Role	Name	Affiliation
Principal Investigator	A. Raghuramaraju	Professor, Department of Philosophy, University of Hyderabad
Paper Coordinator	Shyam Ranganathan	Assistant Professor, Department of Philosophy and Department of Social Sciences, South Asian Studies, York University, Toronto
Content Writer	Shyam Ranganathan	Assistant Professor, Department of Philosophy and Department of Social Sciences, South Asian Studies, York University, Toronto
Content Reviewer		
Language Editor		

Description of Module

Subject Name	Philosophy
Paper Name	Ethics-1
Module Name/Title	Jainism II: Normative and Applied Ethics
Module Id	4.37
Pre-requisites	Jainism I
Objectives	
Keywords	*Ahiṃsā, Śramaṇa , virtue theory*, ethics, karma, *jīva*

Jainism II: Normative and Applied Ethics

1. Introduction

Normative ethics concerns the practical resolution of questions about the right and the good. Applied ethics concerns the case-based resolution of questions of the right and the good. In this module, we look at the implications of the radical Virtue Theory of Jainism for practical questions, such as life decisions, occupations, and diet – questions of normative and applied ethics. These issues were central moral questions for the ancient philosophers who opted to leave society and pursue philosophy not as Brahmanas (within the social order), but as *Śramaṇa* – critics at the margins of society. The views held by differing *Śramaṇa* philosophies differed in large measure on ethical issues. The Jain tradition stands out for its uncompromising commitment to *ahiṃsā*, or non-harm.

In this module, I shall review the Jain position on the self as virtue, and its criticism of action. This entails an ethics of *ahiṃsā*, as action in conformity to the virtues of the self. Yet, the ultimate justification for this ethic is virtue theoretic. It is, hence, possible to discuss Jain ethics in two respects: first with respect to its account of action, but more basically, on account of virtue. It is Virtue Theory that gives rise to its particular brand of normative ethics, and ultimately, the normative ethics is reducible to its Virtue Theory.

In the third section, I will discuss how this theory impacts questions of guilt and responsibility. The Jain theory entails the rejection of the moral symmetry principle but also its acceptance, depending upon what one counts as the appropriate outcomes. Unlike Buddhists who treat states of the world as the outcomes that justify actions, Jains treat the virtue of the self as the guiding outcome of ethical deliberation. It is the ultimate good. Hence, if Jains help themselves to this as a justification for action, then they are also Consequentialists of sort, but also must accept the moral symmetry principle. But this takes them in a different direction from Buddhists, who classically treated ordinary states of affairs as justifying ethical action.

In the fourth section, we will review a classic disagreement between Jains and Buddhists. This highlights a difference: while Buddhists regard virtue to be a consequence to be maximised, the Jains reject this. Virtue is our essence, and the authentic life reflects our virtue.

In the fifth section, I will conclude with some observations about the contributions Jain ethics has made and can make in moral philosophy.

2. Jain Ethics: Virtue Theory, *Ahiṃsā*, Pseudo Deontology

Let us begin by reviewing some basic distinctions in moral theory.

The right and the good comprise poles of ethical theory, and together, they give rise to differing permutations. There are four primary options.

1. Consequentialism: the good (end) justifies the right (proceedure).
2. Virtue Theory: a good – virtue or strength – produces right action.

These two theories are often associated with each other in the literature. They are together *teleological* ethical theories. What they have in common is the primacy of the good over the right. The difference is whether this relationship is seen as causal or epistemic. The inverse could be called *procedural:*

3. Deontology: the *right* is prior to the *good* as a matter of justifying choices.
4. Bhakti Theory**:** the *right* is productive of the *good*.

We can add to this list other ethical theories noted so far, including a further basic theory:

5. Moral Particularism: the question of the right is to be determined by the good of specific contexts.

and a theory that combines two other theories:

6. Contractarianism**:** there are Consequentialist reasons to prefer Deontology.[i]

Studying Indian moral philosophy is essential to the study of moral theory as Indian philosophers were very careful in distinguishing between moral theories that we often do not countenance in the West. Bhakti, for instance, is an example of an Indian moral theory that is the opposite of Virtue Theory, but is also not talked about in the West.

