

**FINDING PARALLELS BETWEEN JAIN PHILOSOPHY AND  
SARTREAN EXISTENTIALISM: RECOGNISING THE RICHNESS OF  
ANCIENT SOUTH ASIAN RELIGIOUS PHILOSOPHY AGAINST  
DEVELOPMENTS IN CONTINENTAL PHILOSOPHY**

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## Introduction: Framing the Thesis

“I have made a very archaic religion the subject of my research because it seems better suited than any other to help us comprehend the religious nature of man, that is to reveal a fundamental and permanent aspect of humanity.”<sup>1</sup> - Émile Durkheim

As a Religious Studies and Humanities: Interdisciplinary Studies in Culture major, I have noticed several striking similarities between South Asian religious philosophies and Western philosophical systems of thought. However, in my philosophy and philosophy of religion classes, I have noticed a lack of representation of South Asian philosophies. However, through stimulating discussions that have revolved around the creation of society, through studying the sociological implications that structure religious order, or through comparing understandings of the self and soul or the conflation of these two concepts, I have discovered connections to South Asian philosophies. While Continental philosophy became more and more secular, its origins are certainly rooted in religious philosophies. For instance, existentialism grew from Kierkegaard's Christendom to Nietzsche's fervent rejection of theism to Sartre's disinterest with supernatural phenomena and beings. The detachment from religion gives these philosophies a sense of credibility that enabled them to become more widespread. They have gained recognition and validation from years of Western scholarship. Similarly, South Asian philosophies are born out of deep religious roots. But in the same way that Continental philosophy moves away from religion, South Asian philosophy can be treated as schools of philosophy. In class discussions, I have always remarked how South Asian religious philosophies deal with comparable concepts like the essence,

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<sup>1</sup> Durkheim Émile. 1995. *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*. Translated by Karen E Fields. New York: Free Press. 1.

soul, self, responsibility, consciousness and morality that are also present in Western philosophy. Although South Asian philosophies have addressed these concepts several years before Western philosophy has, it is interesting that they don't get the recognition they deserve in the academic study of thought.

For example, in my junior year, I took a class on the Philosophy of Religion where we discussed questions regarding religious belief, theism, immortality, the afterlife, the self and existence. In this class, no South Asian traditions were discussed, but these discussions helped me identify parallels between Western and South Asian traditions. Although many South Asian traditions believe in the afterlife or reincarnation through the explanation of the karma theory, the philosophical questions are still present. Thus, I began finding connections between Western philosophies and South Asian religious concepts. I became most interested in existentialism as I noticed fascinating links between South Asian interpretations of the soul and self with the idea of existence and essence as explored in the West. Therefore, I started reading more existentialist philosophy. I read excerpts from Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling* and thereafter, engaged with interpretations of Nietzsche before I read Sartre's *Existentialism is a Humanism*. After mapping the evolution of the existentialist school of philosophy through these three philosophers, I began to see the resonances with Jainism. However, before I delved deeper into these comparisons, I found scholarship that examined connections between Advaita Vedānta and Existentialism. This helped me explore existing attempts at comparing South Asian and Western philosophy, which in turn served as a framework for my interest in finding links between Jainism and Existentialism.

At the onset of this thesis, I must clarify that as I have been raised in a household that embraces Jain and Hindu religious philosophies. Much of my reflection on Jainism used to be based on conversations and observations with my great grandmother and grandaunt. When I was

in high school, I became increasingly invested in the manifestation of Jainism in business and other aspects of daily life. The sect of Jains that my family subscribes to is more inclined towards a systematically organised Jñāna Mārg (the path of seeking knowledge) and thus there is little or no focus on the religious and social ceremonies typical of that of any religion. I began formally understanding Jainism through conversation with religious teachers, scholars and seers. I noticed how our sermon halls were devoid of any idols and statues of God(s) and that discussions centred around the teachings of the Jain *Āgamas*. They are a “collection of pious and benevolent speeches of the Tirthankaras. The Ganadharas, the main disciples of Tirthankaras construct sutras [laws] from the Tirthankara’s preaching. In this way, the Ganadharas have constructed 12 main *Agamas*.”<sup>2</sup> It is the duty and responsibility of these seers to put forth, in simple language, what is written in the Jain *Āgamas* - the lifeline of the Jain religion. The *Āgamas* are in the ancient Ardhamagadhi Prakrit language and are voluminous as they address so many of the issues and questions related to life and universe. However, the original literature is not within the laity’s grasp. While Jainism does not have a central text like the Bible in Christianity or Quran in Islam, the *Tattvārtha Sūtra* by Umāsvati is the single most comprehensive scripture of Jainism, universally accepted by all sects of Jains as it contains the all the fundamental principles of Jainism, as well as the essence and prescribes the recommended path of liberation. Here, we realise that Jainism has a clear and well-defined eschatological and sociological path. The overarching objective is for individuals to lead a life that will exempt them from the cycles of rebirth and death by attaining mōkṣa. In general, this religious path provides a suggested list of guidelines and regulations to lead life, but it thrives on the importance of subjectivity. Therefore, every individual is entitled to a perspective. There is a celebration of multiplicity of views and

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<sup>2</sup> Sahebji, Tej. *Jain Dharmasaar*. Mumbai. 11.

the acceptance of diversity. This is possible because Jainism does not uphold a single leader or heteronomous source. In fact, it believes that every individual is capable of being elevated to divinity. However, in order to achieve that liberation, it is essential that individuals exercise their freedom and responsibility by leading a life with morality and non-violence. Although there are set principles that are recommended, the ownership of determining action is up to an individual. In essence, this religious path is a humanism.

*Existentialism is a Humanism* (1946) by Jean-Paul Sartre encapsulates his notion of existentialism that revolves around atheism, responsibility and morality. He strongly agrees that the individual is the creator of their destiny. Hence, there is an underlying accent given to freedom and thereby subjectivity. The overarching objective of Sartre's existentialist theory is to show the importance of an individual's ability to think, process and reflect without the use of a heteronomous source. According to him, the responsibility placed on the individual to make important decisions gives rise to 'anguish,' as individuals struggle with making decisions. They are given supreme responsibility as there is no external force to show them the correct path. This increased sense of self-reliance often causes an individual to be in a flux of emotions or state of confinement. Given the fervent rejection of a theist being, an individual has the responsibility to seek their own morality. There is no ultimate sense of right or wrong, but instead there is an advocacy for subjectivity. Sartre maintains that the evolved state of human beings enables them to seek virtuous behaviour. This can be linked with a sense of consciousness attributed to individuals. They are capable of using their freedom to be responsible to determine actions that will govern their purpose. At the end of the day, the goal of each individual is to lead a moral life. Hence, the practice of reflection and appraisal guides humanistic behaviour.

Thus, humanism forms the basis of Jainism and Sartrean existentialism. The similarities stem from the core of both their ideologies that revolve around giving individuals a sense of purpose and responsibility. The chief similarity between the two philosophical systems is that they do not give power or receive power from a supreme power. Therefore, the absence of a heteronomous source helps establish and gives rise to other concepts that help order humanistic values. This attributes all responsibility to individuals. However, this responsibility does not come with a set structure. Therefore, there is prominence given to subjectivity of individuals. There is no singular correct way of life, but rather there is an acceptance of leading life on one's own terms. Both these philosophies put great weight on the freedom given to individuals. Hence, all these concepts are inter-connected as one give rise to another. For instance, individuals are free beings because they are not bound to the allegiance of a particular supernatural force. This gives them the ultimate responsibility to make their decisions and choose their path.

Although there is a plethora of similarities in the existentialist concepts of the two philosophies, it is important that I acknowledge the fundamental difference that will persist as I attempt to explore the links between Jainism and Sartrean existentialism. While Sartre quite literally argued that there is "No Exit" from this world, Jainism postulates a different realm of the universe. Therefore, the two philosophies differ soteriologically and eschatologically. Jains accept that individuals are capable of discerning the right actions in order to strive towards liberation and that Jains believe in the concept of the soul that not only has the ability to engage in rebirth, but also attain salvation. Therefore, Jains endorse this notion of a different universe. This primary difference between the two philosophies will become more apparent as I analyse Jain existentialist concepts through a comparison with a corresponding concept in Sartrean existentialism.

The objective of studying Sartrean existentialism and Jainism is to find the consonances between the concepts. Although there is a fundamental difference between Jainism and existentialism in their understanding of the ultimate goal of the human, there are several shared concepts between the two philosophies. For the purpose of this thesis, I am interested in studying the similarities between atheism, subjectivity and responsibility as common concepts between the two schools of philosophies. The larger goal of this thesis is to draw attention to Jainism's rich philosophical roots that have barely received acknowledgement in the West.

Academia in the West is structured around a power dynamic that defines thinking. This leads me to invoke Edward Said's *Orientalism*. He encourages us to ask how to think about human. Although he grounds his framework of explaining how the West marginalises Oriental philosophy in the Middle East and North Africa, I notice a parallel with Asia. He writes, "Indeed the very project of restriction and restructuring associated with Orientalism can be traced directly to the inequality by which the Orient's comparative poverty (or wealth) besought scholarly, scientific treatment of the kind to be found in disciplines like philology, biology, history, anthropology, philosophy, or economics."<sup>3</sup> This points to the lack of representation that South Asian philosophy has in scholarship. The contribution of South Asian thought to the understanding of the role of an individual in society is often ignored. Moreover, even if Eastern religious philosophy is acknowledged or addressed, there is a bias against its historicity and periodisation. Several Western scholars show disdain for Oriental philosophy for its antiquated nature. This is made evident as Said says, "Since the Orient is old and distant, the teacher's display is a restoration, a re-vision of what has disappeared from the wider ken. And since also the vastly rich (in space, time, and cultures) Orient cannot be totally exposed, only its most

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<sup>3</sup> Said, Edward W. *Orientalism*. Brantford, Ont.: W. Ross MacDonald School, Resource Services Library, 2006. 150

representative parts need be.”<sup>4</sup> This further explains why there is an absence of South Asian thought from philosophical discourse in the West. Western existentialist thought renders the rich philosophical systems from South Asia invisible. Like Said, I am interested with Western academia’s treatment or rather lack of engagement with South Asian philosophy. Therefore, I am motivated to write my thesis to demonstrate how a particular religion from South Asia shows us how to think about what it means to be human.

This fascination with understanding how to think about the human leads me directly to an existentialist framework. After evaluating the evolution of Continental existentialist philosophy, I saw the most resemblance between Jainism and Sartrean existentialism. More specifically, I noticed the strongest connection between Jain religious philosophy and Sartre’s *Existentialism is a Humanism*. I am most interested with the concepts that demonstrate humanism. Thus, in my thesis, I will deconstruct the concepts of atheism, subjectivity, freedom and responsibility evident in both philosophies. My objective is to demonstrate how these concepts guide us to understanding humanistic values. Although these are the overarching conceptual comparisons, I will also address underlying notions of the soul, the body and consciousness. This analysis will establish an approach to recognising and reconsidering the value of South Asian philosophy in providing the same concepts that Western philosophy presents several years later.

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<sup>4</sup> *Ibid* 125

## Chapter 1: Literature Review

### Tracing Existentialist Philosophy in South Asian Religious Philosophy: Studying Previous Scholarship on the Comparison between Continental Existentialist Philosophy and Vedānta

Fritz Heinemann's theorises that humanity is losing its "sense of 'being'"<sup>1</sup> and is dominated by the spirit of "having"<sup>2</sup> and this explains the inability of mankind to engage in self-appraisal and to seek spirituality. Dr. Haridas Chaudhuri cites this as his inspiration to write a paper on "Existentialism and Vedānta." As a result, he argues that materialism has become an important factor that prevents mankind from having an innate sense of reflection and instead perpetuates immoralities like egoism, possessiveness and greed. Existentialism and Vedānta both see these characteristics as persisting problems. They become more apparent in the study of existentialism with the rise of 19<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> century Continental philosophy and particularly through Jean-Paul Sartre's work (1905-1980).

I would first like to use Sartre's *Existentialism is a Humanism* to define existentialism as "a doctrine that makes human life possible and also affirms that every truth and every action imply an environment and a human subjectivity."<sup>3</sup> Sartre's texts, *Being and Nothingness* and *Existentialism Is a Humanism* introduce concepts entrenched in existentialism. Similarly, Chaudhuri echoes that "being," "freedom" and "responsibility" are essentials to the study of this school of philosophy as well as are important characteristics of the Vedānta texts. However, Chaudhuri traces the origins of existentialist ideas to pre-Socratic Greek philosophy and

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<sup>1</sup> Chaudhuri, Haridas. "Existentialism and Vedānta." *Philosophy East and West* 12, no. 1 (1962): 7.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid* 7

<sup>3</sup> Sartre, Jean-Paul, Annie Cohen-Solal, Arlette Elkaïm-Sartre, John Kulka, and Carol Macomber. *Existentialism Is a Humanism = (L'Existentialisme Est Un Humanisme) ; Including, a Commentary on The Stranger (Explication De L'Étranger)*. Winnipeg: Manitoba Education and Advanced Learning, Alternate Formats, 2016. 18.

discusses how it has changed with the emergence of several “metaphysical systems.”<sup>4</sup> In light of these new metaphysical systems, I would like to map the evolution of philosophical existentialist theories that endorse comparative studies between Asian religious texts and European philosophy. In a paper that encapsulates the essence of Indian and Greek comparative philosophy, anthropologist Nick Allen highlights Georges Dumézil’s definition of ideology as “a means of exploring material and moral reality or as a means of ordering the capital of ideas accepted by the society. It [Indo-European ideology] was ‘at once an ideal and a way of analysing and interpreting the forces that ensure the smooth running of the world (le cours du monde) and the life of men.’”<sup>5</sup> This leads Allen to establish a comparison using stories from Greek and Indian traditions. He strikes comparisons that delve into the cosmological and eschatological functions of religion. This invokes a discussion of the elements of the Earth as introduced in the *Vedas* and the *Upaniṣads*, which is similarly expounded in the Greek tradition. It revolves around the idea that the soul can transcend different forms and spaces.

This Indo-European comparison can be extended metaphorically to explore existentialist ideas, as described in 20<sup>th</sup> century philosophy, in ancient Indian texts. Chaudhuri attempts to strike a comparison between Western existentialist theory and Vedānta, as he underscores how Vedānta philosophy always justifies that attachment or possession will give rise to egoism and a sense of pride that drives authoritativeness and ownership. Thereafter, he asserts that the study of the existence or the Being “has always been the dominant characteristic of the wisdom of the East.”<sup>6</sup> In essence, Chaudhuri’s article explores “concepts of existentialism and to consider how

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<sup>4</sup> Allen, Nick. “The common origin approach to comparing Indian and Greek philosophy” in *Universe and Inner Self in Early Indian and Early Greek Thought*, edited by Richard Seaford. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016.3.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid* 12.

<sup>6</sup> Chaudhuri, Haridas. “Existentialism and Vedānta.” 3.

they can be related to the corresponding essential concepts of the Vedānta.”<sup>7</sup> Given that Chaudhuri successfully establishes the similarities between existentialism and Vedānta, I want to extend this comparison to similar concepts in Jainism.

Jainism and Buddhism came into existence as a result of the changing social and political order of Hinduism between the 3<sup>rd</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> century BCE. They rejected the Hindu caste system and religious instruction from the *Vedas*. However, they maintained the philosophical tenets of Hinduism and particularly Jainism expounded the idea of the ātman. While Buddhism has gained recognition in the West and received extensive scholarship, Jainism still remains understudied and relatively unknown.

Given that Jainism grew out of Hinduism, it shares the metaphysical system. Concepts entrenched in the study of existentialism such as, Truth (sāt), Being (Brahman) and Existence (ātman) are also embedded in Vedānta texts. Chaudhuri uses this to note that “the point of similarity here between the Vedāntic approach and the existentialist protest against essentialism is obvious.”<sup>8</sup> Therefore, both schools of thought validate that one can only come to terms with oneself by going beyond the “essences.”<sup>9</sup> The focus on the “essences” is an imperative concept in Sartre’s *Being and Nothingness*. Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge that Vedānta does have an essence (ātman), but it cannot be located in the mind or body, but it is part of something beyond. Existentialism and Vedānta have the same critique of mind and body, but existentialism does not posit as essence in the same transcendental way as Vedānta. Chaudhuri mentions how modern existentialism thought does not hold “essences” with the same degree of importance as Vedānta and hence, creates a “false-dualism.”<sup>10</sup> This led Chaudhuri to invoke

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<sup>7</sup> *Ibid* 4

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid* 10.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid* 10

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid* 11

René Descartes focus on dualism as a foundation to explain the concept of ‘transcendence’ and explain how early Indian and Greek philosophy promoted the idea to “know thyself.”<sup>11</sup> Although Chaudhuri deconstructs Cartesian Dualism using other European philosophers, I find a scope of comparison with the notion of the ‘essences’ as laid out in Sartre’s *Being and Nothingness*. While there have been attempts to illuminate Sartrean philosophy through Buddhism (a religion born out of the changing social outcomes of Hinduism, but maintain and internalises its philosophical tenets), I want to explore the compatibility between Sartrean existentialist philosophy and Jainism.

