

OF INTRINSIC VALIDITY: A STUDY ON THE RELEVANCE OF PŪRVA MĪMĀṂSĀ

Daniel Arnold

Doctoral Student in Philosophy of Religions, University of Chicago

Introduction

As one of the six “orthodox” schools of brahmanical thought that are often taken to represent the main philosophical options of India, Pūrva Mīmāṃsā is usually thought to warrant at least cursory treatment in discussions of Indian philosophy; after all, the six orthodox schools collectively represent Indian “philosophy,” so if Mīmāṃsā is to be discussed, surely it is under the rubric of “philosophy.”¹ However, Mīmāṃsā seems in this regard rarely to receive much *more* than cursory treatment, a fact that is explained, if at all, by its having contributed little of “philosophical” relevance. Indeed, Mīmāṃsā’s constitutive concern with demonstrating the authority of the Vedas prompts many Western observers to characterize this tradition as virtually antithetical to truly philosophical inquiry.

Thus, despite its signal influence in the intellectual milieu of classical India, Mīmāṃsā receives relatively scant attention in the Western literature on intellectual practice in India. In Surendranath Dasgupta’s *History of Indian Philosophy*, for example, Mīmāṃsā receives a review about one third the length of those accorded to the traditions of Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika and Śaṅkara’s Vedānta. In introducing his review of the Mīmāṃsā doctrine concerning the authority of *śabda* (“language” or “testimony”), Dasgupta apologizes for thus introducing a topic omitted from his discussions of other schools, saying that discussion of this topic “has but little philosophical value and I have therefore omitted to give any attention to it in connection with the Nyāya, and the Sāṃkhya-Yoga systems.” This discussion, he continues, “has but little value with us, though it was a very favourite theme of debate in the old days of India.”² The philosophically sophisticated B. K. Matilal, though advancing a helpful discussion of the doctrine that we will consider, dismissively observes that “the scriptural way of knowing is by definition infallible! This is a sort of fundamentalism.”³ Even so sensitive an observer as Francis Clooney, in discussing the relation between Pūrva Mīmāṃsā and Uttara Mīmāṃsā (also known as Vedānta), in one place refers us to one of his earlier works for “a description of the *non-philosophical Mīmāṃsā* which is the true predecessor to Advaita.”⁴ Finally, in the context of Buddhist studies (where, it seems to me, much of the philosophically rich discussion of Indian thought currently takes place), there has been rather considerable attention to the significance of Naiyāyikas as interlocutors of Indian Buddhists, but very little analysis of the role played by Mīmāṃsākas in this regard.

As a modest corrective to this imbalance, I would like to develop a sympathetic account of one of the chief doctrines of Mīmāṃsā, namely that of *svataḥ prāmāṇya*,

or “intrinsic validity.” This doctrine is the cornerstone of Mīmāṃsaka attempts to explain the authoritativeness of the Vedas, and, insofar as that project is deemed a fundamentalist exercise antithetical to true “philosophy,” it is no doubt central to the widespread perception that Mīmāṃsā has “but little philosophical value.” And indeed, a glib characterization of this idea of “intrinsic validity” might well lead one to consider this among the less serious contributions to issue from Indian discussions of *pramāṇa*, or “criteria of valid knowledge”; for the doctrine, too briefly stated, is that verbal testimony (*śabda*)—like all other forms of knowledge—is to be judged an intrinsically valid criterion of knowledge, until and unless proven otherwise.

I would like to suggest, however, that there is an important philosophical insight here, and that it is one that was developed with some sophistication in the course of the tradition’s elaboration. Specifically, the doctrine of *svataḥ prāmāṇya* can fruitfully be seen as a compelling critique of foundationalist epistemologies.⁵ Understood as such, this insight can come to be seen as an important contribution to a discussion in which foundationalist options (those of the Naiyāyikas, and particularly those of Indian Buddhists in the tradition of Dignāga and Dharmakīrti) predominated. Moreover, this doctrine, more sympathetically elaborated than has often been the case, can be seen as quite relevant, after all, to contemporary Western discussions in the philosophy of religion. In order to show this, as well as to provide some conceptual tools for a sympathetic account of the Mīmāṃsaka doctrine, I will develop the latter in conversation with William Alston’s recent *Perceiving God: The Epistemology of Religious Experience*.⁶ Alston’s work, like the Mīmāṃsaka project, starts from a powerful critique of foundationalist epistemologies, one with some striking formal similarities with Mīmāṃsā (although, to be sure, some important differences as well). Moreover, Alston’s project, too, can be seen as a “protective strategy” not unlike that of Mīmāṃsā; that is, it is one designed to render certain discursive practices invulnerable to critique.⁷

The point in developing the Mīmāṃsaka doctrine of *svataḥ prāmāṇya* in this way will not be to mount a full-scale defense of the entire Mīmāṃsā system, several key moves in which I would not endorse. Nor, for that matter, will I be endorsing the entirety of Alston’s project. Rather, the point is to deploy Alston’s conceptual tools in the retrieval of a too-often-neglected voice in Indian philosophy. Moreover, the pairing of these two approaches may shed some light on both systems, which, for all their important differences, have some quite striking similarities. I will conclude by suggesting that, despite the radically different contexts from which these systems have issued, there might be some contextual similarities to account for the affinities in their anti-foundationalist critiques. In the case of Mīmāṃsā, the chief factor could plausibly be argued to be the threat of Buddhism, and I will therefore suggest that the Buddhist-Mīmāṃsā dialogue warrants much closer attention than it has yet received.

Pūrva Mīmāṃsā and the Validity of Pramāṇas

Let us see, then, what motivates the development of the Mīmāṃsā doctrine of *svataḥ prāmāṇya*, or “intrinsic validity,” and how it unfolds. The principal discussion of

this doctrine centers on the second of Jaimini's *Mīmāṃsāsūtras*.⁸ This states that "dharma is an end which is defined by injunction."⁹ The point at stake here is the question of what can and what cannot serve to convey knowledge of dharma, which, as an unseen quality, is not available to sense perception.¹⁰ The answer, for Jaimini, is that the defining characteristic (*lakṣaṇa*) of dharma is its being available only by means of (Vedic) injunctions (*codanā*). Since such injunctions are an instance of verbal testimony (*śabda*), this contention effectively raises the question of the status of language as a means of valid knowledge (a *pramāṇa*). Hence, the entire Mīmāṃsā project is launched, and the concern will be to show that language as *such* is intrinsically valid, and that such validity is only compromised by the agency or intentions of speakers (with the Vedas, as authorless, thus being immune to charges of invalidity on this score).

The earliest of the extant commentaries on Jaimini's sūtras is that of Śābarasvāmin, the so-called *Śābarabhāṣya*.¹¹ It is in commenting on Jaimini's second sūtra that Śābara first develops what will become the doctrine of intrinsic validity. Śābara elaborates his point in response to an objector who notes that we are all aware of many cases in which people speak falsely. Śābara's response, insofar as it grounds the later development of the doctrine in question, is worth quoting at length:

This (which was) said is contradictory, (i.e., saying both) "says" and "is false"—(for) by "says" is meant *conveys some knowledge*; it is the cause of (someone's) knowing. That can be said to cause one to know when, given its existence as a cause, one does know. And if it is understood (that) "when there is an injunction, heaven occurs due to the *agnihotra* sacrifice," how could one say it is not so? Moreover, how could it be *known* that it is not so? It is contradictory (to say) "one knows a nonexistent object." And from the sentence "one desirous of heaven should sacrifice," a doubt—"does heaven exist or not?"—is not understood; and, being understood as determinate [i.e., as not ambiguous], this could not be false. For that is a false conception which, having arisen, is overturned; and this one is not contradicted at any other time, nor with respect to any other person, any other situation, or any other place. Therefore, it is not false.¹²

At this point, the epistemological doctrine in question is presupposed rather than stated and argued for, but, before turning to the arguments that were developed by later commentators on Śābara, we can pause briefly to signal the key issues as they figure in Śābara's rejoinder—for the key elements of the doctrine are all in play here. First of all, my tendentious rendering of *avabodhayati* as "conveys some knowledge" should not be understood in the strict sense delimited in contemporary Anglo-American philosophy; for the claim here is clearly *not* that linguistic utterances induce anything like states of "justified, true belief." The point, rather, is simply that linguistic utterances are *understood*, and, thus being intelligible, they impart some conceptual content; thus, they constitute episodes of "knowledge" only in the looser sense that they convey some unambiguous *meaning*.¹³

This brings us to the second point, which is Śābara's contention that "being understood as determinate, [a linguistic utterance] could not be false." The point we should notice here is that it is an utterance's being "determinate" (*niścitam*) that qualifies it as imparting knowledge of the sort intended here. "Determinate," more-

over, seems to mean *not ambiguous*, that is, not necessarily regarding the *referent* of the utterance (which, in the case of dharma, is unseen), but simply regarding its *meaning*. Ambiguity is thus implicitly introduced as one criterion of *invalidity*. Moreover, that there might be other such criteria of invalidity is suggested by Śabara's point that, with respect to the claim made by the sentence he adduces in his example (i.e., one will attain heaven due to performance of the *agnihotra* sacrifice), one could never be in a position to *know* that it is false. In other words, Śabara is hinting at the insight that one can never *demonstrate* certainty, only that one can in certain cases *falsify* knowledge-claims. Of course, the point that Śabara wants to make specifically with respect to his chosen, Vedic example, is that, insofar as it concerns a case that is not accessible to any criteria of falsification other than ambiguity, it must be allowed to stand as true.

Whether or not we wish to defend this application of the argument to the authority of the Vedas, we can appreciate that Śabara has here begun an important critique of foundationalist epistemologies. That is, he has effectively challenged his foundationalist opponents to *demonstrate* that, in this case, heaven is not brought about by Vedic sacrifice. Śabara can, moreover, be understood thus to have issued a serious challenge, one that should cause some consternation on the part of the foundationalist. Stated more strongly, Śabara's insight is that foundationalists can no more *demonstrate* the truth of their own claims than they can demonstrate the falsity of the Vedic claim. Accordingly, the point should not be to attempt foundationalist demonstrations of certainty, which, as we will see the later Mīmāṃsakas argue, are bound to lead to infinite regress; the point, rather, should be to judge ourselves justified in crediting beliefs that have not been falsified. Anticipating the terms introduced later in this essay, then, we can say that Śabara could plausibly be read as holding that we are *prima facie justified* in taking linguistic utterances to be valid, and that this is the best we can hope for with respect to other belief-forming practices as well.

