Article

Anekāntavāda and Dialogic Identity Construction

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Abstract: While strong religious identity is often associated with violence, Jainism, one of the world's oldest practiced religions, is often regarded as one of the most peaceful religions and has nevertheless persisted through history. In this article, I am arguing that one of the reasons for this persistence is the community's strategy of dialogic identity construction. The teaching of *anekāntavāda* allows Jainas to both engage with other views constructively and to maintain a coherent sense of self. The article presents an overview of this mechanism in different contexts from the debates of classical Indian philosophy to contemporary associations of *anekāntavāda* with science. Central to the argument is the observation that *anekāntavāda* is in all these contexts used to stabilize Jaina identity, and that *anekāntavāda* should therefore not be interpreted as a form of relativism.

Keywords: Jainism; *anekāntavāda*; identity; Indian philosophy; Indian logic

1. Introduction: Religious Identity and the Dialogic Uses of *Anekāntavāda*

Within the debate on the role of religion in public life, strong religious identity is often and controversially discussed within the context of violent extremism.[1] Strong religion, as in the title of a book by Gabriel A. Almond, R. Scott Appleby and Emmanuel Sivan (Almond et al. 2003), is sometimes just another word for fundamentalism, with all its "negative connotations" (Ter Haar 2003, p. 3).

Jainism is often regarded as one of the oldest and most peaceful religions (Fohr 2015, p. 1). Although historical reality is always more complex, as for example the biography of King Kharavela shows (Singh 2017, p. 252ff), the study of Jainism and its practices of self-representation and identity formation can offer an interesting counter-example to the usual association of strong or passionate religious identity with violence. My argument is that the Jaina teaching of *anekāntavāda* has allowed Jainas to hold an inherently dialogic identity that is strong enough to unify the community through time and allow for the persistence of Jainism, yet open enough to include the perspectives of the other as well, thus diffusing potential causes for conflict.[2] Christopher Chapple (1993) has framed this as 'flexible fundamentalism', and Olle Qvarnström (1998) has, based on his work on Hemacandra, identified "Stability and Adaptability" as a "Jain Strategy for Survival and Growth".

In this paper, I am going to discuss the various dialogic uses of *anekāntavāda*, from classical Indian philosophy to the colonial period to contemporary global approaches. My argument will be that *anekāntavāda* allows Jainas to open up to other discourses from complex philosophy to religious tolerance to empirical science, while also allowing them to strengthen their own standpoint, which remains in its fundamentals unchanged and non-negotiable. Thus, Jainism fits the criteria of a self-confident strong religion that claims superiority over alternative systems. At the same time, the

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[1] For some key voices in the debate, see, for example (Juergensmeyer 1993; Appleby 2000; Cavanaugh 2009).

[2] The article draws on ideas developed in my book *Jain Approaches to Plurality: Identity as Dialogue* (2017). I have discussed these ideas also in two short pieces "Jain Approaches to Religious Plurality" (Barbato 2018) and "Different Interpretations of *Anekāntavāda*" (Barbato 2019).

identity of many Jainas is dialogic in so far as they not only reject violence unconditionally but define themselves explicitly through their openness to the many perspectives any matter truly has and which might be brought in by conversation partners who hold quite different world views. My claim is that part of the function of *anekāntavāda* lies in dialogic identity construction, which differs from relativism defined as "the view that truth and falsity, right and wrong [...] are products of differing conventions and frameworks of assessment and that their authority is confined to the context giving rise to them" (Baghramian and Carter 2019), as Jainas can hold unconditional truth claims about a normative reality that can be defended authoritatively.

2. What is *Anekāntavāda*?

Anekāntavāda literally means the teaching of non-one-sidedness. It can also be translated as the Jaina teaching of plurality, because it offers a way of dealing with both ontological and epistemological plurality. Jainism holds that there is an infinite number of attributes to any given object, and based on this assumption *anekāntavāda* means most fundamentally that whenever we observe a thing, we only grasp a limited amount of its attributes, missing others that would be equally deserving of attention. Similarly, if we describe an object, we only express a very limited amount of the whole truth that is out there. Other utterances, some of which may at first glance appear to go against our own, may be equally justified when the full picture is taken into consideration. The famous story of the blind men and the elephant is the favorite tale to illustrate the argument. This "full picture" is not only an abstract ideal for the followers of Jainism. Rather, omniscience is taken as the natural state of the soul, which can be achieved again when all karmic particles, which are imagined quite literally as matter and dirt, have been cleansed of the soul. This has already been achieved by the omniscient who are revered as role models by the Jainas.[3]

There are three other terms that have to be known in connection with *anekāntavāda*. These are *syādvāda*, *nayavāda*, and *saptabhaṅgī*. *Syādvāda* is the teaching that in an ideal situation, speakers would insert the particle *syāt* into every utterance. *Syāt* has in this context to be translated not as "maybe" but as "from one perspective" and serves as a reminder that an infinite number of other equally valid perspectives are not captured in that particular utterance.[4] Sometimes, *syādvāda* is also used synonymously with *anekāntavāda*, the *saptabhaṅgī* or—showing the central role of this teaching—the entire system of Jaina thought (Padmarajiah 2004, p. 334).

