Interpreting the Divyadhvani: On Why the Digambara Sect Is Right about the Nature of the Kevalin

Paul Kabay

Philosophy East and West, Volume 63, Number 2, April 2013, pp. 176-193 (Article)

Published by University of Hawai'i Press

DOI: 10.1353/pew.2013.0020

For additional information about this article
http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/pew/summary/v063/63.2.kabay.html
Paul Kabay
Canberra, Australia
maswolfe@gmail.com

The Digambara/Śvetāmbara Dispute over the Nature of the Kevalin

The most noticeable difference between the Digambara and Śvetāmbara sects of Jainism is expressed by the very names of these ancient traditions. Śvetāmbara means ‘white-clad’ and refers to the fact that the ascetics of this tradition wear white garments. Digambara means ‘sky-’ or ‘space-clad’ and refers to the fact that the ascetics of this tradition go naked, that is, they wear nothing but the sky. This is considered by both sects to be a critical difference and one that justifies the split between the two. There are other differences between them, including the resistance of the Digambara sect to the idea that women can achieve moksha.1 Moreover, the Digambara reject many of the scriptures of the Śvetāmbara as apocryphal. The reason for this has its basis in perhaps the least known difference between the two sects and the difference that is the concern of this essay. Dividing the two is a debate over the nature of the kevalin.2

The ultimate goal for the Jain is to achieve moksha or release from the endless cycle of rebirth. This is, of course, part of the common Indic worldview and is shared with various versions of Hinduism and Buddhism. But the unique contribution of the Jain tradition is its claim that the state of liberation consists of the jīva (the jīva being the true self of a person) residing in a state of blissful isolation and self-sufficiency. Achieving such a state of moksha is rather difficult, and few ever accomplish it. It takes innumerable lives to reach a state where this becomes even remotely plausible. At some stage during the final rebirth prior to liberation, the jīva achieves a state of kevalajñāna or omniscience, and becomes a kevalin. This is what happened, for example, to Mahāvīra, who is recognized as the founder of Jainism by most historians, and who is understood by Jains as the latest of the tīrthaṅkara or ‘ford-makers,’ those who build a ford across the river of saṃsāra. According to the Śvetāmbara sect, after achieving the level of a kevalin, Mahāvīra continued to travel, eat, preach, and everything else that characterizes the life of the average human, up until his death and final release from the cycle of rebirth. But the Digambara sect rejects this account of the life of Mahāvīra. According to the Digambara, upon achieving kevalajñāna Mahāvīra ceased to act in any normal sense of the word. At that moment, while he was sitting motionless in the lotus position, his body spontaneously emitted a sacred sound known as the divyadhvani, which his disciples interpreted as the fundamental truth of Jainism.3 This is the reason why the Digambara reject many of the Śvetāmbara
scriptures—these describe the exploits of the enlightened Mahāvīra. For the Digambara the kevalin does not act, and so nothing could truthfully record the exploits of such a being—such a being will have no exploits.

In what follows I am going to examine some reasons for thinking that the Digambara sect is correct in its account of the nature of the kevalin. I begin by explaining that the kevalin is a trivialist. By ‘trivialist’ I mean someone who believes everything—that is, someone who holds each and every proposition to be true. I then present my main argument for believing the kevalin to be a trivialist. The proposal that the kevalin is a trivialist serves to solve a paradoxical element in Jain epistemology. Specifically, it serves to make sense of the mode of knowledge possessed by the kevalin. Despite the kevalin possessing infallible and total knowledge (that is to say, the kevalin is necessarily omniscient), this knowledge is a priori in nature. I argue that the only way to make sense of this is to postulate that for Jainism everything is true and that the kevalin believes everything. That is to say, Jainism is implicitly committed to trivialism and to the claim that the kevalin is a trivialist.

Lest anyone think that by proposing a trivialist account of Jain epistemology I have only served to spell out the ultimate reductio ad absurdum of the Jain worldview, I include a section in which I show how Jain logic and metaphysics render trivialism more plausible than it would otherwise be. I combine the Jain rejection of a priori logic and the Jain doctrines of relativity to form an argument for trivialism. Along with recent a priori arguments for trivialism, this prevents a trivialist account of the Jain worldview from dissolving into a reductio.

I then draw on a recent argument from Graham Priest that purports to show that the existence of a trivialist is impossible. According to this argument, because the trivialist believes everything to be so, the trivialist is unable to form an intention to bring about a given state of affairs. But because it is not possible for someone to be in such a state, it follows that the trivialist (and so the kevalin) cannot exist. I argue that, far from showing the impossibility of such a thing, the argument clarifies the very nature of a trivialist. Among its other properties, such a being will be in a quiescent state, and it cannot perform any action—it cannot eat, preach, walk around, or whatever. And so it follows that the Digambara tradition, at least in this respect, is right about the nature of the kevalin and the Śvetāmbara tradition is not (although that is not to say that the Digambara sect is right about the various other issues which divide the two).

