



Rashabha & Mahavira

JAINA VIEWS ON ENVIRONMENTAL RESPONSIBILITY

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Hello
from the
US Island
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IS AN ECOLOGICAL CRISIS NEAR?



Micronesia and Global Warming

MICRONESIA—CANARY IN COAL MINE

- Micronesia is comprised of several nations and thousands of small islands, covering an area of millions of square miles.
- "The threat is to our existence, survival, not only as a people -- as a culture is real and present. ... We now have just flat beaches -- the wash comes in and hits the roots of coconut tree" Masao Nakayama, President of FSM
- "Even a small rise of 1 meter ... would have a devastating effect," he said. "If it gets to a meter or higher, the islands would get uninhabitable."

MARSHALL ISLANDS' DANGER

- Erosion has accelerated along the shorelines, and salt water has seeped into wells and agricultural land, rendering it useless.
- Marshall Island's southern end was submerged in 2 feet of water during a recent storm surge.
- Storm surge broke through the seawall that protects the Majuro airport, flooding the runway and forcing a United Airlines flight to circle above.
- The Marshall Islands' population of some 70,000 faces a future that could result in evacuating the Islands' population to another country.

ENVIRONMENTAL QUESTIONS



- ◉ What is the extent of current environmental danger?
- ◉ Who or what is principally responsible for this pollution and destruction?
- ◉ Why is it morally wrong to harm, destroy, and pollute the world around us?
- ◉ What is the natural and proper relation between humans and the rest of the world?
- ◉ What approaches or philosophical frameworks can be adopted to combat pollution and ecological dangers.

RANGE OF ECOLOGICAL CONCERN

- Wide spectrum of differing positions:
 - Ethical Egoism
 - Do that which is of benefit to oneself alone
 - Anthropocentrism
 - Care should be directed toward humans alone
 - Sentientism
 - All sentient beings warrant our concern
 - Vitalism
 - All life is sacred, adopt general “reverence for life”
 - Deep Ecology
 - Moral considerations to animate & inanimate entities

SPECTRUM OF ECOLOGICAL POSITIONS

Ethical
Egoism

Benefit or care directed toward others and the environment is only incidental

Anthropo-
centric

Consideration of other non-human entities can be justified only if has instrumental value to a human

Sentien-
tialism

Some non-human beings (sentient) have inherent (intrinsic) value

Vitalism

Reverence for life without qualification, exception-- can harm only for *vital needs*

Deep
Ecology

Extends morality to the soil, waters, to even the "ecosphere." Self-Realiza, Biocen Diver.

JAINISM'S POSITION IN CHART



- ◉ Sentientist contend that only sentient (self-conscious) beings warrant our concern, have inherent (*intrinsic*) value
 - Most Sentientist extend moral domain to include some nonhuman mammals (i.e., whales, dolphins, apes, etc.)
- ◉ Yet Jainas, expressing a more **radical** form of Sentientism, include all life forms—down to single-sensed *nigodas*.
- ◉ Jainas should be classified as Sentientist rather than Vitalists, in that the reason to avoid injury to another lies in the entity's capacity to feel pain and suffer, rather than some metaphysical doctrine regarding the sacredness or sanctity of all life.

BASIS OF AHIMSA



- This prohibition against violence has a dual purpose:
 - Shows compassion and respect for all living beings
 - Protects oneself from spiritual penalties from harming others
- Mahavira said, “As I feel every pain and agony from death down to the pulling of my hair; in the same way, be sure of this, all kinds of living beings feel the same pain and agony...For this reason all sorts of living beings should not be beaten, nor treated with violence, nor abused, nor tormented, nor deprived of life.”
(*Sutrakrtanga* II.i.48)
- Mahavira said, “All creatures who commit sins wail, suffer, and tremble. Considering this, a wise monk who has ceased to sin...should abstain from violence with regard to moveable and immovable beings.”
(*Sutrakrtanga* I.vii.20)

WHY JAINISM AND ECOLOGY?

- Objection: Environmental ethics and ecology are 20th century concepts; no direct Sanskrit correlate to these words exists.
 - Reply: Doesn't follow that the Jainas had no views about the constitution of nature nor had a prescribed ethic on proper conduct of Jainas in relation to nature
 - *Ahimsa* leads to very specific set of views and practices guiding one interaction with the world.
- Terminological sources of ecological problems may be recent, but arguably humans have observed specific attitudes & practices toward nature from prehistoric times.
- Any human recognition and interaction with the external world (nature) presupposes an environmental ethic.



