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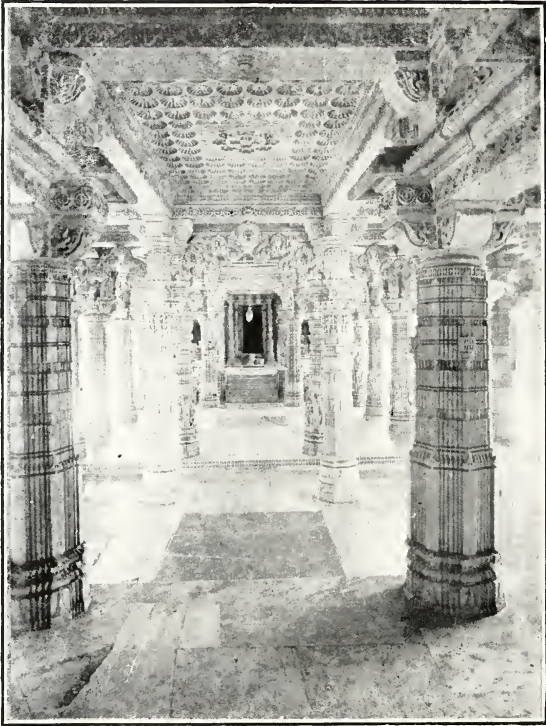
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A JAIN TEMPLE

Frontispiece to The Open Court

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THE PRINCIPLES OF JAINA ETHICS

BY ALBAN G. WIDGERY

JAINISM is a form of belief and practice of a small but influential community in India. It is probable that in earlier times the number of its adherents was far greater than at present: it is certain that they formerly possessed considerable political power and widespread organizations in Bengal, in the south around Mysore, and in Kathiawar. Most occidental scholars and some Indian writers still persist in describing Jainism as an off-shoot or reform of Brahmanical Hinduism. There seems to be more justification for the view of its own scholarly adherents that it was originally an independent movement not arising out of the Brahmanical tradition. It points back to a series of twenty-four *Tirthankara* or teachers of the present age, two of whom at least are generally regarded even by occidental students to be historical: Parsvanatha and Mahavira. The form which Jainism has at present is accredited to the reform and revival inaugurated by Mahavira. However its doctrines may have originated and developed in the past, it is now essentially a dogmatic system: certain fundamental conceptions and terms are accepted from tradition and from writings regarded as authoritative, and reflection amongst Jainas is directed to expounding the meanings of these terms and defending the validity of these conceptions.

Though Jainism may with good reason be called a religion, its main motive is ethical. By this is not to be understood ethical in the sense of predominantly sociological or otherwise humanistically utilitarian. Jainism, as ethical, is bound up with a definite system of metaphysics and with much of the character of rudimentary psychology. As a system of ethics it teaches a way of redemption from evil and of attainment of the good. This involves the *ratna traya* or three jewels, right faith, right knowledge, right conduct. But though the ethical is central and fundamental it is developed in

Jaina writings so frequently from the metaphysical background that any adequate exposition must give definite attention to this. It comes best into view in the consideration of the second of the three jewels, right knowledge.

Right faith is variously interpreted. In the minds of many Jains it appears to be regarded as the general acceptance of or belief in Jainism, just as among many Christians faith is thought to be acceptance of and belief in Christianity. It is a sort of rationalization from this position as implying belief that leads Mr. J. L. Jaini to describe it by the not very consistent expressions of "reasoned knowledge," "belief in things ascertained as they are"; "it is a sort of sight of a thing" (TS, p. 15).¹ The essential implication appears to be an attitude of mind. Right faith, says Mr. C. R. Jain, "only opens the outlook of life to embrace the highest good." It has "its eye constantly fixed on the great ideal of perfection and bliss" (KK, 887, 886).²

Though *kevali jnana* or omniscience is included as an aspect of perfection, there is little in Jaina writings to suggest that knowledge is or should be pursued for interest in it as such, for any intrinsic worth, as knowledge for its own sake. The purpose of its pursuit is its bearing on the attainment of the ethical end of redemption and self-realization. "Right knowledge is the detailed knowledge of the process of self-realization, without which nothing but confusion can be expected as a result of action." It is intended "to furnish an accurate description of the path to be traversed, of the obstacles to be encountered on the way, and of the means to be adopted to steer clear of them." (KK, 887) Jaina metaphysics and psychology are developed with this aim in view. Moral conduct is said to depend on correct knowledge. "First of all a person must have knowledge of substances existing in this universe, and then proceed to regulate his conduct accordingly." (DS, translator's preface xii)³

Right knowledge is of five kinds according to Jaina classification.