I should say before proceeding that what I am essentially doing here is offering a new interpretation of Jain metaphysics and soteriology. Specifically, I am claiming that Jainism is implicitly committed to both trivialism and the claim that the kevalin is a trivialist. It should be noted that I am not asserting that any Jain philosopher has ever claimed these things about their own tradition. What I am claiming is that there are certain conceptual commitments in Jain philosophy that require this trivialist interpretation in order for these conceptual commitments to hold together. I am aware that there are other interpretations of Jain metaphysics and that these perhaps have more historical plausibility than my own. I have in mind, for example, the often-made claim that Jain philosophy understands the world in terms of processes rather
than substances or, as is the case with my interpretation, semantic entities such as propositions and the truth-values of these.\textsuperscript{5} My claim, however, is to be understood as a normative claim rather than a descriptive claim. I am suggesting that this is how a Jain should understand their worldview if they are to make sense of their account of reality. I am not saying that this is in fact how Jains have made sense of their view of reality.\textsuperscript{6} Having clarified this, it is time to begin with my main argument for thinking that Jainism should be interpreted along trivialist lines.

*The Paradox of A Priori Infallibility*

In this section I will show that Jain epistemology is implicitly committed to trivialism and that the *kevalin* is properly understood to be a trivialist. How is this so? The *jīva* in its liberated state is omniscient. As such it believes all true propositions—that is to say, its knowledge is complete in the sense that there is no truth that it does not believe. But apparently it knows such truths a priori. In his *Pravacanasāra*, the third-century Digambara philosopher Kundakunda makes it clear that the liberated *jīva* has no causal connections to the reality external to itself.\textsuperscript{7} That, after all, is what it means to be liberated in the Jain system. Liberation is the realization that one is not in any way dependent on external states of affairs. But despite this lack of connection with the external world, says Kundakunda, the *jīva* knows everything about the world—both internal and external to its mental life. The *jīva* “enjoys direct vision of all objects without sensory stages in his perception.”\textsuperscript{8} Apparently “knowledge is the function of the self alone, and the omniscient self can know all objects as it [sic] were reflected in itself, though there is no mutual contact.”\textsuperscript{9} How can this be possible? How can someone know some truth without in some way coming into some contact (in some sense at least) with the objects that make up that truth? Right now the *kevalin* who went by the name of Mahāvīra knows that I am reading this paper. But there is no causal connection between my reading the paper and his believing it. His believing it is achieved by turning inward to his own self. The idea that there must be a causal connection between the knower and the object known in order for this knowledge to be possible is a commonly held assumption in contemporary epistemology. If indeed this assumption is true, then there is no possible way for the liberated *jīva* to have knowledge, because it is not causally related to anything.\textsuperscript{10}

This puzzle is reflected in the rather extreme ascetic techniques prescribed for the achievement of *moksha*. Most of us would be under the impression that achieving omniscience would require us to undertake a considerable amount of activity. We would have to undertake, for example, an awful lot of experimental and observational activity in order to achieve it. Think of all the running around required in order to know the exact number of slime mould cells in existence at any one time (not to mention all the activities we would have to organize in order to fund this research). But according to Jainism, one achieves the state of the *kevalin* by ceasing all activity. One achieves omniscience by doing nothing—by cutting oneself off from external influences. Again, the idea is that perfect knowledge is to be found within oneself. The difficulty of achieving perfect knowledge lies not in going around trying
to find out a vast amount of information. Rather, the difficulty lies in attempting to completely ignore events that are external to us—something that most of us would find impossible. This idea reaches its most confronting manifestation in the Jain practice of santhārā—the practice of bringing on death through fasting. The idea is to achieve that state of complete inaction but in such a way that all connections to the external world are extinguished, including those that involve the destruction of microscopic beings through the digestive processes.

It is important at this point to have a clear picture of the problem at hand. Note that the problematic claim is not this: there is some person K all of whose beliefs are true. This is not particularly problematic from a philosophical standpoint. When faced with the task of explaining how all of K’s beliefs are true, two possible explanations come readily to mind. First, it could be a mere coincidence. K just happens to be very lucky. Second, it could be that K has special contact with all of the objects of his beliefs and this contact results in having true beliefs. The truly problematic nature of Jain epistemology is seen when we realize that both of these possibilities are ruled out by the Jain tradition. The kevalin does not possess true and only true beliefs by mere accident. Rather, it is necessarily the case that the kevalin has true beliefs. Or, to put it another way, the kevalin is infallible—it is impossible for one of his beliefs to fail to be true. The necessity here arises from the fact that the kevalin has followed the prescriptions of the Jain tradition and these prescriptions are a guaranteed way to achieve true beliefs. But the tradition rules out the second of these possibilities as well. Essential to the Jain tradition is the idea that the kevalin is isolated from the rest of reality. Everything that the kevalin knows is known a priori. So the proposition that is problematic is this: there is some K such that all of K’s beliefs are true and this is not because K is lucky, and neither is it because K is in special contact with the objects of his beliefs. How do we make sense of this?

It might help in this regard to think of an analogous problem. Imagine a person W who wins the lottery every week no matter what numbers they choose. As with K’s cognitive states, there are two possible explanations for W’s success. First, W could simply be incredibly lucky. Second, it could be the case that W has some special contact with the winning numbers via an extrasensory perception. But let’s say that both of these are ruled out (after all, both of these possibilities are very implausible—the first more so than the second, I think). What else could explain W’s success? The only other possible explanation is that every possible number is a winning number! This being the case, it does not matter what W chooses each week; she is guaranteed to choose a winning number.