Nayavāda is the teaching of the different viewpoints. It offers a set of different perspectives that can be taken with regard to any subject, depending on what elements the observer focuses on. Typically, seven viewpoints are presented when explaining *nayavāda*, but this list is not exhaustive. Given the infinite number of properties every object possesses, one could also say that there is an infinite number of viewpoints from which the object can be observed and discussed. For example, the collective view point (*saṅgrahanaya*) refers to the general aspect, such as: This is a human being. The practical viewpoint (*vyavahāranaya*) on the other hand concentrates on the specific particularities, such as: This is my grandmother.[5] In the right circumstances each *naya* is a legitimate way of viewing the world, as long as it is remembered that they just provide a view from a particular angle, not a full image of reality.

The *saptabhaṅgī* is typically translated as sevenfold predication. It consists of all seven logically possible combinations of the affirmation, negation, and inexpressibility. The last element is the simultaneous grasping of affirmation and negation in their appropriate context, for which language does not suffice. It is therefore termed "inexpressible". In the case of considering the sweetness of a mango, the first three combinations would be: (1) in some way it is sweet (now), (2) in some way it is not sweet (before ripening), (3) in some way it is sweet and not sweet (considering successively

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[3] For the Jaina concept of omniscience see Paul Dundas (1992, pp. 74–77).
[4] For a short introduction to *syādvāda*, see for example Jeffery Long (2009, pp. 146–50). On the meaning of 'syāt' see also B.K. Matilal (1981, p. 52f).
[5] The seven viewpoints are explained, for example, by Sagarmal Jain (2006, pp. 96–100).

current sweetness in the ripe mango and previous lack of sweetness in the unripe mango), (4) in some way it is inexpressible (considering simultaneously current sweetness and previous lack of sweetness). The remaining three combinations are (5) in some way it is sweet and inexpressible, (6) in some way it is not sweet and inexpressible, and (7) in some way it is sweet and not sweet and inexpressible.[6] Beyond making a philosophical point about the many-sidedness of reality and the complexity that would be involved in perceiving and expressing reality adequately, this model reproduces as closely as is possible for ordinary human beings the universal insight of the omniscient, who have access to all knowledge simultaneously (Barbato 2017, p. 103ff).

3. The Many Interpretations of *Anekāntavāda*

While the preceding section can be taken as a presentation of *anekāntavāda* in a nutshell, anyone who starts reading up or talking to Jainas on *anekāntavāda* will notice that it seems to mean different things to different people. In particular, there is an observable difference between what I am calling the classical understanding of *anekāntavāda*, when *anekāntavāda* was discussed in an inner-Indian context of different philosophical schools, and the modern understanding, which has become prominent since the 19th century, when the discourse also came to engage a Western and global audience (Barbato 2017, p. 1ff). The shift is largely one from philosophical theorizing to practical application, and I will discuss this in more detail in the following sections. For now, the important point is that the presentation and application of *anekāntavāda* changed as the context and dialogue partners changed. Through its long history, *anekāntavāda* was repeatedly adapted to facilitate theoretical and practical approaches for engaging peacefully with other discourses. This dialogic outlook, I am arguing, has helped the Jaina community to both preserve and adapt its identity across time.

This is connected to another potential dichotomy: the insistence on one's own established position versus the openness to the view of others. As mentioned above, Christopher Chapple (1993) has sought to capture this in his description of Jainism as a form of "flexible fundamentalism". He uses the term "fundamentalism" because throughout its history Jainism's fundamental teachings on ethics and cosmology have remained largely the same. Chapple's category does not convey the typically negative connotation of the term "fundamentalism", although the oxymoronic sound of "flexible fundamentalism" is probably intended: an adherence to fundamental and unnegotiable principles that "is tempered by a fervent concern that the points of view held by others not be dismissed but rather that they be explored, understood, and then contextualized in the light of Jaina doctrine" (Chapple 1993, p. 23).

This negotiation between continuity and change is one of the great challenges all religious communities experience in modernity. As Helen Waterhouse (2001, p. 118) has pointed out, there is often a fine line to tread between conservation and adaptation:

"In order for the symbolic encodements of a religion to be meaningful, they must transmit meaning in ways that are both authentic and accessible. There is little value in thoroughly traditional expressions of religious truths that people are unable to access or understand. Conversely, there is no point in adapting religious teachings in order that people can understand them, if thereby they are changed to such a degree that they are no longer authentic, or, indeed, true within the terms of that tradition. This is especially problematic when a religion crosses cultural divides."

In the following sections I will present how *anekāntavāda* has in different settings been adjusted to help Jainas negotiating the potential tension between the self and the other peacefully.

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[6]　For an explanation of sevenfold predication see K.P. Sinha (1990, p. 12ff).