As for Virtue Theory, it is a basic and standard account of morality. It is perhaps the first moral theory of the Western tradition. We find it defended by Plato and Aristotle. The idea behind Virtue Theory is that our character or some essential trait of our makeup *causes* the right action. Here, the goodness of our constitution takes explanatory priority. Virtue Theory is not a theory about what justifies our actions.

In the case of the Jain account, virtue constitutes the model of ethical action. Just as virtue itself is not an action, right action is, in some sense, not an action. How is this possible? If right action

does not interfere with others, then right action is, in some respect, void. Virtue is non-intervening, so too is the laudable action.

According to the Jains, we are free when we live life according to virtue – *vīrya*. This is one of three essential traits of the living self – *jīva*. But we are unfree when karma – goal-oriented action – takes priority. In this case, it constitutes a material impediment and residue that obscures the virtue of the individual. This is hardly a mysterious doctrine, but a basic deduction that uses Virtue Theory as the explanation of right action. If virtue explains right action, giving priority to action in one's life confuses the order of ethical explanation. As ethics is concerned with the right procedure, this confusion results in practical irrationality. States of practical irrationality are practically unproductive. This is the stasis of karma in the Jain account.

The Jain model mirrors the Bhakti model. Bhakti explains the goodness of our character as a function of our right choice. The bridge is the regulative ideal of one's practice – *Īśvara*, or the Lord. In being devoted to the regulative ideal of the practice, the Bhakta brings about the perfection of her practice. This is the good, and consists in our strength of character. Given this order of explanation, *Īśvara* is indispensable to explaining how it is that we go from right action to the good outcome. It is indispensable for it defines right action as a procedural ideal, thereby bypassing the need to understand right action in terms of good outcomes. But the result is that by perfecting our practice, we instantiate the ideal. We bring about Lordliness by devotion to the Lord.

Vīrya Theory, in contrast, dispenses with the explanatory need for *Īśvara*. Our virtue is what explains right action. If we seek an explanation for why Jain philosophy does not make an essential place for deities, it is here – given the order of explanation, a deity plays no philosophical role. Virtue itself plays the role of the ideal, and action has to mimic it.

Here, we find the derivation of the basic deontic (action guiding) precepts of Jainism. These include the *Mahāvratas*. We find this clearly stated in *Yoga Sūtra* II.30. According to these basic vows, we must aim for five ideals: abstaining from harm (*ahiṃsā*), truthfulness (*satya*), abstinence from theft (*asteya*), sexual restraint (*brahmacarya*) and unacquisitiveness (*aparigraha*). The *Yoga Sūtra* is a text of Bhakti ethics, not Jainism. While it states the *Mahāvrata*s clearly, it seems to be derived from the Jain tradition. We finds it enumerated in the Jain tradition (*Ācārāṅga Sūtra*, II.15.i.1 – v.1). According to the ancient Jain texts, the Jain leader Pārśva only recognized four of these vows. Mahāvīra is said to have added sexual restraint to the list (*Uttaradhyayana*, XXIII.12).

The *Mahāvratas* constitute guides to action that mirror the non-interventionism of virtue itself. Yet, they comprise constraints on how we can behave. Hence, we find that Jains favour vegetarianism and practices that do not result in cruelty to animals. The reason is that *ahiṃsā* constitutes a constraint on what the Jain might do. These action guides seem deontological. Indeed, it seems as though the justification of *ahiṃsā* and the *Mahāvrata*s on the whole cannot be found in what they produce. Rather, the justification is as though procedural. But this is an illusion.