That the insight here can be expanded to cover other belief-forming practices was recognized by Kumārila Bhaṭṭa, whose *Ślokavārtika* is the locus classicus for the development of the doctrine of intrinsic validity, as well as for most of the other characteristic doctrines of Mīmāṃsā epistemology.¹⁴ The *Ślokavārtika* is framed as a commentary on Śabara's *bhāṣya*. Accordingly, Kumārila's elaboration of the doctrine of intrinsic validity comes in a discussion that takes off from Śabara's commentary on Jaimini's second sūtra. Here, in response to a more elaborately imagined objector, Kumārila counters the charge that validity (*prāmāṇya*) cannot be said to belong to Vedic injunctions. Kumārila answers: "You should understand that the validity of all valid criteria is intrinsic; for a capacity (for validity) that does not exist intrinsically cannot be produced by anything else."¹⁵ In other words, infinite regress will ensue if we take our criteria (our *pramāṇas*) themselves to require criteria of validity (if, that is, *pramāṇas* themselves are taken to represent an epistemological problem).¹⁶ Kumārila continues in this vein, expanding the argument into a full-blown critique of foundationalism such as we have seen to be implicit in Śabara. Specifically, Kumārila argues not only that we are *prima facie* justified in taking linguistic utter-

ances to be valid, but also that this is the only degree of validity we are ever justified in judging to obtain with respect to *any* belief-forming practices. He argues, that is, that if we cannot *demonstrate* the truth of Vedic claims, such claims are no worse for that, since we cannot *demonstrate* the certainty of putatively more well-founded claims, either. Thus:

If an object were not determined—even when consciousness (of it) has arisen—until the faultlessness of the cause (of that consciousness) were established by some other valid cognition, then the production of this subsequent awareness, based on another cause, would itself have to be awaited; for faultlessness (of cause) is as good as non-existent until it is decisively settled. Now, only if the cause of this (second cognition) were faultless would there be validity with respect to the awareness (it produces). But this (second cognition) would have the same (problem), and hence, nothing at all is settled.¹⁷

Before explicating Kumāṛila's argument, let us first supplement these passages with some of the comments on them from Sucarita Miśra's sub-commentary, the *Kāśīkā*. Further making clear the ways in which the argument has been expanded to cover all belief-forming practices, Sucarita Miśra elaborates on Kumāṛila's contention that, if the validity of our belief-forming practices is not *assumed*, then we will not be able to find any indubitable source that could provide sure foundations; for no such demonstration could be noncircular, and we are compelled to *assume* the validity of those practices that seem reliable, if we are to have any knowledge at all. Thus, if this capacity were not intrinsic, then no knowledge at all is possible. As Sucarita Miśra says:

It is not the case that awareness does not arise prior to our awareness of the virtue (of the source), or prior to awareness of the correspondence (of what he says with the actual state of affairs). Nor is it the case that, even though (awareness) has arisen, it appears as essentially ambiguous. We do not perceive a pot which has made contact with our senses (in such a way as to think,) "this may or may not be a pot"; rather, awareness arises as essentially determinate, (such that we think,) "this is a pot!" This is why it is only after awareness has arisen on the part of all subjects that the activity of communication is seen (to take place). For even mistakenly cognized silver, just like correctly cognized silver, is seen conducing to effective action. This does not make sense on the part of a doubtful (awareness), so certainty (must be said to have) been produced. What validity could there be other than this? Even if there is correspondence or awareness of the virtue (of a source of cognition), there is only so much reality to the validity; there is no increase at all. So what's the use of (any further validation)? If one objects: There is need of something extrinsic because there may be deviation of such (validity)—(we would respond,) No, because even in this case, it's precisely *because* of the independence of awareness that, even on the part of one who was previously deceived, awareness arises independently and as essentially determinate. The subject may doubt the reality of the judgment because of its similarity with the cognition that had just deceived him. But even on the part of (an awareness which) is doubtful, the capacity of validity does not diminish, because the ascertainment of the object to be known is just as previously indicated (i.e., is valid in the same way already specified). Rather, a subject's doubt has its origin in the sight of some deficiency (in his epistemic situation). This (doubt) disappears when

there is ascertainment of either the presence or absence of this (deficiency); awareness of correspondence is not required. For if there is already awareness of a pot, what will one who is doubtful effect by *another* awareness of the pot?¹⁸

At this point, we clearly have in place a fairly sophisticated and cogent critique of foundationalist epistemologies, with the case for verbal testimony being linked to a critique of those *pramāṇas* that are putatively more indubitable than language (chiefly, *perception*). The central point of this critique is that we must, at some point, *assume* the validity of *some* cognition, if we are to claim any knowledge at all. This is because there can be no *demonstration* of the validity of any *pramāṇa* that does not itself appeal to some *other pramāṇa*, which can in turn be problematized. Thus, if challenged to demonstrate that correct performance of the *agnihotra* sacrifice yields heaven, the Mīmāṃsaka can rejoin by asking the foundationalist to *demonstrate* the validity of *any* claim. Appeal to putative *pramāṇas* is no help in this regard, since we can always ask a second-order question *about pramāṇas*; of the person who claims to know that this is a pot, for example, we can ask, how do you *know* that you know? And there can be no answer to this question that does not in turn presuppose the validity of some other means of knowledge. Thus, if what is in question is precisely the validity of our *criteria* of knowledge, then we are doomed to circularity, since it is only by *some criterion* of knowledge that we can claim to answer the question. To ask these second-order questions is not, then, to make a trivial point, but to get at a real problem with the foundationalist project.

Of course, the critic of foundationalism must then provide an account of why some claims should nonetheless be preferred to others, or else be committed to the view that anything goes. In this regard, it would be important to be clear about what, exactly, Mīmāṃsakas mean by *jñāna*, which I have translated as “awareness” (and which is often rendered as “knowledge”). In the passages translated above, it seems that a valid instance of “awareness” is qualified as such simply by its being coherent or “determinate” (*nīścita*), as opposed to “essentially ambiguous” (*saṃśayātmaka*). It might therefore be objected that if Mīmāṃsaka arguments for *svataḥ prāmāṇya* depend on this understanding of *jñāna*, then these arguments are advanced only at the cost of eliminating important content from the term—namely the content given to it by renderings of *jñāna* as “knowledge,” that is, in the sense of “justified true belief.” In other words, if the Mīmāṃsaka argument depends on taking *jñāna* to consist simply of “determinate-ness” or “lack of ambiguity,” then have Mīmāṃsakas forfeited any claim to be talking about *truth*? There seem to me to be important reasons for thinking that this question, insofar as it turns on the presupposition of “knowledge” as “justified true belief,” is not relevant here. First of all, it is precisely the point of the Mīmāṃsaka critique of foundationalism to argue that *the demonstration of such justification is precisely what is problematic*. Moreover, as Karl Potter has cogently argued, there is a real point at stake in the debate over *svataḥ prāmāṇya* however we understand *jñāna*. As Potter puts it:

The *svataḥ* theorist holds that, whatever causes us to be aware of [judgment] J1 causes us to be aware that J1 can satisfy its purpose, i.e., can lead to successful activity of the rel-

evant sort. The *parataḥ* theorist denies this, holding that in order to become aware that J1 can satisfy its purpose we need a further awareness, presumably inferential, which is over and beyond the awareness which causes us to be aware of J1 itself. . . . Notice that it doesn't matter to the *prāmāṇya* debate so posed whether J1 is true or false, or thought to be true or false. . . . Nor does it matter whether a theorist thinks that only true awarenesses can lead to successful activity or, alternatively, thinks that some awarenesses capable of leading to successful activity can be false. The issue concerns whether, when one becomes aware that J1 is a potential purpose-satisfier, he does so through the same awareness by which he became aware of J1's occurrence, or through some *other* awareness.¹⁹

The same point is made particularly clear in our passage from Sucarita Miśra, who says that "even mistakenly cognized silver" can be conducive to "effective action" (*arthakriyāyai*).²⁰ His point, that is, is in part precisely to refuse the notion of "knowledge" as "justified true belief"; for what use could we possibly have of any further "justification" when we are already directed toward effective action by our awareness? Moreover, how could we *know* that we had reached any further justification apart from the difference this might make to effective action? It is, then, the efficacy of the awareness itself that makes it worthwhile, and not that of some second-order awareness that justifies the first-order cognition. Thus, a cognitive event qualifies as *jñāna* precisely insofar as it is *determinate* (*niścita*), which is all that is required for the "activity of communication" (*vyavahārapravṛtti*) to be possible and effective. This is the only kind of validity there can be, and the reality of this validity would be no greater at all for its having some second-order justification, even if it were possible to demonstrate the latter without circularity.

Thus, given that awareness is judged to be valid or correct chiefly in regard to its pragmatic efficacy, Mīmāṃsakas proceed to ask what is most effectively conducive to the realization of dharma. And their answer, as we saw, is that it is only Vedic injunctions that are effective in this way. It is in this connection that Mīmāṃsakas offer their arguments regarding the authorlessness of the Veda. Without necessarily endorsing this argument, I would like to suggest that it is not an unsophisticated move. Anticipating Alston, we can say that the Mīmāṃsakas are arguing, in effect, that we should credit the Veda as authoritative because this is a socially validated practice; this is what has always been done, as far back as anyone can remember.²¹ Thus, the claim could be read as being that, lacking the possibility of any non-circular demonstration of the validity of knowledge, we should credit as reliable whatever means carry the stamp of social sanction. This is not, of course, an unproblematic argument (neither in the case of Mīmāṃsā nor, we will see, in that of Alston). Nonetheless, Mīmāṃsaka critics of foundationalism are in a good position to claim that we might not, after all, be able to do any better than this with respect to *any* belief-forming practices.