4. The Early Development

Jainism does not have a founder but its adherents believe that the wisdom of the Jaina path has been (re-)discovered at different times in history by spiritually advanced individuals, called the ford-makers (*tīrthaṅkara* or Jina). The last of these ford-makers was Mahāvīra, a contemporary of the Buddha. Although the terminology is not fixed yet, an early form of *anekāntavāda* can already be found in the speeches of Mahāvīra. The *Bhagavatīsūtra* states, for example, that Mahāvīra taught his disciples:

> "The world is [. . .] eternal. It did not cease to exist at any time, it does not cease to exist at any time and it will not cease to exist at any time. It was, it is and it will be. It is constant, permanent, eternal, imperishable, indestructible, always existent. The world is [. . .] not eternal. For [in the cosmic cycle] it becomes progressive after being regressive. And it becomes regressive after being progressive. The soul is [. . .] eternal. For it did not cease to exist at any time. The soul is [. . .] not eternal. For it becomes an animal after being a hellish creature, becomes a man after becoming an animal, and it becomes a god after being a man." (Matilal 1981, p. 19)

While this insight is not presented as a specific idea named *anekāntavāda*, the fundamental idea of the concept is already fully present. According to *anekāntavāda*, it would be incomplete, and thus in a way false, to describe the world or the soul as either eternal or perishable. Mahāvīra shows that to give a good answer to such fundamental questions, one has to keep the complexity of the world in mind and take the time to point it out to the conversation partner. As B.K. Matilal (1981, p. 23) has argued, this approach to tackling religious and philosophical questions distinguishes Mahāvīra from the Buddha, who preferred to remain silent on questions that could cause more confusion than clarity and focused instead on the means of removing suffering from the world. The Jaina attitude, in contrast, is one of engagement through a refinement of speech, which also entails cultivating an awareness of the limitations of language. Unlike Hindus who consider Sanskrit a sacred language and even know a female deification of language called Vāc, Jainas do not believe in an inherent sacrality of language. As Peter Flügel (2009, p. 132) has pointed out, "Digambara Jains [one of the two major Jaina groups] insist that the sermons of a Jina take the form of a miraculous sound (divya-dhvani), which radiates the meaning (artha) of his teachings instantaneously, not mediated through words. As there is no language for the unspeakable (avaktavya) ultimate truth, any language can be used to express it." The Jaina attitude to language is therefore ambivalent. Jainas believe that words can be useful on the path towards enlightenment, but also that uncritical, oversimplified or aggressive speech can lead astray.

5. *Anekāntavāda* in Inter-School Debate

In the debates that occurred between the various Indian schools of thought, Jainism came to represent a critical voice that sought a middle way on different topics that were hotly debated. Rather than denying the claims of the Vedāntins, the Naiyāyikas or the Buddhists by putting forth their own and different counter-theory, the Jaina strategy was to argue that all these schools got important points right, but only present a limited outlook on reality. The ultimately desirable position that encompasses all correct views was then claimed by Jainism, which was presented as the only approach that is *an-ekānta*: not-onesided. As Himal Trikha (2012b, p. 26) has pointed out, the "claim for the superiority of the Jaina doctrine is substantiated in the philosophical works of the Jainas by basically two means: through discussions of their perspectivistic epistemological model and through the deconstruction of the philosophical tenets of opposing traditions, i.e., by means of their refutation."

Two examples will suffice to show this method. The first is taken from the *Āptamīmāṃsā*, which was composed by Samantabhadra probably during the fifth or sixth century (Balcerowicz 2016, p. 438). One of the most fundamental beliefs of Jainism is the equal reality of origination, persistence and decay in the world. The second chapter of the *Āptamīmāṃsā* seeks to take on the two positions that stand for the "one-sided" options on the opposite sides of the spectrum. *Āptamīmāṃsā* 24 states: "But

according to the onesided view of the Advaita, the visible differences become impossible, for example the instrumental cause or the predicates. One cannot be born by oneself."[7] The Jaina view rejects the monism of the Advaita Vedānta school by pointing out that change requires a cause that is different from the effect, and the meaningful use of predicates in utterances requires a subject that is undergoing change through the action implied by the verb. If reality is characterized only by sameness, so the claim of this verse, basic elements of our perception and communication are no longer supported by an ontological basis. The opposing view, however, is also criticized. *Āptamīmāṁsā* 29 states: "If we deny similarity or identity (in one sense), there will not be any gradual flow consisting of cause giving rise to an effect, or the existence (of different qualities) in a single object, or similarity or birth following death, for all of these would become impossible."[8] This argument is directed against the Buddhists, who believed that what people tend to perceive as continuity in the world does in fact not have an ontological basis but consists of individual sense data that are strung together by the often distortive influence of the mind. Jainas, who believe in a transtemporal soul as one of the two big categories of existence (the other being matter), could not accept such a radical rejection of persistence. They argue that without accepting an ontological basis for continuity, both common sense observations like the connection between cause and effect and fundamental principles of Indian religion like transmigration from one life to the next no longer make sense, because both depend on a combination of persistence and change. The typical claim of the Jaina is that only their own "non-one-sided" ontology does justice to the equal reality of origination, persistence and destruction in the world, which is observable and which should form the basis for judging other opinions as true or false.