The links between Western philosophy and South Asian philosophy become more striking as we consider them from the perspective of the philosophy of religion. Although Vedānta’s emphasis on metaphysical notions lose visibility with the rise of Hindu rigidity, Jain religious philosophy embodies these systems and assimilate them into the practice of religion. The *Tattvārtha Sūtra* is an ancient Jain scripture that underlines Jain eschatology and soteriology. It was written by Umāsvāti, who states that “The central themes of the *Tattvārtha Sūtra* are non-violence, non-absolutism and non-possession.”<sup>12</sup> These integral aspects of Jain religious philosophy are instrumental to make this a system of thought that turns inward. Thus, this religious philosophy does not only revolve around a theological analysis, but enhances ontological, epistemological and phenomenological approaches of study.

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<sup>11</sup> *Ibid* 12

<sup>12</sup> Umāsvāti, Devanandī, Siddhasenagaṇi, and Nathmal Tatia. *That Which Is = Tattvārtha Sūtra*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011. xvii

## Brief Introduction to Jainism:

As a religious philosophy, Jainism advocates an ontological and epistemological framework that encourages individuals to engage with themselves. Thus, it deals with metaphysical concepts that are similar to those addressed in Western philosophical theories of existentialism and ethics. Jainism is a religion that firmly believes in *ahimsā* (non-violence), in which the emphasis is non-violence not only in action, but also in thoughts and speech. Jain Tīrthaṅkaras (ford-makers who lead across the sea of suffering) combated sentiments of attachment and gave up worldly desires in order to attain enlightenment and perfect knowledge through meditation and self-realisation. Jainism is derived from the term *Jina* (conqueror)<sup>13</sup>, which means those liberated souls, who have achieved victory over *samsara* [cycle of rebirth and death].<sup>14</sup> This is achieved through stages of renunciation. The soteriology of this religion is to redeem one's karmic cycle of birth and death to attain ultimate spiritual liberation, *mōkṣa*. Jains were formerly known as *śramaṇa* (ascetics). Arthur Schopenhauer (1788-1860) recognises the ascetic practice of Vedānta Hinduism and Buddhism in *The World as Will and Representation* as denying the Will. However, even the essence of Jainism revolves around *samana* -equanimity, self-control and *śramaṇa* -strive. Consequently, I will recognise how Jainism's way of life and religious thought lend itself to a similar comparison with western traditions. For instance, "According to the Jaina doctrine of *anekānta*, or non-absolutism, all knowledge, except omniscience, is only partial truth from a particular viewpoint. Each individual has his or her unique perception of the world, which is a mixture of truth and ignorance. All perceptions are valid, but incomplete, views of reality. To deny their validity or to see one as the total exclusive

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<sup>13</sup> Partridge, Christopher. "Jainism." In *The New Lion Handbook: The World's Religions*. Lion, 2007.

<sup>14</sup> Guy, John. "Worshipping the Jina: Jain Art in The Metropolitan Museum of Art." 60.

truth leads to dogmas.”<sup>15</sup> Therefore, anekāntavāda is an ontological concept that allows one to explore the meaning of existence. Moreover, it exemplifies an existentialist strand of thought.

The study of the philosophy of religion has evolved through the assimilation of different philosophical theories. Merold Westphal’s essay on “Phenomenology and Existentialism” in *A Companion to Philosophy of Religion* draws upon Edmund Husserl’s study of Phenomenology to highlight how it is integral to the study of the philosophy of religion. He deviates from quintessential mechanisms of “normative philosophical theology”<sup>16</sup> and transitions to using religion as an instrument that shapes individuals. It asks important questions about “the believing soul”<sup>17</sup> as the subject and religion as the “object.”<sup>18</sup> Overall, it attempts to explain “what religion is as human experience and practice.”<sup>19</sup> However, it only became pertinent to religious studies “through its confluence with existentialism.”<sup>20</sup> Therefore, I want to propose a study that will trace existentialist theories through Jain philosophy and texts.

Western Ethics can be explored through religious histories of Indian religious thoughts. This is made evident in Nancy Bauer’s article on Advaita Vedānta and Contemporary Western Ethics, which appeared in *The Philosophy East and West*. In this text, Bauer introduces “The challenge now facing influential Western ethicists is, then, to get specific about how to exhume, evaluate, modernize, and amplify the shared moral norms of Western philosophical and religious history.”<sup>21</sup> She uses the ethical theory of emotivism<sup>22</sup> to explain the freedom of an individual to

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<sup>15</sup> Umāsvāti, Devanandī, *That Which Is = Tattvārtha Sūtra*. xvii

<sup>16</sup> Westphal, Merold. “Phenomenology and Existentialism” in *A Companion to Philosophy of Religion* (version 2nd ed.). 2nd ed. Blackwell Companions to Philosophy, 9. Chichester, U.K.: Wiley-Blackwell. 168

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid* 168

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid* 168

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid* 168

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid* 169

<sup>21</sup> Bauer, Nancy F. 1987. “Advaita Vedānta and Contemporary Western Ethics.” *Philosophy East and West* 37 (1): 36.

<sup>22</sup> Emotivism is an ethical theory that engages emotions and feelings to drive action and judgments

rationally act and cites Immanuel Kant's (1724-1804) moral law to further demonstrate links between Advaita Vedānta and western ethical theory. She advocates that it is crucial to find a philosophical system similar to western ethics to "make comparison feasible and at the same time divergent enough to make it fruitful."<sup>23</sup> Thus, she explains that "the theoretical juxtaposition of the Western philosophical tradition and that of Advaita Vedānta, traditionally the most significant philosophical system in India"<sup>24</sup> exhibits immense similarities to navigating human experiences. Likewise, I will argue that Jainsim's emphasis on the concept of ātman supports a compelling comparison with ideas of existentialism.

Although her paper focuses on Kantian ethics, it leads to a larger framework of discussion that demonstrates links with Søren Kierkegaard (1813-1855) and Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900). These philosophers are inspired by Immanuel Kant's philosophy. Bauer further describes Kant's goal as someone who "is at pains to prove the logical existence of a universal moral law that demands the highest and most disciplined exercise of a being's rational capacities and that ought to dictate all controllable human action in the phenomenal world"<sup>25</sup> and she emphasises the importance of free will in order to conduct rational actions through Kantian ethics. This establishes an ontological framework to understand the power of human experiences. Bauer later adds, "All Advaitic philosophical concepts, while operating squarely within the of rationality, also reflect a basic respect for the standard of human experience"<sup>26</sup> The integration of Advaitic philosophical concepts introduces how this religious philosophy "describe[s] and make

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<sup>23</sup> *Ibid* 36

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid* 36

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid* 37

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid* 38

sense of the conditions of being but to guide the unenlightened individual (jiva) to a spiritual awareness of his or her essential subjecthood (ātman)<sup>27</sup>.

She underscores that Advaita uses the self as a locus to traverse abstract knowledge. She grounds this comparison in Enlightenment philosophical theories. Bauer adds that “in the wake of the Enlightenment's failure to create or identify objective rational criteria with which to make universally valid evaluations, the rational self is essentially ‘free’ to adopt its own standards and need not rely on data from its own culture.”<sup>28</sup> While there is a difference between the concept of jiva and the Western self, there is an understanding that both “lack perfect knowledge”<sup>29</sup> and that “their actions are devoid of ultimate value, and that their moral standards fundamentally do not reflect any base ontological or metaphysical truth.”<sup>30</sup> The major difference stems from the fact that “for the jiva (self), there is another status to which to aspire (ātman, or Self), whereas the emotivist self lacks both a well-defined psychological account of the possibilities of self-growth and a coherent or socially accepted philosophical one.”<sup>31</sup> She also acknowledges that “even though we can draw certain substantive parallels between the jiva and the emotivist self, the collective Western consciousness any genuine counterpart to the ideal of ātman, which anchors Advaita's value system by serving as the telos of self-realization.”<sup>32</sup> Therefore, this article seeks from Kantian ethics amongst other western ethical theories to explore a comparison with morality as expressed in the Vedānta. This argument can be extended to Jainism because its religious thought presents that one can live, ideally or otherwise, if the individual’s existence can

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<sup>27</sup> *Ibid* 39

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid* 43

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid* 44

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid* 44

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid* 44

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid* 46

be based on the three Ratnas (jewels) of Jainism, Darśana (Right vision), Jñāna (Right knowledge) and Caritra (Right conduct) in that order.

Merold Westphal attributes the origins of existentialist philosophy to Kierkegaard and Nietzsche who describe a theological or non-theological strand of focus. He summarises, “In reflecting on the meaning of human existence, Kierkegaard demands that we take the reality of God more seriously than Christendom does, while Nietzsche demands that we take the unreality of God more seriously than secular modernity does.”<sup>33</sup> Thus, Westphal presents how theism is an embedded theme in the study of existentialism. In fact, this aspect of existentialism can be found in Jainism as it is arguably an atheist religion. Given the absence of a single supreme entity, Jainism empowers individuals to be in complete charge of their own destiny. Westphal states that there is a “conflict between faith and reason, theism and atheism, whether offered by religious orthodoxy, by militant atheism, or by deisms and idealisms that sort a middle ground.”<sup>34</sup> These factors are entrenched in religious divergence. Kierkegaard not only distinguishes between individual and God, but also discusses how an individual’s behaviour is determined based on their relationship to God or relative to God. In contrast, Nietzsche emphasises that “God is not real and that when religion is examined apart from the ontological support that theism would provide for it, it turns out to be the ideological support for a moral order that does not deserve our support.”<sup>35</sup> Therefore, Kierkegaard and Nietzsche “are more concerned with the social function of religion than with debates about proving the existence and nature of God and worrying about the problem of evil in that connection.”<sup>36</sup> This is similar to Jainism, which

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<sup>33</sup> Westphal, Merold. “Phenomenology and Existentialism” in *A Companion to Philosophy of Religion* (version 2nd ed.) 169

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid* 169

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid* 170

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid* 170

believes that there is no single supreme entity that has reigns over the cosmos. In fact, Jains are more concerned with bringing out the supremeness intrinsic to every soul.

The continuities of Kierkegaard and Nietzsche's existentialist philosophies can be found in the explanations of Jean-Paul Sartre. According to Westphal, "He [Sartre] acknowledges the existence of a Christian existentialism, but defines his own as the attempt to work out the implications of atheism." Since humans are "condemned to be free,"<sup>37</sup> they have the ability to be individualistic. However, this individualism assumes that "the self is essentially relational."<sup>38</sup> Therefore, there is the self and the "Other" as agents who navigate human existence. Sartre is a secular philosopher who believes that individuals are responsible to define their existence and in turn, society. Given that Sartre is an atheist, he challenges the role of God in upholding religious, eschatological and soteriological duty. Additionally, Westphal also introduces Heidegger as a philosopher that "adopts the phenomenological posture."<sup>39</sup> He discusses how Heidegger differs from Sartre in that "he wishes to pose the question of the meaning of being, which he takes to be prior to discussing the existence and nature of any being, including God."<sup>40</sup> Hence, Heidegger is more interested in notions of the "self, soul, person, and so forth."<sup>41</sup> Corresponding notions can be found in Jainism's *Tattvārtha Sūtra*.

The phenomenologist Dr. Debabrata Sinha provides details of relations between East-West systems of thought through an anthropological lens in his book *Understanding in Human Context: Themes and Variations in Indian Philosophy*. In the chapter "how human is ātman?"<sup>42</sup>,

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<sup>37</sup> *Ibid* 171

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid* 171

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid* 172

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid* 172

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid* 172

<sup>42</sup> Sinha, Debabrata. 1996. "How human is Ātman" in *Understanding in Human Context: Themes and Variations in Indian Philosophy*. New Perspectives in Philosophical Scholarship, Vol. 5. New York: P. Lang.150.

he addresses this question using philosophical anthropology and Cartesianism. This framework is applicable to the analysis of Jainism and will serve as a model of many explanations of Jainism as a humanistic religion. He begins his analysis of the question “With the affirmation of the focus of universal spirit in human individual (jīva), the theme of man’s self-transcendence finds its place in a distinctive perspective-call it the Ātman perspective.”<sup>43</sup> He invokes Max Scheler’s philosophical anthropology when he says, “The statement reflects the Western accent on human being as *person*- a being in which spirit and the vital drive, the spiritual and the biological-teleological, essentially unite.”<sup>44</sup> He uses Scheler to draw a comparison to “Sankara’s doctrinal formation of Advaita Vedānta, the principle of Ātman provided the highest paradigm, the ultimate principle, around which the entire reflection on man and the universe was meant to be directed.”<sup>45</sup> Through juxtaposing these two philosophies, Sinha attempts to show that while these interpretations of humanism are incongruent, there is opportunity to find similarities. He explains how Scheler’s philosophical anthropology becomes more apparent in continental philosophy in order to establish a “hermeneutic interaction”<sup>46</sup> that explores the concept of ātman through an anthropological dimension. Consequently, he uses notions of consciousness and epistemology to study “human subjectivity.”<sup>47</sup> This can be applied to Jainism through an analysis of *anekāntavāda* (ontology) *nayavāda* (epistemology) and *syāvāda* (practice). These doctrines maintain the idea that existence is made up of several aspects and perspectives. This allows individuals to understand their essence and find meaning of life while realising that there are several truths to prove their humanism.

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<sup>43</sup> *Ibid* 149

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid* 149

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid* 149

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid* 150

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid* 151

In addition to using anthropology, Sinha assimilates phenomenology, as a branch of philosophy, to explain “Ātman-Brahman.” Therefore, he weaves in aspects of experiential learning as an instrumental factor in moulding human subjectivity. He says, “Vedānta inquiry would thereby be brought within the range of immanent experience from the transcendental level of absolute Being, through reflection directed to the transcendental-subjective region of consciousness.”<sup>48</sup> Here, he creates a distinction between Being and the Self. This is essential to the understanding of subjectivity and recognises the epistemological implications. He believes that acquiring knowledge is a function that has individualistic capacities. Hence, he discusses “The accent on the ‘inner,’ which one can hardly miss in the Western tradition-particularly in modern European thinking since Descartes, though not necessarily as the dominant theme-comes out as the central concern in the Indian tradition right from, and in fact very much in, the *Upaniṣads*.”<sup>49</sup> He explains that the evolution of the Self as a universal entity to an aspect that characterises an individual highlights the power of the ātman with relevance to its epistemological role that shapes subjectivity. Sinha cites Sankara who “urges the point that there is universal, though implicit, awareness of Self.”<sup>50</sup> He acknowledges the Cartesian tendencies of this interpretation, but also emphasises a distinctive factor by saying, “Sankarite and Descartes’- is the presence in the former, and the absence in the latter, of a basic recognition of levels of reflection and correlative evidence, moving from the psychological to the transcendental dimension of the inner.”<sup>51</sup> This can be applied to Jainism as it assimilates and further bolsters the importance of the understanding of ātman.

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<sup>48</sup> *Ibid* 153

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid* 156

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid* 164

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid* 165

Avidyā is cited by Sinha “as the key principle in the ontic subject of the human subject.”<sup>52</sup> He equates avidyā to a sense of nescience. He treats this concept as something that “gets divested of its essential bearing on a hermeneutic understanding of the ontic structure of human reality.”<sup>53</sup> However, he claims that consciousness is an integral aspect to understanding avidyā. Thus, he suggests that the complex nature of this concept lends it to an ontological discussion. He believes that “human condition, involving the non-cognitive modes no less than the cognitive, should be explored through the transcendental dynamics of avidyā.”<sup>54</sup> Therefore, the notion of “nescient” is entrenched in the “ātman-centred avidyā-oriented concept of human subjectivity.”<sup>55</sup> This can connect to Jainism as there is a strong focus on the ability to seek and attain knowledge as described in the tenets of the three jewels: Darśana (Right vision), Jñāna (Right knowledge) and Charitra (Right conduct).