And we can see now how to make sense of the cognitive success of K. We postulate that everything is true, that is, trivialism is true. Thus, every belief is true. And so it follows that it does not matter what K believes. Any belief he has is bound to be true. True beliefs are not that special, because all beliefs are true, and so there is no need to do anything special (such as having special contact with reality) in order to achieve true belief. Neither is there any sense in which K is lucky—the odds have been shifted well and truly in favor of achieving true belief. Again K cannot help but have true beliefs given that every proposition is true. Reality is such that it guarantees
that our acts of cognition match up with it. A trivial reality is epistemically friendly, so to speak.

It might be thought that there is available an alternative metaphysic for accounting for the epistemic friendliness of the Jain account of reality. Rather than construing this in terms of trivialism, we perhaps could construe it in terms of what might be termed perfect ontological flexibility. The idea here is that reality is perfectly flexible (but non-trivial), with the power to modify itself in order to match the beliefs of K. Unfortunately this will not solve the problem at hand, for we would have to account for the success of this reality in managing to work out exactly what the beliefs of K are such that it can transform in the relevant way so as to match up with these beliefs. And it must do this without having any causal connections with K. The only way it could guarantee this (and so rule out blind luck) is by becoming trivial. So it would seem that the only way for reality to be epistemically friendly for K is for it to be trivial.

Jain epistemology is therefore implicitly committed to trivialism—the view that all propositions are true. More importantly, for the task at hand, Jain epistemology is implicitly committed to the view that the kevalin is a trivialist. The kevalin is omniscient and so it is not only the case that all his beliefs are true; he also possesses all true beliefs. And given that trivialism is true, the kevalin believes every proposition. This seems to clear up the more problematic aspects of Jain epistemology. Kunda-kunda insists that one merely look within oneself in order to know the truth. The ‘looking within oneself’ can perhaps be understood as allowing the natural capacity of the jīva to believe things to be unrestrained. In order to know, the jīva does not require anything other than its natural capacity to believe—nothing external is required. The only difficult part in all this is allowing oneself to be uninhibited in belief formation. Forming a true belief is easy—just believe anything at all. Becoming omniscient is hard because you need to be disposed to believing anything at all, and some things are very difficult to believe indeed (try getting yourself to believe that you do not exist, for example, or that you are in love with a donkey, or that 1 = 78). And it is in enabling one to be so disposed that one takes on the arduous ascetic practices of Jainism.11

An Argument for Trivialism from the Jain Doctrines of Relativity

At this point many readers would think that I am being somewhat uncharitable in my analysis of Jain epistemology. Showing that central Jain epistemological commitments entail trivialism might seem to be the ultimate reductio ad absurdum of the Jain worldview. Trivialism is certainly a widely unintuitive view of reality. Most people would probably say that it is obviously ridiculous and that anything that entails it ought to be rejected. If it is indeed true that Jain epistemological commitments entail trivialism, then perhaps we would do well to give up on these commitments. Perhaps the idea that the kevalin is isolated from the rest of reality should be discarded. Perhaps—but given the centrality of this concept in the Jain scheme of liberation, this hardly seems a live option. It would be like Christians giving up on the
doctrine of the resurrection of the dead just to avoid the puzzles concerning personal identity that this doctrine generates.

Fortunately Jain epistemologists do not need to go to such drastic measures. In this section I wish to show that Jainism has the conceptual resources to make good use of its own trivial implications. In particular, it is possible to construct an argument for trivialism based on some important insights in Jain philosophy.\(^{12}\) The Jain tradition very early on seems to have been sensitive to the fact that humans disagree on the nature of reality. But not just any humans—even those who would normally be considered as having trustworthy cognitions seem to disagree. And, unlike other schools of Indian philosophy, Jain philosophers seem to have thought that this disagreement has metaphysical implications. The basic idea here is that the disagreement that is found among wise and enlightened gurus (that is to say, experts in matters of philosophy) is rooted and reflected in what might be called an ontological disagreement. That is to say, reality itself is torn between various contradictory ways of being. Such philosophical disagreement, in other words, shows that reality is perspectival. I think that the Jain tradition might be right about this, and it is my intention here to attempt a construction of an argument for trivialism based on such insights. Before doing so, however, I will provide an outline of the Jain doctrines of relativity for the benefit of those readers who are not familiar with them.

**The Jain Doctrines of Relativity**

The doctrines of relativity are a set of doctrines that have their roots in the teachings of Mahāvīra—the doctrines of *anekāntavāda*, *nayavāda*, and *syādvāda*. As I stated above, the Jain tradition holds such doctrines to be true because of what it sees as an intractable conflict between those with authority in matters philosophical—the gurus. The enlightened beings from various traditions come to very different insights into how reality is structured. The obvious inference for the Jain philosopher is that this is how reality is constituted—at rock bottom reality is conflicted also. I am not going to provide a defense of this line of reasoning here. It was controversial at the time it was first formulated and it is controversial now. My aim is merely to construct an argument for trivialism that the Jain would find convincing, and so I will begin at a point that would be acceptable to Mahāvīra himself.

