



## ETHICAL BACKGROUND OF JAINISM

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### ABSTRACT :

*It cannot be controverted that human nature is essentially end-oriented. This en-orientation of man implies that human life is a striving towards certain ends. In other words, "it is thoroughly teleological that it cannot be understood apart from what it is seeking to become". The discipline which deals with the process of seeking and striving in terms of good and bad, and consequently in terms of right and wrong is termed Normative ethics and the judgments like A was a good man, to harm someone is wrong are known as Normative judgments of Value and Obligation respectively. Again, the discipline which aims at philosophical analysis of ethical terms or concepts like 'right', 'good', etc., which asks the meaning and definition of such terms, seeks justification of normative judgments, discusses their nature, and is concerned with the analysis of freedom and responsibility is termed Meta-ethics. Besides, there is descriptive historical inquiry to explain the phenomenon of morality in the various periods of history. Thus normative ethics, meta-ethics, and descriptive ethics constitute three kinds of ethical inquiry. IN the present paper, I propose to look at Jaina ethics from the normative and meta-ethical perspectives, to the exclusion of its descriptive historical inquiry. In other words, I shall not be describing the Achara of the Householder and that of the Muni in the various periods of history, but shall be dealing with some of the questions regarding value and obligation and meta-ethics, from the point of view of Jaina ethics in order to bring out the contribution of the Jaina to the above ethical questions.*



**KEYWORDS :** human life , philosophical analysis , meta-ethics.

### INTRODUCTION:

Let us start with the Jaina theory of value, then go on to the Jaina theory of obligation and finally to the Jaina theory of meaning and justification of the judgments of value and obligation (Meta-ethics). The question that confronts us is : What is intrinsically desirable, good or worthwhile in life according to the Jaina? What intrinsic values are to be pursued according to him? The answer that may be given is of Ahimsa of all living beings, the attainment of knowledge, the realization of happiness, the leading of virtuous life, and the experiencing of freedom and good emotions. Thus, the criterion of intrinsic goodness or the good-making characteristic shall be the fulfillment of ends like Ahimsa, knowledge, virtues, etc. and depends on the degree of fulfillment of ends and the resulting satisfaction there from. An altogether good shall be wholly fulfilling the ends and wholly satisfying the seeker. The Jaina texts speak of the partial realization of Ahimsa and the complete realization of Ahimsa and of other ends. This theory of intrinsic goodness may be called Ahimsa-Utilitarianism. This means that this theory considers Ahimsa and other ends to be the general good. But it may be noted here that this general good shall not be possible without one's own good. What I

mean to say is that seeking the good of others shall be not only a means to my own but my own good shall consist partly in seeking theirs. Thus, by this theory of Ahimsa-Utilitarianism narrow egoism is abandoned. This Ahimsa-Utilitarianism is to be distinguished from Hedonistic Utilitarianism of Mill, but it has some resemblance with the ideal Utilitarianism of Moore and Rashadall. The point to be noted here is that Moore distinguishes<sup>1</sup> between good as a means and good as an end (good in itself). When we say that an action or a thing is good as a means, we say that it is liable to produce something which is good in itself (Intrinsically good). The Jaina recognizes that Ahimsa can be both good as a means and good as an end. This means that both means and ends are to be tested by criterion of Ahimsa. I may say in passing that the principle that “the end justifies the means” need not be rejected as immoral if the above criterion of means and ends is conceded. It may look paradoxical that Ahimsa is an end. But it is not so. *Samantabhadra* has said there is no inconsistency in saying that Ahimsa is both an end and a means. Thus, the expression Ahimsa-Utilitarianism seems to me to be the most apt one to represent the Jaina theory of intrinsic goodness.

Let us now proceed to the Jaina theory of obligation. “The ultimate concern of the normative theory of obligation is to guide us in the making of decisions and judgments about actions in particular situations”. Here the question that confronts us is this: How to determine what is morally right for a certain agent in a certain situation? Or what is the criterion of the rightness of actions? The inter-related question is: what we ought to do in a certain situation? Or how duty is to be determined? The answer of the Jain is that right, ought, and duty cannot be separated from the good. The criterion of what is right etc. is the greater balance of good over bad that is brought into being than any alternative. Thus the view that regards goodness of the consequences of actions as the right-making characteristic is termed teleological theory of obligation as distinguished from the deontological theory of obligation which regards an action as right or obligatory simply because of its own nature regardless of the consequences it may bring into being. The Jaina ethics holds the teleological theory of obligation (Maximum balance of *Ahimsa* over *Himsa* as the right-making characteristic).