While knowledge is an important theme of Western and Eastern existentialism, consciousness is another central aspect of these philosophical systems. Eastern philosophy highlights the concept of ātman, state of sleep and in turn, consciousness. Joel Kupperman wrote a paper that deconstructs “Asian and Western views of the self.”<sup>56</sup> This paper unravels Sartre’s philosophy as it attempts to examine the complicated nature of the self that ties into notions of consciousness. “For Sartre this is a phenomenon of reflecting consciousness which, insofar as it is consciousness of itself, is non-positional (that is, non-dualistic) consciousness. The reflective act gives birth to the me in the reflected consciousness.”<sup>57</sup> Hence, he establishes a strong

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<sup>52</sup> *Ibid* 173

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid* 168

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid* 173

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid* 173

<sup>56</sup> Kupperman, Joel J. "Investigations of the Self." *Philosophy East and West* 34, no. 1 (1984): 37.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid* 45

connection between the *Upaniṣadic* philosophy of the ātman and Sartre’s advocacy for human consciousness. He alludes to how Kant’s philosophy He says, “in other words, we now are in a position to see how natural it is, as a result of logical reflection on the common sense concept of the self, to say (as in the *Chandogya Upanisad*) that ‘when a person has entered into deep sleep ... he becomes united with Pure Being (sat), he has gone to his own Self.’”<sup>58</sup> He describes the self with regards to not only its waking sense, but also its cognition capacity in a state of sleep. Through these different states, Kupperman underscores how consciousness is intrinsic to the self. This is made evident when he cites, “Eliot Deutsch's reconstruction of Advaita Vedānta includes the claim that in deep sleep there is consciousness, even if there are no object.”<sup>59</sup> Here, he explains how the ātman remains active regardless of the state of being. It is this entity that transcends in the afterlife too. In order to clarify his philosophical discussion, he clearly states “the self one encounters, of course, is ātman. The requirement, which seems to follow with some plausibility from the common sense conception of the self-that ātman be stripped of what changes from one day to the next-has further implications.”<sup>60</sup> Essentially, he describes the ātman as an eternal reality that is permanently conscious. It is this entity that is capable of engaging an individual in introspection and meditation. He says, “the self can be regarded as a construction to unify the khandhas and as a creative construction. Something like this line of interpretation can be found in the work of Kant and Sartre.”<sup>61</sup> influences Sartre’s proclamations about ‘free will.’

Sartre’s *Being and Nothingness* introduces his theory of consciousness. This is underscored in Mark Woodhouse’s paper on “Consciousness and Brahman-Ātman.” The objective of his paper is to underscore theories of consciousness as developed in the West and to

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<sup>58</sup> *Ibid* 42

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid* 42

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid* 43

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid* 45

find compatibility in Eastern philosophy. He initially introduces the “five theses about consciousness”<sup>62</sup> that he chooses to explore. Essentially, these theses involve the uncertainty and theoretical nature of consciousness and its relations to objects. He believes that aspects of these theses are echoed in Elliot Deutsch’s description of ātman as “pure, undifferentiated self-shining consciousness, timeless, spaceless, and un thinkable, that is not-different from Brahman and that underlies and supports the individual person.”<sup>63</sup> Thereafter, Woodhouse introduces his analysis that likens consciousness to ātman. He says, “To begin, while ‘Ātman’ is usually translated as ‘self, it may be rendered as ‘consciousness’, although the latter is technically translated as ‘cit’ . For our purpose, ‘consciousness’ is the preferable rendition of Ātman.”<sup>64</sup> Thereafter, he characterises consciousness “changeless.”<sup>65</sup> This is similar to Sartre’s views on death as a phenomenon that exemplifies that consciousness transcends and exemplifies the ability of an individual to continue to exist. This is made evident when Woodhouse says, “The transcendental character of consciousness, whether depicted as the spaceless, timeless Ātman of Vedānta or as the nothingness of Sartre, escapes particularization.”<sup>66</sup> This shows that the definition of consciousness cannot be constrained and integrates “emotions, sensations.”<sup>67</sup>

While this literature frames a comparison between Hinduism’s interpretation of ātman, I will employ a similar analysis to examine a comparison with Jainism and Sartrean existentialism. I will engage Sartre to discuss the state of consciousness and establish connections with the concept of ātman as described in Jain texts. Most of the previous scholarship on a comparative study between Western existentialism and Hinduism texts do not provide a conclusion that

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<sup>62</sup> Woodhouse, Mark B. "Consciousness and Brahman-Ātman." *The Monist* 61, no. 1 (1978): 109.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid* 109

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid* 110

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid* 112

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid* 121

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid* 120

brings together a solid juxtaposition of the two concepts of philosophy. However, I will continue to explore the ties between western existentialism and ātman through a Jain lens. Using Sartrean analysis as representative of 20<sup>th</sup> century continental existentialist philosophy, I will study Jain scriptures and texts to further explore the consonances, and potential dissonances, between the two systems of philosophy. Nevertheless, I will argue that given Jainism's intense accent on the self, consciousness, responsibility, attainment of knowledge, atheist religious philosophy and overall, comprehension of the essences, it can be perceived as an existentialist religious philosophy.

### **Constructing an argument:**

The thesis will be organised in chapters that highlight thematic overlaps between Jainism and Western existentialist philosophy. However, to form a nuanced comparative study, I will focus on sections of Sartre's *Existentialism is a Humanism*. While the objective of this thesis is to explore existentialist interpretations, there will be a divergence to incorporate ontological, phenomenological and epistemological theories to enhance the argument. Given that Sartre's inspiration stems from existentialist philosophers like Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, hermeneutics of Heidegger and ethics of Kant, the thesis will solely treat *Existentialism as a Humanism* as a consolidated version of Sartrean philosophy. I will demonstrate how Jainism's religious philosophy similar to Advaita Vedānta can be studied through the same concepts of existentialism.

## Chapter 2

### How are Jain Philosophy and Atheist Existentialism similar?

“God”, “immortality of the soul”, “redemption”, “beyond” -- Without exception, concepts to which I have never devoted any attention, or time; not even as a child. Perhaps I have never been childlike enough for them? I do not by any means know atheism as a result; even less as an event: It is a matter of course with me, from instinct. I am too inquisitive, too questionable, too exuberant to stand for any gross answer. God is a gross answer, an indelicacy against us thinkers - at bottom merely a gross prohibition for us: you shall not think!”<sup>1</sup> – Friedrich Nietzsche

The idea of God is central to the study of theology, but given its intrinsic link to religion, it has become an important theme of religious studies. While God drives theological studies, it is important to understand how this supreme entity manifests in philosophy. The belief and disbelief in God has been a debate from time immemorial. It has given birth to ideologies like theism, atheism and agnosticism. These schools of thought have become integral strands of different philosophies as their existence or non-existence lead to extensive probing. It results in the contemplation of creation, assessment of good and bad in the world and most importantly, the justification of injustice. These questions are posed in philosophical discourses and have resulted in atheistic philosophies. Given that our aim is to understand the implication of God or a theist being in existentialist philosophy, it is important that we first lay out a few definitions.

*A Dictionary of Atheism*, published by Oxford University, gives a definition of atheism that states,

“An absence of belief in the existence of a God or gods. This broad definition, faithful to the Greek etymology and favoured in much recent scholarship, encompasses a range of related positions, including (inter

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<sup>1</sup> Curry, William. “Atheism.” Nietzsche Quotes: Atheism. Accessed February 8, 2019. <https://www.theperspectivesofnietzsche.com/nietzsche/nath.html>.

alia) active disbelief, as well as most forms strong agnosticism and religious indifference, and some technical philosophical stances (e.g. logical positivism). Sometimes referred to as negative atheism or non-theism (1), or less commonly weak or soft atheism.”<sup>2</sup>

For the purpose of this thesis, I will ground my analysis in this definition. Using this as a primary definition, it is evident that atheism suggests a disbelief in God, but also regards ambivalent positions like agnosticism as prevalent. In fact, it also likens atheism to “non-theism,” which further denotes a distinction that explains it is important to recognise that many conflate atheism with the idea of being non-religious. However, I will argue against this misconception by showing how Jainism, as a religion, is atheistic in nature by this definition. It presents similarities to atheist existentialism. Therefore, religious philosophies are capable of being devoid of a supreme entity. In fact, *A Dictionary of Atheism* acknowledges this in its section that defines non-theism. It clearly indicates,

“Jainism is often described as a ‘non-theistic religion’, meaning that it does not have a theistic element. Because atheism has come to be associated with positive atheism and is often used as an identity label by or about positive atheists, non-theism is frequently used to identify negative atheism or to differentiate a positive atheist outlook from others that are referred to as atheism.”<sup>3</sup>

Given the use of non-theism and atheism as analogous, we can further explain why Jainism can be explored as an atheistic religious philosophy. While the above definitions of atheism are standard in that it upholds the disbelief of God to be a primary characteristic, they also allude to the distinctions between different types of atheism. This dictionary does not pigeonhole the definition of atheism, but explains that “In common

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<sup>2</sup> Bullivant, Stephen Sebastian, and Lois Lee, eds. 2016. *A Dictionary of Atheism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*

usage, non-theism tends to indicate the absence of theism (negative atheism), as distinct from the explicit rejection of theism (or positive atheism).”<sup>4</sup> Thus, it is clear that the absence of God is different from the absolute denial of God as a supreme entity. This is further supported with atheistic existentialism that is not concerned with the disproval of God or the supreme deity’s role in creation, but rather emphasises the role and responsibility ascribed to every individual. While this viewpoint gained relevance in the West through Sartre’s 20<sup>th</sup> century lecture *Existentialism is a Humanism*, it has been an integral aspect of Jain philosophy since the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE.

Given that Indian Philosophy is largely made up of its rich religious philosophies that originated with the *Vedas* and thereafter, evolved into Hindu, Buddhist and Jain as distinct religions, it is important to acknowledge the presence of theological studies in philosophy. L. R. Joshi wrote a paper on a *A New Interpretation of Indian Atheism* where he references different Indian religious schools, which are considered atheist by stating the following definition, “The term atheism, when applied to a system of thought, usually means that the system has no use for the concept of God and that it is opposed to all forms of spiritualism and religion.”<sup>5</sup> However, this definition explicitly mentions the implications of spiritualism and religious philosophy cannot be considered atheistic. By that definition, he writes “The Sāṃkhya, the Sāṃkhya, Buddhism, and Jainism are atheistic systems with a difference, for while they deny the reality of a personal God, they openly embrace spiritual and religious ideas”<sup>6</sup> and clearly states that they have “theistic

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<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>5</sup> Joshi, L. R. 1966. “A New Interpretation of Indian Atheism.” *Philosophy East and West* 16 (3/4): 189–89. 189

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid* 189

tendencies.”<sup>7</sup> However, I want to clarify that I will use *A Dictionary of Atheism*’s definition, which does not limit the presence of religious philosophy to be a deviation from atheism. I choose to use this definition as it best aligns with Jainism’s rejection of the supernatural and supreme deity. Therefore, I will use that definition to explore why Jainism with its non-theistic roots is an example of an atheistic philosophy. In fact, in the West, atheism has grown to become part of various schools of philosophy and particularly became a strand of focus in existentialism. *A Dictionary of Atheism* explains, “Most religious traditions can be understood to have existential philosophical aspects, as can many nonreligious and areligious philosophies and traditions such as humanism, materialism, existentialism.”<sup>8</sup> To this effect, I can evoke Sartre’s *Existentialism is a Humanism* to further contextualise the meaning of atheistic existentialism and how it has become essential to his understanding of humanism. This will exemplify the similarities between Sartre’s atheistic existentialism and Jain religious philosophy. Moreover, it will also further illuminate how Jainism’s philosophy aligns with existentialism to the extent that its philosophy can also be considered a humanism. This further exemplifies how Jainism is emblematic of existentialist philosophy even before existentialism came into existence as a school of philosophy in the West.

In order to compare the two philosophies, it is important to understand the evolution of existentialist philosophy from a theistic perspective. This can be traced back to Kierkegaard. Although he never formally recognised his school of thought as existentialist, his philosophy has grown to become the foundations of this philosophical

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<sup>7</sup> *Ibid* 189

<sup>8</sup> Bullivant, Stephen Sebastian, and Lois Lee, eds. 2016. *A Dictionary of Atheism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

system. He emphasises the distinction between individual and God as well as explains how individuals behave in relation to the existence of God. He believes, “When God is taken seriously neither the individual (the aesthetic stage) nor society (the ethical stage) is taken to be absolute, but both are seen in their finitude and sinfulness to stand before the judgment of God.”<sup>9</sup> However, he maintains that individuals reserve the right to independently make decisions and follow belief systems. This analysis is grounded in the Christian faith and it is this faith that Nietzsche vehemently opposes. “What is wrong with the old values of ascetic and altruistic morality, according to Nietzsche, is that they are rooted in the resentment of the weak against the strong.”<sup>10</sup> In fact, he became infamous with his phrase, “God is dead.” Although Nietzsche’s atheist philosophy is consistent with Sartrean philosophy, Sartre, just like Kierkegaard, maintains that individuals have innate capacities to determine and discern their behaviour. In fact, “Sartre’s individualism, like Kierkegaard’s, presupposes that the self is essentially relational. It is the Other who teaches me who I am.”<sup>11</sup> Unlike Nietzsche, Sartre is not overcome with the purpose of disproving God, but rather is interested in the role of individuals. This leads Sartre to claim, “existence precedes essence”<sup>12</sup> in his lecture *Existentialism is a Humanism*. In brief, this means that humans have the independence through which they are capable of creating their own conduct. This is strongly evocative of Jain philosophy that individuals have the svátantra or freedom to act rationally and determine their essence. However, the forces of existence are grouped into two categories

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<sup>9</sup> Westphal, Merold. “Phenomenology and Existentialism” in *A Companion to Philosophy of Religion* (version 2nd ed.). 2nd ed. Blackwell Companions to Philosophy, 9. Chichester, U.K.: Wiley-Blackwell. 169

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid* 170

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid* 171

<sup>12</sup> Sartre, Jean-Paul, *Existentialism Is a Humanism*. 22.

in Jainism: “Those two entities are *Jiva* that which has life; and *Ajīv* that which has no life; or that which is conscious and that which is inert.”<sup>13</sup> Although this does not align with Kierkegaard’s theistic perspective, there is a strong resonance of Jainism found in Sartre’s *Existentialism is a Humanism*, which will lead us to understand that parallels can be drawn between this Western school of philosophy and Jainism’s ancient philosophy to explain their atheistic nature.

Jainism and Sartrean existentialism emphasise the role and responsibility of an individual. In *Existentialism is a Humanism*, Sartre defines atheistic existentialism with the following statement “It states that if God does not exist, there is at least one being in whom existence precedes essence—a being whose existence comes before its essence, a being who exists before he can be defined by any concept of it. That being is man, or, as Heidegger put it, the human reality.”<sup>14</sup> This means that individuals become part of society only after understanding and determining their role and characteristics. According to Sartre, there is no preconceived doctrine that stipulates an individual’s purpose. Moreover, there is no supreme deity that upholds ordinance. Hence, the mere fact of an individual’s existence raises questions about its essence. Similarly, Jainism posits that every individual is the architect of their own faith. Since there is no divine being controlling the action, Jainism maintains “Every creature living in this universe possesses a separate and independent existence and individuality. Every one’s soul is independent. Everyone has a separate existence. Every creature has to put forth its own efforts to get deliverance from the bondage of *Karmas* and to attain salvation in order to end the

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<sup>13</sup> Bhadrabahuviyay. *Guidelines of Jainism*. Gandhinagar, India: Shri Mahavir Jain Aradhana Kendra, 2012.107.

<sup>14</sup> Sartre, Jean-Paul, *Existentialism Is a Humanism*. 22

persistence of rebirth. Dharma [duty] is essentially a personal affair. It is an attainment to be made by one's own self."<sup>15</sup> This sense of responsibility implies subjectivity is attributed to every individual. Consequently, every individual has the capacity to seek their essence and give meaning to their svabhava (nature). Jainism believes each individual has their innate svabhava that can be brought to life by an individual's actions, which essentially determines their essence. The existence varies largely on "The *Jīva* is also called *Atma* soul or *Chetan* consciousness and that which has no life is called *Ajiv*."<sup>16</sup> Individuals are the evolved beings that have the ātman and have the ability to become parmātman- a more evolved being that breaks away from the shackles of Karma and paves their path to liberation. While L.R. Joshi argues that this implies "theistic tendencies," it is important to note that " 'God', should be interpreted as being directed towards this and as an acknowledgement of the spiritual principle within every individual."<sup>17</sup> Therefore, in Jainism, every individual must strive to the soteriological goal of attaining mōkṣa. However, this is a function that is influenced by "morality," "freedom" and "responsibility" as we know in the West and Jainism would call it sachai, svātantra and javabdhari respectively. Jainism believes that there is no supreme deity that has control over these attributes, and it is solely in the hands of an individual to strive to seek liberation.<sup>18</sup> There is no singular understanding of what must constitute an individual's nature and hence, an individual is an architect of their own doing. This is consistent with Sartre's lecture that says, "Man is nothing other than his own project. He

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<sup>15</sup> Bhadrabahuviyay. *Guidelines of Jainism*. Gandhinagar, India: Shri Mahavir Jain Aradhana Kendra, 2012.106.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid* 107.