Let us conclude our survey of *svataḥ prāmāṇya* by quoting from a late (ca. seventeenth century) commentary on Śabara, namely that of Vaidyanātha Śāstri.²² While this commentary is rather too late to be relevant to the questions I hope eventually to pursue (i.e., those concerning Buddhist responses to this Mīmāṃsā critique of foundationalism), it nonetheless provides a particularly clear statement of

the whole argument, from the point of view of the Mīmāṃsaka tradition following Kumāṛila. This passage is Vaidyanātha's commentary on the passage from Śābara that we considered above and from which Kumāṛila launched his discussion. Vaidyanātha frames this discussion by first quoting the key verse from Kumāṛila's *Ślokavārtika* ("You should understand that the validity of all valid criteria is intrinsic; for a capacity that does not exist intrinsically cannot be produced by anything else"). Having thus located himself in the tradition of Kumāṛila, he continues:

Thus, in this system, because of the intrinsic-ness of the validity of awareness, a ground of validity is not necessary. But there is reliance on a ground of *invalidity*; (thus,) nonarising of awareness is a ground (of invalidity); essential ambiguity of (such) awareness (as has arisen (is a ground); the arising of another, contradictory conception at a later time (is a ground); and awareness of there being a deficiency in the instrument (of cognition) (is a ground). With respect to this subject at hand: as is going to be proven using a group of arguments, such as (that) there does not exist any memory of an agent, on the part of the Veda, (which is characterized by) authorlessness, there can't be considered to be awareness which is based on a defective instrument. Nor, moreover, does the sentence "one desirous of heaven should perform the *agnihotra* sacrifice" have ambiguity as its essence; it produces awareness. Nor, moreover, is there contradictory awareness with respect to the awareness arisen from this sentence, (of the sort:) "heaven does not exist as a result of the *agnihotra*"; (for) when, and on the part of whom, (could such awareness) arise? Nor is it the case that awareness does not arise at all. Hence, based on the nonapprehension of any one among (these options) considered as grounds of invalidity, through the complete rejection of doubt as to invalidity, validity stands, without exception, as intrinsically established.²³

The argument is by now quite familiar, although, as we will note, Vaidyanātha here lays it out in a way that compels us to attend to the larger Mīmāṃsaka goal that is served by the elaboration of the doctrine that we have so far surveyed. What Vaidyanātha's elaboration adds is a particular emphasis on the criteria that can be taken to override such knowledge-claims as have been provisionally accepted. As we will see, the Mīmāṃsaka criteria for overriding claims that we were *prima facie* justified in accepting are quite similar to the "overrides" that Alston appeals to. Thus, there are clearly fallibility clauses, with a clear provision for the arising of subsequent cognitions that force us to revise earlier beliefs, and one providing for the realization that our cognitive apparatus is defective. Again, though, the emphasis is on nonambiguity, and the point is that we are *prima facie* justified in crediting claims that are intelligible. In this context, note again the use of "awareness" (or "knowledge," *jñāna*) in all of this. The point is that the sentences in question simply impart some particular and specifiable *content*, some intelligible *meaning*; it is not claimed that they impart anything like "justified true belief." Again, though, in noting this, I do not intend to weaken the Mīmāṃsaka position; indeed, the very strength of the Mīmāṃsaka position depends on noting this, for it is integral to the Mīmāṃsaka position that strict notions of "justified true belief" are to be eschewed, *since the demonstration of such justification is precisely what is here shown to be problematic.*

Of course, it is again Vaidyanātha's point to show that, given these criteria (and given other, more questionable arguments for the authorlessness of the Vedas), there is no possibility of showing the Vedas to be anything other than valid. Certainly, we can appreciate the force of the Mīmāṃsā critique of foundationalism without following him down that path. Nonetheless, it is important to note that this is the major concern of the Mīmāṃsakas, and that defending the Vedas from attack on the grounds that they take to be admissible is, therefore, the "constructive" part of their project. Thus, before turning for further elucidation to the work of William Alston, I would like to be clear about what I do and do not wish to commend in the Mīmāṃsā project—I wish, that is, to note briefly something of the larger argument in which the doctrine of *svataḥ prāmāṇya* figures so importantly. Indeed, Vaidyanātha's passage invites us to consider the larger context, as he draws our attention to a key part of the argument, the importance of which I have so far minimized. In a different context, Sheldon Pollock has aptly characterized the dialectic of which *svataḥ prāmāṇya* is one moment:

First—this is where we encounter the essential a priori of Mīmāṃsā—*dharma* is stipulatively defined, or rather posited without argument, as a transcendent entity, and so is unknowable by any form of knowledge not itself transcendent. Second—and this is the basic epistemological position of Mīmāṃsā—all cognitions must be accepted as true unless and until they are falsified by other cognitions. The first principle eliminates as sources of knowledge of *dharma* perception and any cognitive act based on perception (verbal communication, inference, and the like). The commitment to falsifiability (without Popper's corollary that what is not falsifiable cannot count as true) renders the truth claims of a transcendent source of knowledge—revelation—invulnerable.²⁴

Thus, the key presupposition is that the most important sort of knowledge concerns an object (*dharma*) that cannot be known by the kinds of cognitive acts that are capable of being falsified by such criteria as Vaidyanātha lays out as admissible, and the main argument based on this presupposition is that the one valid means of knowing that object (namely the Veda) is not falsified by any of these criteria, precisely insofar as the Veda is authorless (*apauruṣeya*)—for the admitted criteria of falsifiability are all centrally concerned with the intentionality of some agent, and where there is no agent of whom, say, a defective knowledge-instrument could be predicated, there is, ipso facto, no basis for claiming invalidity.

It does not seem necessary to spend time arguing that there are good reasons to doubt these claims. We can, nonetheless, appreciate that the Mīmāṃsaka goal of elaborating such a protective strategy led to the formulation of a sophisticated critique of foundationalism. A sympathetic retrieval of this critique seems to me to be a worthy project, particularly in the context of Indian epistemology, in which foundationalism (in the form of various doctrines of *pramāṇa*) has predominated. Karl Potter has aptly characterized, with respect to the foundationalism of Nyāya, the predicament that the Mīmāṃsakas perceived:

The Naiyāyika says that the way to justify the validity of judgment *p* is by showing that it is grounded in a *pramāṇa*. But a *pramāṇa* is, on Nyāya grounds, another judgment, *q*.

Therefore in order that q be shown to be valid, appeal will have to be made to reasons justifying the inclusion of that *pramāṇa* as a proper ground. Such a reason will be another judgment, r . It in turn will have to be grounded, and so forth and so on, ad infinitum. Thus it would seem that somewhere even the Naiyāyika must admit that there are judgments that are *self-validating*. And once he has admitted this, he has admitted his inability to answer my question. For he could as well have said, to my problem about how p is known to be valid, that it is self-validating—since what he intends to do instead will lead him eventually to assert the self-validating character of some other judgment which grounds p .²⁵

Though Potter here makes his point without specific reference to the Mīmāṃsaka doctrine of *svataḥ prāmāṇya*, his characterization of the problem could very well serve as a summary of precisely the argument advanced by Kumārila and his followers (and hinted at by Śabara). Potter's sensitive account of the difficulties encountered by the Naiyāyika project should return us to the conclusion that although the Mīmāṃsā project is not unproblematic, it contains a sophisticated and cogent philosophical critique of foundationalism.

William Alston and the Reliability of Doxastic Practices

In my explication of *svataḥ prāmāṇya*, I have anticipated the introduction of William Alston to the discussion by making use of some terms and concepts drawn from his *Perceiving God*. Thus, when we turn now to Alston's critique of foundationalism, which is similarly in the service of a defense of certain religious commitments, we should find it familiar. Alston's work represents a particularly sophisticated contribution to the philosophical literature on "religious experience," which, Alston argues, we are justified in crediting for the same kinds of reasons that incline us to credit beliefs based in sense perception. The point, that is, is to show that in *both* cases we are *prima facie* justified in considering these doxastic ("belief-forming") practices to provide bases for true beliefs—and this despite the fact that in *neither* case is it possible to *demonstrate*, without circularity, the reliability of these practices. This is, then, a critique of the classical foundationalist project (which seeks precisely such a demonstration)—and a critique, moreover, which, like that of the Mīmāṃsakas, is intended to defend certain ways of deriving religious belief as being no less reliable than sense perception (which, for us as for, say, the Naiyāyikas, tends to be credited as the paradigm case of a reliable basis for knowledge). In surveying Alston's discussion, I will venture to be more critical than I have been in the case of Mīmāṃsā, with my critique, I think, being relevant to both cases. Thus, while I have so far attempted a sympathetic account of the Mīmāṃsā project, I will here make more clear my sense of the problems with such an account. In this way, we will see that both the strengths and problems of the Mīmāṃsā project remain in play in the contemporary Anglo-American philosophy of religion.

In Alston's view, putative experiences of God (which issue from what he calls "mystical" practices) are to be accounted as a species of *perception*; and the question of whether persons are epistemically justified in crediting such perceptions is

analyzed by comparing these perceptions with *sensory* perception, which is generally held to be the most reliable source of justified belief. Alston's principal goal is to show in this way that the doxastic practices that he labels "mystical" are *prima facie justified*, in the same kind of way as, and for the same reasons as apply in, the case of *sensory* "practices." As Alston says, the only way of arguing, from a standpoint "outside any practice of forming beliefs . . . that people do genuinely perceive God,"

is to argue for the epistemological position that beliefs formed on the basis of such (putative) perceptions are (*prima facie*) justified. If that is the case, we have a good reason for regarding many of the putative perceptions as genuine; for if the subject were not often really perceiving X why should the experience involved provide justification for beliefs about X? This reverses the usual order of procedure in which we first seek to show that S really did perceive X and then go on to consider what beliefs about X, if any, are justified by being based on that perception. (p. 10; cf. pp. 68, 227)

In other words, the procedure is to show that the subjects of religious experiences are *prima facie justified* in thinking the experience to *be* an experience such as it *seems*, phenomenologically, to be; and, if one is thus *justified*, then the experience can, *ipso facto*, be taken as genuinely an experience *of* what seems to be experienced.

