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SAPTABHAṄGĪ—THE JAINA THEORY OF SEVENFOLD PREDICATION: A LOGICAL ANALYSIS

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The *Syādvādamañjarī* is a commentary on Hemacandra's *Anyayoga-vyavacchedikā*. Written in 1292 by Malliṣeṇa, the *Syādvādamañjarī* is a work consisting of thirty-two verses criticizing the philosophical positions of the other schools—Vaiśeṣika, Nyāya, Vedānta, Sāṃkhya, Buddhism, and Cārvāka—in favor of the Jaina *anekāntavāda,* literally, 'the doctrine of non-onesidedness'. A belief in the non-onesided, pluralistic nature of reality meant that the Jainas viewed conflicting philosophical systems as equally valid, each system being a correct description of just one aspect of this manifold reality. They maintained that only by synthesizing all of these descriptions could the philosophical truth be obtained. Thus, the Jaina *anekāntavāda* was a positive doctrine, accepting the validity of all philosophical theories, provided that these were appropriately qualified to make explicit the relative nature of each theory. In order to establish their doctrine of *anekāntatā,* the Jainas made use of *Saptabhaṅgī* ('seven modes'), a theory of sevenfold predication, which was a method of predication emphasizing the 'non-onesidedness' of reality.

A detailed account of *Saptabhaṅgī* is contained in sections 23 and 24 of Malliṣeṇa's *Syādvādamañjarī* —'the blossom cluster of the doctrine of *syāt*'. It is the term *syāt* in the seven predications that does the work in exposing the relative nature of the predications; hence *Saptabhaṅgī* is also known as *syādvāda,* 'the doctrine of *syāt*'. The use of *syāt* is a distinguishing feature of the system of sevenfold predication, which sets the *Saptabhaṅgī* of the Jainas aside from the systems developed by the other schools of Indian thought. Indeed, *Saptabhaṅgī* has been hailed by some as the main contribution of Jainism to the philosophical traditions of India. However, *Saptabhaṅgī* has also been severely criticized on the grounds that the seven predications are made without logical basis, and that the system is self-contradictory by virtue of the fourth predication. In this essay, I examine the subtleties of the sevenfold system of predication, and suggest that the seven predications can be seen to be the result of a precise and systematic analysis. I also provide an interpretation of the fourth predication that renders the system of *Saptabhaṅgī* free from contradiction.

The System of Sevenfold Predication

Saptabhaṅgī is a system of predications, seven in all, that can be employed to describe an entity with respect to some predicate. According to the Jainas, each predication expresses only one aspect of the truth about the entity being discussed. The seven predications taken together, however, provide an exclusive and exhaus-

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tive list of the correct ways of speaking about the entity. A statement of the seven predications can be extracted from the *Syādvādamañjarī,*[1] section 23:

1. *syāt asti eva sarvam iti*
2. *syāt na asti eva sarvam iti*
3. *syāt asti eva syāt na asti eva iti*
4. *syāt avaktavya eva iti*
5. *syāt asti eva syāt avaktavyam eva iti*
6. *syāt na asti eva syāt avaktavyam eva iti*
7. *syāt asti eva syāt na asti eva syāt avaktavyam eva iti*

1. possibly everything simply exists
2. possibly everything simply does not exist
3. possibly it simply exists, possibly it simply does not exist
4. possibly it is simply unutterable
5. possibly it simply exists, possibly it is simply unutterable
6. possibly it simply does not exist, possibly it is simply unutterable
7. possibly it simply exists, possibly it simply does not exist, possibly it is simply unutterable[2]

Here the word 'possibly' is a translation of the term *'syāt'*. *'Syāt'* is derived from the root $\sqrt{as}$—'to be'; it is the optative form, third person singular, and is generally translated as 'could be' or 'maybe' or 'perhaps'. In the context of the seven predications, *'syāt'* comes to mean 'possibly', but not in the sense of there being some uncertainty as to whether or not the sentence is true, but rather in the sense of there being some way in which the sentence really *is* true. The term *'syāt' qualifies* the rest of the sentence: it says that in a certain way, or from some particular standpoint, the sentence is (undoubtedly) true. So, for example, the first predication states that "in a certain sense, everything simply is," or "there is some point of view from which everything simply exists." For ease of exposition I will leave *syāt* untranslated in what follows, the idea hopefully being clear. Further considerations of the function of *syāt* in the seven predications will be taken up below, in the section on A Modal Analysis of *'Syāt'*. The word 'unutterable' in predications (4) through (7) is a translation of the Sanskrit term *avaktavya*. Since a plausible interpretation of *avaktavya* in the fourth predication is a major theme of this essay, I will defer a discussion of its meaning until later.