<sup>17</sup> Dundas, Paul. 2002. *The Jains* (version 2nd ed.). 2nd ed. Library of Religious Beliefs and Practices. London: Routledge. 110.

<sup>18</sup> Sahebji, Tej. *Jain Dharmasaar*. Mumbai. 151

exists only to the extent that he realizes himself, therefore he is nothing more than the sum of his actions, nothing more than his life.”<sup>19</sup> While Jainism discusses action as an accumulation of karma, Sartre endorses the same belief that an individual is a product of their actions.

The heightened sense of individualism is strongly displayed in Sartre’s *Existentialism is a Humanism*. This is made evident when he says, “We mean that man first exists: he materializes in the world, encounters himself, and only afterward defines himself. If man as existentialists conceive of him cannot be defined, it is because to begin with he is nothing. He will not be anything until later, and then he will be what he makes of himself. Thus, there is no human nature since there is no God to conceive of it.”<sup>20</sup> Similarly, this can be echoed by “The distinguishing feature of Jain philosophy is its belief on independent existence of the soul and matter, denial of supreme divine creator, owner, preserver or destroyer, a strong emphasis on non-violence, accent on relativity and multiple facets of truth, morality and ethics based on liberation of the soul.”<sup>21</sup> Here, we notice the poignancy in that both these philosophies abandon the notion of a creator deity and place the understanding of society on an individual. There is an acceptance or rather celebration for the multiplicity of perspectives. While Sartre emphasises the practices of appraisal and recognition in a more ambiguous tone, Jainism shows a more definitive path. However, both philosophies maintain that it is only an individual’s responsibility to tread on these paths. There is no support that can be provided through

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<sup>19</sup> Sartre, Jean-Paul, Annie Cohen-Solal, Arlette Elkaïm-Sartre, John Kulka, and Carol Macomber. *Existentialism Is a Humanism = (L’Existentialisme Est Un Humanisme) ; Including, a Commentary on The Stranger (Explication De L’Étranger)*. Winnipeg: Manitoba Education and Advanced Learning, Alternate Formats, 2016. 37

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid* 22.

<sup>21</sup> Sahebji, Tej. *Jain Dharmsaar*. Mumbai. 151

the form of a supreme deity. Atheist existentialism denounces that God can save an individual from death and likewise, Jainism maintains that an individual's death is a result of their karma. Although atheist existentialism does not operate on the term karma, there is an evident focus on the actions of an individual. As a result, an individual's responsibility is powerful in guiding rational conduct. The focus on the ability to engage in right conduct further shows the commonalities between the atheist existentialist philosophy and the Jain path.

Atheist existentialism and Jainism strongly advocate that the individual is responsible for their own actions. Jainism believes that every individual is in charge of their own karma. "Creation and destruction; production and disposal are always going on. Behind this eternal process there does not exist anyone's planning or organization. The whole universe is a self-regulated one. But in this organization, *Karma* plays an important role. In this process the effect of Karma is empathetically evident."<sup>22</sup> An individual's karma is contingent on performing *samvār*<sup>23</sup> (stops the influx of the *pāp*) and staying away from *pāp*<sup>24</sup> (sins). An individual is capable of distinguishing good from the bad because of their consciousness, which is another integral theme of existentialism. However, in understanding the role of an individual, it is important to remember that this individual is not influenced by a supreme entity. It denotes that Jains trust individuals with the freedom to determine their actions. This is also representative of Sartre's existentialist philosophy when he says, "If, however, God does not exist, we will encounter no values or orders that can legitimize our conduct. Thus, we have neither

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<sup>22</sup> Bhadrabahuviyay. *Guidelines of Jainism*. Gandhinagar, India: Shri Mahavir Jain Aradhana Kendra, 2012.107.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid* 108

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid* 108

behind us, nor before us, in the luminous realm of values, any means of justification or excuse. We are left alone and without excuse. This is what I mean when I say that man is condemned to be free: condemned, because he did not create himself, yet nonetheless free, because once cast into the world, he is responsible for everything he does.”<sup>25</sup> In essence, both these philosophies describe that the role of individual is superior to any being and is solely responsible for leading their life with morality. It is evident that even in the presence of a God or supreme entity, the role of an individual must be self-decided. This demonstrates that both these philosophies encourage contemplation, self-appraisal and reflection. These tenets are fundamental to drive the behaviour of an individual. Sartre further emphasises this when he says, “From the moment that the possibilities I am considering cease to be rigorously engaged by my action, I must no longer take interest in them, for no God or greater design can bend the world and its possibilities to my will.”<sup>26</sup> This explains that an individual must exercise their inherent freedom to guide their behaviour. There is no supreme deity that holds the reins to steer an individual’s conduct. It is exclusively an individual’s duty to be responsible for their actions.

Given that an individual has ownership of their action in both these philosophies, the presence or absence of God is not aggressively questioned. While Sartre’s existentialism and Jainism are atheistic, they do not examine the belief in a God. Both philosophies admit that it is futile to waste time mulling over the existence of a divine being. It does not serve any purpose, but instead detracts from an individual’s primary responsibility of determining their action. They believe that individuals become overcome and absorbed in proving theism or atheism. This is exemplified when Sartre

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<sup>25</sup> Sartre, Jean-Paul, *Existentialism Is a Humanism*. 29

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid* 35

says, “Existentialism is not so much an atheism in the sense that it would exhaust itself attempting to demonstrate the nonexistence of God; rather, it affirms that even if God were to exist, it would make no difference-that it is our point of view.”<sup>27</sup> It is common that individuals question creation or require justifications to comprehend the injustice in the world. Several individuals might attribute the suffering in the world to a supreme being’s control while others believe that if a supreme being were to exist, there would be more balance in society. This naturally raises questions regarding external powers. Individuals believe that the lack of uniformity and equality in the world flaws the argument for a God. Hence, this leads to theistic versus atheistic debates. However, Sartre and Jains don’t want to be overwhelmed by questions like “If God really has these attributes, then why did he create this world which is groaning in agony and anguish?”<sup>28</sup> Jainism thinks “Instead of getting caught in the meshes of such questions, it would be better to consider the universe as being devoid of any beginning. We have to think that after all some truth is without a beginning; then why is it not possible to consider that the universe itself is without a beginning?”<sup>29</sup> Therefore, the idea of not getting consumed in the details of creation is a shared idea between the two philosophies.

Although Jainism believes that there is no God that is at the helm of creation, it endorses that every individual is capable of becoming supreme. Jainism scholar Paul Dundas says, “It nonetheless must be regarded as a theist religion in the more profound sense that it accepts the existence of a divine principle, the paramātman, often in fact referred to as ‘God’ (e.g. ParPr 114–16), existing in potential state within all beings. Jain

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<sup>27</sup> *Ibid* 53

<sup>28</sup> Bhadrabahuviyay. *Guidelines of Jainism*. Gandhinagar, India: Shri Mahavir Jain Aradhana Kendra, 2012. 105

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid* 106

devotional worship of the formakers, who as a totality are frequently also designated.”<sup>30</sup>

In my analysis, this interpretation can be categorised as an example of ‘soft atheism’ by the definition provided in *A Dictionary of Atheism*. In that sense, I see more concreteness in classifying Jainism as atheistic. It is imperative to recognise that Jains have made clear that there is no hand of the supreme in creating or generating the functions of the universe. “As compared with most other religions, it is important to notice that Jainism has a very definite and uncompromising attitude towards the conception of God. It is accused of being atheistic. This is not so, because Jainism believes in Godhood and in innumerable gods; but certainly Jainism is atheistic in not believing its gods to have created the Universe.”<sup>31</sup> Instead Jainism gives individuals the dominance over creation. Although it does not support the notion of a supreme deity, Jainism believes every individual has the potential to be supreme. Since there is no hierarchy or power dynamic with regards to worship or belief, Jainism focuses primarily on morality that enables individuals to seek liberation. Although Sartre’s existentialist philosophy stresses that there is no secondary universe, the ideology behind an individual’s existence and essence remains consistent between the two schools of thought. This is similar to existentialism’s “existence precedes essence,” in that an individual’s existence must be followed by living in accordance with the three Ratnas (jewels) of Jainism, Darśana (Right vision), Jñāna (Right knowledge) and (Right conduct). Moreover, individuals have the authority to choose their behaviour that aligns with the fundamentals of this moral path. There is no absolute correct way to lead life and nor is there a prescribed path in existentialism.

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<sup>30</sup> Dundas, Paul. 2002. *The Jains* (version 2nd ed.). 2nd ed. Library of Religious Beliefs and Practices. London: Routledge. 110.

<sup>31</sup> Jaini, Jagmanderlal. “THEOLOGY.” Chapter. In *Outlines of Jainism*, edited by F. W. Thomas, 1–6. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013. 4

Jainism believes that every ātman comes with intrinsic rationality to be accountable for their own doing. While there is a suggested path in Jainism, there is a strong agency given to subjectivity. This is representative of atheistic existentialism, as well, since it disregards a focus on a supreme deity and prides itself on being an inward philosophy. This inward philosophy keeps the individual at the centre of societal functions without the influence of any supernatural force. The absence of the supreme implies the atheistic nature of the philosophical system. It is an individual's freedom along with their responsibility that must give them the wherewithal to act rationally. Hence, Sartre argues that this philosophy is a *Humanism*. It allows individuals to be agents of their actions as well as learn from the consequences of their actions. It is not about knowing oneself as much as constantly engaging and learning with one's actions, emotions and behaviour. This is attributed to the fact that "man is this transcendence."<sup>32</sup> This supremacy conferred on individuals make them the pioneers of their actions.

Given our understanding that humanism is detached from supreme forces and based on the ascendancy of individuals, it is important to understand exactly what Sartre meant when he described *Humanism*. This will help us draw parallels to explain the consonances with Jain religious philosophy.

"Since man is this transcendence, and grasps objects only in relation to such transcendence, he is himself the core and focus of this transcendence. The only universe that exists is the human one—the universe of human subjectivity. The link between transcendence as constitutive of man (not in the sense that God is transcendent, but in the sense that man passes beyond himself) and subjectivity (in the sense that man is not an island unto himself but always present in a human universe) is what we call "existentialist humanism." This is humanism because we remind man that there is no legislator other than himself and that he must, in his abandoned state, make his own choices, and also because we show that it is not by turning inward, but by constantly seeking a goal outside of himself in the form of

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<sup>32</sup> Sartre, Jean-Paul, *Existentialism Is a Humanism*. 52

liberation, or of some special achievement, that man will realize himself as truly human.”<sup>33</sup>

This transcendence is similar to the concept in Jainism, which states that every ātman is capable of being parmātman. Once again, Jain ontology differs in that they believe in another world and Sartre emphasises “No Exit,” but they both suggest the transcendental nature of an individual. Moreover, this theme of existentialist philosophy has a connotation of allowing individuals to go beyond what is conceived to be standard. Since existentialism does not prescribe a singular path of human conduct, it raises individuals to the capacity of being judges of their own actions. Likewise, in his book on the Jain *Āgamas*, Tej Sahebji says, “Jainism believes that every soul is a potential God. Every soul can become God, so, Jainism can be called a kind of Humanism soul, by its own efforts, can reach the highest form of perfection.”<sup>34</sup> This corresponds with the idea of “transcendence” in atheist existentialism. Therefore, according to both these philosophies, individuals are instinctive and responsible to maintain their subjectivity. The absence of an established supreme being allows individuals to become that being. Sartre’s existentialism believes that individuals are “abandoned” since there is no individual watching over them. This sense of neglect promotes them to be the sole decision-makers. This can be found in Jainism, which says, “The loka [world] is without beginning or end in time and was not brought into existence through the agency of any divine being. To this extent, Jainism is an atheist religion, inasmuch as it regards it as an illegitimate conclusion that there is a conscious creator who can intervene in or control

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<sup>33</sup> *Ibid* 52-53

<sup>34</sup> Sahebji, Tej. *Jain Dharmsaar*. Mumbai. 148

the affairs of living creatures.”<sup>35</sup> Therefore, individuals are not influenced by external forces that serve as the conduit of their actions. As a result, humans are “subjective.” This subjectivity is a vital aspect of Jainism as discussed through the concept of *anekāntavāda*, which will be discussed in the following chapter of this thesis.

There is a compelling accent given to the importance of reflection and introspection in existentialism. These practices are an indispensable part of Jain philosophy as well. Jainism posits that an individual’s ability to engage in meditative practices gives them the potential to become supreme entities. Although Sartre alludes to “liberation,” he does not define or characterise what he means by that. He believes we are trapped in this world and must continue to exist by finding purpose. This void can be answered by Jainism’s soteriological objective of attaining *mōkṣa*. While there is a definite ultimate aim in Jainism, it can be achieved through the principles of “responsibility” and “freedom” as described in Sartre’s existentialist philosophy. Therefore, it is crucial that individuals use their cognitive abilities to perform their actions without depending on validation of a supreme entity in both these philosophies.

As per the definition provided by *A Dictionary of Atheism*’s rigorous explanations of the various connotations of ‘atheism,’ Jainism can be regarded as an atheistic religion. While we’ve drawn distinctions that unravel the nuances between atheistic and non-theistic perspectives, it is important to recall that the absence of a supreme deity is a classification of atheism. In that case, Jainism falls under the category of an atheist philosophy albeit those looking at Jainism as an organized religion may consider Tīrthaṅkaras as Gods; but even they accede that those divine beings are not keeping a

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<sup>35</sup> Dundas, Paul. 2002. *The Jains* (version 2nd ed.). 2nd ed. Library of Religious Beliefs and Practices. London: Routledge. 90.

watch over their actions; they discovered a path of liberation for themselves and hence documented it with the help of the Gandharas as *Āgamas*. They are definitely not hand holding them to walk on the path, just strongly recommending a way of life. In a more nuanced conclusion, one can say that Jainism leans more towards soft atheism in that it does not promote arguments against divinity. This analysis can also be extended to Sartre's version of atheist existentialism as he does not question or prove the presence of a supreme being. Both these systems of philosophy uphold the notions that humans are the supreme beings capable of controlling their actions. These actions are a result of their responsibility and freedom and not those influenced by a supreme being. In essence, Jainism's recommended path can be a potential answer to the vacuum that Sartre leaves us with when he insists that there is no escape from this world.

## Chapter 3

### Subjectivity and Anekāntavāda

“I think, therefore I am”<sup>1</sup> - René Descartes

The human-world revolves around the interactions of individuals with the material world. Consequently, individuals have the ability to determine their actions and thereby, create their own identity. This discerning power of individuals is often attributed to the notion that humans are the most evolved species. In Jainism, individuals belong to the category of Jīv Tattva (living elements), which is in contrast to Ajīv Tattva (non-living elements). The primary difference between the two categories is that the Ajīv lack the ability of “self-realisation.”<sup>2</sup> In *Guidelines of Jainism*, the author Bhadrabahuviḷjay says, “All living beings are called Jīvs. Jīvas have a consciousness which is called *Ātman* (soul-*chetana*). The soul and the body are two different entities according to Jainism and Existentialism. “The soul cannot be reproduced, it is described as a sort of energy that is indestructible, invisible and shapeless. The body is merely a home for the soul. At the time of death, the soul leaves the body to occupy a new body.”<sup>3</sup> Therefore, the soul enables an individual to seek knowledge and realisation. In fact, *ātman-*chetana** is comparable to Western notions of the self in existentialism. It helps us answer existentialist questions like What is my purpose? What is the function of my soul? Why am I in this body? What Jainism and existentialism both have in common is a fervent acknowledgement of subjectivity with regards to an individual’s conduct.

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<sup>1</sup> Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy. Accessed February 24, 2019. <https://www.iep.utm.edu/descarte/>.

<sup>2</sup> Bhadrabahuviḷjay. *Guidelines of Jainism*. Gandhinagar, India: Shri Mahavir Jain Aradhana Kendra, 2012.114.