According to the Jain worldview reality is *anekānta* or ‘non-one-sided.’ The doctrine of *anekāntavāda* states that every entity and property has unlimited aspects. An arbitrary object and its properties are *anekānta*, which means something like multifaceted or manifoldedness or non-one-sided. But, as Matilal points out, “Manifoldedness in this context is to be understood to include mutually contradictory properties.”\(^{13}\) The main reason why this is thought to be so by Jain philosophers is that it is the only way to make sense of the obvious empirical observation that reality is constituted by the opposites of unity and diversity, and stability and change. Jain philosophical literature is replete with arguments to show that each of these cannot be reduced to the other, but that they must be taken as equally basic to the nature of reality.\(^ {14}\)

According to Jain metaphysics, in order to express true statements about a given object and a given property, it is necessary to make use of the semantic doctrine of
Take any arbitrary object—a desk, say—and any arbitrary property—the color red, for example. Given the truth of the doctrine of syādvāda, if one were to say of the desk that it is true that it is red, then one would only be very partially correct. There is much more truth about the desk and its color than is contained in that single claim. The Jain consensus is that one has to make seven different claims to capture the full truth about the desk, each one prefaced by the Sanskrit phrase syāt:

- Syāt the desk is red
- Syāt the desk is not red
- Syāt the desk is red and not red
- Syāt the desk is inexpressible
- Syāt the desk is red and inexpressible
- Syāt the desk is not red and inexpressible
- Syāt the desk is red and not red and inexpressible

Most of us would be quite comfortable with the idea that the desk is colored either red or some other color. But few of us would be familiar with the claim that the color of the desk is both red and not red, or that the color of the desk is inexpressible. The former of these is supposed to capture those states of affairs in which the color of the desk is some combination of red and some other color—one part being red and another blue, say, or the color being red at some time and being some other color at another. The latter of these (that the color of the desk is inexpressible) captures the state of affairs in which the desk is simultaneously both red and not red all over. That is to say, this a situation in which the color of the desk shows a contradictory state of affairs. Jainism is therefore a form of dialetheism (the view of that some contradictions are true). It is also important to emphasize that Jain philosophers have been consistent in their insistence that everything in reality is anekānta, and so the doctrine of syādvāda applies to everything. The doctrine therefore applies to everything about the desk, including its existence. There are aspects to the desk that make it such that the desk exists, that the desk does not exist, and so on. The doctrine also applies to every predicate. As such, even propositions and their truth-values are anekāntavāda. Any given proposition is true, not true, partly true and partly not true, and fully true and not true simultaneously and so on.

Colloquially speaking the Sanskrit phrase syāt means ‘maybe.’ But the meaning of this particle in Jain logic is something like ‘in this context but there is more’ or ‘from a particular perspective and not another perspective.’ The idea is that a statement about the desk is made so by a particular way that the desk is—but it is not the only way. It indicates that the claim is only a partial truth. This links up with the epistemological correlate of the doctrine of syādvāda, namely the doctrine of nayavāda.15 According to this doctrine one’s knowledge of the world is perspectival. What you know is always so from a particular perspective. If I know that the desk is red, this is so from the perspective of that particular aspect of the desk. The various statements about the desk can be understood as being true from a particular naya or perspective. The syāt particle of the doctrine of syādvāda is to be understood as correlating with a naya of the doctrine of nayavāda.
It is important to understand the doctrine of nayavāda correctly. It is common to take it as being akin to some sort of Protagorean relativism. The idea here is that it is the fact that it is a certain perspective that makes it true, where the perspective is purely a mental or subjective phenomenon. But it is a mistake to understand Jainism in general and the doctrine of nayavāda specifically in this way. Jainism is well known for its realist metaphysics and epistemology. For the Jain there is a world independent of our beliefs, and it is this world that endows our beliefs and propositions with a truth-value of one sort or another. The doctrine of nayavāda must be understood in light of this realism. It is not the perspective or view in which a proposition is being asserted that makes the proposition true, if ‘perspective’ is meant in a subjective sense. Rather, it is some aspect of a reality that makes the proposition true. That means that we are to understand a naya or perspective as being anchored in some aspect of reality. Or, to put it another way, it is not my perspective that makes it true, but the perspective of the particular aspect of reality that makes it so. The point is put well by Satkari Mookerjee: “The differences in predication are not due to our subjective contemplation from different angles of vision, but are founded upon objectively real attributes.”

A Jain Argument for Trivialism
How exactly do these doctrines of relativity help in the construction of an argument for trivialism? The argument begins with the claim that there is a perspective or naya in which every proposition is true, that is, a naya in which trivialism is true. Let’s call this trivial naya nt. Why think that there is an nt? Well, according to the doctrine of anekāntavāda, everything, including every proposition, is multifaceted. In terms of the doctrine of syādvāda, every proposition will have a truth-value of true in some perspective or naya—even those propositions, such as ∀pTp, that are contradictory. Hence, there is a trivial perspective, nt. Now, I must emphasize that this does not amount to trivialism. Trivialism is the claim that ∀pTp is true simpliciter. The initial premise in the argument claims that ∀pTp is true in nt. While ‘∀pTp is true simpliciter’ entails that ‘∀pTp is true in nt’, the converse is not so (or at least not obviously so—conceptual analysis will reveal that it does in fact hold, as I will now show).