Now, while the seven predications as stated in the *Syādvādamañjarī* are initially made with reference to reality, they are not restricted to this use. After all, we may want to speak about particular objects in the world, too. So another common statement of the system of sevenfold predication uses the example of a pot: (1) *syāt,* the pot exists, (2) *syāt,* the pot does not exist, and so on. In fact, it is possible to generalize this even further, by using predicates other than 'exists' to state the seven predications. This would lead to the following general statement of the seven predications:

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1. *syāt, a* is *F*
2. *syāt, a* is not-*F*
3. *syāt, a* is *F; syāt, a* is not-*F*
4. *syāt, a* is *avaktavya*
5. *syāt, a* is *F; syāt, a* is *avaktavya*
6. *syāt, a* is not-*F; syāt, a* is *avaktavya*
7. *syāt, a* is *F; syāt, a* is not-*F; syāt, a* is *avaktavya,*

where *a* stands for any object, and *F* for any predicate. However, in listing the seven predications, the *Syādvādamañjarī* mentions only the predicate 'exists', and this seems typical of early explications of *Saptabhaṅgī*. This doesn't necessarily indicate that *Saptabhaṅgī* lacks the generality of the system presented above, for a statement such as 'The book is green' might well be replaced with 'The book *exists* as green', or some such sentence. And indeed, Malliṣeṇa remarks in the *Syādvādamañjarī* that there is the "possibility of even infinite seven-modes . . . with regard to a single thing for each state."[3] This goes some of the way to suggesting that the generalization given above is at least implicit in the *Syādvādamañjarī*. In any case, the main thing to note here is that the Jainas view *Saptabhaṅgī* as not just a group of seven statements, but instead as a system encompassing infinitely many statements, occurring in groups of seven—potentially, seven for each statement of the form *'a* is *F'*.

A Logical Excursion

Why is it that there are *seven* predications, and not six, say, or eight? This is a natural question to ask, and, indeed, Bimal Matilal has suggested that certain criticisms of *Saptabhaṅgī* on this account are based on a misunderstanding due to a failure to provide an answer to this question.[4] The key lies in realizing that the seven predications are based on three 'simple' predications: (1), (2), and (4) above. The other predications are complex ones, giving all of the possible combinations of these three. Although this may be obscured by the order in which the predications are presented, the fact that the seven predications are built out of the above three is mentioned explicitly in the *Syādvādamañjarī:*

> *Astitvaṃ na astitvena saha na virudhyate. Avaktavyatvam api vidhiniṣedhātmakam anyonyaṃ na virudhyate. . . . Anena ca na astitvā astitvā avaktavyatva-lakṣaṇa-bhaṅgaka-trayeṇa sakala-saptabhaṅgyā nirvirodhata-upalakṣitā. Amīṣām eva trayāṇām mukhyatvāt śeṣa-bhaṅgānāṃ ca saṃyoga-jatvena amīṣu eva antarbhāvāt iti.*
>
> Existence is not contradictory to nonexistence. Also, unutterability, consisting of affirmation and negation is not mutually contradictory. . . . And by this the noncontradiction of the whole system of *Saptabhaṅgī* is understood, by means of the triad of modes defined as nonexistence, existence, [and] unutterability; *since these three alone are the principal, inasmuch as the remaining modes are included in them, by arising from combinations.*[5] (my italics)

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We will return, in the sections below, to the question of contradiction raised here in the text. Matilal provides a nice symbolic characterization of the seven predications.[6] Writing '+' for the first predication, '−' for the second predication, and '0' for the fourth, the symbolic 'values' of the seven predications are as follows:

$$+ \quad - \quad \pm \quad 0 \quad +0 \quad -0 \quad \pm 0$$

Mathematically, the seven values are the nonempty members of the *powerset*[7] of the set $\{+, -, 0\}$. Matilal's choice of symbols for the three simple predications is a natural one: the first predication *'a* is *F'* is a *positive* statement, ascribing the property *F* to the object *a;* the second predication *'a* is not-*F'* is *negative* in the same sense. Matilal chooses the symbol '0' to represent the fourth predication *'a* is *avaktavya',* hinting that it is *neutral.* But we will have more to say about the 'neutrality' of the fourth predication later.

The idea of ascribing 'values' to the predications is a fruitful one. As noted earlier, corresponding to each object *a* and each predicate *F,* there are seven predications, each predication providing a correct way of speaking about the world. Matilal's characterization shows that there are also seven *values* associated with each object *a* and predicate *F*—we could say that these are the seven *truth-values* of the sentence *'a* is *F'*. So, given an object *a* and a predicate *F,* we could say that the sentence *'a* is *F'* is positive (or *true*) if *a* is *F,* and (under a standard account of falsity) negative (or *false*) just in case *a* is not-*F.* Finally we could say that *'a* is *F'* is *neutral* if *a* is *avaktavya*. And then there is a simple identification between the seven predications of *Saptabhaṅgī* and the possible truth-values that a sentence of the form *'a* is *F'* can take (leaving aside the function of the term *'syāt',* which we will take up in the next section):

1*. true
2*. false
3*. true and false
4*. neutral
5*. true and neutral
6*. false and neutral
7*. true, false, and neutral