<sup>3</sup> Sahebji, Tej. *Jain Dharmasaar*. Mumbai. 23

Jainism and existentialism both ascertain that individuals determine their own essence and existence. This is made evident in Sartre's *Existentialism is a Humanism* when he says, "Man is indeed a project that has a subjective existence, rather unlike that of a patch of moss, a spreading fungus, or a cauliflower. Prior to that projection of the self, nothing exists, not even in divine intelligence, and man shall attain existence only when he is what he projects himself to be-not what he would like to be."<sup>4</sup> This denotes that individuals, unlike mere unicellular organisms, have the ability of sense perception. Similarly, Sartre stresses that an individual's sense perception is the guiding force of their existence as there is no heteronomous power that determines essence. This enables us to control our existence. We are capable of rationalising, reasoning, feeling and emoting and hence, shaping our outlook and personality. There is no singular way of life and this gives us subjective freedom. Individuals are responsible for the expression of their identity. Similarly, Jainism explains that individuals are evolved beings since they inherently have five senses. In fact, Jainism theorises it is from fungus that each soul begins its journey and it is a long road ahead until one reaches the stage of achieving all five senses of a human being. Thereafter, the soul transmigrates from one birth to another. The soul's form is contingent on the karma accumulated in former lives. However, a consistent aspect of the soul is that it "possesses the inherent knowledge and intuition which can empower it to destroy the beginning less deluded *world*-view tormenting it."<sup>5</sup> The soul has the ability to realise an enlightened world-view. Jains postulate that individuals, unlike Ajīv tattva "have consciousness."<sup>6</sup> This consciousness gives us purpose and identity. However, these aren't

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<sup>4</sup> Sartre, Jean-Paul, *Existentialism Is a Humanism*.23

<sup>5</sup> Umāsvāti, Devanandī, Siddhasenagani, and Nathmal Tatia. *That Which Is = Tattvārtha Sūtra*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011. 6.

<sup>6</sup> Sahebji, Tej. *Jain Dharmasaar*. Mumbai. 26

universal entities and instead Jainism thrives on the idea of “non-absolutism.”<sup>7</sup> Several examples of this can be found in Jain parables. These parables are shared daily in households, schools, theatre and in community assembly halls by the seers to reinstate values of humanity and to harmonise sacred and secular strings.

In Jainism, a parable that demonstrates the acknowledgment of pluralism is that of an elephant and six blind men. Although this might not be originally a Jain text, it is referenced to showcase the diversity in beliefs and understanding. In this story, a group of blind men heard that a strange animal had been got to their town. Since none of them were aware of its shape, size and form, they decided to find out for themselves. They use their heightened sense of touch. Therefore, they sought it, found it and felt it. The first blind man’s hand fell on the elephant’s big trunk and he said, “this being is like a thick snake.” For the second one, whose hand reached its ear, the creature felt like some sort of a fan. The third one managed to touch the elephant’s leg and found the creature to be like a pillar and likened it to a tree trunk. The fourth one touched one side of the elephant’s body and described the being as a wall. The fifth one placed his hand on the tail and thought the elephant was a rope. The last one, who felt the elephant’s tusk, announced that it was like a spear-smooth and hard. From this story, one can say that each of the blind men grasped the partial truth, not the whole truth and so each one was right in their own way. As a result, this story expounds the idea that one cannot obtain the whole truth by knowing only one aspect of reality. This concept of a many-sided outlook is called *Anekāntavāda* in Jainism. “The term, *Anekāntavāda* may be translated as the doctrine of many sidedness of reality and knowledge. It is relative pluralism or non-absolutism.”<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Umāsvāti, Devanandī, Siddhasenagani, and Nathmal Tatia. *That Which Is = Tattvārtha Sūtra*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011. xvii

<sup>8</sup> Dr Kokila Hemchand Shah, pg 122, Prabudhh Jeevan, March 2015, Published by Shri Jain Yuvak Sangh, Mumbai

Pluralism in self-determination in Jainism and Sartrean existentialism is based on the heightened evolved senses of mankind. Sartre also believes “It is also what is referred to as “subjectivity,” the very word used as a reproach against us. But what do we mean by that, if not that man has more dignity than a stone or a table?”<sup>9</sup> Here, he emphasises that individuals have the power of sensitivity and perception far superior than any other form of existence. Therefore, individuals are associated with a higher dignity than an inanimate object. This is echoed in Jainism as “The body can consume food and water; can speak and move because of the presence of the soul in it; and because for all these activities the motive force is the soul.”<sup>10</sup> The entity of the soul gives humans more authority and agency as opposed to inanimate objects. This gives humans the liberty to find their own path. This path involves the interaction of individuals with not just themselves and other individuals, but also the material world around them. In Jainism, “The framework of the Tattvārtha Sūtra, recognize two fundamentals of existence. The first is the beginningless and interdependent co-existence of physical and spiritual reality. The interaction between soul and matter is the nature of a worldly life.”<sup>11</sup> Just like Western existentialism, Jainism demonstrates that individuals are on their own quest to perceive, adapt, assimilate and traverse their milieu and material environment. There isn’t a universal path, but there is definitely a recommended path. On the other hand, Sartre does not suggest a path as he deems existentialism is a result of an individual’s absolute freedom to make decisions. While existentialism acknowledges that the objective is to seek the truth, Jainism has a recommended structured way of life. Nevertheless, both these philosophies uphold the notion of subjectivity that is possible because of an individual’s evolved state.

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<sup>9</sup> Sartre, Jean-Paul, *Existentialism Is a Humanism*.23

<sup>10</sup> Bhadrabahuviṃjay. *Guidelines of Jainism*. Gandhinagar, India: Shri Mahavir Jain Aradhana Kendra, 2012.109

<sup>11</sup> Umāsvāti, Devanandī, Siddhasenagaṇi, and Nathmal Tatia. *That Which Is = Tattvārtha Sūtra*. New Haven: Yale /University Press, 2011. xix

Subjectivity is at the core of existentialism and Jainism. In the case of both these philosophies, subjectivity is a product of the freedom attributed to individuals. In Western philosophy, subjectivity can be traced back to Cartesian and Kantian ethics. Their philosophical reasoning for this concept is related to understanding the fundamentals of an individuals. Therefore, philosophical concepts like freedom, consciousness and truth become pertinent. Sartre's advocacy for subjectivism is inspired by Cartesian and Kantian philosophy and this is made evident in *Being and Nothingness*. However, he solidifies this argument with relevance to the importance of subjectivism for individuals to seek morality in *Existentialism is a Humanism*. This link between subjectivism and morality can be directly compared with Jainism's focus on seeking the truth. Although the path of realising this truth might be recommended, there is an accent placed on diverse beliefs and behaviour as long as the overarching objective is to lead a moral life. Sartre says, "Subjectivism means, on the one hand, the freedom of the individual subject to choose what he will be, and, on the other, man's inability to transcend human subjectivity. The fundamental meaning of existentialism resides in the latter."<sup>12</sup> This explains that an individual isn't capable of traversing life without an original outlook. Individuals flourish in a state of diversity and hence, achieving uniformity is not endorsed by existentialist philosophy. Similarly, the *Tattvārtha Sūtra* of Jainism acknowledges that trying to find a common structure "leads to an oscillating world-view in which we become unable to conceive of spiritual and material reality at once, and as a whole."<sup>13</sup> Thus, Jainism upholds that individuals aren't able to overcome their intuitive desire and nature until they attain liberation. If individuals strive to find a common approach to life, there would be more instability. This will distract an

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<sup>12</sup> Sartre, Jean-Paul, *Existentialism Is a Humanism*.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Umāsvāti, Devanandī, Siddhasenagaṇi, and Nathmal Tatia. *That Which Is = Tattvārtha Sūtra*. New Haven: Yale /University Press, 2011. xix.

individual from their quest for seeking truth and morality. Therefore, both philosophies are strong proponents of a multi-dimensional truth.

In *Existentialism is a Humanism*, Sartre focuses his attention on an individual's responsibility to engage with the truth. This is similar to Jainism in that the *Tattvārtha Sūtra* written by Umāsvāti suggests paths for an individual to seek truth. Sartre says, "For strictly philosophical reasons, our point of departure is indeed, the subjectivity of the individual-not because we are bourgeois, but because we seek to base our doctrine on truth, not on comforting theories full of hope but without any real foundation."<sup>14</sup> Here, it is evident that truth is one of the primary principles of existentialism. However, the notion of truth is grounded in subjectivity. In Jainism, "Following the logic of non-absolutism, Umāsvāti shows that the truth or distortion of our knowledge is not determined by the grasp of practical facts but by ethical and spiritual values which provide our viewpoint."<sup>15</sup> As a result, Jainism's ontology does not reduce the truth to a single concept. In fact, it is explained by the epistemological concept of *nayavāda* that confirms the presence of multiple perspectives. These perspectives are a result of leading a moralistic and ethical life. However, these perspectives might be true or untrue depending on which perspective that one views as a claim. This doctrine is *syāvāda* and means that one can view the truth from differing stances. There is no universality in truth as long as individuals undertake a virtuous path. Given that every individual has the right to perceive the world in their own instinctive way, there is diversity in perspective. "To deny their validity or to see one as the total, exclusive truth leads to dogmas."<sup>16</sup> Therefore, it is essential to become accepting of differing perspectives whilst

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<sup>14</sup> *Ibid* 40

<sup>15</sup> Umāsvāti, Devanandī, Siddhasenagaṇi, and Nathmal Tatia. *That Which Is = Tattvārtha Sūtra*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011. xviii

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid* xviii

maintaining individuality. This becomes the basis of Umāsvāti's dogma as the process of learning and acquiring the truth is not definitive.

Sartre's existentialist philosophy and Jainism describe the discovery of truth as a constant work in progress. Both philosophies stress upon the fact that an individual is in control of determining their way of life. Sartre says, "Man makes himself; he does not come into the world fully made, he makes himself by choosing his own morality, and his circumstances are such that he has no option other than to choose a morality."<sup>17</sup> This exemplifies that there is no singular reality or morality. In fact, it is the individual that is responsible for discovering their truth and discerning morality. This belief of Western existentialism can be compared to the objectives of Umāsvāti in Jainism. In the *Tattvārtha Sūtra*,

"Umāsvāti presents the gateways of investigation and the philosophical standpoints as a means for broadening one's knowledge and understanding. The "gateways" are various aspects of a phenomenon, such as its definition, cause, location, duration, etc., which provide a means of understanding it better. The "standpoints" are different perspectives from which a phenomenon can be understood. For instance, in the first stand point, that of the "common person's view, the distinction between the remote and the immediate is overlooked, and one or the other is noted as if it were the whole, depending upon the intention of the observer. So, speaking from the common person's view, we might describe an area of tropical forests as "timber" in which case we are seeing the remote, the use of the trees for building materials. On the other hand, standing two inches from a deadly snake we might describe the area as a "death trap" in which case we are describing it in terms of the immediate. Umāsvāti presents the gateways and standpoints as a means of undertaking one's own exploration of truth."<sup>18</sup>

In this text, it is made clear that Umāsvāti celebrates heterogeneity by promoting the importance of expanding one's views. This is based on the doctrine of syāvāda where one can understand claims from different perspectives. The ability to process viewpoints from differing dimensions cultivates a sense of acceptance and uniqueness. These unique perspectives contribute to an

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<sup>17</sup> Sartre, Jean-Paul, *Existentialism Is a Humanism*. 46

<sup>18</sup> Umāsvāti, Devanandī, Siddhasenagaṇi, and Nathmal Tatia. *That Which Is = Tattvārtha Sūtra*. New Haven: Yale /University Press, 2011. xviii

individual's understanding of the truth. It is clear that there is no standard truth, but multiple views that are valid. This plurality gives the accountability to the individual to understand the truth. Interestingly, Tej Sahebji explains that the five major vows held by Jains at the centre of their lives are Āhimsa (Non-violence), Satya (Truthfulness), Brahmacharya (Celibacy), Āsteya (Non-stealing) and Āparigraha (Non-possession) cannot be fully implemented without the philosophy of non-absolutism. He states, "Anekāntavāda is the foundation of Jain philosophy."<sup>19</sup> Hence, it is important to be able to lead a life where one is accepting and understanding of multiple points of views. This links to Sartre's idea that individuals are responsible to create themselves. They do not come into this world with a monolithic disposition. Thus, it is important for us to select our way of life that is founded in morality. In a similar way, Jainism delegates the duty of finding a righteous path to the individual. However, the only difference is that Jainism provides more structure to describe practices and conducts that inhibit a life of morality. Nevertheless, the individual is encouraged to lead a life of independence where they can exercise their free will to determine principled practices. In essence, the overarching objective binding these philosophies is the idea that individuals do not come into this world as a whole but are constantly subject to change. This gives rise to the notion of subjectivity.

Sartrean existentialism and Jainism draw from the fundamentals of René Descartes philosophy. There is an emphasis on the fact that individuals are a product of their beliefs, thoughts and ideas. Sartre says,

"As our point of departure there can be no other truth than this: *I think therefore I am*. This is the absolute truth of consciousness confronting itself. Any theory that considers man outside of this moment of self-awareness is, at the outset, a theory that suppresses the truth, for outside of this Cartesian *cogito*, all objects are merely probable, and a doctrine of probabilities not rooted in any truth crumbles into nothing."<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Sahebji, Tej. *Jain Dharmasaar*. Mumbai. 138

<sup>20</sup> Sartre, Jean-Paul, *Existentialism Is a Humanism*. xviii

This denotes that seeking truth is a projection of an individual's thinking. It is important to acknowledge that consciousness is the conduit that leads to self-awareness. Sartre's philosophy follows the lines of Cartesianism and explains the importance of placing the responsibility to generate perspective on the individual. These philosophies endorse an individual's innate ability to think. Along the same lines, Jainism also expresses an importance of being self-aware and introspective. They believe that every soul has the consciousness to pursue reflective practices. This is an integral feature of Jainism as it is a religious philosophy that relies on practices that allow an individual to engage inwards. The *Tattvārtha Sūtra* states "Limited knowledge, which is all we can hope for as worldly souls, will be distorted by ignorance unless we uncover within ourselves the insight and wisdom born of an enlightened world-view."<sup>21</sup> Therefore, Jainism highlights that an individual must seek worldly knowledge through their intrinsic and wisdom. However, once again this follows "the logic of non-absolutism."<sup>22</sup> This shows that an individual has the reigns to their own line of thoughts. Consequently, these thoughts become an outward expression through behaviour and morality. While this is similar to Sartre's existentialist philosophy in that it prescribes the idea of an individual's thinking as the conduit of the truth, Jainism demonstrates a more structured framework that classifies truth. Nevertheless, a common factor between both these philosophies is that it is based on individuals interacting with themselves before they interact with other individuals and worldly matter. Therefore, the individual is the locus of thought.

Sartrean existentialism and Jainism both acknowledge that seeking the truth involves the understanding of other individuals. Sartre says, "But the subjectivity is that we thereby attain as a

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<sup>21</sup> Umāsvāti, Devanandī, Siddhasenagaṇi, and Nathmal Tatia. *That Which Is = Tattvārtha Sūtra*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid* xviii

standard of truth is not strictly in nature, for we have demonstrated that it is not only oneself that discovers in the *cogito*, but also the existence of others.”<sup>23</sup> This signifies that an individual’s quest to seek the truth is also dependent on learning about the existence of others. It is important to realise that an individual is not alone in his search to seek the truth. This results in the generation of differing identities. In Jainism, a similar rationale applies wherein Jains believe that despite an individual’s independence, there must be respect and recognition of other souls. It is one of the primary principles of the *Tattvārtha Sūtra* and this is made evident in *That Which Is, A Classic Jain Manual for Understanding the True Nature of Reality* as it highlights, “Scientific materialism denies or ignores the existence of the soul in its exploration of reality, while on the other, religious fervor can turn too sharply toward the spiritual verities and disregard the physical ones. This leads to an oscillating world-view in which we become unable to conceive of spiritual and material reality at once, and as a whole.”<sup>24</sup> While others might impinge on our subjectivity, there must be a sense of acceptance. This exemplifies that the world revolves around differing ways of thinking. While this is the reason for several conflicts, the notion of subjectivity must promote a harmony. Thus, the truth can only be unravelled by being conscious of the fact that there are other individuals on the journey to seek their own truth. Since there is no expectation of consistency, there is weight on acknowledging the multiplicity of perspectives. In both these philosophies, an individual’s quest for seeking the truth is a personal one, but also shaped by one’s acceptance of other individuals.

Relativity is an integral concept to Sartrean existentialism and Jainism. In both these philosophies, the absence of absolutism results in relativism. This can be attributed to the fact that

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<sup>23</sup> Sartre, Jean-Paul, *Existentialism Is a Humanism*. Xix.

<sup>24</sup> Umāsvāti, Devanandī, Siddhasenagaṇi, and Nathmal Tatia. *That Which Is = Tattvārtha Sūtra*. New Haven: Yale /University Press, 2011. xix.

individuals are evolved beings that possess unique sense perception. The truth lies within each individual and hence, morality is not universal. This philosophy features in *Existentialism is a Humanism* when Sartre says, “We must also note the relativity of Cartesianism and the absolute nature of the Cartesian commitment. In this sense, we can say, if you prefer, that every one of us creates the absolute by the act of breathing, eating, sleeping, or by behaving in any fashion at all.”<sup>25</sup> This makes it evident that every individual must live in their own truth. Similarly, in Jainism, it is believed that “Whatever a soul possesses, whether the capacity for speech, breath, or thought, is a result of its interaction with matter.”<sup>26</sup> This further demonstrates the similarity between Jainism and Sartrean existentialism in acknowledging that regardless of an individual’s behaviour, they have the consciousness and freedom to determine the truth.