Now, if you reflect on the nature of nt for a moment it will become apparent to you that for any naya, that naya will exist or obtain in nt. This follows from the definition of nt—it is trivial, that is, everything obtains within it, and so any given naya will obtain within it. In fact, for any naya we can understand it to be a proper part of nt, because that naya and some more (in fact everything else) exists within nt. Any and every naya is a proper part of a wider trivial reality.

The next step of the argument is to understand the sense in which a given naya is a proper part of nt. There is no absolute sense in which the given naya is isolated from the wider makeup of nt. That is to say, the rest of nt is in an important sense accessible from a given naya. It is illuminating in this regard to compare naya to possible worlds as they are characterized in modal realism (the view that possible worlds are concrete objects). There is an important sense in which the possible worlds of modal realism are in or a proper part of a wider logical space. But for objects within a
possible world, the rest of logical space is inaccessible. This is not so for naya located within \( n \). The Jain tradition has always insisted that although the fact that the perspectival way we see reality is indeed anchored in reality, it is nevertheless partial and incomplete, and it is something that is ideally transcended. Kundakunda drew a distinction between the perspectives of vyuvahāyanaya and niścayanaya.\(^{18}\) The former of these is the cognitive perspective of average folk like you and me—it is partial and fragmented at best. The latter is the perspective of the liberated kevalin and it is the integration of all the partial perspectives of the rest of us. Of course, the goal of the Jain darsana is for a person to escape from the perspective of vyuvahāyanaya and achieve the perspective of niścayanaya.

What all this entails is that the wider and comprehensive set of truths of \( n \), are accessible in a broad metaphysical sense from any given naya—even if those who are locked within a particular naya, due to their own karmic limitations, find it impossible in a practical sense to access them. And what all this entails is that we can reason from the premise that a given naya is located within or is a proper part of \( n \), to the conclusion that trivialism is true in that naya. This is quite unlike the possible worlds of modal realism. Although a given possible world is located in a wider logical space, we cannot say that all these extra truths hold in that possible world. Such truths are simply not accessible in the relevant sense due to the isolation of these worlds from one another. There is no such isolation for the various naya that constitute reality according to Jainism.

But if trivialism is true for every naya, then trivialism is true simpliciter. The simple fact that trivialism holds universally with respect to naya is the very definition of absolute truth or truth simpliciter—it means truth everywhere or universal truth. To put it succinctly, conceptual analysis reveals that ‘trivialism is true from some perspective’ entails that ‘trivialism is true simpliciter.’ This ends my argument for claiming that both trivialism and the claim that the kevalin is a trivialist are implicit in Jain philosophical commitments. Before showing how this supports the Digambara claim that the kevalin cannot act, I wish to look briefly at an important objection to the argument I have constructed.

**Jain Logic and Non-Apriorism**

Many would be inclined to reject the preceding argument as being misguided. In constructing such an argument I have accepted the Humean maxim that we should apportion our belief according to the evidence. But most logicians would reject such a maxim.\(^{19}\) According to this view, which I will refer to as apriorism, there are some beliefs that are known with such certainty that it is inappropriate to support them using evidence and argument, and there are some beliefs that are so obviously absurd that we are entitled to ignore any evidence cited in their favor. If apriorism is correct then we know some propositions a priori, and these are the foundations of all reasoning. Some common examples of such a priori and foundational principles are the Law of Non-Contradiction, the Law of Non-Triviality (LNT), and the Law of Excluded Middle.
According to apriorism the LNT is the most fundamental logical law there is. It is known with absolute certainty by a priori means—that is to say, it is obviously true. It requires no argument or evidence, and, indeed, the citing of such evidence or constructing such an argument would be considered inappropriate as it would be based on principles that are known with less certainty than the LNT. According to this very popular view, any evidence or arguments for trivialism are misguided and known to be fallacious even without attempting to interact with them. No amount of evidence can get trivialism off the ground as a worldview because of the fact that we know LNT with absolute certainty by a priori means.

Whatever the popularity of this logical apriorism in general, it is not a view that I need to have any concern for in my attempts to justify trivialism using Jain metaphysics. This is because Jain philosophers have always been committed to what might be referred to as non-apriorism in their philosophy. We can understand non-apriorism to be the view that “it is possible to revise logical principles (or logical rules) on the basis of extra-logical considerations—which include empirical considerations.” Mookerjee describes the Jain position this way:

Even the primal attribute of existence, which is the foundational element of the nature of an entity, is not capable of being ascertained by a priori logical considerations. Our knowledge of things and of their relations starts from experience, and reason can at best serve to organize the experienced data and build a system of thought, the elements of which together with their relations, must be ultimately derived from this fundamental source of knowledge, in other words, from direct acquaintance furnished by observation. The Jaina does not draw a line of distinction between internal and external sources of knowledge as far as their logical value is concerned. He refuses to put a premium [on] internal intuition.

