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Source: *Philosophy East and West*, Vol. 50, No. 3, The Philosophy of Jainism (Jul., 2000), pp. 378-384

Published by: University of Hawai'i Press

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1400180>

Accessed: 04-09-2017 07:19 UTC

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DETERMINING WHICH JAINA PHILOSOPHER WAS THE OBJECT OF DHARMAKĪRTI'S CRITICISMS

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The Buddhist philosopher Dharmakīrti, who lived during the seventh century C.E., often criticized the ideas of other schools of Indian philosophy, and was often criticized by other schools. Although his primary target when criticizing the Mīmāṃsā school was clearly Kumārila, it is less clear whom he had in mind when criticizing Jainism. By examining Dharmakīrti's critique of the Jaina philosophy, this essay will attempt to show that the rival Dharmakīrti had in mind was Samantabhadra, a philosopher who lived in southern India, where Dharmakīrti also lived.¹

Dharmakīrti's arguments against the Jaina philosophy can be classified into three categories: epistemological, ontological, and ethical, and his arguments in each of these categories will be examined here.

Dharmakīrti criticizes the Jaina concept of *sarvajña* (omniscience) from an epistemological point of view. At that time, such a criticism of the Jaina ontology was quite new to Buddhist philosophy, but this does not mean that Buddhist critiques of Jaina philosophy began with Dharmakīrti. In Pāli literature, one can find many descriptions of the omniscience of Jaina saints, and Buddhists—including the Buddha himself—deny this omniscience.²

In the third chapter of the *Nyāyabindu*, Dharmakīrti examines inferences for others (*paramārthānumāṇa*). *Sūtra* 123 and others that follow it deal with false examples for syllogisms (*dṛṣṭāntadoṣa*). Dharmakīrti argues that Ṛṣabha, Vardhamāna, and others are false examples for the inference "those who are omniscient or reliable persons have special knowledge in astrology and other fields." They cannot be true examples, he argues, because it is questionable whether they are different from non-omniscient or non-reliable people, and this must be proven. In another example, Dharmakīrti argues that Ṛṣabha is a false example for the inference "One who has no desire does not possess or keep anything to himself."³ Here Ṛṣabha and Vardhamāna are most certainly the first and last *tīrthaṃkaras* (saviors) in the Jaina tradition, and it seems relatively clear that Dharmakīrti discusses the nature of example in inference as a pretext for denying the omniscience or reliability of the Jaina *tīrthaṃkaras*.

In the *Pramāṇavārtika*, Dharmakīrti admits that the Buddha should be seen as the standard for human beings to follow and as a reliable person (*pramāṇa*). But he does not claim that the Buddha is omniscient in the sense of knowing everything in this universe. On the contrary, he suggests that knowledge concerning obscure and trivial facts, such as the exact number of worms that exist, is useless. Moreover, he scornfully points out that if followers of a sect admire a person as being reliable

simply for looking at things from a distance, they should admire vultures for having the same ability.⁴

Although many Jaina philosophers quote these passages, it is not certain whether Dharmakīrti is criticizing the Jaina concept of omniscience in this section of his work. Just the same, in his opinion an omniscient person does not necessarily know everything, and it is not important for an omniscient person to possess supernatural and esoteric knowledge that an ordinary person could not possibly possess.

Because of the Jaina practice of sometimes going nude, which many Buddhists considered a shameful (*āhrika*) activity,⁵ the Jainas were sometimes called “*āhrikas*.” The derogatory name “*āhrika*” refers to Jainas in general and the Digambara sect in particular. In the second chapter of the *Pramāṇavārtika*, Dharmakīrti refers to Jainas as “*āhrikas*” and argues against the Jaina ontology, which in turn argues for the dualistic nature of all things. If all things had two natures, Dharmakīrti argues, one thing could be milk (*dadhi*) and a camel (*uṣṭra*) at the same time, and a person ordered to drink milk would unknowingly rush to a camel because, according to Jaina ontology, there would be no nature that distinguishes milk from a camel.⁶ Since this passage is often quoted and argued against in Jaina philosophical works, it is obvious that many Jaina philosophers took Dharmakīrti’s comments as a challenge to their theory.⁷

Dharmakīrti also criticizes Jainism on ethical grounds. Both Jainas and Buddhists regard liberation (*mokṣa*) as the highest level of attainment in their religious beliefs, but they have different views concerning the means to achieve this liberation. In the *Āgama*, Buddhists criticize the Jaina belief that austerity (*tapas*) is the way that leads to liberation.⁸ Following this tradition, Dharmakīrti also attacks the Jaina belief that austerity is the means to attain liberation.