Western Existentialism and Jainism both deal with the positionality of an individual. However, they both bring to the fore that regardless of an individual’s status, they have the responsibility to act and think freely. There is no sense of homogeneity associated to these thoughts and actions. In *Existentialism is a Humanism*, Sartre encapsulates this by saying:

“Historical situations vary: a man may be born a slave in pagan society or a feudal lord or a member of the proletariat. What never varies is the necessity for him to be in the world, to work in it, to live out his life in it among others, and, eventually, to die in it. These limitations are neither subjective nor objective; rather they have an objective as well as subjective dimension: objective, because they affect everyone and are evident everywhere; subjective because they are *experienced* and are meaningless if man does not experience them—that is to say, if man does not freely determine himself and his existence in relation to them.”<sup>27</sup>

This further demonstrates that every individual possesses the same level of cognition. This is an innate feature that enables an individual to seek the truth. Essentially, they are responsible to find

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<sup>25</sup> Sartre, Jean-Paul, *Existentialism Is a Humanism*. 44

<sup>26</sup> Umāsvāti, Devanandī, Siddhasenagaṇi, and Nathmal Tatia. *That Which Is = Tattvārtha Sūtra*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011. xix

<sup>27</sup> Sartre, Jean-Paul, *Existentialism Is a Humanism*. 42

their way of life without fearing the possibility of being wrong. It is important to learn how to exist and one constantly learns by merely existing. As a result, existence is an ongoing experience that shapes an individual's subjectivity. Although individuals might be performing the same action, their understandings might differ. Therefore, an individual must exercise their free will. While Jainism upholds the same idea of reality, it provides an answer that rationalises an individual's action. This is found in Jainism's theory of karma. In the Jain scripture of the *Tattvārtha Sūtra*, "the second critical principle underlying the categories of truth is the inexorable law of cause and effect (through karma) which drives the universe."<sup>28</sup> The concept of karma justifies more concrete explanations than what is encapsulated in Sartrean existentialism. For instance, an individual's socio-economic position is determined by the merits of an individual's past life. The body is the mere carrier of the immortal soul that gets carried forward through lifetimes, hence, the form that individuals take is based on former deeds. The more merit accumulated, the more likely that an individual will be born as a human-the most supreme of living beings. However, "each unique soul possesses the inherent knowledge and intuition which can empower it to destroy the beginningless deluded world-view tormenting it."<sup>29</sup> Therefore, the soul is the most integral feature of an individual. It carries the capacity of perceiving and discerning. These abilities are associated with a sense of relativism. This relativism, or as Jains call *Anekāntavāda*, illustrates that reality is not universal. Thus, an individual is the sum-total of their interactions with living and non-living material. Given that experiences differ, so do perspectives.

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<sup>28</sup> Umāsvāti, Devanandī, Siddhasenagaṇi, and Nathmal Tatia. *That Which Is = Tattvārtha Sūtra*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011. xix

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid* 6

This multiplicity in perspectives is a consequence of several factors according to Sartrean existentialism and Jainism. While it is representative of an individual's thinking and morality, it is formulated based on an individual's past, interactions with other individuals and the material world. This remains consistent in both philosophies. Although there is a strong assertion of subjectivity, there is also a sense of a certain universality. Sartre says,

“In this sense, we can claim that human universality exists, but it is not a given; it is in perpetual construction. In choosing myself, I construct universality; I construct it by understanding every other man's project, regardless of the era in which he lives. The absolute freedom of choice does not alter the relativity of each era. The fundamental aim of existentialism is to reveal the link between the absolute character of the free commitment, by which every man realizes himself in realizing a type of humanity—a commitment that is always understandable, by anyone in any era—and the relativity of the culture ensemble that may result from such a choice.”<sup>30</sup>

Here, it is evident that the focus is for an individual to examine their identity. The ability to understand oneself is essential to humanity. It demonstrates that an individual has the ability to be accepting of several perspectives. It validates the importance of relativity in examining perspectives. Therefore, the truth resides in several factors. To provide a more nuanced understanding of what truth entails, we can turn to Jainism. In the *Tattvārtha Sūtra*, there are

“The Seven Categories of Truth

The essential concepts which a person must understand as true before they acquire an enlightened world-view are classified by Umāsvāti as the seven categories of truth:

- (1) The existence of souls
- (2) The existence of non-sentient entities (matter, time, space, media of movement and of rest)
- (3) The inflow of karmic particles to the soul
- (4) The binding of karmic particles to the soul
- (5) Stopping the karmic inflow
- (6) The falling away of the karmic particles
- (7) The liberation from worldly bondage.”<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Sartre, Jean-Paul, *Existentialism Is a Humanism*. 43

<sup>31</sup> Umāsvāti, Devanandī, Siddhasenagaṇi, and Nathmal Tatia. *That Which Is = Tattvārtha Sūtra*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011. xix

This framework gives us the ability to understand the nature of factors associated with an individual's quest for seeking truth. It is clear that it starts with recognising oneself and understanding oneself in relation to the material world. These interactions with other beings as well as intangible entities characterise the relativity with which an individual begins to view the world. While the first two categories of truth are reflective of Sartrean principles of existentialism that represent the importance of relativity, the categories based on karma provide a detailed analysis of the pluralism prevalent. Jainism, unlike Sartrean existentialism, shows that there is a certain reason that is common or universal that affects an individual's quest for the truth. Hence, there is a possibility of an enlightened world-view in Jainism, but not in existentialism.

Although Sartrean existentialism and Jainism do not endorse universality, it indicates that morality is widespread and collective. While *Existentialism is a Humanism* lacks detail on how one achieves this morality, Jainism provides a recommended path and explanations for these differences. Sartre says, "Thus, although the content of morality may vary, a certain form of that morality is universal."<sup>32</sup> This makes it apparent that an individual's undertaking may differ, but the objective of finding the truth is ubiquitous. This understanding can also be found in the "Jaina view that all things are both autonomous and interdependent and spells out our joint responsibility for the common environment we create and share."<sup>33</sup> Once again, the *Tattvārtha Sūtra* explains that an individual has the freedom to grapple with the truth, there is a certain sense of collectiveness. This further shows the similarity in the two philosophies that highlight how individuals are able to seek the truth with individuality. While this is a shared goal of the two

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<sup>32</sup> Sartre, Jean-Paul, *Existentialism Is a Humanism*. 49

<sup>33</sup> Umāsvāti, Devanandī, Siddhasenagaṇi, and Nathmal Tatia. *That Which Is = Tattvārtha Sūtra*. New Haven: Yale /University Press, 2011. xx

philosophies, Jainism provides a suggested path that helps individuals in their search for the truth. The categories of truth are indicated above, but more importantly, they support an individual's ability to engage with metaphysical nature. This contact with metaphysical concepts, like the soul, has a result in the direct outward expression of identity.

In Sartrean existentialism and Jainism, the duty of an individual as a responsible and free agent to find morality remains consistent. Nevertheless, the material world is in constant flux. This impacts an individual's ability to seek a moral way of life. As a result, individuals assimilate perspectives that thrive on relativism. Sartre says, "Progress implies improvement, but man is always the same, confronting a situation that is forever changing, while choice always remains a choice in any situation."<sup>34</sup> This exemplifies that an individual's role might not be structured, but it is clear that they are responsible for existing within a continuously changing environment by judiciously exercising their freedom. Thus, there is a relation between an individual and the persistently altering world that generates relativity. This interpretation is also found in Umāsvāti's text the *Tattvārtha Sūtra*, which shows that "The broad version of the *anekānta* world-view maintains that, contrary to the Shakespearean world-view, it is possible for something "to be *and* not to be." A phenomenon is "real" as it is called, flows through "modes" which are infinite and ever-changing."<sup>35</sup> Therefore, individuals are expected to use their individuality to perceive the ongoing changes around them. This results in the lack of correctness, but rather an understanding that is approved by relativity. The ability of an individual to possess this relative way of thinking is strongly advocated for in Sartrean existentialism and Jainism.

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<sup>34</sup> Sartre, Jean-Paul, *Existentialism Is a Humanism*. 47

<sup>35</sup> Umāsvāti, Devanandī, Siddhasenagaṇi, and Nathmal Tatia. *That Which Is = Tattvārtha Sūtra*. New Haven: Yale /University Press, 2011. xxii

Given that humans are associated with the responsibility to seek the truth in an ever-changing environment, they learn from experience. This experiential learning shapes ideologies and morality. According to Sartrean existentialism and Jainism, individuals are accountable for creating a sense of humanity. Sartre says, “Life itself is nothing until it is lived, it is we who give it meaning, and value is nothing more than the meaning we give it. You can see, then, that it is possible to create a human community. Some have blamed me for postulating that existentialism is a form of humanism.”<sup>36</sup>This, once again, exemplifies that humans evolve from experience that is supplemented by appropriate appraisal and introspection. Hence, permitting individuals to engage with morality. To engage in moral practices is a sense of humanism. This can be testified by Jainism that justifies the acceptance of individuality will bring harmony. Thus, there is definitely a humanism associated with this doctrine of relativism. It instils tolerance and diversity in perspective amongst other imperative principles. This can be attested by the *Tattvārtha Sūtra*’s guidance to seek the truth as “these are the only values that can save humanity from the deadly acts of war, economic exploitation and environmental destruction.”<sup>37</sup> This further symbolises that the practice of reflecting on lived experiences to understand one’s innate ability to live a virtuous life will sustain a more peaceful world. Therefore, both these philosophies prescribe values and in turn practices that are congruent with humanistic approach.

While Sartrean existentialism and Jainism both uphold humanism that strongly endorses relativism, it is evident that there are certain characteristics that remain constant. The foremost characteristic that is universal is that of the human. The role of an individual is pre-determined only to the effect of giving them the responsibility of finding purpose. However, there is no

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<sup>36</sup> Sartre, Jean-Paul, *Existentialism Is a Humanism*. 51

<sup>37</sup> Umāsvāti, Devanandī, Siddhasenagaṇi, and Nathmal Tatia. *That Which Is = Tattvārtha Sūtra*. New Haven: Yale /University Press, 2011.xvii

preconceived path or outcome for an individual to follow. In fact, the overarching objective is to ensure that seeking the truth leads to morality. Sartre says, “Furthermore, although it is impossible to find in every man a universal essence that could be said to comprise human nature, there is nonetheless a universal human *condition*.”<sup>38</sup> This concludes that it is impossible to expect individuals to be clones, but that their existence is a universalistic characteristic. The lack of justification and examples in *Existentialism is a Humanism* can be supplemented with Jainism’s detailed framework found in the *Tattvārtha Sūtra* that leads individuals on a quest for the truth. While both these philosophies have the shared purpose of encouraging an individual to seek morality by engaging with the truth, Jainism has more concreteness for ideas and explanations. Although this religious philosophy does not particularly indicate that this is the singular right way of life, there is a recommended path. Nevertheless, what makes this religious philosophy similar to Sartrean existentialism is the emphasis on relativism. This relativism is reminiscent of Cartesianism. It gives individuals the authority to be the architects of their morality. This process revolves around reflective practices that impacts behaviour and perspectives of an individual, thereby celebrating uniqueness. Although, I use truth and morality interchangeably in this chapter, the overarching objective is to demonstrate that they are both open to interpretation. While truth is about knowledge and morality is more about action, they are both essential components that constitute the ontological and epistemological framework that help individuals navigate life.

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<sup>38</sup> *Ibid* 42

## Chapter 4

### Responsibility

“Consciousness is a being whose existence posits its essence, and inversely it is consciousness of a being, whose essence implies its existence; that is, in which appearance lays claim to being.”<sup>1</sup> - Jean Paul Sartre

Sartrean existentialism and Jain philosophy focus intensely on the nature of human consciousness and its ability to drive action. It is believed that Sartre’s idea of consciousness, and the Jainism concept of Chetan, enable an individual to cognise, feel and conduct themselves. An individual’s conduct must be a virtue of their responsibility. Sartrean existentialism and Jainism posits that an individual’s action has the power to affect humankind, which places them in an evolved state to be a responsible stakeholder in society. Therefore, an individual’s consciousness allows humankind to recognise their existence and give expression to their beliefs and thoughts. It is the guiding force behind responsibility. This responsibility, or as Jainism would call javabdhari, results in human actions. It gives individuals the capacity to introspect, seek knowledge and divinity. In the previous chapter, we learned that Sartrean existentialism explains that an individual’s subjective nature is a direct result of their conscious being. Similarly, Jainism as a philosophy that believes the ātman or soul intrinsic to every individual is the map that guides an individual’s potential for conducting rightful action. This notion of morality, common to both Sartrean existentialism and Jainism, exemplify that an individual’s action is the utmost force of society. This allows us to engage with metaphysical, epistemological and ontological aspects of the two schools of philosophy. While Sartre emphasises the purpose of action as a guiding force behind human conduct, Jainism discusses

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<sup>1</sup> Sartre, Jean-Paul, Sarah Richmond, and Richard Moran. *Being and Nothingness: An Essay in Phenomenological Ontology*. Abingdon, Oxon, UK: Routledge, 2018. Lxii.

how action contributes to the perpetuation of the karmic cycle and the indefinite durability of the soul.

The overarching objective of existentialism and Jainism is to demonstrate the power of responsibility attributed to mankind. Sartrean existentialism upholds that individuals are at the helm of the future of society. Moreover, the focal point of existentialism is an individual and how their role contributes to the shaping of the collective. However, this collective notion is not necessarily based on uniformity. In fact, there is a remarkable accent on subjectivity in the conduct of an individual. Nevertheless, what remains constant is that individuals are the agents of their conduct. Therefore, Sartre says, “Our **responsibility** is thus much greater than we might have supposed, because it concerns all mankind.”<sup>2</sup> He believes that the freedom conferred to individuals comes with a responsibility. This responsibility enables an individual to discern and act in a manner that is moral and rightful. On the other hand, Jains believe that there is an innate soul in every individual. They believe, “The synonyms of Ātman are soul, spirit, jeeva, chetana, etc. It is characterised by consciousnesses and Upayoga, i.e. Knowledge and Perception [Samyak Gnâna and Samyak Darshan]. It is eternal and formless. It is indestructible. It is conscious energy characterized by infinite qualities like knowledge, bliss and power in its pure state and in the impure state; all these qualities are veiled by Karmas.”<sup>3</sup> According to Jainism, the soul is an entity that exercises consciousness to seek knowledge, determines emotions and discerns responsibility. The dichotomy constructed between pure and impure is essentially analogous to moral and immoral behaviour. Hence, an individual has the ability to lead their life on their own terms. However, every aspect of their conduct is being recorded as karmic actions. Thus, Jains believe that the soul, a constant and identical, entity present in every individual is an agent of

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<sup>2</sup> Sartre, Jean-Paul, *Existentialism Is a Humanism*. 24.

<sup>3</sup> Sahebji, Tej. *Jain Dharmasaar*. Mumbai. 107

responsibility. This is similar to Sartrean existentialism that will emphasise the responsibility of an individual to act rationally and morally given the acknowledgment of subjectivity and multiplicity of views. This responsibility determines actions. However, the only difference between Jainism and Sartrean existentialism is that Jains attribute the responsibility of an individual to the soul as it is a persisting element of an individual that carries forward through lifetimes. Nevertheless, both philosophies ascribe the same level of responsibility to the individual for their actions. Both philosophies maintain that responsibility is defined by us and not by an external law. Therefore, individuals are in charge of defining what is moral. There is no responsibility placed in the power of a heteronomous source.

Sartrean existentialism and Jainism credit individuals with their inherent wherewithal to be responsible agents. However, these philosophies also recognise that an individual has the potential to feel a flux of emotions. These emotions can be a product of how an individual determines to live their life based on their responsibility. Therefore, the feeling of these sentiments is also a result of an individual's own conduct. This signifies that responsibility also drives an individual's emotional faculties. Sartre says, "Existentialists like to say that man is in anguish. This is what they mean: a man who commits himself, and who realizes that he is not only the individual that he chooses to be, but also a legislator choosing at the same time what humanity as a whole should be, cannot help but be aware of his own full and profound responsibility."<sup>4</sup> This explains that humans can be overcome or be over-whelmed by responsibility and thereby, leads them to a state of anguish. However, the operative term lies in "legislator" that renders clear an individual's agency to act in anyway. This ties back to the notion of subjectivity in Sartrean existentialism and Jainism's Anekāntavāda. Jains say, "The

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<sup>4</sup> Sartre, Jean-Paul, *Existentialism Is a Humanism*. 25

bondage and deliverance of each individual belong to himself or herself. The experience of happiness or sorrow belongs to each individual and it is his own.”<sup>5</sup> This further explains that Jains endorse that an individual is solely responsible for their feelings and sentiments. There is no external force that governs an individual’s emotions. In fact, it is the human consciousness that gives rise to externalities. Therefore, Jains also honour the idea that individuals are the architects of their own doing. In essence, Sartrean existentialism and Jainism both strongly advocate that an individual’s power to use their responsibility is deterministic of their emotional state. Given the heightened sense of responsibility and autonomy ascribed to individuals, they are often in anguish. There is no heteronomous being controlling their feelings.