¹*Tattvarthadhigama Sutra*: A treatise on the essential principles of Jainism. By Sri Umasvami Acharya; translated by J. L. Jaini. Arrah, India, 1920. Hereafter referred to as TS.

²*The Key of Knowledge*. By Champat Rai Jain. Arrah, India, 1919. 2nd ed. Hereafter referred to as KK.

³*Dravya-Samgraha: A Compendium of Substances*. By Nemichandra Siddhanta-Chakravarti, with a commentary by Brahma-Deva. Translated by S. C. Ghoshal. Arrah, India, 1918. Hereafter referred to as DS.

Jaina writers have a fondness for making classifications and lists. This practice no doubt arose in part through their convenience for oral instruction of adepts and for facilitating memorization. The divisions are often not strictly in conformity with the principles of occidental logic in that they frequently overlap and do not always imply the application of one *fundamentum divisionis* in each group of classes. The precise significance of some of the following divisions of knowledge is not clear. The five kinds of knowledge are: 1) knowledge of the self and the non-self by means of the mind and the senses; 2) knowledge from the scriptures; 3) direct knowledge of matter; 4) direct knowledge of another's mental activity about matter; 5) omniscience, being knowledge of all things in all their aspects at all times (TS.21). "In the state of perfect knowledge we have a clear idea of the real nature of everything, ego and non-ego," that is, both *darsana* (general) and *jnana* (detailed) knowledge. (DS.105).

The fundamental concepts of Jainism have been grouped in lists with comparatively slight variations. The most definite is that of the seven *tattvas* or principles: 1) *jīva* the living; 2) *a-jīva*, the non-living; 3) *asrava*, the influx of *ajīva* to *jīva*; 4) *bandha*, the bondage of *jīva* to the *ajīva* associated with it; 5) *samvara*, the cessation of the influx of *ajīva* to *jīva* 6) *nirjara*, the elimination of *ajīva* from *jīva*; 7) *moksha*, the state of complete liberation and bliss. Another list, under the name of the *padarthas*, gives the above seven with the addition of: 8) *papa*, vice or demerit; and 9) *puṇya*, virtue or merit.

The two most fundamental concepts are *jīva* and *ajīva*, the living and the non-living. *Jīva* is an agent, possessing the attribute or consisting of *chetana*, consciousness, intelligence. It is *amarta*, that is, it cannot be apprehended by the senses and has no qualities which can be apprehended by the senses. It is not found as one universal consciousness, but as a multiplicity of individuals. There is an infinite number of *jīva*. They may be grouped in two classes: *mukta jīva*; those entirely free or liberated; and *samsari jīva*, those entangled in the meshes of *samsara* or transmigration associated with bodies. All *jīva* are in essence eternal, unoriginated simple substances with no beginning and no end to their existence. There are *jīva* everywhere in the world we know, in plants, animals, mankind, and for the cosmology of popular fancy in hell and the realm of the gods.

Samsari jiva are of varying grades in the level of existence viewed from the standpoint of perfection. As such their existence consists in a series of finite life courses until the state of perfection is reached and the condition of finitude ceases. The forms *jiva* thus assume are due to their own activity, yet "in spite of the origin and decay of forms the soul (*jiva*) maintains its nature and identity" (PS. 17).⁴ In fact, in essence, the *jiva* is eternally perfect: imperfection can be rightly attributed only to the embodied *jiva* as a totality of *jiva-ajiva*. Though the intelligence of *jiva* may be obscured it can never be destroyed. Now while it is believed that certain individual *jiva* have from this embodied state attained the perfect state of pure *jiva*, it is maintained that at present, and as far back as we may go in the lives of the other *jiva*, they are and have been in the condition of finite embodiment. Those who have attained perfection are *jina* or conquerors. Thus "every *jiva* to begin with is a *karma-jiva*, and *nirvana* is a unique state to be acquired anew and for the first time. The state of nature is not a state of freedom. It is a state of bondage. *Jiva* finds itself in chains and by its own exertion secures its own freedom." (PS. 19) All that the *jina* or conquerors can do for others is to teach them the truths, the right knowledge, and inspire them with the right faith: actual attainment depends entirely on individual effort. Regarded as realistic the Jaina view of *jiva* was opposed to the nihilistic and *anatta* theory developed in early Buddhism. "That he is infinite in perfection and yet finite with reference to temporal life, that he is born into perfection and yet dead from *samsara*: that he is the negation of all extrinsic qualities, and still the affirmation of his own intrinsic nature; that he has knowledge perfect, and yet devoid of knowledge, imperfect; these eight attributes will not be associated with him if *nirvana* is interpreted nihilistically" (PS. 33).

