreter and the tradition provides an idle setting for the hermeneutic reflection to happen. For one can then, in retrospective, take into account the totality of past interpretations, and therefore more easily contextualize the tradition *qua* its representative ('eminent') texts to the present set of conditions and circumstances. Or, again as Gadamer puts it, "[E]ven the most genuine and solid tradition does not persist by nature because of inertia of what once existed. It needs to be affirmed, embraced, cultivated. It is, essentially, preservation, such as is active in all historical change".[58]

In concluding it might be contented that the more liberal, indeed a self-confessedly hermeneutical, rendering of the Mīmāṃsā project as I have given here, sits oddly with its otherwise well-worn reputation as the most orthodox of Indian systems. What, however, can be made of

[57] See writer's 'Hindu Doubts About God' (*op. cit.*).

[58] *Truth and Method*, p. 250; see also Mohanty, *loc. cit.*

an 'orthodoxy' that stridently takes a stance against, amongst other things, the belief in the existence and potency of the Transcendent, whether conceived as the plurality of gods (of the Vedas and *Purāṇas*) or as the absolute, the *onto-logos* (of the Upaniṣads and Vedānta), which the larger bulk of the Brāhmaṇic-Hindu tradition in one form or another shared? Secondly, while it is true that the Mīmāṃsā hermeneutics shows little trace of a widespread or significant influence on the actual performance of the Vedic rituals (although the Mīmāṃsā pandits I have been studying with in India avouch the converse), the principles formulated (*nyāya*) and its entire system of textual exegesis, known as *sadliṅgas*, were adopted, a) by the philosophical systems, notably the Vedānta from the time of the author of the *Brahmasūtra*, and more rigorously by Śaṅkara onwards; and b) in quite significant ways by the legalistic tradition, especially in the Hindu Mitākṣara Law, to the present day. (There have been recorded instances of High Court judges consulting Mīmāṃsā pandits on the likely Mīmāṃsā interpretation of some traditional ruling, say, on inheritance rights, on which a case was being contested).[59]

That is not to say however that the Mīmāṃsā account is free of other kinds of conceptual mistakes and linguistic defects, not least in its appraisal of history and its ritualistic excess at the expense of *mantras*, which no inquiry can afford to ignore. While more has been written on these defects[60], not much has been said on the positive features and possible fruitful comparison they might commend with modern reflections on similar concerns, which has been my focus here. I have explored here a number of different trajectories - though none definitive, nor fully satisfactory to my philosophical mind - for explicating the 'originary non-origin' claim in respect of the Brāhmaṇic canonical tradition, the apotheosis of which is said to be marked in the Veda or *Śruti*, itself thought to be exemplary of the pre-eminent 'authorless voice' as of the hermeneutic or interpretative self-understanding that is constitutive of the culture of the tradition, or alternatively of the anonymous residuum of the historical experiences of its people.

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[59] Discussed in writer's paper 'Rights and Duties: The (Modern) Indian Dilemma', (note 20); forthcoming in Ninian smart and Shivesh Thakur (eds.) *Ethical and Political Dilemmas of Modern India* London: MacMillan, 1992.

[60] See for instance Frits Staal's comments in his introduction to *Agunicayana*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass. Vol. I; and other authors mentioned in notes 39, 41, 42.