An individual’s emotional state is manifested in different ways according to Sartre and Jainism. However, both these philosophies suggest responsibility is the reason behind an individual’s purpose. While Sartre believes an individual’s inability to successfully process their reason for existence will result in anguish, Jains insist that every individual is capable of being aware. Sartre says, “The anguish we are concerned with is not the kind that could lead to quietism or inaction. It is anguish pure and simple, of the kind experienced by all who have borne responsibilities.”<sup>6</sup> Thus, anguish is a common feature of those individuals facing inner turmoil or to those who can’t rely on an external guidance. Those individuals tend to feel confined in their perturbed emotional sense. They struggle with finding meaning, cognising and becoming aware. Here lies the fundamental difference between Jainism and Sartre. Sartre explores responsibility can lead to a state of discomfort that results in an individual feeling trapped. Nevertheless, “The Jain dharma clearly believes that the soul is conscious, formless, and animate. Awareness is the feature of consciousness. This shows itself in the form of sorrow and

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<sup>5</sup> Bhadrabahuviya. *Guidelines of Jainism*. Gandhinagar, India: Shri Mahavir Jain Aradhana Kendra, 2012. 106.

<sup>6</sup> Sartre, Jean-Paul, *Existentialism Is a Humanism*. 27

happiness, knowledge and self-realization. The soul is spotless and formless, the soul is neither masculine nor feminine. It is a collection or composite of countless conscious, formless entities and is formless.”<sup>7</sup> Jains posit that following the Jina is not ordained by God, but an individual’s choice. This makes it evident that Jains believe, every individual, given their inherent soul, has the bandwidth to be conscious and accountable for their emotional state. It is important that individuals are aware of their innate faculty to be at the centre of their emotions. This inborn faculty is another feature of an individual’s soul or ātman according to Jainism. This aspect of an individual allows them to determine their actions. Hence, the responsibility is within an individual’s power to self-recognise. Given the transcendent nature of an individual’s soul, there is certainly the opportunity for an individual to end their suffering. Thus, unlike Sartrean existentialism, Jainism believes that individuals can break free from this realm of life should they follow the path of rightful action. Nevertheless, both these philosophies entrust individuals with the propensity to be in charge of their emotions.

Sartre and Jains attribute anguish to be a result of living a life devoid of external factors. This notion of suffering arises from an individual’s presence to lead an autonomous life, but also because of material attachments. This dependence on other factors causes individuals a sense of agony. Sartre says, “It is the very condition of their **action**, for they first contemplate several options, and, in choosing one of them, realize that its only value lies in the fact that it was chosen. It is this kind of anguish that existentialism describes, as we shall see it can be made explicit through a sense of direct responsibility toward the other men who will be affected by it.”<sup>8</sup> This signifies that individuals have the freedom to be responsible for their own actions. Their behaviour is based on deliberation and realization. Individuals undergo a thinking process

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<sup>7</sup> Bhadrabahuviyay. *Guidelines of Jainism*. Gandhinagar, India: Shri Mahavir Jain Aradhana Kendra, 2012.114.

<sup>8</sup> Sartre, Jean-Paul, *Existentialism Is a Humanism*. 27

given their evolved state and hence, must exercise their aptitude to act rationally. This rationality will guide them on the path of morality by constructively affecting their actions. Hence, Sartre believes that if an individual take control of their suffering, they become more responsible agents of change in society. This positively influences other individuals. In a similar vein, Jains believe that individuals have the autonomy to elevate their souls to be released. The satisfaction that one receives from rightful impact further enables an individual to achieve Jainism's soteriological objectives. Jains maintain, "The inherent nature of the soul is absolute freedom. It can choose to either steadily abide in its blissful Self or run outside for worldly pleasures and suffer. Man is at such stage of evolution that if he awakens, he is liberated; otherwise he will have to repeat transmigration."<sup>9</sup>This makes it evident that should individuals cling to other individuals or worldly attachment, they will perpetuate this cycle of suffering. Given an individual's evolved status of discernment and realization, they choose to use their freedom to strive to be on the path of liberation. This eschatological focus in Jainism explains that regardless of the fact that individuals have the freedom to seek their emotional fulfillment, they must work towards liberation. This notion of liberation means a permanent end to the suffering. Therefore, should an individual desire a way out of this anguish state, they must judiciously use their responsibility to accumulate good karma. As a result, Sartrean idea of 'action' can be undoubtedly linked to the Jain belief of karma. Additionally, Sartre says, "This is what "abandonment" implies: it is we, ourselves, who decide who we are to be. Such abandonment entails anguish."<sup>10</sup> Hence, this immense freedom assigned to individuals will place them in a continued sense of uncertainty, particularly because of the absence of an heteronomous source. It is imperative that individuals use this liberty to introspect and deem the path of conduct that is best suited to their emotional

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<sup>9</sup> Pujya Gurudevshri Rakeshbhai. *Sadguru Insights*. Dharampur: Shrimad Rajchandra Mission, 2016. 17

<sup>10</sup> Sartre, Jean-Paul, *Existentialism Is a Humanism*. 34

being. This will have a direct impact on their effect and role in society. In essence, the individual is the agent of action that governs society. Moreover, Sartre further adds, “As for “despair,” it has a very simple meaning. It means that we must limit ourselves to reckoning only with those things that depend on our will, or on the set of probabilities that enable action.”<sup>11</sup> Therefore, it is clear that an individual’s purpose is to effectively take responsibility for their own emotions and act in a manner that will put an end to their suffering. This path involves a sense of detachment. Here, we once again notice a strong connect to the Jain value of renunciation. This is an essential aspect of a Jain’s desire to attain salvation or an escape from the flux of emotions that individuals undergo on Earth. In essence, both Jains and Sartrean existentialism give individuals the absolute freedom to be responsible agents in society. This not only allows an individual to put an end to their suffering, but also become better citizens. Thus, an individual’s emotional state has direct impact on their ability to act in a manner that is moral.

Sartrean existentialism and Jainism believe an individual’s character is reflective of a combination of an internal and external factors. Consequently, individuals are a sum total of their relationship with themselves and their equations with others. An individual’s relationship with themselves is an outcome of their emotional being. This human characteristic makes an individual’s behaviour or actions part of a causality. Sartre explains, “What we mean to say is that a man is nothing but a series of enterprises, and that he the sum, organization, and aggregate of the relations that constitute such enterprises.”<sup>12</sup> Although individuals are attributed with the freedom to act on their own terms, these actions are affected by societal or other deterministic reasons. This demonstrates a certain causality in the analysis of comprehending why individuals choose to lead their life in a certain way. Jains discuss this action as representative of karma.

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<sup>11</sup> *Ibid* 34

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid* 38

Essentially, action become deeds that engage an individual's duty in this lifetime and carries forward through other lives, "The Jain dharma considers Karma as an independent and separate entity. It has been calculated in terms of Pudgals [Pud meaning hell and Gals meaning essence that is not pure] because the body is made up of Pudgals. Karma is its cause. Hence, Karma is also made up of Pudgals. The impact of Karma and Pudgals on the soul is deep. The relationship between the soul and Karma is without a beginning."<sup>13</sup> Once again, we notice the weight given to an individual's soul and not a transcendental being. It is the soul that channels an individual's freedom to act responsibly. This consciousness arises from the evolved state of humans and certain actions are inborn. Nonetheless, karma encapsulates the existentialist idea of acting with responsibility and exercising freedom with awareness.

The inborn consciousness that comes with being human is considered *a priori* knowledge according to Jains and Sartre. It is evident that with the responsibility of being a human, the most evolved species on this planet, there are certain virtues that become innate. Sartre says, "It must be considered mandatory *a priori* for people to be honest, not to lie, not to beat their wives, to raise children, and so forth. We therefore will need to do a little more thinking on this subject in order to show that values exist all the same, and that they are inscribed in an intelligible heaven, even though God does not exist."<sup>14</sup> As a result, this notion of morality is intrinsic to the idea of existence. This level of truth is part of being human. There is no way to teach an individual this practice but is rather acquired by simply being born in this evolved state. While Sartre thinks nothing is instinctive, he asserts consciousness is a faculty that is a result of being born in this evolved state. They are responsible to contemplate and distinguish right from wrong. As a child, I remember hearing from my Jain religious philosophy teacher that being honest and harmless is

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<sup>13</sup> Bhadrabahuviijay. *Guidelines of Jainism*. Gandhinagar, India: Shri Mahavir Jain Aradhana Kendra, 2012. 121.

<sup>14</sup> Sartre, Jean-Paul, *Existentialism Is a Humanism*. 28

not dharma, that is duty and anyone with reasonable amount of common sense should perceive that, as a given. Dharma lies in how useful to make my life to ensure that I uplift someone else's. Here again, I notice the strong link between existentialism and Jainism. While Jains may attribute an individual's level of cognition to their previous karma or actions from former lives, they accept that every individual has the consciousness to be aware of the truth. Sartre echoes this when he says, "There could no longer be any *a priori* good, since there would be no infinite and perfect consciousness to conceive of it. Nowhere is it written that good exists, that we must be honest or must not lie, since we are on a plane shared only by men."<sup>15</sup> This is, again, linked to the action of an individual. Jains also believe that karma guides an individual's morality and not a heteronomous source. This is possible because individuals possess the consciousness to be responsible agents. Their behaviour severely impacts the structuring and organising of society. Sartre also acknowledges this when he mentions, "In an excellent article, Francis Ponge once wrote: 'Man is the future of man.; This is absolutely true.'<sup>16</sup>Jains say, the inner feature of life is *Chetan* or consciousness. The Jain dharma believes that the soul or Jiva embodies consciousness. It goes on manifesting itself in various states, retaining its original and essential form."<sup>17</sup> This explanation makes it clear that consciousness results in awareness. Moralistic lessons can be acquired but are mostly an extension of an individual's ability to be conscious. This *a priori* sense is an epistemology that comes with the good karma of being born a human versus another primitive organism. It is important for individuals to channelise their consciousness to be responsible agents in society. They must realise how their actions affect not just their future, but also other individuals. Therefore, both philosophies uphold that there are external impacts to an

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<sup>15</sup> *Ibid* 28

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid* 29

<sup>17</sup> Bhadrabahuvijay. *Guidelines of Jainism*. Gandhinagar, India: Shri Mahavir Jain Aradhana Kendra, 2012. 108.

individual's actions. Nonetheless, every individual has the freedom yet access to *a priori* knowledge. It is about rightfully subscribing to a consciousness that allows morality to prevail. This is further made evident when Sartre reiterates, "Who can decide that *a priori*? No one. No code of ethics on record answers that question."<sup>18</sup> This ties in to the atheist nature of Sartrean existentialism and non-theistic nature of Jainism. *A priori* knowledge cannot be acquired but must be homed in on. Jains say, "The universe has not been created by God; but has been revealed by him. He does not create this universe...he does not rule it; does not govern it; and does not direct it and "the creation is such."<sup>19</sup> This further underscores that an individual cannot learn morality from a supreme being. They are capable of receiving this knowledge by using their consciousness productively. Their actions have the capacity to influence other individuals. Although both philosophies argue that individuals are allowed to be subjective in nature, there are certain virtues that are universal and innate. This is a function of consciousness. As a consequence, consciousness drives responsibility. This becomes part of the Karmic account in Jainism. Sartre cites an example of the hero and a coward to express his confusion as to why one is born victorious and triumphant while the other a weakling. However, Jains would clearly attribute the status of an individual to the past karma. However, these states are not permanent and are subject to constant change based on the deeds of an individual.

In Jainism and Sartrean existentialism, there is a strong focus on the responsibility of an individual. This responsibility is part of a cycle of causality in that there is a sense of cause and effect given to the actions of individuals. Sartre says,

"If you are born a hero, you need not let it concern you either, for you will be a hero your whole life, and eat and drink like one. What the existentialist says is that the coward makes himself cowardly and the hero makes himself heroic; there is always the possibility that one day the coward may no longer be cowardly and the hero may cease to

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<sup>18</sup> Sartre, Jean-Paul, *Existentialism Is a Humanism*. 31

<sup>19</sup> Bhadrabahuviyay. *Guidelines of Jainism*. Gandhinagar, India: Shri Mahavir Jain Aradhana Kendra, 2012. 106

be the hero. What matters is the total commitment, but there is no one particular situation or action that fully commits you, one way or the other.”<sup>20</sup>

This illustrates that an individual is completely in control of perpetuating their emotional state or choosing to act in a manner that will use their freedom to grow. However, this does not require a universally accepted path. The action is left to the assessment of an individual. Thus, an individual is responsible for their own fate. Their action will determine their role in society. Their destiny is not permanent and subject to change. It will be based on the nature of their actions. Therefore, an individual should not assume the same positionality or status in society. This is heavily contingent on their propensity to conduct themselves. In this case, it is evident that existentialists accredit individuals with the permanence of existence in this world, but emphasises that it is based on alteration of fate. Jainism, similarly argues that individuals are responsible for their actions and thereby, karma. However, they sustain that this is a function of the ātman present in every individual. They believe that the “The Jīva is that which grows; which decays, that which fluctuates and varies, that which eats, sleeps, is awake, acts, fears, takes rest, makes attempts for self-defense and that which can reproduce. All of these qualities appear in the Jiva when it enters a physical body. These are the external features of the Jīvātmā.”<sup>21</sup> Therefore, this explains how individuals are at the helm of their action. They have the opportunity to use their developed senses to act in a manner that will enable them to lead a life based on morality and virtue. The soul of an individual is immortal and transmigrates into different life forms. Its functionality will remain the same, but the individual’s consciousness is the responsible conduit of its action. This action will modify their fate. Thus, the Sartrean concept of action strongly resonates with the theory of karma with the underlying thread of responsibility.

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<sup>20</sup> Sartre, Jean-Paul, *Existentialism Is a Humanism*. 39

<sup>21</sup> Bhadrabahuviḷjay. *Guidelines of Jainism*. Gandhinagar, India: Shri Mahavir Jain Aradhana Kendra, 2012. 108

Sartre and Jainism heavily draw attention to how an individual's existence is based on action. Sartre says, "existentialism [is not] an attempt to discourage man from taking action, since it tells him that the only hope resides in his actions and that the only thing allows him to live is action."<sup>22</sup> Therefore, there is a strong value given to the ability to act. It is important to note that action is the reason behind an individual's existence. This signifies that an individual's presence on this Earth is to act. This action might be a result of subjective thinking, but must be geared by responsibility. This action contributes to karma according to Jainism.

Although this action predominantly affects an individual's destiny, it affects society. As we discussed earlier, there is a causality with other societal elements. An individual's behaviour is driven by certain knowledge that is *a priori*, a sense of relativity and then dependence on other factors. Sartre summarises this as, "The effect of any form of materialism is to treat all men—including oneself—as objects, which is to say as a set of predetermined reactions indistinguishable from the properties and phenomena that constitute, say, a table, a chair, or a stone. Our aim is exactly to establish the human kingdom as a set of values distinct from the material world."<sup>23</sup> This further signifies that individuals have an advanced sense perception that gives them access to high order epistemology. This grants them the knowledge of choosing morality through acting in a manner that is informed by responsibility. This exactly echoes Jainism as they believe that individuals are evolved beings with an ātman that is capable of seeking virtues surrounding detachment and compassion. They say that "The soul pervades the body it occupies. It has the characteristic of contracting and expanding. Just as air fills the balloon, the soul occupies the body in which it exists."<sup>24</sup> This shows the ephemeral connotation of life, but the permanence of

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<sup>22</sup> Sartre, Jean-Paul, *Existentialism Is a Humanism*. 40

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid* 41

<sup>24</sup> Sahebji, Tej. *Jain Dharmasaar*. Mumbai. 107

the soul as an entity. Therefore, an individual has the opportunity to escape agony should they act morally. Their conduct will give them the salvation or liberation they seek. “One ought to reflect everyday on the transitory nature of all worldly things and concentrate on spiritual matters to exert spiritually for emancipation.”<sup>25</sup> Thus, while both philosophies ascribe individuals with the freedom to act responsibly towards determining their own actions, Jains have found a more structured theory regarding these actions. In essence, the karma theory uses the same Sartrean principles of freedom, *a priori* knowledge, evolved sense perception, suffering, but packages it with the possibility of breaking away from the shackles of pain and sorrow. Additionally, karma also justifies the level of an individual’s evolvment and quality of life. Nevertheless, it emphasises that every individual is capable of achieving liberation. However, it is solely the responsibility of the individual to strive towards that. This liberation is possible because every individual has an inherent soul that is inclined to transmigrate to a different lifeform and eventually, achieve mōkṣa or enlightenment.