This is precisely the opposite of a foundationalist approach, which would seek to ground justification in a causal story that takes X indubitably to have *caused* the perception. That is, what foundationalists claim is that "true" beliefs are the ones that can be specified as having been *caused* in such a way as to guarantee their foundations in certainty. On this view, the *reliability* of practices is inextricably tied to the question of their *truth*, since for a practice to be reliable is precisely for it to have been caused in such a way as to guarantee its truth. Against this, Alston very persuasively argues that *no* doxastic practice can be *demonstrated* to be reliable in a way that does not already presuppose its reliability. As Lewis Carroll showed with respect to inference, it is a fallacy to suppose that "what it takes for a condition, C, to be sufficient for P (call this "what it takes" 'A') must itself be part of any sufficient condition for P."²⁶ In other words, while we might reasonably claim to know something, we can never demonstrate conclusively *how we know that we know*; for it is not possible to know something independently of the ways in which we know things! Alston strongly emphasizes the importance of thus seeing the issue as a function of different "levels" or "orders" of knowing. Thus, the inescapability of epistemic circularity is not a problem once we realize that it obtains only at the level of second-order claims about knowledge; and this recognition is sufficient for us to take the first-order beliefs as nonetheless reliable since, according to Alston's theory of epistemic justification, "there are no 'higher-level' requirements for justified belief" (p. 87). As Alston says,

I will be working with the concept of a subject S's *being justified in believing that p*, rather than with the concept of S's *justifying* a belief. That is, I will be concerned with the *state* or *condition* of being justified in holding a certain belief, rather than with the *activity* of justifying a belief. . . . The crucial difference between them is that while to justify a

belief is to marshal considerations in its support, in order for me to *be* justified in believing that p it is not necessary that I have *done* anything by way of an argument for p or for my epistemic situation vis-à-vis p. Unless I *am* justified in many beliefs without arguing for them, there is precious little I justifiably believe. (p. 71)

With respect, therefore, to the question of how Alston's epistemic reliability is related to the likelihood of a belief's being *true*, this important distinction between levels is what entitles us to assume our reliable practices to be "truth-conducive." That is, Alston can acknowledge that "we have finally settled for an epistemic status for SP ["sensory practice"] (and derivatively for the epistemic status of perceptual beliefs) that falls short of likelihood of truth," and yet go on to emphasize that this reduced epistemic status "attaches to the *higher-level* claim that SP is reliable, not to the particular perceptual beliefs that issue from that practice. As for the latter, what we are claiming is still the full-blooded (prima facie) justification . . . that involves likelihood of truth" (p. 181). And, as he adds in a footnote to this, "This does not, of course, imply that the higher-level claim is not justified in the truth-conducive sense. It is just that we have given up on *showing* that it is." In other words, while we cannot show that it is "likely true" that we *know that we know*, we are nonetheless justified in claiming to *know*.

Alston considers several different attempts to argue, to the contrary, that the reliability of sense perception can in fact be demonstrated. Among these, for example, is the verificationist hypothesis proposed by the logical positivists. Alston notes that this could be criticized by questioning the coherence of the very idea of factual meaningfulness, but his point here is specifically to show that the verificationist approach cannot demonstrate reliability *without epistemic circularity*. In this context, then, the relevant objection is that the very criterion invoked by verificationists "*presupposes* the by and large reliability of sense perception. What would be the point of requiring empirical *verifiability* or *confirmability* of p as a necessary condition of the factual meaningfulness of p unless it were possible to verify or confirm a hypothesis by relating it properly to the results of observation?" (p. 111). In other words, only a corroboratory *perception* could be counted as confirming the reliability of perception. The point, then, is not unlike that of Sucarita Mísra, who, as we saw, asked how awareness of a pot could possibly be any *further* "justified" by *another* awareness of a pot. Alston has in effect noted here that we could take ourselves to be better justified by a second awareness of a pot only if we already presupposed that perceptual awareness grants justification—in which case, why not settle for the justification granted by the *first* awareness?

Having canvassed in this way some of the attempts to demonstrate such second-order justification, then, and having shown them all to fail, Alston concludes that "*a firmly established doxastic practice is rationally engaged in unless the total output of all our firmly established doxastic practices sufficiently indicates its unreliability*. In other terms, *a firmly established doxastic practice is rationally engaged in provided it and its output cohere sufficiently with other firmly established doxastic practices and their output*" (p. 175; emphasis original). He then proceeds to make his case that

“Christian mystical practice” (“CMP”) qualifies as one such “firmly established doxastic practice.” Here, it is important to note the role played by Alston’s constraint that it is “firmly established doxastic practices” that we should take as *prima facie* justified; for this limitation will provide Alston with his most significant evaluative criteria. In Alston’s view, one of the chief characteristics of “firmly established doxastic practices” is that they specify what can count as overriding beliefs apparently generated by the practice. Thus, “overrides” are integral to Alston’s case for CMP being on a par with SP. As Alston reminds us, “the justification of perceptual beliefs is always *prima facie*, subject to being overridden by sufficient indications to the contrary. This gives us another way in which a belief can be relevant to the justification of another belief. It can be *negatively* relevant by constituting an (actual or possible) overrider or by ruling out such” (p. 90). This notion is much like that of the Mīmāṃsakas, who, as we saw, held that only *invalidity* is extrinsic. What it is most significant to note in Alston, though, is his contention that relevant overrides can come, in the case of CMP, only from the context (essentially, I submit, the *tradition* or *canon*) that constitutes it as a “firmly established” practice. This is key, since Alston wants to insist that his epistemological approach does *not* entail the conclusion that “anything goes.” Rather, he thinks that CMP is on a par with SP since it is both similarly justified *and* similarly falsifiable. We can, then, see that the formal similarities with the Mīmāṃsā project begin to line up with striking regularity, such that we are now perhaps in a better position to see the real problem with the Mīmāṃsaka project (and to see that their problem is not a silly one, but remains a problem in play in contemporary discourse).

In considering whether or not Alston’s move here is problematic, much depends, it seems to me, on the sharpness with which Alston individuates different doxastic practices (both “sensory” from “mystical” and “*Christian* mystical” from, say, “Vedic mystical . . .”). Moreover, it is here that we begin to see most clearly the extent to which Alston’s project can be characterized as a *protective strategy*; for, having individuated these different doxastic practices, Alston then wants to maintain that we should count as significant overrides only those belief-outputs that are “appropriate” to the respective practices—and, perhaps not surprisingly, these turn out to be the outputs that are generated *within* the practice in question. Thus, the extent to which Alston’s individuation of doxastic practices is empirically adequate becomes quite significant, since these analytic cuts provide us not only with the objects of our inquiry *but also with the criteria for evaluating them*. Despite the direct realism of his externalist epistemology, then, Alston’s project here has close affinities with Wittgensteinian fideism, and his hitherto persuasive project begins to seem more problematic.

That our evaluative criteria for a doxastic practice should be taken from *within* that practice is a point quite clearly emphasized by Alston. Stressing the “irreducible plurality of doxastic practices,” Alston insists that “the criteria of justification are quite different for different doxastic practices, and only confusion results from an attempt to subject the outputs of one practice to the standards of another, without good reason for supposing that those standards carry over” (p. 220). Still more clearly:

Thus, to a large extent at least, the practice supplies both the tester and the testee; it grades its own examinations. There is a certain circularity involved in supporting the choice of tests. One has to use the practice, including the tests in question, to show that these tests are the right ones to use. Choosing tests [is] an 'inside' job. And this circularity attaches as fully to universal practices like SP that are taken, in practice, to be unproblematic, as it does to controversial practices like CMP. (p. 217)

Finally, with respect to doxastic practices other than SP, only a privileged few can properly claim to be sufficiently "inside" the practices to judge whether or not the relevant tests have been passed, for

the normal situation in religious communities (and our fragmented and spiritually impoverished society is not at all typical in this respect) is for the young to learn how to perceptually recognize God well before any critical reflection on the process. But just because the practice is so much at the mercy of social influences, it is possible for a person to take up the practice after arriving at the age of reason, though this remains the exception rather than the rule. (p. 187)

It is important to notice how much of Alston's argument stands or falls with the adequacy of this empirical description of the epistemic situations of persons past and present. In order for the evaluation of beliefs issuing from CMP to be (as Alston insists) really a matter *internal* to CMP, it must be the case (1) that "mystical" doxastic practices really are as cleanly separable from sensory practices as Alston maintains, and (2) that *particular* "mystical practices" (e.g., *Christian*) must be individuable in such a way as to make clear whether or not candidate overrides are properly *internal* to them. In regard to the former point, I am not convinced that Alston has adequately met an objection from Richard Gale, which Alston himself cites. Gale has noted the tension between Alston's demands, "on the one hand for parity of treatment of the religious and sense experience doxastic practices and, on the other, that we not be chauvinistic, that we not uphold the epistemological principles of one practice as a standard by which to judge the adequacy of others."²⁷ What Gale has noted, in essence, is the problem of whether different doxastic practices are in fact as easily individuated as Alston seems to presuppose. This is formally related to the second point, with respect to which we should consider the extent to which Alston's list of possible override sources for CMP (which list, I submit, essentially represents Alston's sense of what the Christian *canon* should be taken to include) is a controversial one. According to Alston, "CMP takes the Bible, the ecumenical councils of the undivided church, Christian experience through the ages, Christian thought, and more generally the Christian tradition as normative sources of its override system" (p. 193).

To be sure, Alston acknowledges the controversial character of all of these, and his problem is perhaps no different from that of any such stipulative definition. Nevertheless, it seems to me particularly important for Alston's case that this description be *right*, since it is *Alston* who has so insisted that the proper evaluative criteria for assessing the outputs of CMP are those *internal* to CMP; accordingly, it is

incumbent on *Alston* to show that it is (in fact or even in principle) possible to specify *which* criteria qualify as thus internal.