In chapter 2 of the *Pramāṇavārtika*, Dharmakīrti supports the theory of nonselfness (*nairātmyavāda*), and then goes on to criticize the Jaina idea of austerity. According to Dharmakīrti, “By observing its various manifestations, one can infer the various powers of *karma*, and therefore one cannot destroy *karma* through the pain of austerity. If one argues that the power of *tapas* is different from pain, then it would follow that *karma* could be destroyed by a painless *tapas*, and that *karma* could be destroyed rather painlessly.”⁹

There are, then, two main points to this argument: first, since there are many kinds of *karma*, there must also be many kinds of *tapas* to destroy the *karma*. Secondly, if one supposes that *tapas* and pain are quite different, then the relatively painless actions that Jaina monks and nuns sometimes practiced, such as plucking out one’s hair instead of cutting it with a knife, could destroy all the *karma*.

Since Dharmakīrti does not directly mention the Jainas by name, there is no absolute evidence that he is attacking the Jainas in this section of his work, but it is obvious that he is pointing out the contradiction of viewing *tapas* as the means to reach liberation.

It seems quite likely that Samantabhadra recognized and praised the Jaina *tīrthaṃkaras* as being omniscient, and, indeed, his work *Svayambhūstotra* (“Hymn to the Self-Beings”) was written in praise of them. Ādinatha, the first *tīrthaṃkara*,

sometimes called “Rṣabha,” is given the epithet “*samagravidyātma*,” a title that clearly indicates omniscience, for it means a “person with complete knowledge.”

Strangely enough, however, one cannot find in Samantabhadra’s works any explicit mention of Mahāvīra as being “*sarvajñā*” or “*kevalin*” —words that directly indicate omniscience. Even in the *Yuktyanusāsana*, written in praise of the greatness of the Lord Mahāvīra, the words “*sarvajñā*” and “*kevalin*” do not appear. According to Jainas, all the Jinas or *tīrthaṃkaras* were theoretically omniscient because they had destroyed all the *karma* that obstructed an omniscience innate to *jīvas* or living beings. And since Samantabhadra describes Mahāvīra as having completely destroyed his *karma*, one could argue that Samantabhadra indirectly admitted the omniscient nature of Mahāvīra.¹⁰ According to Samantabhadra, all reliable people are devoid of defects and are all-knowing.¹¹ Moreover, omniscience has no desire and is completely pure.¹²

From the earliest period of their history, Jainas have maintained that the Jaina saviors know everything in the universe. Before Samantabhadra, however, the *tīrthaṃkaras* and their omniscient natures were merely objects of praise.¹³ Jainas would simply proclaim that “Our saviors are great, create miracles, and know everything in the universe.” Samantabhadra appears to be the first Jaina philosopher to try to prove the omniscient nature of the *tīrthaṃkaras* by inferential reasoning.

Comparing the purifying of the soul to the purifying of a metal, he argues: “Just as impure matter inside as well as outside a metal can be removed through the metal’s own action, one can completely remove internal defects and external barriers through one’s own power.”¹⁴ Samantabhadra is trying to argue here that one can become omniscient by destroying one’s *karma* and eliminating its negative influence on the soul. In another passage, he argues: “It is possible to perceive minute things temporally or spatially in the distance because such things can be inferred, and something that is inferred must be perceived, such as fire on a distant mountain, which can be inferred from the base of smoke associated with it.”¹⁵

As mentioned above, Jainas did not attempt to establish the omniscience of the *tīrthaṃkaras* through inference before Samantabhadra. No doubt, various schools of Indian philosophy during Samantabhadra’s day came to view inferential reasoning as a valid method of acquiring knowledge. Furthermore, it is quite likely that Samantabhadra was the first person to argue that only the Jaina saviors could be omniscient and to deny the omniscience of leaders of other schools of Buddhism—including the Buddha.¹⁶ Samantabhadra’s epistemology, or, more strictly speaking, his idea concerning omniscience, can be summed up as follows: the possibility of omniscience can be established by inference, and an omniscient being is not only able to perceive minute things but is reliable and faultless.

To understand Dharmakīrti’s ontological critique of Jainism, it is important to understand the Jaina ideas concerning existence and reality. Traditionally, Jainas maintain that everything that exists has three aspects or modes: rising, ceasing, and continuing.¹⁷ The first two of these can be combined into one category, called “changing,” and the third aspect can also be referred to as “persisting.” Reality, then, has two basic aspects: change and persistence. These two aspects may seem to

contradict each other, but Jaina philosophy views the presence of such contradictory pairs to be part of one reality. This ontology is called “*Anekāntavāda*,” or “the theory of many-sidedness.”