Most adherents of classical logic, which has only the two truth-values of true and false, would view this system of truth-values as pure madness, and would reject (3*) through (7*) out of hand. But it is interesting to note that various contemporary logicians have investigated logics with values taken from the powerset of the standard two truth-values.[8] For example, Graham Priest endorses a three-valued logic with the values True, False, and Both,[9] and J. Michael Dunn's favorite logic has four values: True, False, Both, and Neither.[10] In fact, Priest actually investigates a logic with values taken from the powerset of {True, False, Both},[11] resulting in a seven-valued logic. Recall that the seven values presented above arise from the powerset of {True, False, Neutral}, and so it may be tempting to *identify* the truth-values of *Saptabhaṅgī* with those of Priest's seven-valued logic, simply by interpreting the

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'neutrality' of the fourth predication as being *both* true and false. But may we not instead interpret the fourth predication as being neutral by virtue of having *neither* value? I believe that this is a possibility that cannot be denied, and, indeed, we will see that there is a sense in which the fourth predication encompasses both of these 'neutral' values.

A Modal Analysis of 'Syāt'

In the list of truth-values above, the most glaring is (3*): how can a sentence be true as well as false? Or, in terms of the third predication, if *a* is *F* how can *a* also be not-*F?* Is the third predication self-contradictory? Not surprisingly, the term *'syāt'* plays an important role in showing that it is not.

Let us introduce a piece of terminology. We will say that the three simple predications (1), (2), and (4) are *independent* if two conditions hold:

a. No two of (1), (2), and (4) imply the third
b. No two of (1), (2), and (4) imply the negation of the third

If we assume that (1), (2), and (4) are independent (we will see shortly that they are), then conditions (a) and (b) give two important properties of the seven predications of *Saptabhaṅgī.* Firstly, condition (a) ensures that each possible combination of (1), (2), and (4) gives a *new* predication; that is, predications (3), (5), (6), and (7) are *distinct* from each other and also from (1), (2), and (4). Condition (b) ensures that none of the predications (3), (5), (6), and (7) are contradictory—provided, of course, that (1), (2), and (4) are free from contradiction. So the possibility of (3) being contradictory is ruled out if (1), (2), and (4) are independent; for if condition (b) is satisfied, then (1) and (2) are not contradictories, and so (3), the combination of (1) and (2), is not self-contradictory.

It is the presence of the term *'syāt'* that determines the independence of the three simple predications. Earlier I suggested that *syāt* could be translated as 'in a certain sense', or 'from a particular point of view', qualifying the sentence as being relative to the point of view taken. I think that the idea is that the truth of a sentence is never absolute, but rather is *conditional* on some standpoint from which the sentence is true; it is only true relative to some particular condition obtaining. Drawing on this idea of conditions, Matilal offers an interpretation of the term *'syāt'* in these predications as an *operator* that "turns the categorical proposition into a conditional."[12] He then gives the following analysis of the first two predications:

1′. If *p* then *a* is *F,* and
2′. If *q* then *a* is non-*F,*

where *p* and *q* are 'standpoints' from which *a* is *F* —in (1′), or *a* is non-*F* (2′). Of course, here *p* and *q* are *different* standpoints, and so, under this analysis of *syāt,* it is clear that (1′) and (2′) are *not* contradictories, nor even contraries. They are, in our new terminology, *independent.* By explicitly introducing conditionals in place of the term *'syāt',* Matilal makes the independence of the three simple predications obvi-

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ous. And we can now see why the third predication is not self-contradictory on Matilal's interpretation: the third predication simply asserts that there is some standpoint *p* from which *a* is *F,* and also some *other* standpoint *q* from which *a* is not-*F.*

An example from the *Syādvādamañjarī* will clarify this last point:

> *Tatra syāt kathaṃcit sva-dravya-kṣetra-kāla-bhāva-rūpeṇa asti eva sarvaṃ kumbhādi na punaḥ para-dravya-kṣetra-kāla-bhāva-rūpeṇa. Tathāhi kumbho dravyataḥ pārthivatvena asti na āpyādi-rūpatvena. Kṣetrataḥ pāṭaliputrakatvena na kānyakubjāditvena. Kālataḥ śaiśiratvena na vāsantikāditvena. Bhāvataḥ śyāmatvena na raktāditvena.*
>
> Here, from some point of view, everything, pot, et cetera, simply exists with the form of its own substance, place, time, nature; but not with the form of another substance, place, time, and nature. For instance: a pot exists as earthen with respect to substance and not with an aqueous form, et cetera; it exists as being of Pātaliputra in respect to place, and not Kānyakubja, et cetera; it exists in the cool season with respect to time, not being of the spring, et cetera; it exists with a black color with respect to nature, but not with a red, et cetera, color.[13]

So, suppose it is 'the cool season' and that there is a black earthenware pot in Pātaliputra. Then, employing Matilal's terminology, we can say that from the standpoint of earthen substances, the pot exists, but it does not exist from the standpoint of aqueous substances or metallic substances, and so forth. It exists when considered from the standpoint of Pātaliputra, but fails to exist from the standpoint of Kānyakubja or Canberra or Bloomington. And so on. The *two syāt* 'operators' in the third predication show that the positive part of (3) (in the example above, 'the pot exists') is to be considered from one standpoint, while the negative part ('the pot does not exist') is to be considered from some other standpoint.