In the scale of *samsari jiva*, the humanly embodied *jiva* are distinguished from those below them by the possession of reason. There are thus three aspects of the life of this *samsari jiva*: 1) the cognitive, *darsana* and *jnana*; 2) the active *karma-chetana*; 3) the affective, hedonic and non-hedonic, *kama-phala-chetana*. Feelings are *subha bhava*, pleasant; *asubha bhava*, unpleasant; and *sudha bhava*, pure. The first two depend on external contact; the last one is the

⁴*Panchastikayasara*. The five cosmic constituents. By Sri Kundakundacharya. Translated by A. Chakravartinayanar. Arrah, India. 1920. Hereafter referred to as PS.

enjoyment of the self by the self not depending on external contact. The emotions are of two main types: 1) *sakashaya*, as anger, pride, which defile the soul; and 2) *akashaya*, as sorrow, which do not defile the soul but aid in its purification. The cognitive and feeling aspects of experience being due predominantly to activity, activity is the most important of these three aspects of the soul. If on the one hand activity may lead to bondage, on the other it is activity which liberates the soul if the proper rules are observed.

Not following the usual order of the *tattvas* as given above, attention may next be directed to the Jaina ideal, *moksha*. This is seen in the essential nature of *jiva* itself. As conscious the *jiva* has the capacity of knowing, but there is nothing to show that what any one *jiva* may know, any other *jiva* might not also know. Each *jiva* is thus regarded as potentially capable of omniscience. Actual omniscience is part of perfection. It is maintained along similar lines that the *jiva* is capable of perfect and complete bliss, and also of perfect freedom from restraint or constraint from beyond itself. The ideal is a condition of omniscience, complete freedom, and perfect bliss, and to these attributes is sometimes added omnipotence though it would seem that the significance of this in such a scheme must be the same as complete freedom.

Freedom and bliss are very closely related, as will be seen by a consideration of the nature of bliss. Bliss is not pleasure. Pleasure and pain are experienced through the relation of *jiva* to something other than itself. Pain may come through its association with a physical organism or body. Pleasure may be obtained by means of the physical organs, as hearing a musical symphony or tasting nice foods. Pleasure and pain being themselves simply accompaniments of particular transient experiences are temporary and impermanent. Pleasure depending on external conditions cannot be the ultimate good of a free spiritual being, the good of which to be entirely within its own power must be within itself.

The ideal state of *jiva* being one of infinity, perfect freedom, and bliss, contrasted with the experience of finitude and bondage in which it is immersed in the ordinary conditions of this life, the cause of these experiences calls for close consideration. Expressed briefly the cause is the conjunction of *jiva* with *ajiva*. It has been observed that the Jainas rarely recognise and never attempt to solve the problem as to how *jiva* could ever have become originally entangled with

ajīva. At the commencement of each life in the realm of *samsara* the *jīva* is associated with some *ajīva*. But, further, it may by its activity draw more to itself. This is the process indicated by the term *asrava*. It is here that the term *karma* comes into use in Jainism. The activity of *jīva* draws to it, or holds to itself, *karmic* matter. Two problems are thus implied: 1) How is the influx of karmic matter to be arrested? and 2) How is the karmic matter already associated with *jīva* to be got rid of?