The in-depth study of the application of *anekāntavāda* in philosophical discourse by Himal Trikha (2012a) shows how the Jaina writer Vidyānandin engages in his *Satyaśāsanaparīkṣā* with the philosophy of the Vaiśeṣika, another rival school of Indian thought. Trikha (2012a, p. 90) observes that despite some conciliatory elements, Vidyānandin central aim is the falsification, not gentle modification or completion of the other position. The *Satyaśāsanaparīkṣā*, which was probably written during the 10th century, wants to test the truth or falsity of philosophical views by measuring their claims against the correspondence to sensory perception. It sets out by presenting the Vaiśeṣika position on reality, namely that properties, substances, and other ontological categories are all distinct elements of reality, although they appear unified to us through their relation (*sambandha*). According to the Vaiśeṣika, a grey stone, for example, is made up of separate elements such as stone and greyness, the greyness being located in the stone by means of a relation. In *Satyaśāsanaparīkṣā* 2.12, Vidyānandin starts to refute the Vaiśeṣika position by pointing out that it stands in contrast to sensory perception, which does perceive a property and the location of this property as a unity. The Jaina (non-one-sided) view on the issue of relations is that property and substance are in some way different and in some way non-different. The Vaiśeṣika position is therefore not refuted because it does not contain any truth, but because it lacks the full truth, which would have to take the many-sidedness of reality into account. This is summed up towards the end of the text, in *Satyaśāsanaparīkṣā* 2.40, in a quote by Samantabhadra, the author of the *Āptamīmāṁsā*: "According to you [the omniscient], the true nature of a thing consists in difference and non-difference. What is independent in one way or the other is a skyflower."[9] The skyflower, a flower with no stem that floats freely, is in Indian philosophy the stock example for something that is fictitious and "eternally non-existent" (Chatterjee 2017).

6. Conceptualising *Anekāntavāda*

Already this classical understanding of *anekāntavāda*, which is a complex but largely unified concept, and which does not yet entail the variety of interpretations that can be found from the 19th

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[7]　Sankrit text in Saratchandra Ghoshal (2010, p. 87). Translation modified by the author.
[8]　Translation by Saratchandra Ghoshal (2010, p. 93).
[9]　The verse is taken from Samantabhadra's *Yuktyanuśāsana*. Sankrit and German translation in Trikha (2012a, p. 299), English translation from Sanskrit by the author.

century onward, raises the question of categorization. Is *anekāntavāda* a religious teaching as it teaches the path towards becoming omniscient, or a philosophical teaching because it is applied to discussions on ontology, epistemology and logic?

A concept that claims many-sidedness might hardly fit into one box. Thus, *anekāntavāda* is religion, or philosophy, "not only but also". Only a self-critical use of categorical boxes can do justice to a concept designed to criticize the use of such boxes. In addition, my claim about dialogic identity is that *anekāntavāda* is specifically helping Jainas to position themselves in different frameworks of categories.

There is ample literature on the difficulty of applying a religion/secular dichotomy in the context of Indian culture (Fitzgerald 2000; Dressler and Mandai 2011), as well as on the failure of taking Indian philosophy seriously as philosophy with relevance beyond those with an interest in regional studies (King 1999; Perrett 2016). Here, I will concentrate on a more specific issue: the tendency to misconstrue *anekāntavāda* as a form of many-valued logic that could be formalized as including statements that are mutually contradictory.

Without contextualization, readers might at first be intrigued by the mysterious and rather cryptic *saptabhaṅgī*. An initial understanding might grasp the theorizing behind the *saptabhaṅgī*, with the true but not particular spectacular insight that non-existence always refers to the object's other-form. Certainly, the new pot did not exist thousand years ago, but this simply means that now it exists and then it did not exist, not that somehow it now both exists and also does not exist. Such a disappointment can lead to the conclusion that the *saptabhaṅgī* should be interpreted in a different way that would maintain real contradiction. Jainism is then understood as a form of organized relativism or an epistemological system that transcends binary logic.

From my point of view such misunderstanding shows a lack of understanding the cultural situatedness of *anekāntavāda*. For why should Jainas, who hold a realist and dualist view of the world, even want to legitimize or harmonize contradiction of the type both A and non-A? There is no reason why the followers of Jainism, a religion and philosophical school in its own right, would want to maintain that the opinion diametrically opposed to their own is just as right and valuable, or that any claim whatsoever is, in the absolute sense, as true or false as its opposite. Such relativism would imply all the consequences which Śaṅkara has polemically listed as the alleged flaws of *anekāntavāda*.[10] As intriguing as the idea of a philosophy that embraces contradiction might be, Jainas cannot be blamed for not having ventured on such a questionable and utterly self-destructive feat. *Syādvāda*, it has to be emphasized, is not an attempt to justify contradiction in the sense of two incompatible properties being located in the same locus. Jaina philosophy is a perspectivist realism, not a form of relativism. The claim that an infinite number of attributes entails an infinite number of possibly true perspectives does not mean that all views have to be accepted as true. This can be illustrated trough a simple analogy: while there is an infinite number of prime numbers, not every number is a prime number. Equally, an infinite number of true statements does not require every statement to be true. And even those views that are considered partially true (but one-sided) are called out by the Jaina writers.

