

1 Being sentiently with others

The shared existential trajectory among humans and nonhumans in Jainism

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Introduction

Jainism is renowned for its exquisitely intricate ethical code that extends far beyond the human, and its complex catalogue of beings, some so small as to be invisible to the human eye, but who are nonetheless important players in the drama of life and liberation. The animal—or more accurately, the nonhuman—plays a role of immeasurable importance in Jainism, a degree which is astonishing in comparison with most other traditions. For this reason, among those with an interest in the “animal question,” or, more generally, in the relationship between religion and ecology, Jainism has been garnering considerable attention as a possible source of traditional wisdom about the place of humanity within the broader biotic community. But Jainism differs in striking ways from most of the traditions that are explored for this end. While Jainism offers a fascinating articulation of the human–nonhuman dynamic in which all life is treated as inviolable, it considers human beings as distinct from and superior to all other life forms. In addition, it does not seek engagement or communion with other beings but, instead, it ultimately seeks distance from them. Jainism parts company with mainstream environmental thought in its refusal to see human potential as realizable only in fellowship with the rest of nature. Instead it envisions human fulfillment as possible only in isolation from the world.

By treating the human as ontologically distinct and privileged, Jainism can be said to violate the new “post-human” ethos, which problematizes the very demarcation between human and animal. Jacques Derrida, for instance, in his book *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, argues that the labeling of living beings as “animal” is a form of violence and tantamount to “a crime.”¹ Jainism unapologetically does just that.

The word “animal” has become problematic for many in the contemporary period because, among other things, it glosses over the great diversity of life in the service of differentiating that which stands ostensibly outside it: the human. It is often used in such a way as to point unquestionably to a condition from which humanity is categorically exempt and, it is argued, thereby permits us to think about and act toward real, live animals in ways that would be unethical if directed toward humans. It is now commonly argued, on many fronts—from

evolutionary biology to moral philosophy—that the human/animal demarcation has no ontological basis and should be discarded and superseded by a less anthropocentric classification.² Jainism, however, would never make this claim. Jains unhesitatingly demarcate between the human and the animal, and place human beings in a category of their own, superior to animals. Indeed, the animal is subsumed within the broader nonhuman category that also comprises insects and plants. Whatever the merits and demerits of this categorization, it is important to note that it does not, in and of itself, encode an exploitative relationship. The animal in Jainism, though ontologically distinct, is on the same existential trajectory as the human, and its claims to life are no less valid than those of any other sentient being.³

Despite the existential gulf Jainism posits between humans and nonhumans, it recognizes the world in its entirety as alive, purposeful, intelligent, sensory, and responsive. It is this crucial recognition—perhaps more importantly than the distinctive ideological and ethical elaborations emerging from it—that has secured Jainism’s robust and harmonious human–nonhuman encounter for the past three millennia. The Jain example—among many others—should give us pause about making broad indictments about terminology, no matter how laudable the motives. More vital and more fundamental for the creation of a harmonious “community of subjects” than terminological correctness,⁴ or “getting it right” conceptually, ideologically, or even ethically,⁵ is the embodied, sensory experience of being in the presence of others, and with others.

Most scholarly attention, my own included, has focused on the renunciatory dimensions of Jainism: its philosophical texts, ethical system, distinctive religious practices etc., all of which aim to limit involvement in worldly existence. These undoubtedly make Jainism unique among the world’s religions, but by confining our discussion to ideology and to conceptually informed practices relating to Jain renunciation, we run the risk of leaving its phenomenological meaningfulness unexplored. And yet the primary impetus for Jainism’s celebrated focus on nonviolence and its astonishing attention to the nonhuman is not ideological (or, therefore, ethical), but relational, insofar as it inheres in the far more fundamental experience of being sentiently with others. This chapter argues that embodied perceptions of the animate cosmos constitute the generative ground from which Jain philosophical and ethical reflections emerge. This Jain “way of being” might fruitfully be characterized as one of sympathy—not in the sense of being tenderhearted—but in the sense of the word that accentuates its receptive and responsive connotations: being Jain means being receptive, or alert, to the omnipresence of the activities of life, in order to be effectively responsive to the universal requirement of all beings. In brief, the Jain way of being with animals, and with the nonhuman more generally, is where the Jain imagination begins.

Background

Appearing on the historical scene sometime between the ninth and sixth centuries BCE, Jainism was part of a *śramaṇa* (“world-renouncing”) movement that also gave rise to Buddhism. The *śramaṇa* movement arose at a time of social and economic upheaval in India, with the development of cities, commerce, and increased trade. It was also the time of the emergence of the sciences of logic, physics, the establishment of rules for empirical observation, and the systematization of the Indian philosophical tradition. These developments reflect the emergence of new conceptions of the self and of the material, incarnate world. The early *śramaṇa* groups, in particular, emphasized the opposing natures of self and cosmos. The self came to be seen as estranged in the world, in a suffering state of karmic bondage and yearning for spiritual release (*mokṣa*). The *śramaṇa* movement rejected the Brahmanical orthodoxy of the day and considered the Brahmins’ preoccupation with cosmic and social order to be fundamentally flawed. All the elements that went into maintaining that order—the hierarchical caste system, the elaborate liturgy, the rituals, and above all the cult of animal sacrifice—were anathema to the renouncers.