This attitude comes out most strongly in the Jain response to contradiction. While the Buddhist and Hindu opponents of the Jains were of the opinion that it was an a priori truth that it is impossible for a proposition and its negation to be true or for contrary properties to be instantiated in the same entity at the same time (that is to say, they accepted the Law of Non-Contradiction to be an a priori truth, and so it has precedence over other considerations), the Jain philosopher has always rejected this. For the opponent of the Jain it is just plain obvious that contrary or contradictory properties are mutually exclusive or in opposition to one another. For the Jain metaphysician, however, nothing, not even the so-called laws of logic, has this privileged a priori character. Reality is the final arbiter on what is or is not possible. Only through a combination of metaphysical reasoning and empirical observation (in addition, perhaps, to conceptual analysis) can it be determined if being and nonbeing, for example, are such that they are mutually exclusive or in opposition to one another. Indeed, Jain metaphysicians are infamous in the Indic tradition for their various arguments for not only the compatibility of contradictory attributes such as being and nonbeing, but also the actual instantiation in the same entity at the same time—and that this is supported by our experience of reality.

This a posteriori approach to logic and philosophy ideally should transfer across to the Jain philosopher’s attitude toward trivialism. Assuming that he is committed to
this view of logic, the opponent of trivialism is not entitled to rest his case with the claim that it is intuitively obvious that trivialism should be rejected. Rather, he must take seriously any arguments that have been proposed in defense of trivialism and put forward arguments to show that a trivial world does not as a matter of fact obtain. As of now this kind of work has not been done nearly thoroughly enough. There have been attempts to articulate the case for trivialism and show that it is not nearly as problematic as its opponents make it out to be—the point being that so long as such arguments are available and so long as one rejects the claim that the LNT is logically privileged, one has to take seriously the possibility that trivialism is true.

In the previous section I presented what is essentially an a posteriori argument in favor of trivialism. It is a posteriori because, despite containing steps that are conceptual and a priori in nature, it is ultimately based on empirical premises—specifically the claim that valid cognitions seem to be in conflict with one another. Most importantly, these premises are accepted by the Jain tradition and so show that a trivialist interpretation of Jain metaphysics is charitable.

Priest on the Nature of the Trivialist

How does establishing that the kevalin is a trivialist help us to establish who is right about the nature of the kevalin? In order to find an answer to this problem I am going to turn to an argument that was recently formulated to show that there is no such thing as a trivialist. If we take this argument from Graham Priest at face value, then we would be compelled to conclude that there is no such thing as a kevalin. There are two parts to Priest’s argument. In the first part he attempts to establish that it is impossible for someone who believes everything, that is, the trivialist, to act. In the second part he attempts to show that someone who cannot act cannot be conscious and hence, insofar as a person is a conscious entity, cannot exist. I will show that while the first part of Priest’s argument is insightful and arguably sound, the second part fails to be anything close to convincing and so can be safely ignored. The value of Priest’s argument, then, is that it clarifies for us the nature of the trivialist, and as such it clarifies the nature of the kevalin.

Let’s take a look at part one of the argument. Why is it impossible for the trivialist to act? The reason cited by Priest is this:

One cannot intend to act in such a way as to bring about some state of affairs, s, if one believes s already to hold. Conversely, if one acts with the purpose of bringing s about, one cannot believe that s already obtains.

And of course it follows that because the trivialist believes that every state of affairs obtains, he cannot act to bring about anything at all. Priest does not actually give a reason for why he thinks it is impossible to intend to act to bring about s if one already believes that s obtains. It does seem to be an intuitive principle, however. Think of someone who has just finished drinking a glass of water, and who says to you “I intend to drink this very glass of water” (indicating the very glass that they have already drunk). We would conclude that they did not understand the meaning of the
word ‘intend.’ Whatever is going on inside their mind, it is not the forming of an intention. Intentions are prior, both logically and temporally (although perhaps they are simultaneous in this regard), to the completion of the act.

The second part of the argument is far less persuasive, and indeed seems to me to be fallacious. According to Priest, having to choose is phenomenologically unavoidable for a person.\(^{26}\) This is because a person is a conscious being. But because choosing entails having a purpose to bring about some state of affairs, it follows that a conscious being necessarily has intentions and purposes, and so it cannot be the case that anyone is a trivialist. And if the \textit{kevalin} is a trivialist, there cannot be such a thing as a \textit{kevalin} either. Priest provides the rudiments of an argument for this claim. The argument, as far as I can make out, goes something like this. Either a person chooses to do something or a person chooses to do nothing. But either way she’s choosing: “Even if they decide to ‘do nothing’ they have still chosen a course of action.”\(^{27}\) So choosing is unavoidable.

I do not think that it is too difficult to see the mistake in this line of reasoning. Its initial premise is certainly false. The claim ‘either a person chooses to do something or a person chooses to do nothing’ is a false dichotomy. There is clearly another possibility: that a person fails to choose at all. What I mean here is not that a person is choosing to do nothing at all but that there is no choosing, period. And it is Priest himself who spells out one set of conditions under which such a thing is possible—namely in the event that a person believes everything. By believing everything, a person loses the capacity to choose. In a sense the second part of Priest’s argument is a straw man. It is not as if the trivialist chooses to do nothing. Rather, the trivialist just has no capacity to choose at all, whether that be choosing to do something or choosing to do nothing.