While it may be tempting to see the *saptabhaṅgī* as an early attempt of multi-valued logic, already Umrao Bist (1984, p. 49) has remarked on this matter that "those who take pride in stating that Syādvāda is an Indian version of multivalued logic are misguided."

Much of the criticism of Jaina logic turns out to be inappropriate once the effort is put in to judge *anekāntavāda* by its own terms rather than by the reader's expectations of what would be an interesting interpretation of it. The Jainas offer with *anekāntavāda* not a new logic with truth values, but a critique of the basis on which arguments are formed, about the limitedness of the beliefs we hold and the language with which we can operate. For an argument involving fire and the proverbial hot iron ring, Jaina logic does not offer new syllogistic steps or an alternative logic denying the *tertium non datur*,

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10   For a discussion of Śaṅkara's criticism of the Jaina position, see Natalya Isayeva (1993, pp. 130–44).

but admonishes the parties involved in the debate to make explicit what stands behind the concepts they use.

Piotr Balcerowicz has presented a paper on the topic "Do attempts to formalise the syâd-vâda make sense?". Here he writes:

> "[W]hat the theory is about is not really logical relations but rather semantics and our usage of natural languages: it's main practical import is to demonstrate to what degree every proposition is context-dependent. The 'logical' approach will probably never solve the problem of redundancy in the sense that it is unlikely that one will once present the theory as an absolutely consistent, redundancy-proof and error-free model. Rather, the purpose of formalization attempts and formal models should be a lucid presentation through which one could more clearly see the limitations of a particular interpretation of all the seven figures adopted [...] by a particular Jaina thinker". (Balcerowicz 2015, p. 225)

Balcerowicz clearly understands the limitations of formalizing Jaina logic, and he has carefully attempted his own interpretations. In my opinion, interpretations of as a form of logic only make sense when keeping in mind the close connection between logic and rhetoric in Indian culture, the status of Jainism as both philosophy and religion, and the use of *anekāntavāda* in dialogic identity construction.

7. The Colonial Context

The rhetorical and situative use of *anekāntavāda* becomes apparent when considering the shifts in application from the 19th century onward. The dominance of the British colonial power meant that the decisive conversation partner could no longer be assumed to be from among the other Indian schools of thought. The questions which determined the status of a group were no longer the complex discussions about properties, modes, and substances but whether Indian religions conformed to the standards set by the British. These standards were monotheism, absence of "superstition" and a generally progressive and rational spirit. The representatives of Indian religions had to adapt the presentations of their traditions to these standards if they wanted to be perceived positively by the West.

The most prominent case for such conscious self-presentation was the Council for a Parliament of the World's Religions that was held in connection with the World Columbian Exhibition in Chicago in 1893 (Seager 1993; Altman 2017). While the World Columbian Exhibition primarily served to present the United States of America as a beacon of light onto the nations, the Parliament had been organized by progressive Christians who saw at least some other religions as potential partners in their effort for global progress and therefore also invited representatives of various religions as speakers. This event drew already at the time significant media attention and is now widely remembered as the first occasion of organized high-level interreligious dialogue. Alongside different forms of Hinduism and Buddhism, Jainism, too, was selected for representation. As travel across the ocean is problematic for the Jaina religious, a lay person was sent: Virchand Gandhi, a young and intellectually brilliant barrister. In his presentation at the Parliament he did not distinguish primarily between Jainas and non-Jainas, but between narrow-minded and openminded people:

> "If you will only permit a heathen to deliver his message of peace and love, I shall only ask you to look at the multifarious ideas presented to you in a liberal spirit, and not with superstition and bigotry, as the seven blind men did in the elephant story. [...] Brother and sisters, I entreat you to hear the moral of this story and learn to examine the various religious systems from all standpoints". (Barrows 1893, p. 171)

Gandhi, well aware of the Christian dominance of the setting, asks as a "heathen" humbly for permission to deliver his message. His message, nevertheless, is sets out to show that Jainism already encompasses all the principles that the Parliament is dedicated to: a progressive spirit that weighs, for the benefit of all and in a rational and compassionate way, the merits and shared reason of different religious and philosophical traditions. This is illustrated through the story of the blind men and the

elephant, which though shared with other Indian traditions, is frequently used to this day by Jainas to explain the principle of *anekāntavāda* in a narrative way. In this story, a group of blind men for the first time encounters an elephant. Touching different parts of the body, they each proclaim what an elephant is like. They each insist on their own tactile perception and an angry dispute about the true nature of the elephant breaks out, which is only resolved by a seeing man coming in. He explains that there is truth in each of their observations but that they all just represent partial perspectives which have to be understood as parts of a bigger whole. Obviously, the seeing man stands for the Jaina who can oversee the multitude of different views. In the context of the Parliament of the World's Religions, these are no longer the philosophical schools of India but all religions and world views. Just as Jainism presented itself as the middle way in the debates of the schools of Indian philosophy, *anekāntavāda* was in the new setting used to show that Jainism was in all important parts in line with other progressive forms of religion and due to its breadth of perspectives ultimately superior to them.