The question now arises whether Jaina ethics subscribe to act-approach or rule-approach in deciding the rightness or wrongness of actions. The former is called act-utilitarianism,<sup>2</sup> while the latter rule-utilitarianism. It seems to me that though the Jain *Acaryas* have given us moral rules yet in principle they have followed act-utilitarianism, according to which every action is to be judged on the goodness of the consequences expected to be produced. Since to calculate the consequences of each and every action is not practically possible, Jain *Acharyas* have given us guiding moral principles in the form of *Anuvratas* and *Mahavratas*, *Gunavratas* and *shikshavratas* and so on. This means that Jain ethics accepts the possibility that sometimes these general moral principles may be inadequate to the complexities of the situation and in this case a direct consideration for the particular action without reference to general principles is necessary. May be, keeping this in view, *Samantabhadra* argues that truth is not to be spoken when by so doing the other is entangled in miseries,<sup>3</sup> the *Kartikeyanupreksha* disallows to purchase thing a low price in order to maintain the vow of non-stealing.<sup>4</sup> According to rule-utilitarian exceptions cannot be allowed. This implies that Jain ethics does not allow superstitious rule-worship, but at the same time prescribes that utmost caution is to be taken in breaking the rule, which has been built up and tested by the experience of generations. Thus according to Jain ethics acts are logically prior to rules and the rightness of the action is situational.

This is capital importance to note here that according to Jain ethics, there is no such thing as a moral obligation which is not an obligation to bring about the greatest good. To call an action a duty is dependent on the fact of producing a greater balance of good over evil in the universe than any other alternative. Duty is not self-justifying; it is not an end in itself. “The very nature of duty is to aim beyond itself. There can no more be a duty to act, if there is no good to attain by it, than to think if there is no truth to be won by thinking.”<sup>5</sup> Thus, duty is an extrinsic good, good as a means; this does not deprive duty of its importance in ethical life, just as health does not become unimportant by its being extrinsic good. The pursuance of *anuvratas* for the householder and the *Mahavratas* for the Muni may be regarded as dutiful actions.

In view of the above, it seems to me that Jaina ethics will look with critical eye at the deontologism of Prichard and Ross. According to Ross there are self-evidently binding *Prima-Facie* duties such as duties of

gratitude, duties of self-improvement, duties of Justices, etc. The conviction of the Jain is that all these duties are conducive to good as an end. Hence, they should be followed because of the conduciveness to good, and not because that they are independent of good consequences.

We have so far considered the criterion by which we are to determine what we morally ought to do in a given situation, how the rightness or wrongness of actions is to be decided. But the question that remains to be discussed is: How the moral worth of an action is to be evaluated? How does in Jaina terminology an action become *Punya* and *Papa*-engendering? In other words, how does an action become virtuous and vicious, praiseworthy or blameworthy, morally good or bad<sup>6</sup> (1) it is likely that an action by the criterion of rightness may be externally right but internally immorally motivated. A man may seem to be doing things according to a moral rule, but it may be with a bad motive. (2) Again, an action by the standard of rightness may be externally wrong, but it may be done with a good motive. For example, one may kill the rich in order to serve the poor. (3) An action may be externally right and done with good motive. (4) An action may be externally wrong and done with a bad motive. Thus there are four possibilities: (1) Right action and bad motive, (2) Wrong action and good motive, (3) Right action and good motive and (4) Wrong action and bad motive. The third and fourth category of actions which according to Jaina ethics may be called *Shubha* (auspicious) and the *Ashubha* (inauspicious) *Leshyas* are respectively called virtuous and vicious, are actions having moral merit and demerit. The concept of *Leshyas* in Jainism also invites our attention to the fact that the degree of praiseworthiness and blameworthiness of actions will depend on the degree of intensity of good and bad motives. The first category of actions (Right action and bad motive) may look proper externally but its moral significance is zero. All deceptions are of this nature. The moral worth of the second category of actions (Wrong action and good motive) is complicated and can be decided on the nature of the case. Though in Jaina ethical works, the importance of good motive is recognized as contributing towards the moral merit of an action, yet the Jain *Acharyas* have clearly stated that he who exclusively emphasizes the internal at the expense of the external forgets the significance of outward behavior. In consequence, both the internal and external aspects should occupy their due places. Ewing rightly observes that "they (good motives) lead us into evil courses on occasion if there is not at the back of our minds a moral consciousness which prevents this, so the strictly moral motive should always in a sense be present potentially."<sup>7</sup>