Jainism is the oldest of humanity’s still extant world-renouncing traditions. Its scriptures capture, in a distilled form, a sense of radical alienation from the world. Of course, the Jain community of today is far more than simply a “renunciatory tradition,” and certainly within the social world of South Asia, it is better known for its impressive this-worldly successes, than its asceticism. Nevertheless, renouncers continue to be held in very high esteem, and the renunciatory ethos of traditional Jainism continues to inform virtually all aspects of the tradition.

The most basic teaching of Jainism states that life, in all its myriad expressions (human, animal, insect, plant, water, earth, air, fire beings, hell and heaven beings etc.), is endowed with an eternal quality that is noble and worthy of respect. Each eternal quality, called *jīva*, is a perfect entity, endowed with omniscience and the capacity for bliss. But each is equally estranged in the world, and in a state of suffering. The most fundamental existential quandary shared by all beings of the cosmos is the entanglement of the soul and matter (i.e., of *jīva* and *ajīva*). That soul (*jīva*) and matter (*ajīva*) are utterly enmeshed is what prevents the soul from achieving a state of bliss, a bliss which can only be experienced in a state of purity and separation from all that is matter. Jains do not posit an original state of separation from which there was a “fall,” instead they assert that the *jīva*–*ajīva* entangled state is eternal, “without beginning.”⁶

Jainism depicts the *jīva* as blundering on a lonely sojourn through endless time within a purposeless, violent cosmos. It is a cosmos indifferent to its machinations; no hand of God extends to assist the fortunate few. Instead, the *jīva* moves continuously, one life after another, in and out of birth categories, inhabiting diverse sensory expressions. And it alone, on its own efforts, must meticulously extricate itself out of the worldly mess. This would be a hopeless, desperate situation if it were not for the teachings of the Jinās (Spiritual

Victors)⁷—those perfected human beings who attained enlightenment by their own might, and then taught others the way to escape the cycle of birth and death (*saṃsāra*). Within a fixed and vast cycle of time, a series of twenty-four such Jinas appear to reveal the timeless truth about the nature of the soul and the path to salvation. Their teachings, through memorialization, application in everyday life, ritualization, and celebration, constitute the foundation of the tradition of Jainism.

Being sentiently

Jains assert that the teachings of the Jina are perfect; beyond courage and self-determination, they have provided us with all we need to attain salvation. But what is to come of those who do not or cannot hear the teachings of the Jina? Jainism postulates the existence of some 8.4 million species of life, most of which lack the capacity to receive the Jina's message; they are literally blind and deaf to it.

All living beings are born in one of four states of existence, or “birth categories,” called *gatis*. The four *gatis* are humans (*manuṣya*), celestial beings (*deva*), hell beings (*nāraki*), and the composite category of animals, plants, insects, and microorganisms (grouped together as *tiryāñca*). The human *gati* is accorded such overwhelming prominence because it is from this state alone that final liberation (*mokṣa*) can be attained. Even the celestial beings look down from their heavenly abodes in envy at the uniquely human capacity for self-transcendence. Despite its privileged position, the Jina does not preach to those of the human *gati* alone. More fundamental than birth category for hearing and comprehending the teachings of the Jina is the degree to which one participates sensorially in the world. Those who are endowed with five senses are privileged in this way, and they are present in all four *gatis*; the rest, ignorant of the Jina's teachings, live unaware of their existential plight.

Jainism postulates that each being occupies a fixed place in a cosmological hierarchy based on degrees of sensory perception and self-awareness. Worldly beings inhabit space and time and come to perceive their existence in *saṃsāra* through their senses. By contrast, those beings who have attained enlightenment no longer exist sensorially. Instead, they experience unobstructed perception and inimitable bliss through the soul itself, which is its nature. This experience of plenitude, unmediated as it is by sensorial differentiation, marks the successful completion of the existential trajectory directing all life and, as such, it is the goal of the renunciators, the enlightened humans who have given themselves over to the disciplines that enable them to transcend their sensory modes of existence. They alone can remain detached and dispassionate, observing the world without emotionally participating in it. The canonical Daśavaikālika Sūtra states, “Knowing that pleasing sound, beauty, fragrance, pleasant taste and soothing touch are transitory transformations of matter, the renouncer should not be enamored of them.”⁸ But the rest of us—that is, all embodied life forms—are essentially sensorial beings. Our senses produce our way of being in the world,

allowing us to engage with others in purposeful ways. The passions that course through our human bodies—sadness, joy, trust, fear, anger, jealousy etc.—which cause us to be transported to great heights and plunged to great depths, belong to the world. It is through such moods, informed by the senses, that all beings participate in the world with each other.

At the bottom of Jainism's cosmological hierarchy are single-sensed beings, possessing only touch (examples of these are the elements of earth, water, fire, and air, as well as most plants). As one moves up the hierarchy, additional senses are possessed. Doubled-sensed beings possess taste and touch (e.g., worms). Three-sensed beings possess smell, taste, and touch (e.g., ants). Four-sensed beings possess sight, smell, taste, and touch (e.g., butterflies). At the top of the hierarchy are five-sensed beings in possession of hearing, sight, smell, taste, and touch. They are referred to in Jainism as *pañcendriya* (the five-sensed), and among them are celestial and hell beings, animals, and humans. They alone can hear, understand, and benefit from the Jina's teachings.

