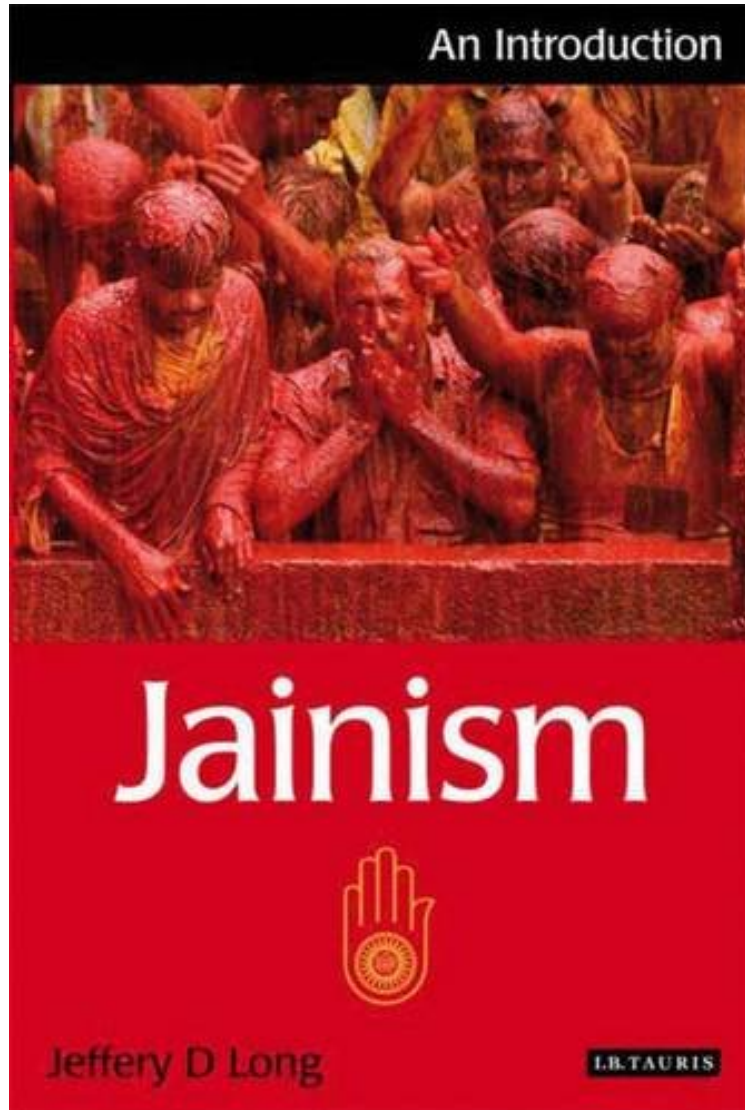


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## Jainism: An Introduction (Introductions to Religion)

*Jeffery D. Long*

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**Jeffery D. Long : Jainism: An Introduction (Introductions to Religion)** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Jainism: An Introduction (Introductions to Religion):

18 of 18 people found the following review helpful. Inside Indic Thought: Historical Context and Modern RelevanceBy Darren L. HacklerProfessor Long's book, Jainism: An Introduction, is a thoroughly researched overview of the Jain tradition, a religion and set of philosophical constructs that have influenced Indian thought for over 2500 years. This succinct, completely engaging overview of Jainism, the historical contexts of Jain intellectual thought, and the relationship of Jainism and Jain philosophers within the greater context of Hinduism, brahminical/Vedic thought,