One drawback of Matilal's approach is that it is difficult to give an account of what we are to understand by the 'standpoints' *p* and *q*. For example, if we understand by *p* some set of conditions, then (1′) says that *a* is *F* if this set of conditions obtains. This may be an adequate conditional analysis of (1), but taken in this way, *p* is *not* a standpoint, and it is clear that Matilal intends it to be. However, if *p* is indeed a standpoint, then it seems that the desired conditional analysis of (1) is not (1′), but instead something like (1′*):

(1′*) If we are considering things from the point of view of *p,* then *a* is *F.*

And then the difficulty becomes one of determining what the standpoint *p* should be. In fact it is peculiar to single out one particular standpoint *p* for the analysis of (1), when it seems that what is required is a statement that quantifies over standpoints: (1) holds just in case there is some standpoint *p* such that viewed from *p, a* is *F.* While Matilal's analysis of *syāt* as a conditional-forming operator makes it clear that the simple predications are independent, it seems that this approach gives away too much—it makes reference to a particular standpoint when it isn't any particular standpoint that will do the task.

One way around this is to employ modal operators, for the term *'syāt'* does seem to have modal force. The modal operator $\Diamond$, read 'possibly', seems well-suited to representing the function of *syāt.* If φ is a sentence, then we write $\Diamond\varphi$ for the sen-

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tence 'possibly, φ', which is understood to be true just in case there is some 'possible world' in which φ is true; or, alternatively, there is some way that things could be so that φ holds. Without stretching the standard interpretation of ◇ too much, we can bring this into our framework: ◇φ is true just if there is some point of view, or some way of considering things, such that φ is true. The first three predications can then be analyzed as follows:

1″. ◇ (*a* is *F*)
2″. ◇ (*a* is not-*F*)
3″. ◇ (*a* is *F*); ◇ (*a* is not-*F*)

It should be clear that (3″) is not self-contradictory: it simply asserts that there is some way of considering things (some standpoint) so that *a* is *F,* and also some (other) way of considering things (some other standpoint) so that *a* is not-*F.* This modal approach has the advantage over Matilal's conditional analysis of providing a *uniform* interpretation of the function of *syāt* in the seven predications.

The Fourth Predication

We now turn to perhaps the most puzzling aspect of *Saptabhaṅgī.* How is one to understand the fourth predication? The term *a-vaktavya* is the 'negation' of the gerundive *vaktavya,* which comes from the root √*vac*—to speak—and so *avaktavya* comes to mean 'not to be said'. Taken quite literally, the fourth predication could have *normative* force: it could be taken as forbidding one to say something. But, more likely, given the nondogmatic nature of Jaina philosophizing, the use of *avaktavya* here is *descriptive*—the idea being that it just *can't* be said, try as one might. Thus F. W. Thomas translates *avaktavya* as 'unutterable'. This does seem to be the most literal translation of *avaktavya,* but, in English at least, it is quite puzzling to say, for example, that the pot is unutterable. Of course, the problem here is that unutterability is a property of *words:* it is words that are utterable or unutterable, and it doesn't make sense for a nonlinguistic object to be unutterable. I think that it is instructive to examine the ways in which other authors have translated *avaktavya.* Dhruva translates it as 'indescribable', while Matilal chooses the term 'inexpressible'. These terms have the sense of there being insufficient resources within the language to convey some situation in the world. Indescribability perhaps emphasizes the complexity of phenomena in the world as a barrier to providing a description; inexpressibility seems to place more emphasis on the inadequacy of linguistic resources. Still, the question remains: just what is the intended sense of *avaktavya* in the fourth predication?

It will perhaps be useful to return to the *Syādvādamañjarī* for an explanation of the fourth predication:

> *Dvābhyām astitva-na-astitva-dharmābhyāṃ yugapad pradhānatayā arpitābhyām ekasya vastuno abhidhitsāyāṃ tādṛṣasya śabdasya a-saṃbhavād avaktavyaṃ jīvādivastu. Tathāhi sad-asattva-guṇa-dvayaṃ yugapad ekatra sad iti anena vaktum aśakyam. Tasya asattva-pratipādana-asamarthatvāt. Tathā asad iti anena api. Tasya sattva-pratyāyana-asāmarthya-*

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abhāvāt.... Iti sakala-vācaka-rahitatvāt avaktavyaṃ vastu yugapat sattva-asattvābhyāṃ pradhāna-bhāva-arpitābhyām-ākrāntaṃ vyavastiṣṭhate.