JAINISM'S VALUE IN ANALYSIS



- ◉ Jainism provides a model of highly successful nonviolent and ecologically sensitive society, existed for at least three millennia
- ◉ Attempt to reconstruct a Jaina ecological ethic based on the notion of *ahimsa* as well as other Jain conceptual distinctions
- ◉ Jainism can provide an “external” critical analysis of strengths and weakness of current environmental ethic systems identified above

JAINA ENVIRONMENTAL ETHIC

- 1. All proper conduct is based on the principle of *ahimsa* or nonviolence
 - “All breathing, existing, living, sentient creatures should not be slain, nor treated with violence, nor abused, nor tormented, nor driven away. This is the pure, changeable, eternal law which the clever ones, who understand the world, have proclaimed.” (*Acarangasutra* 1.4.1.1-2)



JAINA ENVIRONMENTAL ETHIC

- **2. All life strives for self-preservation and avoidance of pain; *ahimsa* arises from an observance of this reality and an attempt to respect this basic tendency in life**
 - “True understanding embodies itself in non-violence through an awareness that all living creatures, including oneself, do not wish to suffer in any way.” (*Sutrakrtangasutra*, 1.3.4.20)



JAINA ENVIRONMENTAL ETHIC

- ◉ 3. *Ahimsa* is directed *only* toward sentient beings (*jiva*) and not nonsentient things (*ajiva*); consequently, there is only indirect observance of nonviolence toward the nonliving (nonsentient) world, i.e., rocks, dirt, water, air, etc.
 - “He who injures these [earth, water, fire, air-bodied beings] does not comprehend and renounce his demeritous act...a wise man should not act sinfully toward the earth, water, fire, or air.” (*Acarangasutra* 1.1.2-4,7.)



JAINA ENVIRONMENTAL ETHIC

- 4. Observance of *ahimsa* is *not* absolute, as acts of violence (*himsa*) are done in specific circumstances when observance of *ahimsa* is not feasible; but when destruction of life is unavoidable, kill the being with least number of senses.
 - Sthavara, immobile/one-sensed souls divided into 5 kinds
 - *Prthvikaya*, i.e., earth-bodied souls,
 - *Apkaya*, i.e., water-bodied souls,
 - *Tejahkaya*, i.e., fire-bodied souls,
 - *Vayukaya*, i.e., air-bodied souls; and
 - *Vanaspatikaya*, i.e., vegetable bodied souls.
 - Trasa, mobile/many-sensed souls are divided into 4 classes
 - *Dvi-indriya jivas*, i.e., those which have the first two senses of touch and taste, for example, worms, etc.,
 - *Tri-indriya jivas*, i.e., those which have the first three senses of touch, taste and smell, for example, ants, etc.
 - *Chatur-indriya jivas*, i.e., those which have first four senses of touch, taste, smell & sight, e. g. bumble-bee
 - *Pancha-indriya jivas*, i.e., those which have five senses of touch, taste, smell, sight and hearing, for example, man, etc.



JAINA ENVIRONMENTAL ETHIC

○ 5. There is a bicameral basis for the observance of *ahimsa* toward the world: sensitivity to the potential pain/suffering of others and one's own spiritual development.



- In regards to one's responsibilities and sensitivity to other sentient beings, *ahimsa* is practiced as an expression of one's sincere respect for others and their right to enjoy life and avoid pain.
- From a personal (spiritual) perspective, leading a life of *ahimsa* lessons the acquisition of karma that bonds to one's soul and causes rebirth and suffering.
- Destruction of a five-sensed being results in the accumulation of karma that is substantially more difficult to remove than that acquired through the destruction of a one or two-sensed being.

JAINA ENVIRONMENTAL ETHIC

- 6. The ethical and spiritual nature of one's actions is determined principally by the motivation or intention behind the act, not exclusively on the nature and consequences of the act itself. Nevertheless, it is expected that great effort will be taken to not allow accidents to occur that can harm others.
 - The karmic process differentiates between intentional and accidental acts (harmful or beneficial) and adjusts the “karmic debt” accordingly.
 - Jaina practice also stresses an obligation for maintaining a careful life.



JAINA ENVIRONMENTAL ETHIC



- ◉ 7. Nearly all life is naturally progressing over time toward liberation through—among other things—observance of *ahimsa*; one has a moral and spiritual obligation to hasten this evolution, though the three jewels (*ratnatraya*) of right faith, right action, and right knowledge.
 - Full compliance by a Jaina ultimately would require close approximation to liberation, where one's ignorance-based tendencies would be dissolved and one lives a life protecting all living beings, not just oneself.

EXPLORATION AND EVALUATION OF THE JAINA POSITION

- Analysis will focus on three factors that any plausible ethical system must satisfy:
 - (i) internal coherence;
 - (ii) external coherence; and
 - (iii) moral reasonableness.
- A cogent environmental ethic must cohere with two domains:
 - (a) the “internal” interests, instincts, and beliefs of the human practitioner, and
 - (b) the “external” interests or welfare of the surrounding world made up of other living beings and the physical (inanimate) world.
- Further, one needs to ask if the ethical position is reasonable: Can we buy into it and its goals? More to the point, is the position workable, does it make sense from a practical point of view?



EGOCENTRIC VIEWS

- ◉ Ethical Egoism & Anthropocentrism seems consistent with instincts for personal interests;
- ◉ But are likely to create tension & violence in the agent's interaction with surrounding world.
 - In relation to others each party's efforts to fulfill their individualist goals displaces other's needs and interests; hence, disputes arise.
- ◉ This attitude can expand to one "specie" or "collective group" exploits or uses another for their collective benefit at the exclusion of other groups or individuals in nature. This abusive state-of-affairs has been dubbed "speciesism."