Despite the sophisticated epistemological apparatus and the eminently non-Wittgensteinian realism, then, Alston's position seems to me to be, in the end, vulnerable to the same critiques as can be leveled against the Wittgensteinian-fideist positions of, say, D. Z. Phillips and George Lindbeck. This is emphatically not to say that Alston's position does not represent an advance over these positions. The really valuable part of Alston's argument is his sophisticated and compelling critique of foundationalist epistemologies. This, to be sure, may be read as part of a "protective strategy," insofar as it points out that the proponent of hard-core sense data cannot meet her own burden of proof—insofar, that is, as Alston's project consists of shifting the burden of proof. But this part of his argument seems to me unexceptionable. When it comes to his application of these conclusions to specifically "mystical" practices, though, the project becomes more problematic, and I would shift the burden of proof back to Alston; for now *he* must show, more persuasively than he has, that doxastic practices are as neatly separable as he takes them to be, and that criteria for evaluating them must indeed be taken from *within* them.

This point, it seems to me, is what is most problematically raised by the "problem of religious diversity." In regard to this, Alston seems to me to be astute in his characterization of it as a problem: "But when practice boundaries are crossed in the exchange things become stickier. Now a question arises for the recipient as to whether the practice in question is an acceptable one, and that introduces additional possibilities for doubt, error and lack of justification" (p. 283). That is, the fact of religious diversity undermines the epistemic justification of beliefs issuing from CMP since it forces the question of *external* justification (of *parataḥprāmāṇya!*); that is, even if we grant that we would be *prima facie* justified in taking the outputs of CMP as reliable, the fact of religious diversity forces the question of whether *this* is the doxastic practice to which we should be committed. And I would suggest—contra Alston's assurance that "our fragmented and spiritually impoverished society is not at all typical" with respect to the more usual situation of some MP being "normally acquired and engaged in well before one is explicitly aware of the practice as such and before one comes to reflect critically on it" (p. 187)—that perhaps the problem of religious diversity is not so new and unprecedented as it seems; that perhaps it would not be very easy to individuate, with respect to *any* historical situation, the doxastic practices that obtain. In any case, it seems clear that a judgment on this empirical question turns out to be quite important for Alston's position.

Nonetheless, Alston has developed an argument that represents a very interesting twist on the more familiar projects of the many philosophers of religion who claim the mantle of Wittgenstein. Thus, once he has gotten his project under way and has individuated doxastic practices, his approach looks very much like that of other "Wittgensteinian fideists"; that is, the point then becomes to insist that evaluative criteria be selected only from "within" respective practices. But his way of individuating such practices is decidedly different from other Wittgensteinian arguments, which typically turn on Wittgenstein's notions of "language games" or

“forms of life.” Alston’s move is to individuate doxastic practices by means of a specifically *epistemological* approach. That is, he generates a differentiated field of play through the development of a particularly nuanced critique of foundationalism. This critique persuasively shows that when we make second-order problems of our knowledge-claims (and ask, that is, *how we know that we know*), we cannot escape epistemic circularity; for the answer to the question “*How do we know that we know?*” can only be “*By means of some way of knowing*”—and this way can always in turn be problematized. It is, however, only at this second-order level that we are inescapably faced with the problem of circularity, and we are (if we are to claim any knowledge at all!) entitled to assume the reliability of first-order knowledge-claims that are not “overridden” by any of the ways that Alston specifies. This epistemological approach allows Alston to abide by the claim that he is a direct realist, such that his is the very strong claim that although *no* practice can be *shown* to be reliable, we are nonetheless entitled to consider ourselves *prima facie* justified in thinking ourselves to experience, in fact, what we *seem* to ourselves to experience.²⁸

Conclusion

Alston’s project, it should be clear, has striking affinities with that of the Mīmāṃsakas. Having surveyed Alston’s project, we are now in a better position to see what I have borrowed from him in my elaboration of the Mīmāṃsaka doctrine of *svataḥ prāmāṇya*. We are also in a better position to see what is problematic in the Mīmāṃsaka project in a way that makes its problems more relevant to contemporary discussions such as Alston’s—that is, in a way that could inspire a critique of Mīmāṃsā that is more constructive and less dismissive than has often been the case. I have read the latter position as amounting to the claim that we are *prima facie* justified in crediting (in this case) the verbal testimony of the Vedas, precisely and only insofar as it is only *prima facie* justification that we are in a position to hope for with respect to *any* belief-forming practices. That the latter is the case has been persuasively argued by Kumāṛīla and his followers, who point out that when we ask second-order questions about the *pramāṇas* that are taken to validate our knowledge-claims, infinite regress must ensue, since it will only ever be to other *pramāṇas* that we can appeal. This is, I suggest, effectively the same claim Alston has made in arguing that we cannot *demonstrate* the reliability of doxastic practices without epistemic circularity. Both Alston and the Mīmāṃsakas have thrown down a very serious challenge before the proponent of foundationalism, and, to the latter’s requirement that we demonstrate the reliability of “Christian” or “Vedic mystical practice,” they can quite compellingly rejoin: *demonstrate* the validity of your claim even to see a pot!

Both Alston and the Mīmāṃsaka have good reason to think that the foundationalist will be unable to meet this, her own challenge. Thus, since we *must assume* the reliability of *some* belief-forming practices, the most rigorous challenge we will ever be in a position to meet will be that of falsification; and, absent falsification, we are entitled to credit beliefs formed on the basis of socially sanctioned practices. Moreover, in both cases, what is shown to be a problem is the demonstration of

second-order claims about reliability, with first-order claims allowed to stand as truth-conducive. Thus, in the case of the Mīmāṃsakas, first-order cognitive events (i.e., instances of *jñāna*) are held to be “determinate” (*nīścita*), such that effective action (*arthakriyā*) and social practice (*vyavahārapravṛtti*) are enabled by them, while the second-order question of the *prāmāṇya* (validity or, perhaps we could say with Alston, *reliability*) of such cognitive events is the level at which regress becomes a problem. The problem, then, is not whether or not meaningful and useful cognition is possible, but simply whether the reliability of cognitions can ever be *demonstrated*, or must instead be assumed.²⁹

Again, though, it becomes problematic to unpack and defend the various notions of “socially sanctioned” that are in play in both of these projects, particularly from the perspective of concern for questions of power and ideology; for, while this is not what Alston says, it would certainly not be unreasonable to suspect that what is thus proposed is that the “official” or “authoritative” traditions should be accepted as truth-conducive, and no others. In the case of Alston, we have seen that there are more formal problems with this aspect of the project, as well; specifically, those having to do with how sharply it is possible to individuate belief-forming practices, and, accordingly, how clearly we can specify which evaluative criteria are internal (and, hence, “appropriate”) to certain practices, and which external. In the case of Mīmāṃsā, the problem is similar. Having challenged the foundationalist to demonstrate the truth of *any* claim, the Mīmāṃsaka rests content that the invulnerability of the Vedas has thus been secured. But we are entitled to rejoin by asking: on what basis has dharma been individuated from other objects of knowledge, and on what basis have the Vedas been individuated as the exclusive arbiters of this? This is, as Pollock rightly noted, the “essential a priori of Mīmāṃsā,” and we can allow the Mīmāṃsā critique of foundationalist epistemologies without concurring that this is a reasonable position.

And in fact, Mīmāṃsakas themselves were forced to address the problem of individuating the Vedas as authoritative with respect to dharma. This is particularly clear in the commentarial literature stemming from the section of Śābara’s *bhāṣya* dealing with *smṛti* (i.e., the *smṛtipāda*). In this branch of the discourse, Mīmāṃsakas addressed the status of the many texts classified as *smṛti* (i.e., traditionally passed down, as opposed to the Vedas, which are *śruti*, “heard” or revealed). Insofar as there was reluctance to disallow the authoritative status of all *smṛti* texts, it was argued in some quarters that *smṛti* texts derive their authority from some *śruti* text upon which they are based. That is, the authority of any *smṛti* text was based in an inferable relation to some *śruti* text. This gave rise to the further problem that not all of the *smṛti* texts that Mīmāṃsakas might wish to retain had an obvious basis in any specifiable *śruti*. One response to this situation was to hold that the category of “Veda” exceeds the received *text* of the Vedas; that is, we might sometimes be justified in inferring the existence of a *śruti* text as warranting some *smṛti* text, even where the former is no longer to be found in the Veda as it has come down to us.³⁰ To be sure, Kumārila did not follow Śābara in making this claim. Nevertheless, the need to discuss the issue is evidence of the problem I have identified—that is, the

problem of presupposing that the Vedas (or anything else) can be individuated as the uniquely relevant criterion for some specifiable range of concern.

This presupposition can be seen to function rather like Alston's contentions regarding the sharply "bounded" character of different belief-forming practices. Thus, in both cases, the point that reasonably follows from the critique of foundationalism is greatly stretched: from this critique it follows that we may, after all, be justified in crediting beliefs derived from certain religious practices; but it does not follow that we are entitled to claim that certain kinds of beliefs line up *only* with these practices. Indeed, it could be countered that this claim itself can be falsified by the kinds of criteria that Alston and the Mīmāṃsakas admit; for the claim that we will be able to (or even *can, in principle*) specify what is internal and what is external to a practice could turn out to be *empirically* false, such that this crucial presupposition could turn out to be overridden by criteria that Alston and the Mīmāṃsakas admit. Thus, while Alston and the Mīmāṃsakas can plausibly claim to have shown that we can never demonstrate the reliability of knowledge criteria, they will have difficulty in showing that it follows from this that belief-forming practices are compartmentalized in such a way that, for example, all evaluative criteria with respect to dharma can issue only from the Vedas. Still, they may yet have other moves to make, and it should be clear at least that it is not *self-evident* that attempts to complete these projects will stand on ground any less firm than that of the foundationalist.