When there is a desire to express a single entity with the two attributes existence and nonexistence, applied simultaneously as principal, the entity, soul, et cetera is *avaktavya,* from the impossibility of such a word. For thus: the pair of qualities, existence and nonexistence, are unable to be stated simultaneously in regard to one thing by the term 'existent'; because that term is incapable of expressing the nonexistence of the thing. Nor similarly by the term 'nonexistent', because that term has not the ability to express its existence.... Thus from the lack of all forms of expression the entity is *avaktavya,* being overcome by simultaneous existence and nonexistence applied as principal.[14]

I think that this sheds some light on the intended sense of the term *avaktavya.* The fourth predication is used when an entity—say, a pot—both exists and does not exist from a *single* standpoint (I take it that this is what it is for the two attributes 'existence' and 'nonexistence' to be "applied simultaneously as principal"). This is the crucial difference between the third and fourth predications—recall that the third predication says that there is a standpoint from which the pot exists *and* a *(probably different)* standpoint from which the pot does not exist. The fourth predication says that in a certain sense the pot is inexpressible, and the quote above indicates that this inexpressibility comes about because of the lack of a 'form of expression' to describe the *simultaneous* (i.e., from a single standpoint) existence and nonexistence of the pot. The term 'existent' doesn't describe the pot, for this term fails to capture the nonexistence of the pot, and the term 'nonexistent' is also inadequate since the existence of the pot then remains unexpressed. So it seems that what is being suggested is that language is incapable of describing the pot; the pot is inexpressible by a single term.

This raises two obvious objections. First, in saying that the pot is inexpressible, haven't we just used a single term (namely, the term 'inexpressible') to express it? Admittedly, this is a cheap shot, but, in any case, the *Syādvādamañjarī* has an answer:

na ca sarvathā avaktavyam. Avaktavya śabdena api anabhidheyatva-prasaṅgāt.

But it is not inexpressible in every way; because of the consequence of being inexpressible even by the word *'avaktavya'*.[15]

The idea is that it is not in *every* way that the pot is inexpressible, but just from *some* particular standpoint (after all, this is the function of the *syāt* operator). The second objection is more interesting. Why the emphasis on a *single* term to describe the pot? Why not use two words (or more); or, given the richness of the Sanskrit language, a compound? Surely one could say "there is a sense in which the pot both exists and does not exist"—is this not a 'form of expression' that describes the pot? In short, why is it necessary to 'switch' to the term *avaktavya?* I think that Dhruva has an answer to this, but I shall return to this point later. For now these ideas give rise to a more serious problem with the fourth predication: isn't it self-contradictory?

The text is explicit in stating that the fourth predication is made "with simulta-

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neous affirmation and negation"[16] (of existence). Whereas the third predication escapes the charge of contradiction by applying existence and nonexistence to an entity *successively (syāt,* the pot exists; *syāt,* the pot does not exist*),* it is clear that the fourth predication is intended for use when these predicates are to be applied to an entity *simultaneously.* And to say that the pot both exists and does not exist is to say something contradictory. To put it slightly differently, the fourth predication has only *one syāt* operator, and so it states that there is just a single standpoint from which the pot exists and also does not exist. In the notation of the previous section above, this would be analyzed as:

4″. $\Diamond$ *(a* is *F* and *a* is non-*F)*

Put like this, there is no escaping the fact that, unlike (3″), (4″) *is* self-contradictory. But is (4″) a reasonable analysis of the fourth predication? It does seem to capture the notion of "simultaneous affirmation and negation," but is this really how we are to understand the fourth predication? Does the fourth predication really embody a contradiction?

Matilal thinks that it does. He writes:

> The fourth predication, however, presents a problem. For, it seems to apply two incompatible predicates . . . to the subject *in the same breath* or simultaneously. Although the statement is conditionalized with the *syāt* operator, it only means that under certain conditions a thing will have two contradictory characters. Thus, the speaker here may be taken to have contradicted himself and said nothing.[17]

According to Matilal, then, the fourth predication is useless. I disagree with Matilal's claim that to contradict one's self is to say nothing; there are respectable logical systems that admit of contradictions. But I think that it is important to observe that the Jainas certainly do *not* intend the fourth predication to be an acceptance of contradiction into their system. Indeed, section 24 of the text is given over to 'showing' that the system of *Saptabhaṅgī* is free from contradiction. I shall examine the (not-so-clear!) arguments in this section later. In any case, Matilal concedes that the fourth predication may somehow be 'saved' by an appeal to a hidden meaning, which can be made explicit in order to resolve the apparent contradiction. As an illustration he quotes an example taken from Strawson:

> [W]e can say of a man, "He is both over six-foot tall and under six-foot tall," and then explain that he has a disease that makes him stoop, but that if he were cured and were able to stand upright he would top the six-foot mark. . . . In this way I think the Jainas can answer the charge of self-contradiction against the fourth predication.[18]