What we have, then, is not an argument against the possibility of being a trivialist, but rather an argument that demonstrates the nature of a trivialist.\(^{28}\) The trivialist is in a quiescent state. The trivialist believes everything and so cannot choose or form intentions or purposes and so cannot act. Because the \textit{kevalin} is a trivialist, it follows that the \textit{kevalin} cannot choose or form intentions and purposes, and so cannot act. But then it must be that the Digambara sect is correct about the nature of the \textit{kevalin} and the Śvetāmbara sect is wrong. Mahāvīra did not continue to eat and walk and preach and so on after his achievement of \textit{kevalajñāna}. And of course it also follows that those scriptures of the Śvetāmbara cannon that speak of Mahāvīra’s exploits after his attainment of \textit{kevalajñāna} are, as the Digambara have always claimed, apocryphal.

What, Then, Is the Divyadhvani?

This still leaves us with the puzzle of what exactly was the \textit{divyadhvani}—the sacred sound emitted by Mahāvīra’s body upon his achievement of \textit{kevalajñāna}? As a conclusion to this essay I would like to offer my own suggestion. But before doing so it would be appropriate to spell out what is said in the Digambara tradition about the \textit{divyadhvani}. It should be noted that the Digambara tradition, unlike the Śvetāmbara,
strictly speaking does not have any canonical scriptures. It is the view of this tradition that the canon did exist at some stage but was lost. However, there are a number of texts that are very important to the Digambara tradition (what could be referred to as a secondary canon), and it is from these that we can glean some idea as to what the *divyadhvani* is.

According to various sources, while sitting motionless in a lotus meditative position, Mahāvīra’s body emitted the *divyadhvani* (literally divine or miraculous sound). What did it sound like, phenomenologically speaking? According to the tradition it was a monotone sound like the sacred syllable, *om*. In addition, “the *divyadhvani* is … sometimes described as containing within itself all tongues.” Moreover, it is usually thought to have required interpretation from Mahāvīra’s closest disciples—that is to say, it is not something that just anyone could have found intelligible. How do we make sense of this: a monotone, emitted from the body (i.e., it is not literally spoken), requiring interpretation by experts, and containing all the teachings of Jainism in all languages. What could such a thing be?

I would like to suggest that the *divyadhvani* is in fact the ‘sound’ of silence. This seems to cohere well with the characteristics listed above, so long as some of them are understood metaphorically. It has been convincingly argued by Sorenson that silence has a phenomenological quality to it and so is something that can be ‘heard’ in an analogous sense in which a sound can be heard—silence is the phenomenological feel of the absence of sound. Moreover, it seems apt to describe such a ‘sound’ as monotone. And the significance of such a ‘sound’ could only be understood by those who were most intimate with the life and teachings of Mahāvīra—to anyone else standing there at the time it would have meant nothing. There is also a sense in which it expresses all the languages, as silence plays a part in all languages. And silence is not something that can be spoken—rather it seems fitting to say it is ‘emitted by the body.’ Finally, silence is the one thing that a trivialist can actually do—it is in a sense the sound of inaction. As such, this interpretation of the sacred sound is consistent with the conclusions drawn here. Mahāvīra therefore sat in silence, and the significance of this silence was communicated via the wisdom of his followers.

Notes

I would like to thank Jeff Long for his support and encouragement. His own work on Jainism has been a real inspiration to me. I would also like to thank an anonymous referee for this journal. His/her feedback made this article far better than it would otherwise have been.

1 – That women cannot achieve liberation is linked to the Digambara practice of monastic nudity. Because women are barred from practicing nudity, they are unable to achieve *moksha*. Also of importance here is the fact that women generate karma as a result of the destruction of microorganisms via the process of

2 – For a general introduction to Jainism and its history and practices see Dundas, *The Jains*. Chap. 2 provides an overview of the Digambara and Śvetāmbara sects. For a more philosophically oriented introduction to Jainism see Long, *Jainism*.


4 – A trivalist is someone who believes every proposition to be true, so trivialism is the view or claim that all propositions are true, that is, \( \forall p \top p \). The term ‘trivialism’ seems to have originated with Graham Priest—although I’m not sure of the first instance in which he makes use of the word (certainly he uses it in *Doubt Truth to Be a Liar*). The point of the term is to indicate that the derivation of any claim from \( \forall p \top p \) is a trivial matter; that is, it can be done in a single step.

5 – I thank an anonymous referee for helping me to see that there are a variety of ways of interpreting Jain metaphysics, with the process (as opposed to the substance and semantic interpretations) being one of the most common.

6 – A number of things should be kept in mind at this point. First, the various ways of interpreting Jain metaphysics (whether it is in terms of process or substance or semantic entities or what not) are not necessarily incompatible with one another. Second, Jainism is a rich and varied philosophical tradition with a very long history. It is probable that there is more than one approach to metaphysics present within it. This is not unlike ancient Greek philosophy, which at the very least possessed both a substance (Aristotle) and a process (Heraclitus) approach. Third, Jainism is a living tradition that continues to evolve. My trivalist interpretation can be seen as part of this ongoing development.


8 – Ibid., p. 99.

9 – Ibid.

