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# Jain Acceptance of Life in Nonhuman Entities as a Basis for Environmental Ethics

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# Environmental Ethics

- Is there a moral implication of harming the nonhuman contents of the environment?
- What is the moral relationship of human beings to the environment and its nonhuman contents?
- Is protection of human interests at the expense of nonhumans always justified?
- Is there anything inherent in nonhumans that gives them a standing on their own?



# Current Argument

- ...treat nature as a system of resources that must be preserved and protected (Passmore...)
- ...see the Land as a system with interconnected chains and recognize that all species are ecologically valuable (Leopold...)
- ...that all living things have inherent value, hence are equally deserving of moral respect (Sylvan; Taylor...)
- ..morality to be based on capacity to suffer (Goodpaster...)
- ...granting moral consideration to human only is completely arbitrary (Singer...)

*Can an ethical system be simply based on the prevailing concept of morality or a strong basis needs to be established for the system to deem nonhuman entities at par with humans?*

# Key Questions

We need to formulate an answer to three key questions –

- What is considered “*Living*”?
- How does a living being “*Suffer*”?
- How is “Harm exerted” on living beings?

*In order to drive our understanding in forming a basis for the Environmental Ethic...*



# Living

- Jains classify the universe into a dualistic system of living and nonliving beings
- A living being possesses certain inherent characteristics, a crucial one being consciousness
- Living beings classified as one sensed to five sensed
- One sensed beings, further classified -- earth, water, fire, air and vegetation.
- Jains consider all beings, including one sensed, possess life that is at its essence no different than that of animals, humans or even a fully realized being.

# Suffering

- All living beings are endowed with ten possible vitalities
- Five senses, namely, touch, taste, smell, sight and hearing; respiration, lifespan, body, speech and mind.
- One sensed have four vitalities, touch, body, respiration and lifespan, while the five sensed beings such as humans have all ten
- Every living being whether a human, an animal, a worm, or a tree desires to have free experience of all its vitalities

*“...any intervention in free experience of all its vitalities causes suffering to a living being.”*



# Exerting Harm (108 ways)

- Two constituents – injury to the vitalities of a living being, and the passionate activity that leads to it.
- Three stages of an activity – planning, preparation and execution.
- Four motivations – anger, pride, deceit and greed.
- Three modes of causing harm – through one's mind, speech or body.
- Three methods to commit harm -- by oneself, make others to commit on one's behalf or, approve of someone else doing it.

# Jain Code of Conduct

- From a viewpoint of evaluating day-to-day activities and minimizing harm to living beings, these 108 types of causing harm are summarized as,
  - Subsistential: involving unintentional harm to living beings from activities necessary to sustain life, e.g., cooking.
  - Self-defense: harm caused to living beings from opposing attack on one's life or property
  - Intentional: deliberately and purposelessly causing harm to a living being.
- Jain monks take vows of the perfect practice of non-harming by not committing any of the 108 types
- Householders renounce only the *intentional* type while indulging in the other during their day-to-day activities only after observing vigilance and carefulness.



# Conclusion

- Jains identify with life being existent not only in humans and animals but also equitably in earth, fire, air, water and vegetation.
- Their concept of non-harming expands to reverence to the environment and everything contained in it.
- Jain code of conduct stipulates avoiding unnecessary harm to life
- Helps create an abiding ethics that requires one to protect and pledge non-harming to all elements of the environment.

*While environmental ethics philosophers think in the worthy direction of including nonhuman elements into the ethics, it still leaves human in a supreme position. By including Jain argument of expanding definition of the living, treating all life to be equal and then adopting non-harming as the supreme virtue, we propose a new basis for this direction.*