I find this explanation quite unhelpful. Matilal's example sounds more like an attempt to answer the charge of self-contradiction against the *third* predication: he seems to be explaining the contradiction in the sentence "He is both over six-foot tall and under six-foot tall" by analyzing this as "From one point of view, he is over six-foot tall, and from another point of view he is not." And as a defense of the fourth predication, his explanation seems quite unsatisfactory; given that the text makes it clear that the fourth predication is not intended to be self-contradictory, it seems that

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there should be some attempt to account for the text as it stands, without resorting to hidden meanings to explain the fourth predication. Indeed, there is good reason to suppose that the fourth predication is in fact not self-contradictory, and does not stand in need of 'saving' in the way Matilal suggests. In seeing the fourth predication as involving a contradiction, Matilal in effect accepts (4″) as a correct analysis; he *analyzes* the term *avaktavya* as standing in place of the predicate "both exists and does not exist." His account makes little reference to the presence of the term *avaktavya* in the fourth predication, yet I think that it is with this term that the key to understanding the fourth predication lies.

In all fairness, Matilal does add the parenthetical remark: "This may partially justify the use of 'inexpressible' to denote this predication, for two contradictory predicates are supposed to cancel or erase each other."[19] So here is an attempt to explain the 'switch' to *avaktavya* from the phrase "both exists and does not exist." Matilal doesn't think that the use of the term *avaktavya* does away with contradictions, but that the use of this word is *justified* by the fact that the two contradictory predicates, existence and nonexistence, taken together, cancel each other out (and, I assume, result in no contradiction). Matilal would then say that an appeal to hidden meanings allows one to make sense of the fourth predication. Still, the overriding sense of Matilal's account is that, as it stands, the fourth predication is self-contradictory, and this contradictory nature is in need of further explanation.

Dhruva on the other hand, suggests that the term *avaktavya* is employed precisely to *avoid* self-contradiction. He describes the fourth predication as a "Statement of indescribability arising from making affirmation and negation conjointly and also simultaneously,—thus involving a contradiction *which can be got over by making the statement of indescribability*"[20] (my italics).

I think Dhruva has a good point here. To use the term *avaktavya* to describe a pot, say, is to acknowledge that contradictions such as that embodied in the statement "there is a sense in which the pot both exists and does not exist" are bad and are not to be admitted into the system. The idea here is that by 'switching' to *avaktavya* to make the statement "there is a sense in which the pot is inexpressible" one avoids saying something contradictory. This makes it clear that the fourth predication is not to be thought of as involving a contradiction, for there is nothing contradictory about ascribing inexpressibility to an entity.[21]

So here we have one possible reason for the use of the term *avaktavya*—it is introduced as a means of avoiding the contradiction that would otherwise be present in a system that allows one to predicate simultaneous existence and nonexistence to an entity. Implicit in this reasoning is the thought that a system that admits of contradictions is incoherent, or at least implausible, a thought that is made explicit in section 24 of the text. Here the author takes great pains to 'show' that the system is entirely free from contradiction. The argument given is not particularly clear, but worth mentioning nonetheless:

> *[S]ad artheṣu asattvaṃ na virudham.... Ayam abhiprāyaḥ. Paraspara-parihāreṇa ye vartate tayoḥ śīta-uṣṇavat saha-anavasthāna-lakṣaṇo virodhaḥ. Na ca atra evam. Sattva-*

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asattvayor itaretaram aviṣvag-bhāvena vartanāt. Na hi ghaṭādau sattvam asattvaṃ parihṛtya vartate. Para-rūpeṇa api sattva-prasaṅgāt.... Na ca asattvaṃ sattvaṃ parihṛtya vartate. Sva-rūpeṇa api asattva prāpteḥ. Tathā ca nirupākhyatvāt-sarvaśūnyatā iti.

Nonexistence in existent objects is not contradictory.... This is the meaning: when two things are with mutual exclusion, like hot and cold, there is contradiction, defined as non–abiding together. But such is not the case here; because existence and nonexistence occur without mutual separation. Indeed, in a pot, et cetera, existence does not occur with the exclusion of nonexistence; because of the consequence of being existent even in the form of another.... And nonexistence does not occur with the exclusion of existence, because of the result of nonexistence even with its own form. And so, being unidentifiable, there would be universal emptiness.[22]

How can we make sense of this passage? The main claim seems to be that it is *not* contradictory to ascribe both existence and nonexistence to an entity. The reason given for this is that, unlike hot and cold, existence and nonexistence occur "without mutual separation." And this means that existence and nonexistence occur in an entity together—the presence of one does not exclude the presence of the other. Now the argument for this last claim is somewhat puzzling. As I see it, the argument consists of two parts:

I. Existence does not exclude nonexistence
II. Nonexistence does not exclude existence

How does the argument for (I) go? Well, suppose that the pot exists, and suppose that existence *does* in fact exclude nonexistence. Then it cannot be the case that the pot does not exist (this is what it would be for existence to exclude nonexistence), and so it cannot be the case that the pot does not exist as an elephant, a light bulb, a blanket, and so on; that is, the pot must then be 'existent even in the form of another', which is absurd; hence existence does not exclude nonexistence. The argument for (II) is quite different: if nonexistence excludes existence, then the pot that does not exist does not exist as anything, not even as itself. So, if nonexistence excludes existence, then we cannot even be guaranteed self-identity of objects, and hence nothing would exist: there would be "universal emptiness." This establishes (II). The surprising consequence is that not only is it not contradictory to ascribe both existence and nonexistence to an entity, but existence and nonexistence are *always* predicable of an entity. I do not find the argument (as I've construed it) entirely convincing—I think it fails to acknowledge the difference between 'exists' and 'exists as'—but the interesting point in all of this is that it seems that the Jainas *do not* regard the simultaneous application of the predicates 'exists' and 'doesn't exist' to an object to be contradictory.

And this leads us back to our earlier question of the necessity of introducing the term *avaktavya* (in the section on The Fourth Predication above). Why is it that, for example, "there is a sense in which the pot both exists and does not exist" is not a legitimate 'form of expression' describing the pot? Why does the lack of a single word to describe this property of the pot call for the introduction of the term *avaktavya* in the statement of the fourth predication? As I mentioned earlier, I think

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Dhruva may point the way to answering this intriguing question.[23] Commenting on a passage[24] in the *Syādvādamañjarī,* he writes:

> The gist of the passage in the text is to show how avaktavya arises from attempting to combine simultaneously and with equal prominence the sattva and the asattva. There is no word in the language to do this . . . but supposing there were such a word, *still it would present the two to the mind one after the other. . . .* [T]here is no single word to express sattva and asattva simultaneously combined.[25] (my italics)

This is interesting. Dhruva seems to be suggesting that the two predicates 'exists' and 'does not exist' can only be grasped by the mind one after the other, because language lacks the resources to express these predicates *simultaneously* and with equal emphasis. Thus, it is not so much the lack of a *single word* that forces the introduction of *avaktavya,* but the lack of *any* expression in the language to present these predicates to the mind simultaneously rather than successively—and of course a single word would be the best candidate for such an expression. There is no expression that can capture these two predicates without listing them one after the other, and so presenting them to the mind in that way. The fourth predication tries to capture linguistically the simultaneous application of 'exists' and 'doesn't exist' to an entity, and the lack of an expression to do this renders the entity *inexpressible.* And so the term *avaktavya* makes its appearance in the fourth predication. Its use does not lie in avoiding contradictions (for, as the Jainas see it, there are none here to avoid), but, rather, simply in attempting to describe an entity that both exists and does not exist, the possibility of which does not entail a contradiction.

Logic Revisited

Earlier we remarked that the first predication is a *positive* statement ('the pot exists'; *'a* is *F'*), and the second is *negative* ('the pot does not exist'; *'a* is not-*F'*). What about the fourth predication? I think Matilal is right in regarding this predication to be *neutral* (and he appropriately denotes it with the symbol '0'). But I think it is important to distinguish between at least two different ways in which the fourth predication could be thought to be neutral. Firstly, it could be neutral in the sense of being *neither* positive nor negative. This seems to be how Matilal understands the neutrality of the fourth predication—he suggests that the positive and negative predicates (existence and nonexistence, or, more generally, *F* and not-*F*) that make up the fourth predication "cancel or erase each other." To use the fourth predication, considered neutral in this way, is in some sense to say nothing about the object in question, and not out of ignorance about the object, or out of an inability to describe the object, but simply because the canceling of predicates leaves nothing to be said about the object. Hence the object is *avaktavya.* Indeed, the statement *'a* is *avaktavya'* contains neither a positive nor a negative ascription to *a* of the predicate *F,* and so the statement is neutral in a very literal sense.

But I think that it is now clear that the fourth predication is not to be understood as neutral in this sense. There is, however, a second sense in which the fourth

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predication could be considered neutral: in the sense of being *both* positive and negative. We have seen that the Jainas intend the fourth predication to be used when both existence (positive) and nonexistence (negative) are to be predicated of an object; the 'neutrality' of the fourth predication arises from there being *no contradiction* in ascribing both of these predicates to the object (but importantly, and contrary to Matilal, this is *not* because existence and nonexistence cancel each other out). And the appearance of the term *'avaktavya'* in the fourth predication is not to *avoid* contradictions (contrary to Dhruva), but is merely a result of a lack of resources within the language to express the two predicates 'existence' and 'nonexistence' simultaneously.