Although only the most sensorially differentiated of beings, the *pañcendriya*, may receive the message of the Jina, it is the simpler-sensed beings that receive a preponderance of attention owing to the special vulnerability they incur as a result of their ontological ignorance. To repeat a point made earlier, plants, the elements, and microorganisms constitute the simplest category of being, the single-sensed, which possess only touch. Importantly, Jainism identifies touch as indicative of the presence of the soul (*jīva*). Though these beings lack the capacity to see, hear, taste, and smell, their ability to feel uniquely through touch confers upon them the capacity to suffer. These most rudimentary beings are nearly completely devoid of self-awareness, but are arguably more present to Jain consciousness than higher-sensed beings because of the enormous challenges they pose for the Jain commitment to non-harm (*ahiṃsā*). Avoiding harm to one-sensed beings, while engaged in the normal activities of existence, is impossible. And yet harm to any one of them leads to the inflow of negative *karma*. Worldly life, therefore, by its very nature, presents us with a terrible bind, for the very condition of existence equates to the capacity for suffering. In other words, suffering is the basic existential condition. And to cause suffering or destruction to any life—no matter how simple—is, for Jains, the primary cause of one's bondage in *saṃsāra*.

The intelligibility of Jainism's elaborate ethical codes rests upon this premise, as does the ascetic imperative. If the world we inhabit did not constitute a living, suffering multitude, ascetic withdrawal would be less urgent. Harm to fellow human beings and animals can be fairly easily avoided, say Jains. But harm to the minuscule, even invisible expressions who suffer greatly is impossible in the absence of total, ceaseless vigilance. From this, one also begins to grasp the enormous challenge that Jainism poses, or even, one might argue, its "impossibility."⁹

Intentionally harming another carries the heaviest, darkest, and most deleterious karmic burden, but even unintentional harm is not without karmic consequence. Therefore, intentional nonharm toward all life is the goal of all

Jains—fervently pursued with utmost scrupulousness among the renouncers. Because all life forms are in the possession of a *jīva* (soul), it is the ultimate task and vocation of each to attain salvation. Each is also said to participate in the existential condition of estrangement (though not equally since simpler forms are less aware of their plight). The authoritative Jain philosophic text, the *Tattvārtha Sūtra*, composed by philosopher-renouncer Umāsvāti (second century BCE), asserts that sentience is the defining characteristic of the soul: “The soul is never bereft of sentience, however feeble and indistinct this may be in underdeveloped organisms.”¹⁰

The shared condition of *jīvas* ideally gives rise to a type of sensory communities, which is commonly expressed in the scriptural principle “*parasparopagraho jīvānām*,”¹¹ and translates as, “All life is bound together by mutual support and interdependence.” Jainism achieves its heightened ethical concern and compassion for the nonhuman not through a desire for communion with other beings, but through a sense of a shared plight, and a shared existential trajectory, that leads to empathy and a commitment to nonharm (*ahiṃsā*). The Prayer of Forgiveness (*micchamī dukkaḍam*), which forms a part of daily prayer,¹² encapsulates this Jain sense of being with others, as well as its desire for *ahiṃsā* in an animate, purposeful cosmos:

I ask for forgiveness from all living beings;
 May all living beings grant me forgiveness.
 My friendship is with all living beings;
 I have hostility towards none.

The omnipresence of life evokes, among renouncers as well as householders (though not to the same degree), a heightened awareness of one’s being with other beings. Jains learn from a very early age to be aware of the space one’s body occupies, its potential for harming others, and the need for attentiveness. Vigilance is an especially dominant feature characterizing the relationship with simple-sensed beings. Expressed in terms of emotions, it might very well be apprehension. James Laidlaw emphasizes this characteristic vigilance in his description of Jain nonviolence as “an ethic of quarantine.”¹³ The world for Jains is a living moral theater in which the drama of existence plays out. Each living being inhabits its own distinctive subjective reality, but is also inextricably united in a shared existential trajectory. Reflecting this, Jainism’s central creed, “*Ahiṃsā Paramo Dharma*” (“Nonviolence is the Supreme Religion”) is a commitment to nonharm that extends well beyond one’s own kin to include all sensory beings. It is an expression of heightened sensitivity—but also of apprehension—emerging from the experience of inhabiting a world that is manifestly and unmistakably occupied by others.

Vigilance is certainly the primary concern that underpins the extraordinary practices of Jain ascetics, such as the wearing of the mouth guard to avoid harm to insects as well as air-bodied beings, the sweeping of the ground to avoid harming insects on one’s path, the avoidance of root crops whose harvest causes

unnecessary violence to the earth, traveling only by foot, and never in the dark, to be able to encounter life attentively, etc. In addition to vigilance, being alert to the omnipresence of life should ideally evoke compassion toward all, but the ability to feel genuine empathy for troublesome insects and even the microscopic is generally assumed to be reserved for the spiritually advanced who can perceive the suffering state of every soul.

For Jains, the presence of others is not experienced as an occasion for “communion of subjects”¹⁴ or what Thomas Berry poetically describes as a “cosmic liturgy.”¹⁵ Instead, the presence of others is often experienced as potentially suffocating, perilous, and as the cause of suffering. But being with others is also the condition for greatness, for it is only with mindfulness and compassion that enlightenment is gained.

