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## Does God Have Free Will?

## Hermeneutics and Theology in the Work of Vedāntadeśika

**Freitag, 14. Juni 2013, 15h c.t.**

Seminarraum 1,  
Institut für Südasien-, Tibet- und Buddhismuskunde,  
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Vedāntadeśika devoted his intellectual life to providing an authoritative defense of Rāmānuja's devotion-centered theology; one which would prove convincing not only to committed Śrīvaiṣnavas, but to a wider philosophical and intellectual public. In doing so he relied heavily on the epistemological and linguistic theories promulgated by the Mīmāṃsā tradition of scriptural analysis. This provided a ready made and widely respected body of argument defending the claims of scripture, yet brought in its wake a good deal of unwanted baggage as well. The Mīmāṃsā analysis of scripture and of religious action was designed precisely to rule out the intervention of a personal God, or any divine being whatsoever, in the production of scripture or in the dispensing of rewards for acts of religious merit. Mīmāṃsā argued that scriptures were eternal and uncreated, and were authoritative precisely because no personal agent was implicated in their composition.

The adoption of Mīmāṃsā as the basic model for both defending and interpreting scripture was not of course original to Vedāntadeśika's work, but was already basic to the hermeneutic employed by Rāmānuja in his *Śrībhāṣya*, and by his predecessor Yāmūnācārya in his *Āgamaprāmāṇya*. Both of these authors display a close but uncomfortable relationship to Mīmāṃsā in their works, criticizing selected elements of Mīmāṃsā hermeneutics while adopting its basic model of scriptural legitimation. But Vedāntadeśika chooses to confront this problematic legacy in a far more systematic fashion than his predecessors, actually writing his own full commentary on the *Mīmāṃsāsūtra*, his *Seṣvaramīmāṃsā* or "Mīmāṃsā With God", which, as its title indicates, is an attempt to reread Mīmāṃsā in theistic terms, challenging the antitheistic principles of the earlier Mīmāṃsakas while retaining as much as possible of their interpretive machinery.

In my talk I will examine the tension between Vedāntadeśika's devotional theology and the anti-theistic presuppositions of the epistemological and hermeneutical theories he employs in defending it, and to explore the consequences of the way he seeks to resolve this tension.