In Jainism the term *karma* has implications other than it has in Brahmanical Hinduism and in Buddhism. For it is implicated with the idea of *ajīva* as matter. Nevertheless, there is much to suggest that the *karmana* or *karmic* body of mundane souls is not exactly the same as the physical bodies of men and animals, though it makes these possible. It is "subtler," "finer," it "hears no sounds, sees no sights, etc" and cannot be a source of enjoyment (TS. 75). Yet Mr. Jaini expresses the common Jainia view when he says: "all *karmas* are material." For Jainism, therefore, the body is the prison house of the soul. Through its transmigrations it occupies a series of such prisons. The soul is in bondage, *bandha*. As the goal is to be reached by escape from this bondage, the way is essentially ascetic. Not all are able to embark directly on the path of asceticism in its more austere forms. Hence Jainism, like the Christian ethics of the Middle Ages, has a lower and a higher discipline, the path of the householder and the path of the monk or nun.

The third jewel, right conduct, which is thought to be made possible by the attainment of the knowledge of the character of existence which we have considered in outline, is "doing the right thing at the right moment": it is the "force which actually propels the barge of being havenwards" (KK. 887). There can be talk of right conduct only with respect to *jīva* as associated with *a-jīva*. For "perfect conduct consists in checking all kinds of activities which are opposed to the characteristics of the soul, which is (in itself) devoid of all actions, eternal, consisting of pure *jñana* and *darsana*" (DS. 109). With reference to the rules and precepts of right conduct there are many different yet generally overlapping lists. The ethical rules of the householder⁵ are called *anuvrata*, the (five) minor vows; those of the monk and nun, the *mahāvratā*, the major

⁵See the *Ratna-Karanda-Sravakachara*: The householder's dharma. By Sri Samanta Bhadr Acharya. Translated by C. R. Jain. Arrah, India. 1917. Hereafter referred to as RKS.

vows. The *anuvrata* are: 1) *ahimsa*, non-killing etc. (discussed in detail later); 2) *anrita*, not to commit falsehood; 3) *steya*, not to steal; 4) *abrahma*, not to be unchaste; 5) *parigraha*, not to be attached to worldly things. These faults are described as "the veritable wombs of pain." Another list of the five kinds of right conduct gives them as: 1) equanimity; 2) recovery of equanimity after falling from it; 3) pure and absolute non-injury; 4) all but entire freedom from passion; 5) ideal and passionless conduct. By way of elaboration of these are the forms of external and internal *tapas* or austerities: 1) fasting, the renunciation of luxuries, etc.; 2) expiation, (including self-analysis, repentance, and confession); 3) reverence for the three jewels of Jainism, and respect; 4) service, especially to the saints and fellow members of the order; 5) study; 6) giving up attachments to worldly objects, and bodily passions; 7) concentration on the righteous and pure and avoidance of the painful and wicked. Still another list recognised in Jaina books, though the classes overlap, is of interest for its ethical import: the list of ten *dharma*s: 1) self-control; 2) truthfulness; 3) purity; 4) chastity; 5) absence of greed; 6) asceticism; 7) forbearance and patience; 8) mildness; 9) sincerity; 10) freedom from all sins.

The ultimate motive in Jaina ethics must be said to be definitely egoistic. The bliss which a *jiva* attains can only be through his own effort, no action of another can in any way affect it. Logically, therefore, one might say that as it is impossible to bring bliss to another it is futile to entertain the notion of altruistic conduct. But on such matters other Indian systems besides Jainism are notoriously incoherent. As one would expect, in practice Jainism does insist on what may be called social virtues. Indeed, its chief ethical maxim is interpreted so as to imply them. The motto often used for Jainism is: *ahimsa parama dharma*, non-killing the highest duty. So translated *ahimsa*, the leading concept of Jaina practical ethics, has the negative implication of abstention; but the description given in Jaina literature and insisted on by Jainas is also positive, the cultivation of an attitude of universal kindness and conduct in conformity therewith.

There is much psychological insight of a rudimentary kind in the Jaina system, in the attempts to formulate the conditions and processes aiding in the attainment of the moral ideal. The root of the whole process of self-redemption or self-realization is self-control.