Their justification is not the outcome they produce. Rather, it is the fidelity to virtue that constitutes the reason for acting as for the *Mahāvratas*. This is a an example of

consequentialism: the good justifies the right. Jain ethical theory is teleological, or at least, teleology in the broad sense is consistent with the Jain argument. Fundamentally, we find Jainism to be a Virtue Theory that identifies ethical priority with the strength, virtue or *vīrya* of the individual. This is the proper derivation of right action. But right action so understood respects virtue, and thereby, does not occlude it. If we seek a justification for right action, we can call upon virtue. This would be consequentialism only insofar as the goodness of the virtue would count as a reason for the action. But Jains do not have to play the game of consequentialism. It is possible indeed for the Virtue Theory of Jains to do the work they need: to account for the relative priority of the good over the right. Hence, ethics is about the movement that virtue results in, not merely explaining what is right.

3. Moral Symmetry Principle

Some clarity is sought by considering a principle of moral philosophy: the moral symmetry principle. This claims the following: an action A1 and an omission O1 have the same moral worth, just in case they result in the same outcome (Trammell 1976). In modern moral philosophy, this is usually exemplified by the claim that there is no difference between killing and letting die. Utilitarians appear to embrace this principle. Indeed, Utilitarians use this principle to argue that our neglect of people in far-off places is morally equivalent to their murder as the neglect amounts to the same end (cf. Singer 1972).

Jains appear to reject the Utilitarian reasoning. There is a difference between killing an animal and letting it die. The difference is that in the case of killing, I act against virtue. But in the case of letting die, I allow virtue, which is not an action. This distinction allows me to constrain myself according to *ahiṃsā*. This is something we find Jains arguing:

> misery is produced by one's own works, not by those of somebody else (viz. fate, creator, &c.). But right knowledge and conduct lead to liberation … The (Tīrthaṅkaras [Path Makers]) being (as it were) the eyes of the world and its leaders, teach the path which is salutary to men; they have declared that the world is eternal inasmuch as creatures are (forever) living in it … Averse to injury of living beings, they do not act, nor cause others to act. Always restraining themselves, those pious men practice control, and some become heroes through their knowledge. He regards small beings and large beings, the whole world, as equal to himself; he comprehends the immense world, and being awakened he controls himself among the careless. Those who have learned (the truth) by themselves or from others are able (to save) themselves and others. One should always honour a man who is like a light and makes manifest the Law (Dharma) after having well considered it. He who knows himself and the world; who knows where (the creatures) go, and whence they will not return; who knows what is eternal, and what is transient; birth and death, and the future existences of men: He who knows the tortures of beings below (i.e. in hell); who knows the influx of sin and its stoppage: who knows misery and its annihilation, he is entitled to expound the Kriyāvāda [doctrine of action]. (*Sūtrakṛtāṅga*, I.xii.11-21)

In this passage, we find the characteristic criticism of karma as something that comes into the personal space of the *jīva* (the influx of sin) as well as the primary stress on restraint in the company of the careless. But what is not defended is the idea of intervening in the case of those who require help. If virtue is non-interventionism, then actions justified by virtue are non-

interventionist. Euthanasia or defending the innocent from assault would be examples of crimes in this account.

But there are other ways to understand the moral symmetry principle, and indeed, the question of what counts as an ethically significant outcome is the question that determines how we make decisions. The utilitarian identifies states of pleasure or pain, happiness or misery, as the outcomes that are relevant to moral theorising. They often reject the idea that virtue counts, except perhaps as part of our happiness. Jains, in contrast, identify virtue as the primary outcome of moral thinking, and give this the explanatory priority in decision-making. So, insofar as Virtue Theory claims that an action is right, if it results from the virtues, then two actions that ensue from the same virtue would apparently have the same moral worth. If one choice that results from a virtue is non-interventionist, and the other constitutes a commission of an action, then both would have the same moral status. Technically, this respects the moral symmetry principle. It is worth noting that other virtue theorists have accepted the possibility of more than one action arising from the same virtue (Hursthouse 1996).