ECOCENTRIC VIEWS

- Ecocentric views as (Vitalism and Deep Ecology) created to avoid external tension & breakdown of coherence & mutual respect found in Egocentric
- Yet, problems can arise at an internal level, as inherent, instinctive directives for self-preservation and advancement do not cohere with the Ecocentric approach adopted (altruism)
 - These internal conflicts present real dilemmas to the individual as one must either suppress one's instinctive drive for preserving one's self or violate one's commitment to egalitarianism within the entire ecosphere

ECOCENTRIC

- ◉ Deep Ecologist provides no real method of transformation for the type of attitude changes they advocate.
- ◉ *Intellectual appreciation* of a holistic perspective in life is not the same thing as an actual *personal transformation* at the most fundamental level of human existence.
- ◉ Jainism and other Indian schools of thought integrate and in fact emphasize the personal transformations alleged to arise from meditation, yoga, and reflective contemplation.

ANEKANTA

- ◉ Unlike the views just reviewed, Jaina doctrine of *Anekanta* advocates “multi-perspectivism” so accept both perspectives.
 - ◉ Incorporate egocentrism—nonviolent position is best thing for personal growth/liberation
 - ◉ Incorporate ecocentrism—no being wants to suffer, instead increase happiness/harmony

JAINA VIEW

- Regarding external coherence, the Jaina practice of *ahimsa* covers a broad moral domain, including all life forms and area of the earth, as life exists in even the most remote areas.
- Internal coherence is also maintained, as personal interests are not necessarily mitigated to preserve outside entities.
 - It is held by Jains that there is no greater happiness, no greater personal advancement than progress and eventual attainment of spiritual awakening, siddha—stop desire, stop cycle of rebirth
 - Self-preservation is not excluded, as practitioners of *ahimsa* are permitted to defend themselves when needed—though with possible negative karma results.
 - This “deviation” from *ahimsa* should not be perceived as egoistic or exploitative, as the motive is not purely for the benefit of oneself, i.e., as continuation in an embodied form for one aspiring toward spiritual advancement is beneficial to others.

TRADITIONAL VS. JAINA SENTIENTIALISM

- ◉ Sentientalist take a middle position—try to cohere with at least *some* external interest (other sentient beings), while at the same time be cognizant of internal personal needs
 - Through a “coherence of attitude,” we relate to animals who share similar human-like characteristics, i.e., consciousness, personal sensibilities, suffering and happiness.
 - Yet the traditional Sentientalist position is too limited in its moral domain to cohere with many external interests, leading to the perceived exploitation of others and a general disregard for nature as a whole.

JAINA VIEW

- Further, Jaina philosophy maintains that purely egoistic or selfish thoughts and actions are ignorance-based, erroneous states-of-affairs, and as the aspirant ascends to higher states of awareness, such attitudes fade away, replaced by holistic, altruistic attitudes toward all life.
- For the Jaina practitioner *ahimsa* becomes a way of life, a general attitude toward the world, rather than an abstract ideal, a foreign principle that one encounters or even adopts on a purely theoretical level, i.e., deep ecology.
 - *The natural or inherent state of existence is ahimsa according to Jainism, it is simply a matter of removing the ignorance that blinds life from perceiving its truth.*

JAIN ECOLOGY SUMMARIZED

- ◉ A Jaina ecological ethics incorporates many of the positive elements of other current approaches, while at the same time minimizing problems facing them.
- ◉ 1. The inevitable contrast between prudential interests and moral commitments is minimized.
 - *The allowance of some flexibility to deal with conflicts between one's own interest and sustenance and outside interests.*
 - A rigorous, thorough system of transformation from an ignorant, selfish orientation in life to a holistic, selfless orientation leading to spiritual liberation is encouraged.

JAIN ECOLOGY SUMMARIZED

- ◉ 2. Respect and care for all living beings and the environment they inhabit is provided without the need to postulate and provide rights to metaphysical entities such as the “ecosphere,” soil, rivers, etc.
- ◉ 3. A hierarchy of being is articulated & justified, but there is an underlying egalitarianism that provides for the general well being of all life.
 - ◉ Higher life forms (more spiritually evolved) are given the right to destroy lower life forms (when absolutely necessary), but not for egoistic or specie-wide reasons.

JAIN ECOLOGY SUMMARIZED

- ◉ 4. The Jaina based environmental ethics is an expression of a larger, religio-philosophical system of thought that does not distort some aspects and interests of life in the process of developing an ecological philosophy that could elevate the interests of the environment above other aspects of life
- ◉ 5. Jainism does not require an improvable presupposition about life, i.e., “All life is sacred,” to establish its ethical position; rather, it is founded on the simplest and most immediate of observations about ourselves and the world, i.e., “No one likes to suffer.”

THE END