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<sup>25</sup> *Ibid* 111

## Conclusion

“By “humanism” we might mean a theory that takes man as an end and as the supreme value.”<sup>1</sup>- Jean Paul Sartre

After examining the similarities between Jainism and Sartrean existentialism, it is evident that, at least with reference to this world, the two philosophies share a similar understanding with regards to concepts like theism, freedom, responsibility and subjectivity. In both philosophies, there is a sense of cyclical connection between these concepts. Both reject the notion of a supreme ‘theos’ and place the reins of an individual’s actions in their own hands. Both also posit that individuals have the freedom to define their individual existence and hence, subjectivity is of utmost importance while navigating purpose and meaning of life. This is succinctly summarised in Sartre’s explanation of humanism as:

“Man is always outside of himself, and it is in projecting and losing himself beyond himself that man is realized; and, on the other hand, it is in pursuing transcendent goals that he is able to exist. Since man is this transcendence, and grasps objects only in relation to such transcendence, he is himself the core and focus of this transcendence. The only universe that exists is the human one-the universe of human subjectivity. The link between transcendence as constitutive of man (not in the sense that God is transcendent, but in the sense that man passes beyond himself) and subjectivity (in the sense that man is not an island unto himself but always present in a human universe) is what we call “existentialist humanism.” This is humanism because we remind man that there is no legislator other than himself and that he must, in his abandoned state, make his own choices, and also because we show that it is not by turning inward, but by constantly seeking a goal outside of himself in the form of liberation, or of some special achievement, that man will realize himself as truly human.”<sup>2</sup>

As Sartre argues, that individuals do not conform to a singular path postulated by a ‘theos.’ Therefore, individuals are evolved beings that are capable of seeking morality and truth on their own. Their ability to discern and formulate a way of life is a result of their conscious and autonomous nature. Jainism concurs that individuals are the most evolved of species and hence,

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<sup>1</sup> Sartre, Jean-Paul, *Existentialism Is a Humanism*. 51

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid* 52-53

possess the unique capacity of being able to discern moral behavior without reference to a heteronomous 'other.' They are encouraged to reflect and self-appraise in order to lead a life on their own terms. Sartre also cites that human sense perception gives them the wherewithal to navigate a way of life. The emotional state that results from the lack of a theos that places the burden on the individual to seek a virtuous path. But we must note, it is like Kantian philosophy in which a man acts in accordance with his desires, with regards to reason and moral duty. Nevertheless, this lack of a theos is a feature of Jainism as well.

While both these philosophies dismiss the power of a heteronomous source as clarified above, there is a fundamental eschatological and soteriological difference between the two philosophies. Jainism upholds the eschatology that a soul's journey is adorning the bodies of the likes of a fungus to that of the most highly evolved individual. Jainism's soteriology dictates that every soul (Jīv Tatva) has the potential to achieve salvation, mōkṣa, provided the soul can detach itself from all karmic particles. This solely depends on one's acts and thoughts that are based on karma of one's previous births. Simply put Jainism says,

“The inherent nature of the soul is free. It can choose to either steadily abide in its blissful Self or run outside for worldly pleasures and suffer. You are not dependent. No one can ever interfere in your activities. You are free to wander too. The path of transmigration and the path to liberation from the cycles of birth and death are equally open to you. No one can stop you from taking either one. You are free to choose whether you want to be reborn or not. You provide the cause and inevitably, the effect will follow.”<sup>3</sup>

Despite these variations, the underscoring aspect of both these philosophies is that they are both a humanism.

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<sup>3</sup> Pujya Gurudevshri Rakeshbhai. *Sadguru Insights*. Dharampur: Shrimad Rajchandra Mission, 2016. 17-18

As summarised above, although the two philosophies differ in their eschatological and soteriological focus, the two philosophies share concepts entrenched in similar ontology and epistemology. Sartre puts forward the idea that the human-world is the only realm of society and that humans are trapped in a flux of emotions and problematic decision-making. Jains posit that there is another universe out there and that individuals can strive to attain liberation in order to get access to that world, but for that they biologically need to be born as human beings, because to achieve that liberation, a certain level of knowledge, faith and action is required and that is only in the possession within the intellect an individual. Therefore, Jains suggest a recommended path to seek that sense of enlightenment. However, they strongly emphasise the multifarious approaches that individuals can take to seek that reality. This is strikingly comparable to Sartre's notion of subjectivity in that he validates multiplicity of points of views and possible actions. Thus, the epistemological framework of the two philosophies are in accordance with each other.

These ontological and epistemological concepts of subjectivity, responsibility, freedom and consciousness are common to both philosophies. However, it is interesting that Jainism's cognition of these abstractions is philosophy is not just side-lined, but mostly overlooked in current philosophical discussions. I can attribute the lack of its recognition to its under-studied and under-researched nature largely because the vows of Jain ascetism are so austere that there are no representatives that spread the philosophy widely. However, it is important that I also acknowledge the literature review that presented how Vedānta has consonances with Western philosophy. Even though Vedānta has gained reputable scholarship, its philosophies aren't incorporated into the typical philosophy of religion studies in the West either. There is a great sense of marginalisation of South Asian philosophy, as Said also argues.

Through the course of writing this thesis, I have noticed the rich array of philosophical concepts that were born in the South Asia long before they made their way in Western philosophy. At this juncture, I am reminded of my initial classes in Jain religious philosophy, where my teacher used to always say that Jainism is not a religion, it is a way of life and it is based on Niyamas i.e. fundamental rules, that means it can be likened to the law of gravity and it is same for all individuals. It seems my teacher was saying ‘truth is out there’– we all are victims of our psychological egoism and that no ‘one’ viewpoint, person or account of the truth that is correct because it is very complex to grasp. Nevertheless, the lack of exposure and engagement with these philosophies in the West do not give them the credibility.

The comparison that outlines how Jainism follows the same existentialist framework of Sartre underscores its humanistic nature. The fact that Jains reject the idea of a heteronomous source and encourage individuals to use their javabdhari (responsibility) and svátantra (freedom) to determine their karma shows that they give paramount importance to individual choice and freedom. This is in complete alignment with Sartre’s existentialist philosophy, particularly in Jainism’s focus on anekántavāda (subjectivity). These inter-linked concepts contribute to a humanistic system.

However, it is essential to acknowledge that Sartre accentuates that there is “no exit” from this cycle of thought whereas Jainism does posit an ‘escape.’ This is the most significant contrast to Jainism’s notion of the existence of different universal realms and external enlightenment. It is this rudimentary dissonance that requires more exploration in this thesis. Having studied the conceptual consonances between Jainism and existentialism, it is extremely evident that the two philosophies have more commonalities than dissimilarities. Having attempted to juxtapose similar concepts from both these philosophies, I am still interested to

study whether Jainism's relatively more structured framework, in that it has a recommended path or a *syāvāda* (practice), is the answer to the vacuum or sense of helplessness that Sartre highlights as "anguish?" I can extend the scope of investigation of this thesis by drawing analogies between Jain parables and Sartre's anecdotes. This would enhance the study by providing more context to help establish abstract notions.

Although the thesis requires more illustration of the philosophical concepts, it renders clear the similarities between the explanation of atheism, subjectivity and responsibility as seen in Jainism and Sartrean existentialism. It demonstrates that these three notions are pillars of human behavior in both systems. In summation, the concepts encapsulate the power of an individual, and not a supreme being, in controlling their world. They thrive on a sense of distinctiveness in that every individual's journey is their own and hence, their emotional state would differ. While Jainism justifies this variance due to an individual's karma, Sartre does not provide a rationalisation. Once again, I am encouraged to further explore how or if Jainism's complex philosophy can answer some of the questions that Sartre leaves unanswered or open-ended.

## Glossary

**Advaita Vedānta:** Advaita Vedānta is one version of Vedānta. Vedānta is nominally a school of Indian philosophy, although in reality it is a label for any hermeneutics that attempts to provide a consistent interpretation of the philosophy of the Upaniṣads or, more formally, the canonical summary of the Upaniṣads, Bādarāyaṇa's Brahma Sūtra. Advaita is often translated as “non-dualism” though it literally means “non-secondness”<sup>1</sup>

**Āgamas:** scripture; literally ‘coming’ down from the past, being passed on from one generation to the next; what has been passed down from the enlightened beings of the past; term used by many Indic traditions for their collections of scripture, including the Jains<sup>2</sup>

**Ajīva:** matter; substance which lacks awareness (jñāna), perception (darśana), bliss (sukha), or energy (vīrya)<sup>3</sup>

**Ajīva Tatva:** non-living elements

**Anekāntavāda:** doctrine of the multi-faceted, complex nature of reality; metaphysical basis for the Jain philosophy of relativity<sup>4</sup>

**Ātman:** self; sometimes used as a synonym for the individual soul (jīva) in Jainism; in Hindu thought, there are individual souls (jīvātman), but there is also a supreme soul (paramātman – ‘God’) that dwells in all souls and is identical to Brahman<sup>5</sup>

**Avidyā:** lack of knowledge

**Caritra:** acting, behaving, behaviour, habit, practice, acts, adventures, deed, exploits

**<sup>6</sup>Chetan:** consciousness<sup>7</sup>

**Darśana:** literally ‘view’ or ‘vision,’ but often understood in Jain contexts as ‘faith’; ‘right faith’ or samyagdarsana, along with right knowledge (jñāna) and right conduct (caritra), is one of the three essential components of the path to liberation according to Umāsvātī's Tattvārthasūtra; darśana as ‘worldview’ refers to any traditional Indian system of philosophy; as ‘vision’, it refers to the act of seeing (and being seen by) a sacred image or person as a form of blessing; also perception, one of the characteristics of the soul<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy. Accessed April 24, 2019. <https://www.iep.utm.edu/adv-veda/>.

<sup>2</sup> Long, Jeffery D. Jainism: An Introduction (I.B.Tauris Introductions to Religion) (Kindle Locations 4660-4661). I.B.Tauris. Kindle Edition.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>6</sup> Monier-Williams, Monier. *Sanskrit-English Dictionary*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1984 [1899].

<sup>7</sup> Bhadrabahuviṣay. *Guidelines of Jainism*. Gandhinagar, India: Shri Mahavir Jain Aradhana Kendra, 2012.106.

<sup>8</sup> Long, Jeffery D. Jainism: An Introduction (I.B.Tauris Introductions to Religion)

**Ganadharas:** the main disciples of Tirthankaras construct sutras<sup>9</sup>

**Javabdhari:** responsibility

**Jina:** victor, spiritual conqueror; one who has attained kevalajñāna; the word Jain is derived from Jina<sup>10</sup>

**Jīva:** soul; life-force; substance characterized by unlimited awareness (jñāna), perception (darśana), bliss (sukha), and energy (vīrya), all of which are obscured by karmic matter prior to liberation ( mokṣa); there are as many souls as there are living beings<sup>11</sup>

**Jīv Tatva:** Living elements

**Jñāna:** gnosis, knowledge, awareness; one of the essential characteristics of the soul that are obscured by karmic matter prior to liberation mokṣa<sup>12</sup>

**Jñāna Mārg:** the path of seeking knowledge

**Karmas:** principle of cause and effect governing all action; a form of matter (ajīva) which adheres to the soul ( jīva ), obscuring the soul's true nature and producing the effects to which actions give rise, including rebirth; there are many types of karma, the specific effects of which vary<sup>13</sup>

**Mōkṣa:** liberation from saṃsāra, the cycle birth, death, and rebirth; occurs after kevalajñāna, the realization by the soul of its true nature through the purging of karmic matter<sup>14</sup>

**Nayavāda:** ‘doctrine of perspectives’, Jain teaching that there are many possible valid ways of viewing any given topic; in ancient versions, as found in Umāsvāti’s Tattvārthasūtra , the perspectives were formalized as being seven in number (not corresponding to the later seven perspectives of syādvāda); in later versions, the nayas , or perspectives, are said to be vast in number, corresponding to the number of aspects of a given entity<sup>15</sup>

**Pāp:** sin, vice, crime, guilt<sup>16</sup>

**Paramātman:** ‘supreme self’, in Hindu thought, the divine ‘oversoul’ that dwells within all individual souls; in Jainism, the nature of the soul as it truly is, in its liberated state, as opposed to its karmically bound, incarnate state<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Sahebji, Tej. *Jain Dharmasaar*. Mumbai. 11.

<sup>10</sup> Long, Jeffery D. *Jainism: An Introduction* (I.B.Tauris Introductions to Religion)

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>16</sup> Monier-Williams, Monier. *Sanskrit-English Dictionary*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1984 [1899].

<sup>17</sup> Long, Jeffery D. *Jainism: An Introduction* (I.B.Tauris Introductions to Religion)

**Pudgals:** Material objects including atoms<sup>18</sup>

**Sachai:** Truth

**Samana:** male member of an ‘intermediate’ order of Jain ascetics who live a life stricter than that of a Jain person, but not as strict as that of a Jain monk or nun; this order was established in 1980 by Ācārya Tulsī to minister to the Jain community living outside of India (given the strictures against travel that more traditional Jain ascetics must observe)<sup>19</sup>

**Sāmkhya:** Sāṅkhya (often spelled Sāṅkhya) is one of the major “orthodox” (or Hindu) Indian philosophies<sup>20</sup>

**Samyak:** conduct<sup>21</sup>

**Śramana:** ‘striver’, one who achieves spiritual progress through individual (usually ascetic) effort, in contrast with a Brahmin, who is believed to be holy by birth; the śramaṇas and their lay supporters were strong critics of Brahmanical spiritual claims; Jainism and Buddhism are the only śramaṇa movements that survive to the present<sup>22</sup>

**Sūtra:** An excerpt of a scripture

**Svabhava:** Nature

**Śvatantra:** Śva: one’s own Tantra: self-dependence, independence, self-will, freedom<sup>23</sup>

**Syāvāda:** ‘maybe doctrine’ or doctrine of conditional predication; the Jain doctrine that all statements (prior to the attainment of enlightenment) are only relatively true, their truth being dependent upon the aspect of a topic that is under consideration; the possible truth values of any claim are seven in number, according to this doctrine, which is therefore also known as the saptabha ṅginaya (sevenfold perspective); these seven truth values are distinct from the seven perspectives traditionally articulated in nayavāda<sup>24</sup>

**Tattvārtha Sūtra:** ‘Text on the True Nature of Reality’, also called the Tattvārthadhigamasūtra; written by Umāsvāti (c. 100–200 CE); the one text that is taken as authoritative by all Jain sects; articulates the worldview shared by the various Jain communities<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Monier-Williams, Monier. *Sanskrit-English Dictionary*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1984 [1899].

<sup>19</sup> Long, Jeffery D. *Jainism: An Introduction* (I.B.Tauris Introductions to Religion)

<sup>20</sup> Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy. Accessed April 24, 2019. <https://www.iep.utm.edu/sankhya/>

<sup>21</sup> Monier-Williams, Monier. *Sanskrit-English Dictionary*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1984 [1899].

<sup>22</sup> Long, Jeffery D. *Jainism: An Introduction* (I.B.Tauris Introductions to Religion)

<sup>23</sup> Monier-Williams, Monier. *Sanskrit-English Dictionary*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1984 [1899].

<sup>24</sup> Long, Jeffery D. *Jainism: An Introduction* (I.B.Tauris Introductions to Religion)

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid*

**Tīrthaṅkara:** ‘ford-maker’, Jina who creates a path to liberation for beings trapped in the realm of samsara, 24 Tīrthaṅkaras appear in each cosmic cycle; Mahāvīra is the 24th tīrthaṅkara of our current cosmic cycle<sup>26</sup>

**Upaniṣads:** The Upaniṣads are ancient texts from India that were composed orally in Sanskrit between about 700 B.C.E. and 300 B.C.E. There are thirteen major Upaniṣads, many of which were likely composed by multiple authors and are comprised of a variety of styles. As part of a larger group of texts, known as the Vedas, the Upaniṣads were composed in a ritual context, yet they mark the beginning of a reasoned enquiry into a number of perennial philosophical questions concerning the nature of being, the nature of the self, the foundation of life, what happens to the self at the time of death, the good life, and ways of interacting with others<sup>27</sup>

**Upayoga:** Employment, use, application<sup>28</sup>

**Vedas:** Hindu texts

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<sup>26</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>27</sup> Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy. Accessed April 24, 2019. <https://www.iep.utm.edu/upanisad/>

<sup>28</sup> Monier-Williams, Monier. *Sanskrit-English Dictionary*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1984 [1899].

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