Before moving on to discuss five-sensed animals, which play a special role in Jainism, it is worth noting that gods and demons are also important presences of whom Jains must take note. Gods and demons are of many types (occasionally appearing in animal form) and constitute part of the multitude of beings that inhabit the world with us. They are among the five-sensed, and are possessors of mind who must at some future time take birth in human form in order to embark on the path of liberation. Most have their own preoccupations and are unconcerned with human affairs, but some can be called upon to help, and some also seek to harm. It is important to note that the normative tradition of Jainism, with its focus on world renunciation and detachment, counsels against interactions with these worldly presences. Nevertheless, most Jains regularly interact with gods (e.g., mother goddesses, gods of locales, gods associated with particular temples), approaching them through prayer and ritual, in the hope of gaining assistance in some worldly matter (such as a cure for illness, desire for wealth, help in childbirth). Apotropaic magic is also regularly undertaken to propitiate or ward off evil presences. Because the world is full of multiple intelligences and competing wills, it can be capricious and volatile, as well as magnanimous. Seeking assistance from the gods, and protection from evil, is simply another way of engaging the presences with whom we inhabit the world.¹⁶

Animals and the inner circle

The weight of his body felt heavier than before, suddenly it was a burden to carry. Once a powerful force, it was now a useless instrument of violence. So perfectly crafted for a life of killing, it mocked him now as he felt as a stranger in the world of *saṃsāra*, an arena where birth and death, consuming and being consumed, generate meaning. The words of the *sadhus* quietened his passions and made clear his path. He remained still and ate no more. And as he laid down his noble head, with his magnificent orange mane gently crowning his face, his eyes communicated an awareness of who he was. Dispassionately and in full awareness, the once majestic lion grew frail and died. He thereby freed himself, once and for all, from his animal body, and moved one step closer to final release.¹⁷

The lion, or, more precisely, the eternal soul that was embodied as the lion, whose destiny it was, in a future incarnation, to eventually become the great Jina Mahāvīra, experienced a profound spiritual awakening upon hearing the words of the *sadhus* (mendicants). Called *samyak darśana*, this spiritual awakening is the crucial first step to eventual liberation (*mokṣa*). And, as the story makes clear, it is an experience open to animals.

Needless to say, the condition of animals in Jainism is manifestly different from that for plants, insects, and microorganisms who share their birth category, or *gati* (namely, the birth category called *tiryāṅca*, which includes animals, plants, insects, and microorganisms). For one, they were present at the *samavasaraṇa*—those privileged gatherings in the presence of the omniscient Jina, at which he delivered enchanted sermons on the path of salvation. The *samavasaraṇa* is among the most popular themes in Jain narrative, painting, and sculpture. At these exquisitely built divine assembly halls, *devas* (celestial beings) hover in delight above the Jina, and listeners sit in concentric circles around him: closest to the Jina are male and female renouncers, followed by lay devotees, and then animals. Elephants, lions, birds, and other beasts, sit in rapture as they listen to, and understand, the preachings of the Jina. Clearly, animals represent the inner circle of the tradition.

But animals are not equal to humans since they are far more under the influence of their bodily appetites. While all beings in *saṃsāra* are governed by their embodied natures, the determining force of animal bodies is nearly absolute. The animal body's appetites, its aversions, and its attachments, can overwhelm the *jīva* (soul) to such an extent that it usually lives out its life in total ignorance of the existence of its eternal and true nature. Of course this misfortune is true for all simple-sensed *jīvas*, and, tragically, it can also befall a human being. Animals are in that unusual state of possessing the possibility of attaining *samyak darśana* (spiritual awakening/correct vision), but are normally so karmically burdened that they do not realize it. Only a very few manage to be awakened to the truth.

The distinctiveness of animals' place in the cosmological hierarchy means that the relationship Jains have with them is also fundamentally different, and far more complicated, than it is with simpler-sensed beings. Rather than apprehension, the dominant attitudes are those of compassion and commiseration, emerging out of a shared condition of alienation. From this comes profound empathy, and an attentiveness to the pathos of animal existence that may be unrivaled. The animal's suffering is tantamount to our own suffering as we partake of the same sensory condition. The earliest of Jain scriptures, the *Ācārāṅga Sūtra* (c. third century BCE) states:

That which you consider worth destroying is yourself.

That which you consider worth disciplining is yourself.

That which you consider worth subjugating is yourself.

That which you consider worth killing is yourself.

The result of actions by you has to be borne by you, so do not destroy anything.¹⁸

The Ācārāṅga Sūtra continues: “All breathing, existing, sentient creatures should not be slain, nor treated with violence, nor abused, nor tormented, nor driven away. This is the pure unchangeable Law.”¹⁹ And from Hemacandra’s twelfth century Yogaśāstra: “In happiness and suffering, in joy and grief, we should regard all creatures as we regard our own self.”²⁰

Jainism insists that we are embedded in a world of competing subjectivities—some of which we see, hear, and touch, and none of which we can blithely ignore. The cries of geese, the howls of wolves, and the chirping of birds, are purposeful utterances no less so than human speech. And when the raven, dog, snake, and cat return our gaze, it is nothing short of an exchange of vision. Our shared condition of being with means, at its most basic, a condition of communication. To assert, as Jains do, that we inhabit the world sensorially is to understand the world as fundamentally communicative, speaking as it does to the existential trajectory shared by all beings.