While Jainas will understand who is meant by the seeing man, namely the person following Jainism and in the most literal sense the Jaina omniscient, this is not made explicit in Gandhi's passage. Rather than dealing with complicated theories of properties and relations, the most fundamental meaning is *anekāntavāda* is considering the merit of other views peacefully, rationally and tolerantly. Gandhi states: "Brothers and sisters, I entreat you to hear the moral of this story and learn to examine the various religious systems from all standpoints" (Barrows 1893, p. 171). *Anekāntavāda* is thus promoted as a principle of intellectual non-violence that is rooted in Jainism but which is also relevant for all people, and thus as a basis on which Jainas can encounter other traditions, most importantly the dominant Protestant Christianity, on an (at least) equal footing.

The presentation of *anekāntavāda*, which is after all also a communicative tool for showing the superiority of Jainism, as a form of non-violence presents a potential tension and has itself to be understood at least partly as strategic communication. As Peter Flügel (2009, p. 192) has pointed out in a different context, "[t]he importance of their [i.e., the doctrinally trained ascetics'] power of persuasion for the continuation of the Jain tradition is a universal topos of Jain narrative and biographical literature. There, the problem of the moral ambivalence of religious rhetoric is explicitly addressed as a form of necessary violence (āvassaya-hiṃsā < āvaśyaka-hiṃsā >), to be repented by means of the obligatory ascetic rites (āvaśyaka)".

John Cort (2000, p. 341) criticized the rendering of *anekāntavāda* as intellectual nonviolence as "inadequate", not so much because the opposite would be true but because such an understanding presents an oversimplified and unhistorical generalization (see also Barbato 2017, p. 135ff).

8. *Anekāntavāda* in a Global Context

Since independence and due to secularization and globalization, the authoritative status of Christianity for Jaina discourses has waned. The external conversation partner has become a global audience, which includes a young generation of Jainas that has grown up in the diaspora. In this context, general and individualized concepts of spirituality have become more important, with observable processes of "uncoupling of the doctrines of Jainism from the traditional institutional bedrock of the Jain communities and the establishment of a universal religion of nonviolence" (Flügel 2005, p. 11). Young Jainas abroad may need to be attracted to a Jaina tradition about which they may not know much. As many Jainas in the diaspora are successful business people and professionals, it appears that young people, too, are addressed in a language that is more scientific and rational, and which does not presuppose much religious literacy. This has led to a strong emphasis on the reasonableness and at times "scientificness" of Jainism. Sometimes *anekāntavāda* is presented as a native version of scientific theories. M.R. Gelra (2007, p.112) states that the "Jain principles of Anekant and Syadwad find semblance in the scientific theories of relativitiy and uncertainty". He seeks to describe the wave particle duality in terms of the elements of the *saptabhaṅgī*, stating on the element "inexpressible":

> "Avaktavya, it is the third most important aspect of syadwad. This term envisages two
> different meanings for micro- and macro-physical entities. In the case of former, it is

unpredictability, uncertainty or probability, whereas, in case of latter it is the partial descriptivism. In the context of macrophysical entities it is multi-faceted manifestation. For instance, an entity can be called 'table' if the shape is to be mentioned. It may be referred to as 'wood' if the material used is talked about". (ibid.)

The intention is clearly to show that Jainism is compatible with the rational and worldview of modernity, and that some of science's most fundamental principles were already entailed in it many centuries before their discovery by the West. The attempts to combine Jainism with science follow a similar communication strategy as the interpretation as religious tolerance. Both show a desire and to some degree the actual ability to engage constructively with a diverse range of conversation partners. They are, however, also indicative of the problems that can arise in attempts of dialogic identity construction. The understanding of *anekāntavāda* as a form of tolerance and intellectual non-violence obscures the use of *anekāntavāda* as a rhetorical instrument in intellectual debate. Claiming that *anekāntavāda* is really a scientific theory awards a status of authority that, however, ultimately delegitimizes those elements of Jainism that are not deductible from empirical science (Zydenbos 2006, pp. 69–82).

9. Is Jainism Moving towards Relativism?

When speaking about Jainism today, Jainas rarely touch onto the philosophical context of the classical interpretation of *anekāntavāda*. Most frequently, *anekāntavāda* is explained through the story of the blind men and the elephant. Sometimes it is also presented as a general principle of taking more than one perspective into account, or even the general advice that other positions should not be judged. This holds true not only for lay followers but also for *bhaṭṭārakas*, community leaders and academics.