Would a Virtue Theory allow for this moral symmetry? The challenge for making sense of this is that virtues are often demonstrable by actions. Kindness is the motive of kind acts. Happiness is the psychological force that powers happy acts. It appears to be difficult to make sense of the virtue of Truthfulness leading to two separate acts in differing contexts. It would be strange if the virtue of Truthfulness leads to truth-telling in one context, and not truth-telling in another. Indeed, this seems unlikely. Moral philosophers often consider the case of duress: what if someone is pressuring you unjustly for information that could compromise someone's safety – should you be truthful in this context? Those who deny that we should be truthful would have to refer to something other than the virtue of truthfulness as the motive for telling a falsehood to protect an innocent third party – perhaps the virtue of protecting the innocent, or the virtue of not aiding the vicious will do the job.

The factor that we are addressing here is the idea that the rightness of an action is defined by the virtue. If virtues cause right actions, then the essential trait of the virtue is what gets passed on to the action – this allows us to trace the causal origins of the right. In the Jain context, this allows us to understand how right actions such as the *Mahāvratas* are a result of the virtues: they exemplify the virtue of non-intervention. Yet, we might note that the *Mahāvratas* are numerous and they all stem from the same source. This would apparently disprove the idea that virtue theories have to define actions in light of the virtues. They merely have to understand right action as sharing the virtue as a defining trait, though perhaps not the full definition. But then, the moral symmetry principle would appear to suggest that all the *Mahāvratas* are morally equivalent: *ahiṃsā* is as important as *satya*. In practice, we find greater priority given to *ahiṃsā*: indeed, *ahiṃsā* seems to be the basic action of non-intervention, and the derivative actions, such as non-stealing and truthfulness are examples or versions of *ahiṃsā*. Nevertheless, the question that the moral symmetry principle leaves us with is: are *Mahāvratas* morally equivalent? If *ahiṃsā* takes priority, then this is not so. But then it would appear that the Moral Symmetry principle is not supported by Jain Virtue Ethics.

And indeed, we might conclude something general about the relationship between Jain Virtue Ethics and the Moral Symmetry principle.

- While it might be the case that a single virtue (good) gives rise to more than one action, it does not follow that the actions are equally good: some might display the essence of the virtue more clearly than other actions.

If *ahiṃsā* takes priority in the realm of action, as the action that most clearly exemplifies virtue, and all other acceptable actions exemplify *ahiṃsā*, then we might have room for some positive actions that are in keeping with virtue. Indeed, the derivative *vratas*, such as truthfulness and sexual restraint, would be examples of this. Could we defend the duties we have toward dependents, the sick and the young? If we were to combine the derivative *vratas*, we might justify caring for others as a matter of respecting the truth of our familial relations, so as to not deprive others of what is rightfully theirs. This would involve both truthfulness and non-stealing.

So, we find Jain moralists prescribing two kinds of ethical rules. One is based primarily on *ahiṃsā*. The kinds of actions that would be permissible here would even preclude what is necessary to sustain one's bodily existence, as such actions invariably involve some harm to another living creature. The Jain ritual fast unto death is the outcome, though not the intended goal of this practice. Then, there is the more robust ethics of all the *Mahāvratas* and the creative combination of the values to defend familial and social duties. In practice, this differentiates the ethics of the Jain "ascetic" and the "laity".

4. The Disagreement with the Buddhists

Buddhists, unlike the Jains, appear to be Consequentialists. For Jains, dharma is not only their moral theory, but movement, that allows us to leave aside the stasis of karma (action) and return to our original virtue. However, Buddhists treat action as what should be justified by the outcome. The outcomes in turn are the dharmas (*dhamma* in Pali) and almost everything is a dharma. Hence, we must practice the appropriate action that is justified by the outcome: mindfulness, vipasana. This is certainly the ethical theory of the early Buddhists, and constitutes a foundational level for later Mahayana ethics too.

What, then, of virtue? For the Buddhist, we have no intrinsic character. Action, or karma, is fundamental, and so, we must be mindful not to confuse such action with our character. Confusing action with character is bondage, and is explained archetypically as a fault of desire. Because we have no essential character in the Buddhist account, the Buddhist account is usually described as holding the an*ātma* (no self) view.