Concluding Remarks

We have seen that the neutral flavor of the fourth predication comes closer in spirit to the neutral value of 'both' than of 'neither'. And there is good reason for this. As Matilal notes, the Jaina *Anekāntavāda,* for which the *Saptabhaṅgī* is a tool, is a positive doctrine of acceptance, while the neutral value of 'neither' is one of strong denial.[26] To admit this value into the system of sevenfold predication would have been to run against the main tenet of *Anekāntavāda*. For the Jainas, each predication of the *Saptabhaṅgī* was considered undoubtedly true, the term *'syāt'* ensuring the non-absolute nature of the predications. And indeed, according to the Jainas, with the qualifying term *'syāt',* each predicate can be applied to any entity at all, as is indicated by the argument in the *Syādvādamañjarī* considered in the section above on The Fourth Predication. But this leads to the natural question of the purpose of a theory of predication under which it is correct to apply any predicate to any entity whatsoever. After all, is it not the purpose of predication to provide a description of an entity that distinguishes it from everything else? Matilal provides a partial answer to this question in his remarks about the fourth predication:

> The Jainas ... might reply that the fourth predication is not intended to distinguish the thing from other things, but to include it in everything else.... The idea of the Jainas is probably that in such predication the purpose of description might fail, but the purpose of stating a truth will not fail.[27]

I agree with Matilal's last claim here, and in fact I would like to go one step further and suggest that the purpose of the predications of *Saptabhaṅgī* is not to provide a description at all. As I see it, *Saptabhaṅgī* is *not* a guide to predication. What it is, rather, is a guide to the correct ways of speaking. And here the importance of the term *'syāt'* cannot be overstated. As Matilal quips: "Add a *'syāt'* particle to your philosophic proposition and you have captured the truth."[28]

Notes

The original version of this essay was written for a graduate seminar on the philosophies of India taught by Dr. Gerald J. Larson. Many of the ideas here stem from

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Professor J. Michael Dunn's work on negation. I would like to thank Dr. Larson and Professor Dunn for their interest and encouragement.

1 – The Sanskrit quoted in this essay has been taken from the *Syādvādamañjarī of Malliṣeṇa,* ed. with introduction, notes and appendices by A. B. [Ānanda-śaṇkara Bāpubhāī] Dhruva, Bombay Sanskrit and Prakrit Series 83 (Sanskrit, with introduction and notes in English) (Bombay: The Department of Public Instruction, 1933). Hereafter, references to Dhruva refer to this text. The translations are my own, having consulted the excellent though somewhat dated translation by F. W. Thomas, *Syādvādamañjarī: The Flower-Spray of the Quadammodo Doctrine* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1968), and Charles A. Moore's short extract of the *Syādvādamañjarī* in *A Source Book in Indian Philosophy,* ed. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan and Charles A. Moore (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957).

2 – Dhruva, *Syādvādamañjarī,* p. 143, lines 104–112.

3 – Ibid., p. 145, lines 157–158: *"... pratiparyāyaṃ vastuni anantānām api saptabhaṅgīnām eva saṃbhavāt."*

4 – Bimal Krishna Matilal, *Logic, Language, and Reality: An Introduction to Indian Philosophical Studies* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1985), p. 309.

5 – Dhruva, *Syādvādamañjarī,* p. 148, lines 10–15.

6 – Matilal, *Logic, Language, and Reality,* pp. 307–308.

7 – The powerset of $\{+, -, 0\}$ is the set consisting of all possible combinations of the elements $+$, $-$, and 0.

8 – That is, from the set {True, False, Both true and false, Neither true nor false}.

9 – Graham Priest, "Hypercontradictions," *Logique et Analyse* 27 (1984): 237–243.

10 – J. Michael Dunn, "A Comparative Study of Various Model-Theoretic Treatments of Negation: A History of Formal Negation", in *What Is Negation?* ed. Dov M. Gabbay and Heinrich Wansing, Applied Logic Series, vol. 13 (Dordrecht and Boston: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1999).

11 – Priest, "Hypercontradictions," p. 240.

12 – Matilal, *Logic, Language, and Reality,* p. 311.

13 – Dhruva, *Syādvādamañjarī,* p. 143, lines 113–118.

14 – Ibid., p. 144, lines 143–152.

15 – Ibid., p. 145, lines 152–153.

16 – Ibid., p. 143, lines 107–108: *Yugapad vidhiniṣedha-kalpanayā caturthaḥ.*

17 – Matilal, *Logic, Language, and Reality,* p. 312.

18 – Ibid.

19 – Ibid.

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20 – Dhruva, *Syādvādamañjarī,* p. 244.

21 – Except for the obvious 'contradiction' of having thereby 'expressed' it, mentioned on p. 392 (above).

22 – Dhruva, *Syādvādamañjarī,* p. 149, lines 22–28.

23 – Ibid., p. 247.

24 – The passage is quoted on pp. 391–392 (above).

25 – Here, *sattva* can be translated as 'being' or 'existence'; *asattva* as 'non-existence'.

26 – Matilal, *Logic, Language, and Reality,* p. 305.

27 – Ibid., p. 313.

28 – Ibid.

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