Let us now try to find out the answer of the Jain to certain meta-ethical question. The fundamental questions to be taken into account are: (1) what is the nature of ethical judgments (obligatory and Value) according to the Jaina? And (2) what is their justification? These two are the main question of ethics in our times. The contemporary moral philosophy has concerned itself with this almost excluding normative ethics: it is not interested so much in practical guidance even of a very general kind as in theoretical understanding and conceptual clarification of ethical judgments.

Let me state the first question more clearly. There have been recognized three kinds of knowledge: (1) knowledge of fact, as, this flower is yellow (2) knowledge of necessity, as  $7+5=12$ ; and itself to this: Are ethical judgments expressive of any cognitive content in the sense that they may be asserted true or false, or do they simply express emotions, feeling, etc. The upholders of the former view are known as cognitivists, while those holding the latter view are known as non-cognitivists (emotivists). When we say that *Himsa* is wrong, are we making a true or false assertion or are we experiencing simply feeling? Or are we doing both? According to the cognitivists, the ethical judgment, 'Himsa is wrong' is capable of being objectively true and thus moral knowledge is objective, whereas the non-cognitivists deny both the objectivity of assertion and knowledge, in as much as according to them ethical judgments are identified with feeling, emotions, etc. Here the position taken by the Jain seems to me to be that though the statement, 'Himsa is wrong' is objectively true, yet it cannot be divested of the feeling element involved in experiencing the truth of the statement. In moral life knowledge and feeling cannot be separated. By implication we can derive from the *Tattvarthasutra*<sup>8</sup> that the path of goodness can be traversed by knowledge (*Jnana*) along with feeling and activity (*charitra*). *Amritachandra* says that first of all knowledge of right, wrong and good is to be acquired, and afterwards moral life is to be practiced<sup>9</sup>. Thus the conviction of the Jain is that the experience of value

and obligation is bound up with our feelings and that in their absence we are ethically blind. In fact knowledge and feeling are so interwoven into a complex harmony that we have never a state of mind in which both are not present in some degree. So the claims of cognitivists and non-cognitivists are one sided and are very much antagonistic to the verdict of experience. Blanshard<sup>10</sup> rightly remarks. "Nature may spread before us the richest possible banquet of good things, but if we can look at them only with the eye of person, we shall care for none of these things: they will be alike inspired. There would be no knowledge of good and evil in a world of mere knower, for where there is no feeling good and evil would be unrecognizable". Thus the nature of ethical judgments according to the Jain is cognitive-effective. "The achievement of good is a joint product of our power to know and our power to feel."

The next question in meta-ethics is to ask how our ethical judgments (Value and obligation) can be justified. That the ethical judgments are objectively true need not imply that their justification can be sought in the same manner as the justification of factual judgments of ordinary and scientific nature. The reason for this is that value cannot be derived from fact, ought from is. In factual judgments our expressions are value-neutral, but in ethical judgments we cannot be indifferent to their being sought by ourselves or by others. That is why derivation of ought from is, value from fact is unjustifiable. The value judgments according to the Jain are self-evident and can only be experienced directly, thus they are self-justifying. The conviction of the Jain is that no argument can prove that 'Himsa is evil' and 'Ahimsa is good'. What is intrinsically good or bad can be experienced directly or immediately. The justification of right can be sought from the fact of its producing what is intrinsically good.

In this paper I have ventured to deal with the Jain ethical theory very briefly in the light of the contemporary discussion of ethical theory. In my view the future Jain ethics should move in this direction so as to keep pace with the modern discussions of the ethical and meta-ethical problems.

#### REFERENCES

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