With regards to the status of other religions, there are two typical interpretations of *anekāntavāda*: The first is that *anekāntavāda* teaches that like two sides of a coin different religions are equally true. The other interpretation is that although the other person's religious views are probably wrong, *anekāntavāda* teaches Jainas that they should treat the adherents of these religions respectfully, because *anekāntavāda* is a principle of intellectual non-violence. These understandings appear at times to be held simultaneously by a single person (Barbato 2017, p. 152f). However, even those Jainas who say that all positions are in some respect true (which would amount to relativism) did not show any relativism that would contradict the fundamental outlook of Jainism when concrete examples were used. This is most apparent on the topic of meat-eating, as Jainas tend to abhor the thought that there would also be some perspective according to which meat-eating would be justified (Barbato 2017, p. 148).

One of the most important conclusions to be drawn from the contemporary use of *anekāntavāda* is therefore that those cases where *anekāntavāda* appears as relativism (as in appeals for limitless tolerance) or where *anekāntavāda* is used while the Jaina background seems completely lost (as in the equations of *anekāntavāda* with science), should be interpreted as exaggerations, not inversions, of the general willingness to open up debate with a wide range of groups and topics. When Jainas talk about *anekāntavāda*, this is meant as a means to stabilize, not deconstruct Jaina identity. As Marcus Banks (1991, p. 258f) has pointed out, regardless of regional and sectarian differences "there is a consciousness of identity as Jains [...but this 'c]ommunity' is not an a priori quality of a group of Jains, or of all Jains, it is something that they, from the conceptual category of 'Jainism', create for themselves." *Anekāntavāda* has across time and place played an important role in the creation and stabilization of Jaina identity, by allowing for a flexible re-orientation according to the needs of the situation and the conversation partner. The red thread that runs through history is thus *anekāntavāda's* dialogic purpose, not its (current) interpretation as nonviolence or pluralism. As Cort (2000, p. 341) has cautioned: "While it may be possible for contemporary Jain intellectuals to reformulate *anekāntavāda* as a principle that can be helpful in locating themselves within the discourses and lived realities of modernism and postmodernism, with their emphases on pluralism, diversity, and ambiguity, I feel that there are dangers in blithely extending that new formulation back in time to rewrite the history of Jain struggles with non-Jains as a history of benevolence and tolerance."

10. *Anekāntavāda* beyond Jainism?

Already in the philosophical discourses, *anekāntavāda* was presented as a principle for defending the common-sense view that draws on perception against the one-sided systems of other philosophical schools. At the Parliament of the World's Religions, all people in the audience were called by Virchand Gandhi to examine the various religious systems from all standpoints. Already at a time when Jainism was still a largely understudied religion, Chapple (1993, p. 29) presented *anekāntavāda*'s "flexible fundamentalism" as a model for interreligious dialogue, the strength of which is that it "encourages respect for others' perspectives and yet allows one's primary commitment to remain rooted in that with which one feels most authenticated". Anne Vallely (2004, p. 112) has described her learning experience of putting *anekānta* into practice when discussing Christianity with Jainas in India, stating that she had initially made the "pluralists' mistake of believing openness to the other required a break from one's own beliefs—a temporary suspension in epistemological limbo. [...] But Jain pluralism does not require it and therefore the possibility for an honest and creative acceptance of diversity can exist". Jeffery Long (2009, p.184) states that he wrote his introduction to Jainism because he found *anekāntavāda* "to be an essential tool for affirming pluralism without lapsing into a self-refuting relativism", which he wanted to share with the world. And indeed, a growing number of philosophers and theologians are referencing in their writing *anekāntavāda* as a resource and inspiration for developing their own thought.

Ram Adhar Mall (2014, p. 79), for instance, has drawn on *anekāntavāda* as a foundation for his philosophical approach with an intercultural orientation. He states: "In my attempt at developing interculturally-oriented 'analogical hermeneutics' I have greatly benefitted from the Jaina ideas of anekantavada, syadvada and nayavada". He explains:

> "The Jaina argument for a reciprocal recognition of different stand-points (*naya*) that are not exclusive, but rather complementary to each other, is one of the best methodological moves in the service of inter-cultural understanding. [...] Applying this methodology, I have tried to work out and intercultural hermeneutic approach which is non-reductive, open, creative, and tolerant. It approves of overlapping centers, searches for them, finds and cultivates them. These overlapping structures are the common factors which make communication possible, and they also allow philosophies and cultures to retain their individual characters". (Mall 2014, p. 80)

Chakravarti Ram-Prasad, Professor of Comparative Religion and Philosophy at Lancaster University, has developed his theory of multiplism on the basis of *anekāntavāda*. He distinguishes four "modes of relationship with the Other" (Ram-Prasad 2007, p. 5). These are homogenization, in which the otherness is eliminated; exclusion, which reacts defensively to otherness; pluralism, which acknowledges the other; and multiplism, which he defines as "seeking affinity with the other" (ibid.) Ram-Prasad does not claim that his theory is identical to the standard Jaina position, and I think rightly so. However, according to Ram-Prasad (2007, p. 50) multiplism takes from *anekāntavāda*: "The likeness between oneself and the Other is primarily a matter of empathetic inter-location of one's sensibilities in the scheme of the Other, or a recognition of inter-subjection of will; it is the result for the search for affinity. It is that affinity which is the effective realization of the non-violent engagement with the Other."