I should at least briefly point out that this Alstonian reading of Mīmāṃsā's *svataḥ prāmāṇya* is not the only possible reading of the doctrine. One possible point of significant difference, which I have so far suppressed, concerns the notion that I rendered above as "capacity" (*śakti*). Recall that Kumārila launches his critique of foundationalism by saying, "a capacity that does not exist intrinsically cannot be produced by anything else." While I have tendentiously seen the issue as one of *prima facie* justification, there is some ground here for arguing that the Mīmāṃsakas have in mind something more like an occult "power" that is intrinsically *possessed* by *pramāṇas*. In that case, arguments for the doctrine of intrinsic validity would amount to the claim not simply that we are *prima facie justified* in crediting *pramāṇas*, but that *pramāṇas* (and, for the Mīmāṃsakas, particularly *śabda*) intrinsically and objectively "bear" the means of their validation. Certainly, this is how some Buddhist critics of Mīmāṃsā have wanted to understand the claim. Śāntarakṣita and Kamalaśīla, for example, in characteristically Mādhyamika fashion, attack the Mīmāṃsakas for introducing a causal *entity* that cannot be coherently posited as either the same as or different from the possessor of that entity.³¹

Aware of the stock character of this Mādhyamika approach, one should hesitate to consider this a damning accusation. There may, nonetheless, be some basis within Mīmāṃsaka discourse for such a reading of the notion of *śakti* as it figures in Kumārila's elaboration of *svataḥ prāmāṇya*. I hope to have shown, however, that this doctrine can also plausibly be read as one that argues only that we are *prima facie* justified in crediting belief-forming practices, and that the "locus" of this *śakti*, as it were, is the perceiving subject. This is, perhaps, the point that Pandeya and Manju had in mind in writing, "The question of validity seems, in the Mīmāṃsā system,

more of a psychological phenomenon than the logical one, because in keeping with the logic of truth a valid cognition cannot be rendered invalid subsequently."³² Again, though, to put the matter this way is to presuppose a notion of truth that the Mīmāṃsakas have tried to show can never be *demonstrated*, that is, one such that it could make sense to think of *knowing* when one's cognition has been caused by true states of affairs.

In any case, having shown something of the affinities between these arguments, I would like to conclude by suggesting some interesting questions that are opened up by our more serious attention the Mīmāṃsaka doctrine of *svataḥ prāmāṇya*, and by our elaboration of this doctrine in conversation with William Alston. The kinds of questions I have in mind mostly have to do with the intellectual contexts that gave rise to these similar critiques of foundationalism, which are similarly in the service of protective strategies with respect to religious commitments and practices. I would be reluctant to propose that there is some *essential* similarity that obtains with respect to these very widely separated cultural milieux. It might, nonetheless, be tempting to speculate on family resemblances between these different situations.

For now, I will leave speculation regarding Alston's context (i.e., *our* context!) to others, as I am most interested in further exploring the context that gave rise specifically to the Mīmāṃsā doctrine. We have seen, in this regard, that Karl Potter (rightly) finds a dilemma such as Kumārila elaborated to obtain specifically with respect to Nyāya philosophy. And, to be sure, the Mīmāṃsaka critique certainly applies to the case of Naiyāyika foundationalism. I would suggest, however, that the Mīmāṃsā elaboration of an epistemological doctrine that protects its larger project was chiefly motivated by the threat of Buddhist attacks.³³ Here, it is interesting to recur to Vaidyanātha, who begins the discussion translated above by laying out four possible positions on the question of validity (*prāmāṇya*). On this schematization:

The Sāṃkhya say it is ascertained that the validity *and* invalidity of awareness is intrinsic; the Logicians (i.e., Naiyāyikas) say that both (validity and invalidity) are (determined) by cause, quality, deficiency, and so forth (i.e., are determined extrinsically); the Buddhists say (there is) intrinsic-ness of invalidity, and external-dependence of validity; but the Mīmāṃsakas say (that) validity is intrinsic, and invalidity is dependent.³⁴

Here, it is interesting to note that it is the *Buddhists* who are seen to hold a position precisely the opposite of that defended by the Mīmāṃsakas. In the view thus attributed to Buddhists, not only should we suppose that validity can be demonstrated with respect to such "external" means as perception, but, indeed, we are told that anything else is *necessarily* erroneous. And, in fact, this seems to me to be a fair summary of the position elaborated by Buddhist epistemologists in the tradition of Dignāga and Dharmakīrti (who were, respectively, predecessor and successor to Kumārila, who was an interlocutor in the same broad stream of philosophical debate shared by these great Buddhist epistemologists). In their view, perception (*pratyakṣa*) is our only means of undistorted knowledge of the world, and the introduction of any conceptual elaborations of this *necessarily* entails distortion, since conceptual processes are essentially characterized by error. While Mīmāṃsakas hold that we are

prima facie justified in crediting any means that imparts an intelligible conception, these Buddhists hold that this is exactly wrong—that we should, rather, assume our beliefs to be *false*, until and unless we can eliminate the necessarily distorting influence of conceptual activity. Moreover, the Buddhists of this epistemological tradition would at least recognize the thumbnail sketch of their position as countered by Vaidyanātha, for the same schematization of possible positions on validity is found in relevant Buddhist sources as well.³⁵

With this in mind, it becomes interesting to ask just how Buddhists and Mīmāṃsakas interacted with respect to these issues. Clearly, the Mīmāṃsakas experienced Buddhist epistemologists as representing a serious challenge to the worthiness of their enterprise, and Kumāriḷa was particularly concerned to respond to the arguments of Dignāga (with Kumāriḷa’s critique in turn rebutted by Dharmakīrti). What is rather less clear is how later Buddhists were affected by the Mīmāṃsaka responses to their challenges. There is some question, for example, as to what extent Buddhists such as Śāntarakṣita appreciated the force of the anti-foundationalist critique that goes with the Mīmāṃsaka defense of *svataḥ prāmāṇya*.³⁶ Whatever the case, it is certainly true that Mīmāṃsakas have not received the attention they deserve as influential interlocutors of Indian Buddhists, studies of whom much more often attend to the role of Naiyāyikas in this capacity. At the very least, then, I hope to have shown that Mīmāṃsā represents an important voice in the inter-traditional conversation that unfolded as Indian thinkers of various dispositions turned to the task of defending their positions against the attacks of other thinkers. The Mīmāṃsā doctrine of intrinsic validity is a philosophically serious and tenable position, and the philosophically problematic character of the larger Mīmāṃsā project should not keep us from taking it seriously as such. Moreover, that their critique of foundationalism is not only serious but also of contemporary relevance should be suggested by its affinities with the sophisticated project of William Alston, who, in response to challenges perhaps not unlike those that Buddhists represented for Mīmāṃsakas, has made an important contribution to the contemporary philosophy of religion.

Thus, the move that the Mīmāṃsakas make in attempting to individuate the Vedas as the sole arbiters of dharma is, in fact, a move that is still in play in contemporary discourse, and the sophistication of Alston’s argument for a similar move should indicate that it is not an altogether untenable move. While I have shown that there are problems with this move, and while I would not commend either Alston’s project or that of the Mīmāṃsakas as worthy of wholesale adoption, I would nevertheless urge that they be taken seriously.

Notes

I would particularly like to thank Sheldon Pollock for his considerable role in my understanding of the Mīmāṃsā material. I would also like to thank Jonathan Gold, Paul Griffiths, and Parimal Patil for their suggestions regarding an earlier draft of this essay.

- 1 – On the complex question of applying the comparative category of “philosophy” to the study of classical Indian *darśanas*, see Wilhelm Halbfass, “*Darśana, Ānvikṣiki, Philosophy*,” in his *India and Europe: An Essay in Understanding* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988), pp. 263–286.
- 2 – Surendranath Dasgupta, *A History of Indian Philosophy* (Cambridge, 1922; Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1975), vol. 1, p. 394.
- 3 – B. K. Matilal, *Perception: An Essay on Classical Indian Theories of Knowledge* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), p. 32.
- 4 – Francis X. Clooney, *Theology after Vedānta: An Experiment in Comparative Theology* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), p. 212 n; my emphasis. I hasten to add that this problematic characterization of Mīmāṃsā notwithstanding, I consider Clooney’s an excellent book. Clooney’s observations on the subject of *apauruṣeyatva*, or the “authorlessness” of the Vedas, represent a very helpful discussion from a literary-theoretical perspective (see pp. 31–32). For another relevant and interesting discussion from Clooney (this one also informed by perspectives in ritual studies), see his “Why the Veda Has No Author: Language as Ritual in Early Mīmāṃsā and Post-Modern Theology,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 55 (4) (1987): 659–684.

It is pertinent to note some of the other philosophically sensitive attempts to explicate Mīmāṃsā doctrines. In regard to philosophy of language, there is Othmar Gächter’s *Hermeneutics and Language in Pūrvamīmāṃsā: A Study in Śābara Bhāṣya* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1983). Gächter’s comparative lens is quite different from the one that I will deploy, as his concerns are with hermeneutical discussions as elaborated by Heidegger and, particularly, Gadamer. This is surely a rich vein, and students of Mīmāṃsā could certainly be forgiven for coming to think that Heidegger sometimes seems almost like a crypto-Mīmāṃsaka. Consider, especially, a passage in Śābara that particularly exercises Gächter: Śābara, anticipating the argument that the Veda is authorless, considers the case *when language itself speaks (śabde bruvatī; discussed in Gächter, passim)*. While comparisons with continental hermeneutics may be promising, then, I will here be considering Mīmāṃsā in conversation with a prominent trend in Anglo-American philosophy of religion.

G. P. Bhatt’s *Epistemology of the Bhāṭṭa School of Pūrvā Mīmāṃsā* (Varanasi: Chowkhamba Sanskrit Series Office, 1962), though dated, is quite useful (see especially pp. 129–145). Also with respect to the doctrine of *svataḥ prāmāṇya*, see Francis X. D’Sa, *Śabdaprāmāṇyam in Śābara and Kumārila: Towards a Study of the Mīmāṃsā Experience of Language* (Vienna: Institut für Indologie der Universität Wien, Sammlung De Nobili, 1980), pp. 180–191, where D’Sa offers texts, translations, and close readings of some relevant passages from Kumārila. See also Puruṣottama Bilimoria, *Śabdapramāṇa: Word and Knowledge* (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1988), *passim*. Bilimoria is not entirely sympathetic to the doctrine of *svataḥ prāmāṇya*, and works at “qualifying and

tempering" it (p. 272). Also useful is Ganganath Jha's *Pūrva Mīmāṃsā in its Sources*, 2d ed. (Banaras Hindu University Press, 1964), especially pp. 75–79. For a more comprehensive bibliography, see Jean-Marie Verpoorten, *Mīmāṃsā Literature*, vol. 4, fasc. 5 of Jan Gonda, ed., *A History of Indian Literature* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1987).