Buddhism, and Indic philosophical movements is indeed quite relevant to understanding and appreciating the Jain communities in India and in the West. This highly-readable monograph is intended as an introduction to the Jain tradition; and it is aimed at a college-level audience, but it is also a book with considerable relevance to any person interested in philosophy, religion, history, India, or the evolution of intellectual movements. I highly recommend this book for every reader--it is accessible, engaging, and provocative. One of the aims of the book is to put core Jain (and for that matter, Buddhist and Hindu) beliefs and assumptions about the nature and meaning of existence into an intellectual context, both historical, and applicable to modern-day societies. With an exceptionally clear explanation of core Jain beliefs including non-violence, non-absolutism (or perhaps more easily understood as religious pluralism), detachment from materialism, and the karmic cycle, the author has indeed put the evolution of Jain thought into an appropriate historical context vis--vis Buddhism and Hinduism. Jainism: An Introduction provides the historical context of the Jain founders, Mahavira, and other philosophers; and, how their intellectual thought challenged historical, philosophical movements within Buddhism and Hinduism. Additionally, the book provides a survey of current literature and academic thought concerning the importance of Jain thought within its historical, philosophical, and religious context. I found the examination of current academic thought quite well presented. The examination of Jainism (like Buddhism) as a reaction (in the literal sense) in many regards to brahminical religious structures and thought is quite interesting. The analyses of academic views concerning Jainism and Buddhism as part of the Greater Magadha culture, recent archaeological evidence, and new postulations on the influence of north Indian philosophers provide a greater understanding of core Jain beliefs, and the subsequent influence of the Jain community in India. This book argues for the relevance of Jain thought as a potential solution to many modern crises of religious intolerance, violence, consumerism, materialism, and ecological disasters that the human community continually faces. Interestingly enough, there is also an overview of how Jain thought has actually influenced modern history with a brief examination of Jain influence upon Gandhi and the Indian independence movement. It is fascinating to learn that the small Jain community has influenced Indic and world religious thought in a variety of ways, and the book provides a thorough overview of the internal logic and consistency of Jain thought over 2500 years. Professor Long presents both the historical context of Jainism, and its relevance to modern society--particularly Jain views on non-violence, religious tolerance, renouncing materialism, ecological sustainability, and vegetarianism. Jainism indeed has a great deal to teach western societies about environmental sustainability and social justice, and may provide a solution for sustainable populations living in balance with nature. I highly recommend this book to students and to anyone interested in the subject. And, if you happen to believe that Jain thought is just too exotic to read about, think again, for the Jain tradition has a great deal to teach western societies. Perhaps, if more people adopted some of the core beliefs of Jainism, Buddhism and Hinduism, we might just find ourselves living in a better world. One should fully understand the historical context and evolution of Jain thought, but perhaps more importantly, one should appreciate the relevance of Jainism in order to solve some of the difficulties modern societies confront. And...don't forget to read the footnotes and historical chronology! Do yourself a favor and get this book, and Long's outstanding first book--A Vision for Hinduism: Beyond Hindu Nationalism--about the nature of modern Hindu identity, nationalism, and the relevance of Hindu thought for all contemporary societies. Note: Jan, 2012--Be sure to check out Professor Long's new book in the Scarecrow Press reference series. Professor Long's exceptional reference work on everything Hindu is entitled Historical Dictionary of Hinduism (Historical Dictionaries of Religions, Philosophies, and Movements Series) (published Sept. 2011). This is essential for any library collection and I highly recommend it for anyone interested in Hindu at large. 1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Five Stars By khang fr y Interesting read. 5 of 5 people found the following review helpful. A Book with a Very Important Message By Dr, Scott Flaubert A Review by Dr. Andrea Diem-Lane Jeffery D. Long in his text Jainism argues that the ancient tradition of Jainism has much to offer the modern world. Today we face intense inter-religious conflict as one group challenges the other, often leading to dispute and even full blown war. In addition to this, our world is facing an environmental crisis as resources are being depleted. The Western mentality that we can use the planets resources as we please has certainly contributed to a threatening ecological footprint. Interestingly, Jainism, a relatively small religion in India of 4.2 million, offers us two viable approaches to help with these serious global issues. First of all, in place of religious exclusivism and intolerance Jainism advocates religious pluralism, encompassed by the Jain principle of *anekantavada* (the doctrine of non-one sidedness). In Jainism one of the worst philosophical errors one can make is to assume a position of absolutism, or one sidedness (the Indian term for this is *ekantata*). Since Reality, whatever that may be, is infinite the various expressions and perspectives of it are valid. Of course, the Jain would add the caveat that not all religious positions are true if they fall out of a "Jinas view of a normative standard" (usually this means compassion). For instance, when a religion advocates extreme violence and killing a Jain would have a hard time reconciling this with an acceptable viewpoint. However, when compassion plays a central role (which it often does in the world religions) then the religions approach to the sacred are to be honored and viewed as a different perspective of a many-faced reality. The author himself confesses his early teen attraction to Hinduism, specifically the philosophy of Ramakrishna, a 19th Hindu teacher who professed an eclectic appreciation of the worlds religions. Gandhi was another teacher who approached the religious traditions of the world with such openness. Yet, Longs thesis in part is that of all of the world religions Jainism seems