The theologian Emmanuel Y. Lartey (2017, p. 143) draws in a book chapter on interfaith spiritual care on *anekāntavāda* to support his claim that "[r]eligious plurality is divine" and an "inevitable implication of creation". He sees a parallel between *anekāntavāda* and his own Gã religious tradition, which knows a saying "*Loo pii fiteee wonu*", which he translates as "plenty of/ many different kinds of meat does not destroy but rather enhances the sweetness of the soup" (Lartey 2017, p. 140).

While the development of non-Jaina thought on the basis of *anekāntavāda* can be a legitimate endeavor that is encouraged also by Jainas who highlight its universal applicability, it is also important to keep in mind that *anekāntavāda* is originally part of a religious system that ultimately considered the views of other religions and philosophies as "inadequate" (Dundas 1992, p. 199). Dialogic identity

construction does not have to mean uncritical harmony. Trikha has described Vidyānandin's approach in the *Satyaśāsanaparīkṣā* an enlightened-critical perspectivism ("aufgeklärt-kritischer Perspektivismus"), which recognizes in the view of the other "a claim for the interpretation of reality, which stands in sharp contrast to his own conception of the individual thing and which first has to be falsified, before the attempt can be made to reconcile it in modified form with the own worldview" (Trikha 2012a, p. 87).[11]

Anekāntavāda should therefore at least partly be understood as communication strategy that serves to defend the Jaina world view and to stabilize Jaina identity. It is not the same as relativism, an uncritical pluralism or the idea that religious plurality is in itself desirable as "more meat makes a sweeter soup"—a metaphor Jainas would find rather unappealing. While many modern accounts present *anekāntavāda* as an Indian form of tolerance and intellectual nonviolence that transcends all sectarian boundaries, the rhetorical function of this reinterpretation of *anekāntavāda* should be kept in mind, as well as the original situatedness of the concept. As (Trikha 2012b, p. 26) summed up: "Jaina authors earned a special place in the history of Indian philosophy by taking into account many of the intellectual traditions of their time and geographical region. This examination did not turn out well for the other traditions."

11. Conclusions: *Anekāntavāda* as a Rhetorical Device for a Dialogic Identity

After the 2015 Parliament of the World's Religions, a group of young Jaina participants wrote about the insights that they had gained from the event. The article sums up the specific resources their religion can bring to interreligious dialogue:

> "As advocates of non-violence (ahimsa) and believers of equality and respect for all viewpoints (anekantvad), while being mindful of the impact of our personal consumption in the world around us (aparigraha), it is our social responsibility to advance these issues and to be more engaged and connected in mainstream outlets. [. . .] Jainism is both a scientific and practical philosophy that adapts to social and cultural shifts while preserving its core values and practices. *Anekantvad* teaches us that everyone has a voice and something valuable to contribute". (Bumb et al. 2016)

The young activists specifically highlight what I have termed a dialogic identity construction: Jainism "adapts to social and cultural shifts while preserving its core values and practices". The argument of this article has been that *anekāntavāda* is a key mechanism of Jainism's dialogic identity construction. It allows Jainas to seek debate and to meet the other peacefully but it also allows Jainas to defend their own view of the world. The function of *anekāntavāda* is thus not relativistic but serves to support a religion and philosophy which values complete knowledge but which also holds strong foundational convictions, such as the fundamental duality of reality constituted by matter and soul.

My argument is that it is this dual aspect of *anekāntavāda* that helps Jainas to be a (certainly far above average) peaceful community, rather than the exaggerated claim that *anekāntavāda* in itself presents a form of intellectual nonviolence, or the mistaken belief that *anekāntavāda* means that all (religious) claims are equally valid. Dialogic identity construction, in the sense I use here, does not mean the uncritical acceptance of other views but is a way of stabilizing one's own sense of self through openness towards the other. Dialogic identity construction can therefore be an interesting model for how strong religion and non-violent encounter can reinforce rather than exclude each other.

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[11] "Für Vidyānandin ist klar, dass mit den zentralen Lehren des Vaiśeṣika ein Anspruch auf Deutung der Wirklichkeit vorliegt, die in scharfem Gegensatz zu seiner eigenen Konzeption des Einzeldinges steht und die zuallererst falsifiziert werden muss, bevor der Versuch unternommen werden kann, sie in modifizierter Form mit dem eigenen Weltbild zu harmonisieren." English translation by the author.

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