- 5 – By the phrase “foundationalist epistemologies,” I mean to call attention to the fact that the versions of classical foundationalism addressed here are eminently *epistemological* views. That is, they are views that attend in particular to putative facts about our epistemic situation, facts about *how it is that we come to hold beliefs*. It is characteristic of foundationalist epistemologies, as I understand them, to conflate the question of how we thus come to *hold* beliefs with the question of whether they are *true*. In other words, these views hold that the question of how beliefs are *caused* is the same as the question of how we can know they are *true*. In particular, what foundationalists claim is that “true” beliefs are the ones that can be specified as having been *caused* in such a way as to guarantee their foundations in certainty; in other words, only beliefs arrived at in certain ways (usually by certain putatively irrefragable sense-perceptions) are “true.” Proponents of foundational justification thus hold that it is possible to specify which belief-forming practices tend to cause true beliefs, precisely because some belief-forming practices (and not others) are held to be demonstrably reliable in their tendency to produce true beliefs. To make this claim is, in effect, to hold that we can take as most certainly *known* simply what *appears most clearly* to us. It is, in other words, to mistake our reasons for *believing* something for the kinds of reasons we can offer for its being *true*. Against this notion, John Henry Newman aptly rejoined that “a proposition, be it ever so keenly apprehended, may be true or may be false. . . . [W]e have no right to consider that we have apprehended a truth, merely because of the strength of our mental impression of it” (*An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent* [University of Notre Dame Press, 1979], p. 80). Newman anticipates, to a striking degree, the kind of project advanced by William Alston, whose work figures prominently in the present essay. For Mīmāṃsakas, what corresponds to this notion of foundationalism is *parataḥprāmāṇya*, “extrinsic validity”—that is, the view that validity is dependent on some specifiable extrinsic factor(s). For some thoughts on which opponents of Mīmāṃsā might be said to answer to this description, and on the sense in which validity for them is “extrinsic,” see notes 34 and 35 below.
- 6 – William Alston, *Perceiving God: The Epistemology of Religious Experience* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991). Alston’s critique of classical foundationalism has been separately developed, without the constructive concern that predominates in the second half of *Perceiving God*, in his *The Reliability of Sense Perception* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993). However, it is Alston’s deployment of this critique as part of a project in philosophy of religion that makes for interesting affinities with the Mīmāṃsaka project, and so I

have found it important to make use of his critique specifically as it figures in his work on philosophy of religion. More on this below.

- 7 – The term “protective strategy” is that of Wayne Proudfoot, who uses it pejoratively to characterize the versions of philosophical fideism that he sees issuing from Schleiermacher. See his *Religious Experience* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), pp. 199–209. Alston and the Mīmāṃsakas, insofar as they judge their own arguments to succeed, would of course object to the pejorative aspect of this characterization, which I borrow simply as formally apt.
- 8 – Dasgupta dates these at ca. 200 B.C.E. (Dasgupta, *History of Indian Philosophy*, p. 370).
- 9 – *Codanālakṣaṇo 'rtho dharmah (Jaiminisūtra 1.1.2)*.
- 10 – It is difficult to say exactly what sort of “unseen quality” dharma is. The sūtra just quoted is introduced by the claim that dharma is what “connects a person with the highest good” (*sa [i.e., dharma] hi niḥśreyasena puruṣaṃ saṃyunakti iti pratijānīmahe*). For more on the Mīmāṃsā conception of dharma, and on the kinds of arguments that this conception is thought to require, see N. S. Junankar, “The Mīmāṃsā Concept of Dharma,” *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 10 (1982): 51–60. Junankar’s most succinct summary statement is, “What is conducive to happiness is dharma and what is not so conducive is adharma” (p. 51). It is, of course, a complex question why it was thought by Mīmāṃsakas that only some quality unavailable to the senses could answer to this description.
- 11 – The dates of Śābara are uncertain, but one reasonable guess places him in the first century C.E. (Dasgupta, *History of Indian Philosophy*, p. 370).
- 12 – The translation is mine, based on the edition of the Ānandāśrama Sanskrit Series, 4th printing (Pune, 1976), pp. 16–17. The text is: *Vipratīṣiddham idaṃ ucyate—“bravīti” “vitathaṃ” ca iti. Bravīti ity ucyate ‘vabodhayati, budhyamānasya nimittaṃ bhavati iti. Yasmimś ca nimittabhūte saty avabudhyate so ‘vabodhayati. Yadi ca codanāyāṃ satyāṃ “agnihotrāt svargo bhavati” iti gamyate, katham ucyate na tathā bhavati iti? Atha na tathā bhavati iti katham avabudhyate? Asantam artham avabudhyata iti vipratīṣiddham. Na ca svargakāmo yajeta ity ato vacanāt saṃdigdham avagamyate bhavati vā svargo na vā bhavati iti, na ca niścitam avagamyamānam idaṃ mithyā syāt. Yo hi janitvā pradhvaṃsate na etad evam iti, sa mithyā pratyayaḥ. Na ca eṣa kālāntare puruṣāntare ‘vasthāntare deśāntare vā viparyeti. Tasmād avitathaḥ.*
- 13 – We will return to the question of “knowledge” shortly.
- 14 – At least, characteristic for those Mīmāṃsakas who follow Kumārila. I will not here address the question of the Prābhākara school of Mīmāṃsā and its understanding of the doctrine in question. Kumārila’s dates are generally accepted to be ca. 620–680.

- 15 – *Svataḥ sarvapramāṇānāṃ prāmāṇyam iti gamyatām / Na hi svato 'satī śaktiḥ kartum anyena śakyate // (Ślokavārtika II.47)*. I have used the edition of the Trivandrum Sanskrit Series (ed. K. Sāmbaśiva Śāstrī), which includes the commentary *Kāśīkā* of Sucaritamīśra (originally published in 1913; reprinted, Trivandrum: CBH Publications, 1990). Cf. Ganganath Jha, trans., *Ślokavārtika* (Calcutta, 1900; Delhi: Sri Satguru, 1983), p. 28. Jha's introduction to this translation offers some useful remarks on *svataḥ prāmāṇya* (see pp. ix–xii).
- 16 – This point is reminiscent of a remark from Wittgenstein: “When one says that such and such a proposition can't be proved, of course that does not mean that it can't be derived from other propositions; any proposition can be derived from other ones. But they may be no more certain than it is itself” (Ludwig Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, ed. G.E.M. Anscombe and G. H. von Wright [New York: Harper, 1972], p. 2). We will have occasion to notice this passage again when we bring Alston into the conversation, at which time it will become important to distinguish Wittgenstein's point regarding propositions from Alston's version, which (like that of the Mīmāṃsakas, I submit) has a specifically epistemological twist that is of some importance.
- 17 – *Ślokavārtika II.49–51 : Jāte 'pi yadi vijñāne tāvan na artho 'vadhāryate / Yāvat kāraṇasuddhatvaṃ na pramāṇāntarād bhavet // Tatra jñānāntarotpādaḥ prakṛtyaḥ kāraṇāntarāt / Yāvad dhi na parichinnā śuddhis tāvad asatsamā // Tasya api kāraṇe śuddhe tajjñāne syāt pramāṇatā / tasya apy evamītitthaṃ ca na kvacid vyavatiṣṭhate //*.
- 18 – Text from the Trivandrum Sanskrit Series edition (see note 15 above). The Sanskrit is: *Na tāvad guṇajñānāt saṃvādajñānād vā prāg jñānaṃ na jāyata eva. Na vā utpannam api saṃśayātmakam avabhāsate. Na hi syād vā ghaṭo na vā iti indriyasannikṛṣṭaṃ ghaṭaṃ budhyāmahe, api tarhi ghaṭa eva ayam iti niścayātmakam eva jñānam utpadyate. Ata eva jñānotpatter anantaram eva sarvapramāṇmātrñāṃ vyavahārapravṛttir upalabhyate. Bhrāntisaṃviditarajato 'pi hi samyagrajatabodha iva arthakriyāyai ghaṭamāno dṛśyate. Tadasya saṃśayānasya na utpannam. Ato jāto niścayaḥ. Kim anyat prāmāṇyaṃ bhaviṣyati? Saty api saṃvāde guṇajñāne vā tāvad eva prāmāṇyasya tattvaṃ na adhikaṃ kiś[sic] cid iti, kiṃ nas tadupekṣaṇena? Tādṛśasya eva vyabhicārād asti parāpekṣeti ced, Na. Evam api jñānasya anapekṣatvād, vipralabdhapūrvasya api nirapekṣam eva niścayātmakam jñānam utpadyate. Pramātā tu vipralambhaka-buddhisādrśyāt tathātvam āśāṅkate. Sāśāṅkasya api na prāmāṇyaśaktir avasīdati, pūrvavat prameyaparicchedāt. Pramātus tu āśāṅkā doṣadarśanaprabhavā. Tadasau tadbhāvābhāvayor anyataraniścaye nivartate, na saṃvādajñānam apekṣate. Saty eva hi ghaṭajñāne jātāśāṅkaḥ kiṃ ghaṭajñānāntareṇa kariṣyati?*
- 19 – Karl Potter, “Does Indian Epistemology Concern Justified True Belief?” *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 12 (1984): 307–327 at pp. 317–318. Cf. the notion of *pratyakṣaparīkṣthalabdhaniścaya* (“certainty obtained subsequent to perception”) in note 35 below. In that case, just as Potter points out here, the “further awareness” adduced by that notion is inferential.