Before Samantabhadra, this doctrine was expressed in its primitive form in the works of Kundakunda, but Samantabhadra also ascribes to the theory. He writes that reality “neither rises nor vanishes because it clearly continues to exist as a universal (*sāmānyāt*). As a particular (*viśeṣāt*), however, it rises and vanishes.”¹⁸ Although Samantabhadra is not the first to espouse this theory, he is the first to give a specific example, milk, to illustrate it.¹⁹ He writes, “One who observes a vow to consume only milk does not eat sour yogurt (*dadhi*). On the other hand, one who is limited to sour yogurt will not drink milk. And one who makes it a rule to avoid milk products would not consume either.”²⁰

It is a well-known tenet of Jainism that the way to liberation consists of three things: proper belief, proper knowledge, and proper conduct.²¹ One could say that proper behavior can lead one to become liberated to attain proper beliefs and proper knowledge. In Jaina doctrine, this means that one must conduct one’s self in such a way as to prevent the absorption of more *karma* and to destroy the *karma* that remains. This is important because *karma* that remains attached to the soul causes the transmigration of the soul (*saṃsāra*). Although there are many ways to destroy *karma*, austerity (*tapas*) is considered to be the best.²² Austerity is not limited to bodily action that may cause pain but also includes mental activities such as meditation (*dhyāna*).²³

When praising the Jaina saviors, Samantabhadra illustrates implicitly and explicitly how they destroy *karma* through *tapas*. For example, he writes that the fire of supreme *tapas*, which is called pure meditation, burns up numerous evils.²⁴ Samantabhadra admits that there must be various kinds of *karma* because the consequences of *karma*, such as sexual desire, are varied.²⁵ He observes that the ignorance of one who is deluded causes one to be bound, but this is not true if one is ignorant but not deluded. On the other hand, if one is not deluded, then one can become liberated with a small amount of knowledge.²⁶ For Samantabhadra, knowledge is another means to achieve liberation—just like austerity. Moreover, if there is no delusion (*moha*) at all, one can destroy one’s entire *karma* with very little knowledge.

Dharmakīrti’s criticism of Jaina doctrine seems aimed at Samantabhadra’s philosophy. To begin with, Dharmakīrti criticizes the ontology of “the theory of many-sidedness” by discussing the unlikely confusion between milk (*dadhi*) and a camel. It is not likely to be a coincidence that he uses the same example, milk, that Samantabhadra used to illustrate the Jaina ontology. Dharmakīrti not only points out the contradiction but also laughs at thinkers whose ontology would lead to such a foolish idea. This should make clear that he knew about the Jaina ontology and its reference to milk. In the history of Jaina ontology, Samantabhadra is the first person that historians know of to explain the “theory of many-sidedness” using the example of milk.

Second, Dharmakīrti uses logic to deny the omniscience of Jaina saviors. He

argues that it is unlikely that saviors could be reliable or without defects. According to Dharmakīrti, it is unimportant for a *sarvajña* to recognize minute things because such an ability is innate even in a lowly vulture. Samantabhadra, on the other hand, stresses that the *tīrthaṃkaras* are reliable and have no defects, and claims that they have knowledge of things that are too small to be recognized by ordinary people. Just as he was the first person to give a specific example to illustrate the Jaina ontology, Samantabhadra is also most likely the first Jaina philosopher to try to prove the omniscience of Jaina saviors through logical reasoning.

Lastly, Dharmakīrti argues against Samantabhadra's idea that both austerity and knowledge are a means to liberation. The Buddhist Dharmakīrti points out the contradiction that this theory would mean that one could become liberated with very little austerity. To refute the Jaina tenet, Dharmakīrti seems intentionally to have misunderstood this theory by confusing the idea of austerity and liberation with the idea of knowledge.

In conclusion, it seems most likely that Dharmakīrti's attack on Jainism is directed toward the philosophy of Samantabhadra. Although this conclusion is opposed to the position of Professor K. B. Pathak,²⁷ the arguments given here seem more convincing than his. Of course, one cannot completely negate the possibility that Dharmakīrti has in mind some other Jaina philosopher. Other possible candidates include Siddhasenadivākara, the author of the *Nyāyāvātāra*, a work that deals exclusively with epistemology, and Mallavadin, who belongs to the Śvetāmbara tradition and who wrote the famous work *Nayacaka*. To rule out such possibilities completely, it would be necessary to examine these works more thoroughly, but as far as current scholarship can determine, there are no topics or examples in these works that Dharmakīrti clearly challenged. It might also be argued that Dharmakīrti had no particular Jaina thinker in mind when he discussed and condemned their tenets. This, too, seems unlikely when one considers that Dharmakīrti's opinions on Jaina doctrine seem directed toward the complex and well-organized work of a single person. All of this should make clear that the most likely candidate as the target of Dharmakīrti's criticisms is Samantabhadra.