In practice, this leads Buddhists in a different direction from Jains. Buddhists talk about cultivation, which is a matter of the cumulative wise choices of one's inherited past. As consequentialists, Buddhists stress the importance of right actions over wrong ones: the right ones have good consequences associated with them, but the wrong ones do not. So, *ahiṃsā* is important to the Buddhist insofar as it guides us away from bad outcome. Jains would rather we fall back on the essential traits of the *jīva*, which include *vīrya* (virtue). As an example of this difference, consider a passage from the early Buddhist Pali Canon:

> A certain person who has not properly cultivated his body, behaviour, thought and intelligence, is inferior and insignificant and his life is short and miserable; of such a person

> … even a trifling evil action done leads him to hell. In the case of a person who has proper culture of the body, behaviour, thought and intelligence, who is superior and not insignificant, and who is endowed with long life, the consequences of a similar evil action are to be experienced in this very life, and sometimes may not appear at all. (*Anguttara Nikaya (The Book of the Gradual Sayings)*, 1.219)

The idea here appears to be that the cumulative effect of poor choosing leads to a greater recovery time from a future poor choice, than in the case of an individual with a history of good choosing. The upshot of this diagnosis is that people who have a history of good choices apparently need not worry about bad choices as much as those with a history of bad choices. This is obviously plausible in the case of health: a person who historically makes healthy choices has less to worry about from an occasional unhealthy choice *a* than someone with a history of unhealthy choices *a*. But transposed into the moral context, Jains read this claim as follows:

> If a savage thrusts a spit through the side of a granary, mistaking it for a man; or through a gourd, mistaking it for a baby, and roasts it, he will be guilty of murder according to our views. If a savage puts a man on a spit and roasts him, mistaking him for a fragment of the granary; or a baby, mistaking him for a gourd, he will not be guilty of murder according to our views. If anybody thrusts a spit through a man or a baby, mistaking him for a fragment of the granary, puts on the fire and roasts him, that will be a meal fit for Buddhas to break fast upon. (*Sūtrakṛtāṅga* 1987, II.6.26–28)

The trouble with the Buddhist view, according to the Jains, is the following:

> Well controlled men cannot accept your denial of guilt incurred by unintentionally doing harm to living beings. It will cause error and no good to both who teach such doctrines and who believe them … Do not use such speech by means of which you do evil; for such speech is incompatible with virtues. No ordained monk should speak empty words. (*Sūtrakṛtāṅga*, II.6.30–31)

The problem here, according to the Jains, is that evaluating the merit of choices in terms of one's history of choices fails to respect virtue. Right action respects virtue, while wrong action does not. It matters little what your history of choices are. The question for us all now is: how to act in accordance with virtue. Hence, we cannot let people off the hook for mistakes because they generally make good choices, or at least, that would be a mistaken reason for lowering our standards.

5. Conclusion

Jainism, as India's premier Virtue Theory, is an important part of moral philosophy. Unlike most Western examples, virtue in the Jain account is not something restricted to humans. As an essential treat of *jīvas*, all living things have virtue as an intrinsic feature. The arguments in favour of right action and the moral life apply in principle to all *jīvas*. It is worth noting that many Jain philosophers believed that only humans are in a practical position to activate dharma, which is to say, to leave aside action as the mode of ethical reasoning and resort instead to one's intrinsic strength.

As a normative theory, it is unambiguous: virtue causes right action, and the right action it causes bears the stamp of virtue, which is *ahiṃsā*, in its account. As a resource for applied ethics, a Jain can rely upon the priority of virtue, and thereby, *ahiṃsā* to decide philosophically challenging cases. The right answer would be the one that upholds the virtue of the individual who must act.