Animals as heroic

The Jain narrative tradition contains a great many discussions of animals, and the roles that they play are diverse. Stories of animals who act with restraint, as in the story of the lion-who-would-become-a-Jina, discussed above, are not uncommon. Perhaps the best known of this genre are those of Mahāvīra and Candkaśik, and the Elephant and the Rabbit. Both recount narratives that can be rightfully called heroic, in the Jain sense of the word, with its associations of detachment and compassion. Candkaśik was a gigantic, violent, and terrifying cobra who had viciously attacked and killed a great many hapless villagers. His presence caused the land to turn barren and for villagers to live in great dread, for even his glare had the power to kill. When the Jina, Lord Mahāvīra, came upon the village, he paid no heed to the villagers’ warnings to avoid the forest where the cobra dwelt. Instead, he chose a spot near Candkaśik’s cave to meditate. The cobra was immediately outraged at the stranger’s audacity, and approached with the intention to attack. To his surprise, the stranger seemed unperturbed, and did not move. Enraged, the snake viciously attacked. Still, Mahāvīra remained tranquil and continued to meditate. The cobra was stunned when he saw milk, instead of blood, ooze from his victim’s body. Finally, in the absence of fear and anger, Mahāvīra opened his eyes and looked upon his attacker with compassion. Cowed, Candkaśik retreated. Suddenly, as if with a flash of awareness, he recalled his previous births and the reason for his punishment as a snake. He immediately vowed to renounce violence, and returned to his cave. When the villagers became aware of Candkaśik’s docility, they took revenge on him for his past deeds, and tortured him mercilessly. Though he suffered greatly, he remained steadfast in his commitment to nonviolence. Eventually he died, and was reborn in heaven.

Contained within this story of the heroic snake is the idea that animal birth is punishment for past sins—a belief that is well established in Jainism. The Tattvārtha Sūtra states that deceitfulness and self-indulgence are among the main

causes leading to animal birth.²¹ As such, animals serve as warnings not to squander the precious gift of human birth, the only birth from which *mokṣa* is possible. It must be stated, however, that while human form is viewed as the positive result of a previous life of soft-heartedness and honesty, all incarnations—even human—are the fruits of some past sins (*pāpa*). In the absence of all wrongdoings, incarnate existence would not occur.²²

The story of the Elephant and the Rabbit is equally well known. It tells how, long ago, a terrible fire broke out in a densely populated forest and quickly threatened to consume it. As the fire raged, the animals of the forest fled in fear and quickly congregated on a tiny oasis protected from the blaze. All the animals huddled together, and soon the oasis was over-crowded, leaving no space for the animals to move. Desperate to survive, they quietly endured. An irrepressible itch caused the Elephant to raise his foot to scratch himself. The moment he did this, a rabbit moved into it, and out of danger, perceiving the newly opened space to be a shelter from the flames. If the Elephant were to lower his foot, he would immediately crush the rabbit; to make it scurry would mean certain death in the fire. Instead, he held his foot aloft for three days, the time it took for the flames to cease and for the animals to return safely to the forest. Exhausted and in agony from his ordeal, the Elephant collapsed and died shortly after the rabbit's release. Due to his compassion and restraint, he was reborn as a prince in his next life.

In both stories, the animals behave courageously. Candkauṣīk does not retaliate when abused by the villagers, and chooses death over violence. The Elephant too, chooses to endure suffering rather than to cause harm. Their actions are heroic because they are informed by restraint and nonviolence, and by the transcendence of bodily desire. Adding to these accounts, the heroism of animals is regularly acknowledged in the Jain narrative literature. Indeed, all of the venerated omniscient teachers (Jinas) are known to have had animal existences in prior incarnations, and most (nineteen out of twenty-four) are iconographically represented by an animal symbol. For instance, Mahāvīra, the most recent of the twenty-four Jinas, is represented by a lion, an incarnation he inhabited during a previous birth.

Animals as sufferers

Although animals in Jainism are recognized as possessing self-awareness and intentionality, these capacities are at times eclipsed in the narrative literature, especially when suffering is at focus. Animals here are depicted primarily as beings who feel pain, experience fear, and lack understanding of their predicament. Akin to philosopher Tom Regan's "moral patients," they are contrasted with human beings, or "moral agents," who possess the ability to reason and act ethically, but don't always do so.²³ In this context, suffering animals are identified as being at the mercy of others, serving as passive foils for humans to demonstrate their ethical superiority. However, their suffering also possesses the power to evoke deep compassion, and to awaken a soul out of its slumber. The classic tale in this genre is that of the twenty-second Jina, Neminath:

The entire kingdom had for weeks been joyfully preparing for the royal wedding of Prince Nemikumar. Finally the day arrived and, accompanied by cheers, the Prince ascended his chariot to join the marriage procession. It moved slowly down the decorated path, weaving its way through throngs of well-wishers. Suddenly, it came to a halt. Disorder erupted in the crowds, and confusion spread: What happened to the prince? Amidst the crowd, Nemikumar stood gazing upon hundreds of caged animals. He saw in their eyes only anguish and pain, and demanded to know why they were there. When he was told that they were going to be used for the wedding feast, he was overcome with sadness and compassion. He then experienced a spiritual awakening, and realized that all beings are like the caged animals suffering before him; we are all trapped in the world of *samsāra* and only by renouncing worldly existence can one ever be free from suffering. On the spot, he declared that he would not marry. Instead, he initiated himself into the path of renunciation, and in time gained enlightenment, becoming Jainism's twenty-second Jina, Neminath.²⁴

Modern day Jain animal shelters (*pinjrapoles*) operate on the premise that the animals in their care are innocent sufferers, dependent for their wellbeing on human kindness. Care for such animals is considered to be religious behavior, resulting in good *karma* (*puṇya*). There are literally thousands of animal shelters throughout India, providing compassionate care and medical attention to injured and dying animals. Most of the animals present have been the hapless victims of human activities or devices—birds mangled in the blades of ceiling fans, animals hit by trucks, chickens diseased and injured in cages etc. Interesting to note, carnivorous animals (e.g., birds of prey) are not kept at *pinjrapoles* as their care would require Jains to violate their commitment to vegetarianism. Perhaps, too, carnivorous animals disrupt, to a certain degree, the idea of the “innocent” animal, upon which the *pinjrapoles* are based.