Notes

- 1 – For a more detailed account of Samantabhadra's life, see Jugalkiśor Mukhtār's article "Svami Samantabhadra," in *Ratnākaraṇḍakaśrāvācāra* (Bombay: Mānik-candr a Digambar Jaina Granthamālā, 1925).
- 2 – For example, in *Majjhima nikāya*, edited by V. Treckner (London: Pali Text Society, 1979), I.14, the Buddha says that Nigantha Nātaputta proclaims himself as all-knowing and all-seeing.
- 3 – Cf. *Nyāyabindu*, D. Malvaniya, ed. (Patna: Kashiprasad Jaysval Research Institute, 1971), pp. 239–245.

- 4 – See *Pramāṇavārtika*, Swami D. Shastri, ed. (Varanasi: Bauddha Bharati, 1968) I.35.
- 5 – The Buddhist work *Tattvasaṃgraha* uses the word “*Āhrika*” to refer to the Jains.
- 6 – *Pramāṇavārtika* II.182–183 reads: “*sarvobhayarūpatve tadviśeṣanirākṛteḥ. codi-to dadhi khādeti kim uṣṭraṃ nābhidhāvati.*”
- 7 – The *Anekāntajayapaṭākā* by Haribhadra is the most famous of these.
- 8 – See *Samuyutta nikāya*, M. Leon Feer, ed. (London and Boston: Pali Text Society, 1973), vol. 1, p. 103.
- 9 – *Pramāṇavārtika* I.277–280.
- 10 – See *Ratnākaraṇḍakaśrāvācāra* verse 1.
- 11 – Ibid., verse 5 reads: “*āptenotasannadoṣena sarvajñenā . . . bhavitavyam niyogena. . .*” Note that this verse is the same as verse 9 of Siddhasenadivākara’s *Nyāyāvatāra*.
- 12 – See *ibid.*, verse 7, where the word “*sarvajña*” is seen to have the same meaning as “*virāga*,” “*vimala*,” and other synonyms.
- 13 – See A. N. Upadhye’s introduction to Kundakunda’s *Pravacanasāra* (Agas: Shri Raojibhai Chhaganbhai Desai, 1964).
- 14 – Samantabhadra, *Āptamīmāṃsā*. Edited by Gajādharial Jain (Varanasi: Pannalal Jain, 1914). Verse 4 reads: “*doṣāvaraṇayor hānir niśeṣā ’sty atīśayanāt. kvacid yathā svahetubhyo bahirantarmalakṣayaḥ.*”
- 15 – Ibid., verse 5 reads: “*sūkṣāntaritatdūrārthāḥ pratyakṣāḥ kasyacid yathā. anumeyatvato agnyādir iti sarvajñasamsthitiḥ.*”
- 16 – See *ibid.*, verses 6 and 7. In verse 6, Samantabhadra proclaims: “It is only you that has no defect (*nirdoṣa*).” The word *you* here refers to all twenty-four *tīrthaṃkaras*.
- 17 – Umāsvāti, *Tattvārtha Sūtra*. Edited by Mody Deshavlal Premchand (Calcutta: Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1903) verse 29 reads: “*utpādavyayadhrauvyayuktaṃ sat.*”
- 18 – Samantabhadra, *Āptamīmāṃsā*, verse 57 reads: “*na sāmānyātmanodeti na vyoti vyaktam anvayāt. vyaty udeti viśeṣāt. . .*”
- 19 – He makes the same point, using gold as an example, in verse 59. This is suggestive of Kumārila’s discussion concerning nonexistence in the *Ślokavārtika*.
- 20 – Samantabhadra, *Āptamīmāṃsā*, verse 60: “*payovrato na dadhy atti na payo ’tī dadhivrataḥ. agorasavrato nobhe. . .*”
- 21 – Umāsvāti, *Tattvārtha Sūtra*. I.1 reads: “*samyagdarśanajñānacāritrāni mokṣamārgaḥ.*”

- 22 – Ibid., IX.3 reads: “*tapasā nirjarā ca.*” The word *ca* suggests that stoppage (*sambara*) can also be achieved through austerity.
- 23 – Ibid., IX.19–28 distinguish and explain the two kinds of *tapas*.
- 24 – *Svayaṃbhūstotra* Jugalkiśor Mukhtār, ed. (Saharanpur: Vīrasevāmandir, 1951) verse 110 reads: “*yasya ca śukhlaṃ paramatapo ‘gnir dhyānam anataṃ duritam adhākṣīt.*”
- 25 – Samantabhadra, *Āptamīmāṃsā*, verse 99 reads: “*kāmādiṣṭabhavaś citraḥ kar-mabhandhānurūpataḥ.*”
- 26 – Ibid., verse 98 reads: “*ajñānān mohino bandho nājñānād vītamohataḥ. jñā-nastokāc ca mokṣaḥ syād amohān mohino ‘nyathā.*”
- 27 – See K. B. Pathak, “On the Date of Samanatabhadra,” *Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute* 11 (2) (1930): 149–164.