- 20 – The concept of *arthakriyā*, or *arthakriyatva*, is, of course, highly complex, with significant implications in Buddhist contexts, as well. For a discussion of this term in the context of Dharmakīrti's thought, see Masatoshi Nagatomi, "Arthakriyā," *Adyar Library Bulletin* 31–32 (1967–1968): 52–72. It would be interesting to compare the use of the term here with that in play in Dharmakīrti's work.
- 21 – Indeed, this is a key part in Mīmāṃsā arguments for the authorlessness of the Vedas. The argument, in brief, is that while we can in every case remember the names associated with various traditions of knowledge (Pāṇini and others with respect to grammar; Kauṭilya and others with respect to politics), only in the case of the Vedas is knowledge transmitted without being indexed to some *names*. In a context in which lineage (*guruśiṣyaparaṃparā*) is so highly significant, this is not such a trivial argument.
- 22 – This commentator is also referred to as Vaidyanātha Tatsat, Vaidyanātha Bhaṭṭa, and Vaidyanātha Dīkṣita. His commentary, *Prabhā*, is printed in the Ānandāśrama Sanskrit Series edition of Śabara's *Bhāṣya*.
- 23 – The passage translated here is printed on the same pages as Śabara's passage (see note 12 above). The Sanskrit is: *Tathā ca siddhānte jñānaprāmāṇyasya svatastvāt prāmāṇyakāraṇaṃ na apekṣyate. Aprāmāṇyam eva tu kāraṇādjhānaṃ: tac ca kāraṇaṃ jñānānutpattiḥ, utpannasya jñānasya saṃśayātmakatā, uttarakāle bādhakapratyayāntarotpattiḥ, kāraṇe doṣavattājñānaṃ ca. Tatra prakṛte vedasya kartṣmarāṇābhāvādiyuktnicayena apauruṣeyatvasya sādhaiṣyamāṇatvān na kāraṇadoṣajñānaṃ śakyaśaṅkam. Na api agnihotraṃ juhuyāt svargakāmaḥ ityādivākyaṃ saṃśayātmakaṃ jñānam utpādayati. Na apy evad vākyajanyañānasya agnihotrāt svargo na bhavati iti bādhakajñānaṃ, kadā 'pi kasya api jāyate? Na vā jñānam eva na utpadyate. Ato 'prāmāṇyakāraṇatvena saṃbhāvitānāṃ madhya iha kasya apy anupalambhād aprāmāṇyaśaṅkāyā dūrāpāstatvena svataḥsiddhaṃ prāmāṇyaṃ nirapavādaṃ tiṣṭhati iti.*
- 24 – Sheldon Pollock, "Mīmāṃsā and the Problem of History in Traditional India," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 109 (4) (1989): 603–610 at p. 607.
- 25 – Karl Potter, *Encyclopedia of Indian Philosophies*, vol. 2, *Indian Metaphysics and Epistemology: The Tradition of Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika up to Gaṅgeśa* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1977), pp. 157–158. Cf. also the passage from Wittgenstein's *On Certainty* (see note 16 above).
- 26 – Alston, *Perceiving God*, p. 86. Cf. Lewis Carroll, "What the Tortoise Said to Achilles," *Mind* 4 (1895): 278–280.
- 27 – Richard Gale, *On the Nature and Existence of God* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); quoted in Alston, *Perceiving God*, p. 223.
- 28 – This realist twist is the difference I had in mind in suggesting that the passage from Wittgenstein (see note 16 above) would have to be qualified in the con-

text of Alston's argument. Thus, while Wittgenstein puts the matter in terms of the circularity that must obtain with respect to the hope of taking *propositions* as certain, Alston always has in mind the reality of the *referents* of propositions. When Alston concludes, therefore, that although we lack any way of demonstrating the second-order certainty of our beliefs we are nonetheless entitled to consider the first-order claims to be reliable, he also has in mind that we are entitled to consider our first-order claims as *true*, that is, that we are entitled to assume not only that some *propositions* are true, but that *certain states of affairs actually obtain* (e.g., it is really *God* that people sometimes experience). Alston has more fully developed these points in his more recent work, *A Realist Conception of Truth* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996).

- 29 – Thus, perhaps the most interesting part of Matilal's *Perception* with respect to which we could situate the doctrine of *svataḥ prāmāṇya* is his chapter 5, "Knowing that One Knows." This chapter includes a bit on Kumārila's Mīmāṃsā, but *svataḥ prāmāṇya* is not emphasized. However, the problem of "knowing that one knows" is precisely the problem the recognition of which guides the development of the *svataḥ prāmāṇya* doctrine.
- 30 – For some very insightful remarks on this whole line of argument, see the two articles of Sheldon Pollock cited in note 24 above and note 33 below.
- 31 – This argument is developed at length in the penultimate chapter of the *Tattvasaṃgraha*, which is titled *Svataḥprāmāṇyavādaparīkṣā*—and which is, interestingly, among the longest chapters of the *Tattvasaṃgraha* (Swami Dwarikadas Shastri, ed., *Tattvasaṃgraha of Ācārya Shāntarakṣita, with the Commentary 'Pañjikā' of Shri Kamalashīla* (Varanasi: Bauddha Bharati, 1968), vol. 2, pp. 903 ff. See especially the passage at pp. 905–906, which lays out this form of the dilemma, which, according to Kamalāśīla, arises for the Mīmāṃsakas. Thus, the *śakti* adduced by the Mīmāṃsakas amounts, says Kamalāśīla, to something *svābhāvīkī* ("natural," "essential," etc.), and it must be asked whether this "essence" is the same as or different from the *pramāṇas* to which it belongs: *sā vyatirikṭā vā bhaved, avyatirikṭā vā yad vā ubhayānubhayasvabhāvā iti catvāraḥ pakṣāḥ*. The ensuing sustained critique of the Mīmāṃsaka position is an important source for a full understanding of the doctrine (cf. note 35 below).
- 32 – R. C. Pandeya and Manju, "Pūrva Mīmāṃsā and Vedānta," in Brian Carr and Indira Mahalingam, eds., *Companion Encyclopedia of Asian Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 1997), pp. 172–188 at pp. 176–177.
- 33 – Cf. this interesting remark from Sheldon Pollock ("From Discourse of Ritual to Discourse of Power in Sanskrit Culture," *Journal of Ritual Studies* 4 [2] [1990]: 342 n): "As one famous contemporary Mīmāṃsaka told me, Mīmāṃsā has only one real enemy: Buddhism."
- 34 – Vaidyanātha's *Prabhā*, p. 16 of Ānandāśrama Sanskrit Series edition (see

note 12 above): *Jñānasya prāmāṇyam apramāṇyaṃ ca svata eva nirṇīyata iti Sāṃkhyāḥ. Ubhayam api kāraṇaguṇadoṣādinā iti Tārikāḥ. Aprāmāṇyasya svatastvam prāmāṇyasya ca paratastvam iti Bauddhāḥ. Prāmāṇyaṃ svato 'prāmāṇyam eva parata iti tu Mīmāṃsakāḥ.* In this regard, G. P. Bhatt makes the obvious (and loaded) comparison: “The Naiyāyika is like a judge who sees every man appearing in his court with an unprejudiced eye and the Bhāṭṭa [Mīmāṃsaka] is like one who believes that every man is innocent until his crime is proved. But the attitude of the Buddhist is just the opposite of the Bhāṭṭa [Mīmāṃsā] attitude. He is like a judge who takes every man to be a criminal until the proof of his innocence is available” (*Epistemology of the Bhāṭṭa School of Pūrva Mīmāṃsā*, p. 145). Interestingly, Alston at one point (p. 153) uses exactly the same image: “Thus we will follow the lead of Thomas Reid in taking all our established doxastic practices to be acceptable as such, as innocent until proven guilty. They all deserve to be regarded as *prima facie* rationally engaged in (or ‘acceptable’, as we shall say), pending a consideration of possible reason for disqualification. . . .”

- 35 – See Kamalaśīla’s *pañjikā* on Śāntarakṣita’s *Tattvasaṅgraha*, ad. verse 2811 : *Tathāhi catvāraḥ pakṣāḥ sambhavanti: kadācid ubhe 'pi prāmāṇyāprāmāṇye svata eveti prathamah, kadācit parataḥ eveti dvitīyah, prāmāṇyaṃ parato 'prāmāṇyaṃ tu svata eveti tṛtīyah, etadviparyayaś caturthaḥ* (Shastri, ed., *Tattvasaṅgraha of Ācārya Shāntarakṣita*, p. 903. For the second *pakṣa*, Shastri follows the earlier edition of Krishnamacharya in reading *kadācid aparataḥ*; this must be incorrect, although I have been unable to check the Tibetan.) To be sure, this presentation of the fourfold schema does not attribute the *pakṣas* to particular philosophical schools. Nevertheless, it later becomes clear that Kamalaśīla knows the same attributions; for he has his Mīmāṃsaka *pūrvapakṣin* ask the Buddhist *siddhāntin* why he accepts *parataḥprāmāṇya: yadi bhavatāṃ na vivādaḥ kathaṃ tarhi parataḥprāmāṇyam abhyupagatam. . .* (Shastri, *Tattvasaṅgraha of Ācārya Shāntarakṣita*, p. 909). Not surprisingly, Kamalaśīla refuses this characterization of the Buddhist position. Still, it must be stressed that there is at least some basis for characterizing particularly the epistemology of Dignāga and Dharmakīrti as a species of *parataḥprāmāṇyavāda*. Again, this is true insofar as these thinkers contentiously define *pratyakṣa* (which, for them, is the foundational *pramāṇa*) as *kalpanāpoḍham*, “free of conceptual activity.” The problem is that *nīścaya*, “certainty” or “determination,” is an eminently *conceptual* function. (For Mīmāṃsakas, of course, there is no problem here, insofar as they would refuse the characterization of *pratyakṣa* as *kalpanāpoḍham*; indeed, as we have seen, they regard *any* cognitive event that is not ambiguous as *nīścita*, “determinate.”) That is, any *nīścaya* will, ipso facto, be a *judgment*, a *vikalpa*—and this *cannot* come with the initial perception, but must be subsequent to it. Hence, in order for *pratyakṣa* to be the foundation for *nīścaya*, it must be the case that the latter is conferred by something subsequent (that is, something *extrinsic*) to the original cognition. That this is so was clearly

recognized by the tradition of Buddhist epistemology subsequent to Dharmakīrti. Thus, among other things, Devendrabuddhi develops the notion of *pratyakṣapṛṣṭhalabdhanīścaya*, “certainty obtained subsequent to perception.” For a good discussion of this, see John Dunne, “Foundations of Dharmakīrti’s Philosophy” (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 1999), pp. 318 ff.

- 36 – Again, though, whether or not the critique advanced by Śāntarakṣita and Kamalaśīla has any purchase depends in part on what we understand the Mīmāṃsakas to have meant by the *śakti* of *pramāṇas*.