Finally, and importantly, compassionate care toward the suffering of others is also undertaken in clear recognition of the emotional bonds that can form between sentient beings, and that can endure over time. The central Jain principle *parasparopagraho jīvānām*, or “all life is bound together by mutual support and interdependence,”²⁵ (mentioned above in relation to simple-sensed beings), recognizes that empathy is the nature of the soul, and that therefore the soul moves through sense-incarnations, transcending the particularities of time and space. The story of Lord Pārśvanath illustrates the reciprocal nature of existence, and the bonds of friendship that can endure across time:

One day, while walking through a forest, the Prince Pārśva came upon the renowned yogi Kamath, performing a fire ritual. Immediately, he could intuit the presence of two cobras trapped in the burning logs being used for the ritual, and he requested Kamath to help the snakes. Kamath, who perceived nothing but the burning logs, was greatly annoyed by the disruption, and ignored the request. He then watched in anger as Pārśva proceeded to

remove a log from the fire, crack it open, and reveal two scorched, dying cobras. As they died, Pārśva recited the Namaskāra Mantra²⁶ over their bodies, causing them to be reborn in heaven, as the god Dharaṇendra and the goddess Padmāvātī. Years passed. Kamath died, and was reborn as Meghmali, the god of rain. Prince Pārśva renounced his kingdom to pursue the path of renunciation. One fateful day, while Pārśva sat in the quiet of the forest, deep in meditation, the rain god Meghmali looked down from his heavenly abode and recognized his former antagonist. Filled with anger once again, he decided to take revenge on him, and released upon him a torrent of violent rains. The waters began to swell around Pārśva but, because he was deep in meditation, he remained oblivious to the danger. The raging waters rose ever higher and soon threatened to drown him. From heaven, Dharaṇendra and Padmāvātī (the former cobras) witnessed the scene below and quickly descended to assist the former prince. The Goddess Padmāvātī formed a lotus under the seated Pārśva, raising him aloft from the gushing torrents, and Dharaṇendra spread his 1,000 headed cobra hood above Pārśva's head, shielding him from the deluge. Pārśva, cocooned in the protective embrace of the gods, continued in his meditation, and soon attained enlightenment. When Meghmali saw his wicked efforts were in vain, he became humbled and sought forgiveness.²⁷

Lord Pārśvanath, the twenty-third Jina of Jainism, is always represented with the protective hood of the snake, serving as a reminder of the reciprocal nature of life, and of the enduring bonds of friendship between sentient beings.

Animals as worldly

Above all else, Jainism valorizes restraint and detachment, and understands non-violence in those terms. Animals are most commonly understood as beings who lack restraint, and therefore represent the very antithesis of the Jain ideal. As I have argued in the last section, animals are among the “inner circle”—they are five-sensed beings capable of self-awareness and ethical behavior. They are understood in diverse ways, including as fellow sufferers, as powerful and even as heroic. But taken together, they are the most conspicuous and unambiguous expressions of “the worldly” which Jainism seeks to transcend. A common aphorism in Jainism asserts that “in the absence of religion, man is no better than the animal.” By this, Jains mean that in the absence of self-discipline and nonviolence, nothing of substance distinguishes humans from the nonhuman. And those beings, be they human or nonhuman, who dwell contentedly in their creatureliness (i.e., the vast majority of them) are regarded as lacking self-awareness, as being alien to their true selves. Animals are, in the main, untroubled by the violence of existence, and participate in it enthusiastically, unproblematically destroying life to sustain their own. Yet despite this, as the heroic narratives highlighted above demonstrate, animals can by virtue of their animality provide the substance of powerful pedagogical allegories, which communicate the moral

requirement of existence, that of non-violent mindfulness. On a more basic level, when the communicative utterances of the beasts—their howls, chirps, bleatings, and the like—are properly heard and understood, these utterances are seen to express this same moral requirement of existence.

Of course, Jainism acknowledges the inescapability of violence in the world since all embodied life depends upon the death of others. To live is to consume, to consume is to participate in a cycle of violence. This “law of the fishes” is, for Jains, purposeless and mechanical, but ultimately escapable in a state of *mokṣa* (final release from the cycle of birth and death). Jainism does not seek to change this state of affairs, it seeks only to show the way out of it. It accepts the world as it is, but refuses to find meaning in its workings.

To elucidate this point, it is instructive to contrast the distinctively Jain view with that of the ancient Vedic tradition, a tradition against which Jainism so negatively reacted, and against which it powerfully defined itself in opposition. The Vedic tradition, centered on the sacrificial cult, acknowledged and honored the profound connection between existence and violence, and the union between flesh and spirit. Serving as a ritual linkage, sacrifice was (and is) a kind of theater of reciprocity, showcasing the shared nature of life and death and the need for regeneration to arise from destruction. Significantly, it conceived (as much of popular Hinduism continues to conceive) of the self as cosmologically embedded, part and parcel of a meaningful cosmos, and subject to its laws and rhythms.