10 – This objection is central to critiques of Platonism in mathematics. According to Platonism, mathematical objects are causally inert. But if knowledge of something requires causal interaction, then mathematical knowledge would be impossible given Platonism. The solution that I suggest below to the Jain epistemological problem has something in common with a recent solution to the Platonic problem. The solution explored in Balaguer, *Platonism and Anti-Platonism*, chaps. 3–4, posits a plenitudinous Platonism in order to solve the problem: all mathematical objects exist; which mathematical statements are true?—All consistent statements! All one has to do is form a consistent statement in order to form a true one.
11 – This analysis also enables Jains to undercut a central premise in the objections made by philosophers of the pūrvamīmāṃsā tradition to the claim that the tīrthaṅkara are infallible. According to thinkers such as Kumārila, it is not possible for a person to be infallible, simply because it is possible for individual persons to make mistakes. This is why Kumārila and others of the pūrvamīmāṃsā tradition can consistently ascribe infallibility to the Veda—it has no author and so no author that could be mistaken (see Qvarnstrom, “The Jain-Mīmāṃsā Debate on Omniscience”). Obviously, though, this inference is invalid. The errorless nature of the Veda does not follow from its being authorless. All that follows is that if it is with error, then this error has no beginning. After all, it is quite conceivable that the Veda is eternally mistaken simply by having always failed to correspond with reality.

12 – Could the testimony of the kevalin be used as evidence for the claim that reality is trivial—that is, could we construct an argument from revelation in this regard? Yes, the Śvetāmbara philosopher could make use of this kind of argument from revelation. But such an argument is not available for the Digambara philosopher. Recall that according to this tradition the kevalin cannot act and so a fortiori cannot perform the act of communication. But it might be possible for the Digambara philosopher to make use of a less direct form of argument given the ‘behavior’ of the kevalin: upon observing that the kevalin cannot act it might be inferred that he is a trivialist, and from this and the claim that he is omniscient it can be inferred that reality is trivial.

13 – Matilal, The Character of Logic in India, p. 9.

14 – For an example of such an argument in an important primary text see chap. 24 of Sri Mallisenasuri, Syādvādamanjari (pp. 142–143 of the Thomas translation). The same passage can be found on pp. 266–267 of Radhakrishnan and Moore, A Source Book in Indian Philosophy. Padmarajiah, A Comparative Study of the Jaina Theories is a good introductory discussion of such analysis. See also Mookerjee, The Jaina Philosophy.

15 – Long, Jainism, p. 143.

16 – Mookerjee, The Jaina Philosophy, p. 98. There is more to the doctrine of nayavāda than I have said here, but this is all that is required for the purposes at hand. I have said nothing, for example, about the various attempts to systematically classify the various perspectives under a sevenfold system. For an interesting analysis of this system see Ganeri, Philosophy in Classical India, pp. 134–137.

17 – See, e.g., Lewis, On the Plurality of Worlds.


19 – Perhaps the earliest known example in the West is Aristotle—see, e.g., Metaphysics, Book Gamma (4).
20 – For one example that is typical of the dismissive attitude toward trivialism see Kroon, “Realism and Dialetheism,” 246.


23 – See, e.g., Mookerjee, The Jaina Philosophy, pp. 97–99 (for a summary of the argument that synthetic wholes instantiate contradictory properties). Padmarajiah, A Comparative Study of the Jaina Theories, pp. 136–245, is a succinct discussion of the Jain position and its response to various objections. For an example in the primary literature see Mallisenasuri, Syādvādamanjari, pp. 142–144 of the Thomas translation. One must be cautious, though, in reading both the secondary and primary literature on this issue. There is not always a standard use of terminology. Often it is explicitly stated that Jains deny the existence or truth of contradictions. But what is clearly meant by this is that they deny that a given pair of contradictories or contraries is mutually exclusive or repelling. The Jain position seems to be that being and nonbeing (to take one example), despite being contraries or contradictories of one another, are not mutually exclusive. They can and are instantiated in such a way that a proposition and its negation can both be true. That Jain philosophers advocate dialetheism is certainly the view espoused in Matilal, The Character of Logic in India, pp. 137–138 (although what I refer to as dialetheism Matilal, misleadingly I think, refers to as paraconsistent logic).


25 – Ibid., p. 69.

26 – Ibid., p. 70.

27 – Ibid.

28 – There is an important side issue here about how to characterize the nature of the trivialist (thanks to an anonymous referee for pointing this out). Throughout this section I have referred to the trivialist as a person. But this might not be the best way to describe the trivialist. This is partly an issue of definition, but it might very well be the case that the normal notion of person entails that a person has a perspectival view of reality. If that is indeed the case, then whatever else the trivialist is, he is not a person. On this understanding the kevalin has transcended personhood. The trivialist has an all-encompassing view of reality that integrates all other perspectives. By referring to such a being as a person I am merely pointing out that it is conscious and that this consciousness is all encompassing—it is aware of all things in a single act of cognition.

29 – Glasenapp, Jainism, pp. 111, 121–123.


33 – Long, Jainism, p. 196.

References


Kroon, F. “Realism and Dialetheism.” In Graham Priest et al., The Law of Non-Contradiction, pp. 245–263.