Glossary

Letter	Term	Definition
A	*Ahiṃsā*	Non-harm. This is the master action guiding value, which is the essence of virtue in the Jain account.
C	Consequentialism	Idea that right action is justified by good outcomes.
D	Deontology	Idea that right action is not justified by good outcomes.
K	Karma	Behaviour defined by a goal: action.
M	*Mahāvratas*	Great Vows: which include five action guides: abstaining from harm (ahiṃsā), truthfulness (satya), abstinence from theft (asteya), sexual restraint (brahmacarya) and unacquisitiveness (aparigraha). Central to Jain philosophy.
V	Virtue Theory	Idea that good states cause right actions.

Questions

1. Correct Answer	**1**	The Mahāvratas constitute guides of action that mirror the non-interventionism of virtue itself, according to Jain philosophers.
Correct Answer	True	
	False	
	feedback	

2. Correct Answer	**2**	All action guides are deontological.
	True	
Correct Answer	False	
	feedback	Consequentialists can justify actions by way of ends. Virtue theorists can identify the right action as what is caused by the virtues.

3. Correct Answer	**3**	Jain philosophers, Indian virtue theorists, reject the moral symmetry principle.
Correct Answer	True	
	False	
	feedback	

4. Correct Answer	**4**	Moral symmetry principle is the claim that two outcomes with the same action are morally the same.
	True	
Correct Answer	False	
	feedback	Moral symmetry is the idea that the moral worth of an action is reducible to its outcome: hence, two actions with the same outcome have the same moral worth.

5. Correct Answer	**5**	Jains believe that there is no difference between killing and

		letting die.
	True	
Correct Answer	False	
	feedback	As virtue theorists, Jains regard the right action as what is caused by the virtue, and the wrong action as what is not. Hence, letting die as caused by the virtues, is different than killing, which is against the virtues.

6. Correct Answer	**6**	The *Mahāvratas* exemplify virtue as non-interfering, according to Jain moral theory.
Correct Answer	True	
	False	
	feedback	

7. Correct Answer	**7**	According to Jain moral theory: ahiṃsā takes priority in the realm of action, as the action that most clearly exemplifies virtue, and all other acceptable actions exemplify ahiṃsā, then we might have room for some positive actions that are in keeping with virtue.
Correct Answer	True	
	False	
	feedback	

8. Correct Answer	**8**	Jain ethical theory only has one way of life for everyone.
	True	
Correct Answer	False	
	feedback	Some ethical rules can be merely based on *ahiṃsā*, while some more expansive rules can be based on values derivable from *ahiṃsā*.

9. Correct Answer	**9**	Jains viewed the Buddhists as licensing unintentional wrongdoing.
Correct Answer	True	
	False	
	feedback	

10. Correct Answer	**10**	Buddhists apparently thought that unintended wrongdoing was acceptable.
	True	
Correct Answer	False	
	feedback	Their view is that in the case of those with a track record of good choices, bad choices will have a less significant outcome than in the case of people with a history of bad choices.

The following Reading material will be of special help:

Ācārāṅga Sūtra. Translated by Harmann Georg Jacobi. Jaina Sūtra. Edited by Harmann Georg Jacobi 2 vols. Vol. 1, Delhi: AVF Books, 1987.

Anguttara Nikaya (The Book of the Gradual Sayings). Translated by F. L. Woodward and Edward M. Hare. Pali Text Society Translation Series; no. 22, 24-27. London: Pali Text Society, 1932–1936.

Hursthouse, Rosalind. 1996. Normative Virtue Ethics. In *How Should One Live?*, edited by Roger Crisp: Oxford University Press.

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Trammell, Richard Louis. "Tooley's Moral Symmetry Principle." *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 5, no. 3 (1976): 305-313.

Uttaradhyayana. Translated by Harmann Georg Jacobi. Jaina Sutras. Edited by Harmann Georg Jacobi 2 vols. Vol. 2, Delhi: AVF Books, 1987.

Comments

The introduction is inexplicable. More needs to be elaborated on normative and applied ethics.

More clarity is also needed on the relation of ethics. Also on virtue theory and moral symmetry.

Modules require a careful review with an inclusion of the their original terms/technical terms of Jainism from the basic Jain canons and literature in Prakrit /Sanskrit language along with technical sutras as definition.

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