In the Vedic *Puruṣa Sūkta*, among the most celebrated poems of the *R̥g Veda*, the creation of the cosmos out of the sacrifice of a giant man (*Puruṣa*) is described (*R̥g Veda*, 10.9).²⁸ Its dismemberment gives rise to the stars, moon, oceans, and wind, to the world as we know it with its myriad life forms. The destruction of the giant initiated all subsequent creations. This famous poem of the ancient Indo-Aryans, like many ancient cosmologies, describes an understanding of human existence emerging out of sacrifice, and of the cosmos as dynamic, reciprocal, and sacrificial. Implied in it (and in all such cosmologies) is the idea that creativity and destruction are one, they are inseparable and integrally linked. It is both a description of, and a charter for, a cosmology of reciprocity.

Jain cosmology also makes use of a primordial giant *Puruṣa*, though in ways that are distinctive. Importantly, the giant is not sacrificed to create the cosmos, because, according to Jains, the cosmos has no origin, it has always existed. By denying a genesis, Jains remove the possibility of conceiving “the sacred” or some “purpose” within its workings. Instead, the *Puruṣa* is understood as an abstract depiction of cosmography, an illustrative representation of Jain metaphysics where the drama of animate life plays out within the zones of the giant’s body. Our world is situated between his chest and bowels, i.e., between the heavens and the hells.

Diagrammatically, and fittingly, we are in the belly of the giant, and here we are subject to the law of consumption. This mechanical process (the sacrificial arena in the Vedas) is where the dreadful cycle of death and rebirth is played out, without end, a meaningless drama of devouring and being devoured.

Sacrificial rituals seek communion between flesh and spirit; they seek the transformation and regeneration of the embodied self. Jainism rejected the entire apparatus of sacrificial ritual and the ontology upon which it is based, in favor of a different goal, namely, the dis-communion of flesh and spirit. Indeed, Jainism (like the other world-renouncing traditions) asserts that true regeneration is not possible within *samsāra*—all actions within *samsāra* are simply the mechanical churning of the belly of the Puruṣa. True transformation is achievable only in the state of *mokṣa*.

For Jains, there can be no “loop holes” of acceptable violence. Participating in life means grasping and devouring the world, with the body as our primary instrument of consumption. One ideally should eat to sustain the body only so long as it serves the purpose of liberation. And not eating is a central religious practice for Jains: fasting is so basic that it is emblematic of the tradition. The word Jains use for “fast” is “upvas,” which literally means “to be near the soul,” underscoring the belief that the soul can only be known when one is uninterrupted by the worldly demands of the body. But animals, subservient to the dictates of the body, are quintessentially “eaters.” Significantly, *mokṣa* is described as a state of “not consuming” (*anāhārī pad*), a state of bliss attainable only when one is outside the violent, and meaningless, cycle of eating and being eaten.

Animals are those beings who are part and parcel of the cosmic surroundings, bound by the reciprocal nature of life and death, and firmly situated within the cosmic cycle of death and regeneration. Lacking restraint, they act impulsively to satisfy each and every bodily desire, making no distinction between soul (*jīva*) and body. Their bodies are their only source of pleasure and fulfillment; effectively they are their bodies. As such, they serve as a type of negative witness to the truth of Jainism, which insists upon the experience of body and world estrangement as the first step to liberation.

The Tattvārtha Sūtra describes, here in especially bleak terms, the body as fundamentally alien to the *jīva*:

Reflecting upon the filthy condition of the body strengthens dispassion and disgust for the body. The body is impure because it is produced by a mixture of father’s semen and mother’s blood, which are impure. It is impure because everything it consumes turns foul and putrid. It is impure because it is the receptacle of dirt, sweat, phlegm, bile, urine and feces. It is impure because it is impossible to change its foul smell by any kind of bath or cosmetic.²⁹

Meditation upon the “otherness” of the body constitutes a core practice of ascetic discipline, and is basic to the renunciatory ethos of the tradition. While human birth is also the means to liberation, and therefore cherished, its “otherness” is the central and constant theme found throughout Jainism.

Animals’ effective “oneness” with their bodies is anathema to the Jain ideal. Their obvious delight in participating in the world through their sensory way of being—smelling, tasting, feeling, hearing, moving—is precisely the seductive trap of *samsāra* that all humans must judiciously avoid.

Conclusion

Jainism unhesitatingly demarcates between the human and the nonhuman, and places the human in a category of its own, superior to all others. By its ontological privileging of the human, Jainism acknowledges the differences in the capacities of sentient life for self-transcendence, but insists that all beings inhabit a shared condition of existence and possess a shared potential for release, however incrementally obtained. Moreover, the tradition posits a strict requirement upon the human to be with the nonhuman conscientiously and nonviolently, as both a means to activate release at the human level of being, but also to further this potential already inherent in the nonhuman.

As argued throughout this chapter, this distinctively Jain way of being stems from the experiential reality of inhabiting a world that is concretely and patently inhabited by others; it takes for granted the experience of life as always and unavoidably in a state of being with others. The animate and intelligent life that encompasses us, that perpetually bombards us, and leaves its innumerable impressions on us every moment of every day, is, for Jains, taken as a given. This all-encompassing life—along with the myriad beings it contains—while certainly a given, is also the foundational source for an understanding of life's existential purpose. When one engages with all senses open and is fully attuned to life's complex stratifications—when one is deeply cognizant of the suffering nature of the simplest of beings most especially—it is at this point that an ontological “crossing over” is possible and release may be obtained.

The impetus for the Jain path is, therefore, not ideological but relational, arising from the fundamental experience of being sentiently with others. Most fundamentally, our condition of being with means a condition of engagement with all life; we are all inescapably participants in a world that communicates, each speaking a language that expresses our distinctive levels of being, but all of a voice expressing the final objective of our shared existential trajectory. Thus, whether speaking through the fabulous personifications of traditional lore, or speaking viscerally through the cacophonous cries of natural creatures, the non-human unites, in calling out to the enlightened human, reminding one of the timely need for release.