Without this inner attitude, the external practice of *tapas* or austerities is of no avail. Self-control implies freedom from desire and aversion, and the passions in which desire and aversion are expressed. There are four fundamental passions which can be overcome by the control of the senses: these are called *kasayas*: 1) anger; 2) vanity and pride 3) insincerity and deceit; 4) greed. It is recognised that passions may be considered from the points of view of protensity, intensity, and extensity, and are to be dealt with accordingly. Moral advance is first by control of the grosser passions, then to the control of all desire and aversion and to the control of thoughts. As an aid to this vows are recommended in accordance with which one sets a limit to the extent of one's possessions or to the area within which one will travel, either to be adhered to for a certain length of time or for always. There is insistence on the practice, daily if possible, of *pratikramana*, self-examination with admission of one's faults and repentance for them; and *pratyaakhya*, the resolution to avoid definite sins in future. Self-control is assisted mainly by particular forms of meditation. "*Dhyana* or meditation is of supreme importance for a person who seeks liberation" (DS. 110). There should be meditation on the transitoriness of all things, that youth, the sources of pleasure, are all temporary, that death comes to all. Meditation on the crude and impure nature of one's physical body is to lead to a cessation of the desire and the effort to find pleasure in it. On the other hand, one should meditate on one's spiritual nature. By the contemplation of universal kindness one may become freed from egoistic passions.

Considering the principle that the *jiva* is in itself perfect eternally, and that morality consists in its liberation from associations which limit it, it is not surprising that the moral life appears to be more concerned with the eradication of vices than with the cultivation of what are usually considered positive virtues. Whatever modern Jainas may say to the contrary, that is the impression given by their authoritative books. An enumeration of some of their precepts will show this at the same time as illustrating the practical aspects of Jaina ethics. The Jaina layman is to abstain from intoxicants, from flesh food, from fruits likely to contain insects. He should not eat at night, when there is not enough light to observe insects which may have got into the food. He should not earn his living by agriculture, for thereby he may kill or injure many small

organisms. Nor should he follow the profession of a soldier, which involves killing. He should not earn his living by music, presumably because music has so often in India been used in connection with dancing stimulating the passions. He should limit his daily work, his food, and his enjoyment—so that these shall not come to dominate or occupy much of his attention. He should observe regular fasts, and each day show some charity by gifts of knowledge, medicine, food, or comfort. He must not use the property of another without his consent, and not express admiration at another's pomp or prosperity. Sexual passion and its practical expression, lewd and voluptuous speech, another man's wife, and prostitutes, are to be avoided. Excessive passion between the married, matrimonial match-making, and all forms of unnatural gratification are condemned. Making false documents, spreading false doctrines, uttering falsehoods or causing others to utter them are evil. It is also wrong to tell truth which causes affliction to others if it is possible to avoid telling it. Back-biting, revealing secrets, such as telling of the hidden deformities of another are condemned. Stealing, giving instruction in methods of thieving, receiving stolen goods, keeping false weights and measures, practising adulteration, and not returning in full a deposit made by another, are all mentioned as sins (see e.g. RKS. ii, iii, iv, v.). The ascetic has naturally to observe all these, but for his higher path, the rules have to be applied more stringently. While for the householder the vow of chastity is to avoid adultery, for the monk and nun it implies complete celibacy, the avoidance of all sex acts, and abstention of all talk or thoughts on sex. "If there be a cessation of sin, other things, wealth, prosperity, etc., are not needed; but if the influx of sin still continues, then what purpose can be served by wealth and the like?", that is, sinlessness is the occasion of bliss (RKS. 16).

There is little stress on positive social virtues in Jaina systematic writings, but more of that kind can be found in folklore stories used for purposes of popular moral teaching. It has been noted previously that the central conception of *ahimsa*, non-killing, has been given a positive interpretation of universal kindness. The Jaina recension of the tales collected together in the *Panchatantra* has a number of ethical maxims of which the following may be taken as examples: "What virtue is there in the goodness of the man who is good to his benefactors? He (only) who is good to

those who do him wrong is called good by the virtuous" (i. 277). "Hear the sum of righteousness, and when thou hast heard, ponder it; Do not to others what would be repugnant to thyself." (iii. 103) *Dana*, gift or charity is frequently praised; especially charity shown to members of the ascetic orders, but it should also be shown to Jaina or non-Jaina (TS. 154). There is to be "tender affection for one's brothers on the path to liberation" (TS. 134); and humility together with proclaiming the good qualities of others (TS. 135); and pity and compassion for the afflicted.

The purpose of this exposition is to give a brief description of the main characteristics of Jaina ethics, and not to examine it critically. Most of its defects are obvious. But notwithstanding these it represents an attempt to make spirituality and inner spiritual freedom the essence of morality and constitutes a noteworthy contrast to the ethics of humanism and worldly civilization of no small part of the occidental world.