Notes

- 1 Jacques Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 48.
- 2 For example, see: Carol Adams, *The Sexual Politics of Meat: A Feminist-Vegetarian Critical Theory* (New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2000); Marc Bekoff, *Nature's Purposes: Analyses of Function and Design in Biology* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1998); Mathew Calarco, “Another Insistence of Man: Prolegomena to the Question of the Animal in Derrida's Reading of Heidegger,” *Human Studies* 28, no. 3 (2005): 317–34; Mary Midgley, *Beast and Man: The Roots of Human Nature* (Brighton, UK: Harvester Press Limited, 1979; London and Oxford, Routledge Classics, 2002); Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*; Gary Francione, *Animals, Property, and the Law* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1995); Tim

- Ingold, *What Is an Animal?* (London: Routledge, 1994); Paul Waldau and Kimberley Patton, *A Communion of Subjects: Animals in Religion, Science & Ethics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006).
- 3 See Christopher K. Chapple, "Inherent Value without Nostalgia: Animals and the Jaina Tradition," in *A Communion of Subjects: Animals in Religion, Science & Ethics*, eds. Paul Waldau and Kimberley C. Patton (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 241–9; and Kristi Wiley, "Five-Sensed Animals in Jainism," in *A Communion of Subjects: Animals in Religion, Science & Ethics*, eds. Paul Waldau and Kimberley C. Patton (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 250–5.
 - 4 To use Thomas Berry's compelling phrase. Thomas Berry, *The Great Work: Our Way Into the Future* (New York: Bell Tower, 1999).
 - 5 Here I refer to the ethical as a codified elaboration of dos and don'ts.
 - 6 Umasvati, *Tattvārtha Sūtra [That Which Is]* (trans. Nathmal Tatia) (New York City: Harper Collins Publishers, 1994), xxi.
 - 7 Also called Tīrthaṅkaras (ford makers).
 - 8 Sayyambhava Arya, *Dasavaikalika Sutra* (trans. Chand Kastur Lalwani) (Delhi: Motilal Banarsudass, 1973), 58.
 - 9 James Laidlaw, *Riches and Renunciation: Religion, Economy, and Society Among the Jains* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 21.
 - 10 Umasvati, *Tattvārtha Sutra*, 39. The *Tattvārtha Sūtra* defines sentience as "awareness or consciousness," which is both knowledge and intuition.
 - 11 *Ibid.*, 131.
 - 12 *Micchami Dukkadam* forms part of the daily prayer called *Pratikramana*. It is also ritually recited during the holiest day of the liturgical calendar, *Samvatsarī*, the final day of *Paryūṣaṇa*.
 - 13 Laidlaw, *Riches and Renunciation*, 153–9.
 - 14 Thomas Berry, "Prologue," to *A Communion of Subjects: Animals in Religion, Science & Ethics*, eds. Paul Waldau and Kimberley C. Patton (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006).
 - 15 Berry, *The Great Work*, 19.
 - 16 For a more detailed discussion, see Anne Vallely, "Ancestors, Demons and the Goddess: Negotiating the Animate Cosmos of Jainism," in *Health and Religious Rituals in South Asia: Disease, Possession and Healing*, ed. Fabrizio Ferrari (New York: Routledge Press, 2011), 64–78.
 - 17 Mahavira's twentieth incarnation was of that of a lion. This passage is the author's fictive retelling of the end of this incarnation.
 - 18 Surendra Bothra, *Ahimsa: The Science of Peace* (Jaipur: Prakrti Bharati Institute, 1988), 1X. English translation of passage in *Ācārāṅga Sūtra*.
 - 19 Hermann Jacobi, trans., *Sacred Books of the East, Jaina Sutras Part II*, vol 22:36 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1884), 36.
 - 20 Hemachandracharya, *The Yoga Shastra of Hemchandracharya: A 12th Century Guide to Jain Yoga* (trans. A.S. Gopani), ed. S. Bothara (Jaipur: Prakrit Bharati Academy; Mevanagar: Shri Jain Swetambar Nakoda Parswanath Tirtha, 1989), 38, couplet 2.20.
 - 21 Umasvati, *Tattvārtha Sūtra*, 159.
 - 22 Birth in the female form, for instance, is similarly attributed to past deceitfulness, while "virulent aggression and extreme possessiveness" ensure birth as a hell being. *Ibid.*, 159.
 - 23 Tom Regan, *The Case for Animal Rights* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2004), 151–6.
 - 24 Author's retelling of a well-known tale. See for example, JAINA Education Committee, *Jain Story Book* (Raleigh, NC: Federations of Jain Associations of North America, 2005), 29–31.
 - 25 *Parasparopagraho jīvanām*. Umasvati, *Tattvārtha Sūtra*, 131.
 - 26 Jainism's most fundamental mantra.

- 27 Author's retelling of a well-known tale. See for example JAINA Education Committee, *Jain Story Book* (Raleigh, NC: Federations of Jain Associations of North America, 2005), 32–3.
- 28 Ralph T.H. Griffith, *The Hymns of the Rg Veda*, rev. ed. (1896; reprint Whitefish, MT: Kessinger Publishing, 2006), 10.9.
- 29 Umasvati, *Tattvārtha Sūtra*, 223–4.

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