to capture this beautiful message of religious universalism most elegantly. And he adds that the modern world has much to gain from this Jain principle of inclusion. There is a famous Eastern story of an elephant and blind men that demonstrates the essence of anekantavada. Though the Theravada Buddhists may have first articulated the story of the elephant and the blind men, the Jain literature also refers to this analogous story whose message of anekantavada is one of the main precepts of Jain philosophy. As blind men describe to the local king what an elephant is like, each return with a different description, though all are correct from their perspective. One feels the trunk and describes it as a snake; another who feels the leg says the elephant is a tree; the tail is taken to be a rope and the one who touches its side says the elephant is a wall. Each of the blind men offers a correct insight but a partial one. Thus, the lesson, it seems, is that each blind man can learn from the other and one's view is immensely expanded. Similarly, while the world religions may seem in conflict with each other, from a wiser viewpoint they touch upon some truth of the Infinite. With this insight one can appreciate the other philosophies and traditions of the world. Interreligious conflict may then hopefully fade. It is important to note that anekantavada is not the position that there is no truth but that each tradition taps into an aspect of it. According to Jainism, the Jina, or Jain enlightened one who has practiced ahimsa, asceticism, and meditation and who has achieved the state of liberation (moksha) from the cycle of rebirth, can see the whole elephant. The second valuable insight Jainism has to offer the modern mind is the principle of ahimsa. Derived from Sanskrit this term simply means non-violence or compassion. Their commitment to ahimsa is the cornerstone of Jainism. If the goal is to attain moksha this is only achievable if one pursues a life of ahimsa, free of harm to others, including humans, animals, plants, insects and even, if possible, microorganisms. While other religions may advocate compassion in different forms (from helping one's neighbor in times of need, to turning the other cheek and forgiving an injustice, to slaying an animal in the quickest and most painless way possible) the form it takes in this Indian tradition is unlike any other. Ahimsa for a Jain monastic is a total commitment not to hurt or kill another creature, however small. Westerners may find the ahimsa approach of Jain monastics extreme. For instance, besides practicing a lacto-vegetarian diet (a requirement for both monastics and laypersons) monastics of the Svetambara and Digambara order, the two main Jain divisions, carry brooms as they walk so not to inadvertently step on insects and will not travel by air, car, etc., so not to cause harm while in movement to other life forms. The Svetambara monastics even wear a mask over their face to prevent the inhaling of insects. Many monastics will strain water so that they do not drink any organisms in it and some will not turn on lights to prevent killing of microorganisms. The most severe form may be the act of santhara or fasting to death under a guru's guidance near the end of one's life so not to kill anything else before death arrives (this helps one not to accrue any more bad karma at the time of death). Yet, the average Jain layperson does not live by these challenging standards. Instead the average Jain drives a car, has a profession (certainly one that correlates with ahimsa in some way), drinks water without straining it, does not wear a mask or starve to death, etc. But one common element remains for all practicing Jains: vegetarianism. Not eating animals of any kind is essential for a Jain. Couple this with an overall respect and concern for nature and imposing upon it as little of an environmental impact as possible and Jainism takes on a very relevant role today. Jains see all life forms as possessing jiva (immortal essence or soul) and so the divine dwells all around us. Profound mindfulness is expected as one interacts with all of the beings of this world. In the text, Long makes the case that we in the West have a lot to learn from the Jains' ahimsa approach, going as far as to contend that the Jains' prescription for ahimsa can serve as a remedy for much of our environmental woes. We do not have to be practicing Jains to reap the value of this principle. In our own lives we can make compassionate choices that benefit other creatures and the planet itself. Perhaps one walks a different path so not to annihilate a group of working ants in the road, or one buys products from a company committed to animal free cruelty or the environment. Maybe one chooses to eat the veggie burger over the hamburger or to enter a profession that contributes to the welfare of others and not their demise. Possibly, now, one can draw from compassion as one makes environmental and moral decisions and does not see the world and its creatures as something to be exploited for human ends. Kant's categorical imperative takes on a new meaning as we universalize our actions beyond the human sphere to all living beings. Interestingly, Long connects the two principles of ahimsa and anekantavada together in the text when he refers to anekantavada as intellectual ahimsa. By this he suggests that religious pluralism is a compassionate approach to the world's religions. Instead of judging and ridiculing different views, with deep consideration one embraces the other. In addition to a passionate plea to garner insights from the Jains, Long does a superb job explaining the origins and history of Jainism. The book almost works for an ethics course, however, in that the ethical principles of ahimsa and anekantavada are clearly delineated and presented as applicable for all.

Jainism evokes images of monks wearing face-masks to protect insects and micro-organisms from being inhaled. Or of Jains sweeping the ground in front of them to ensure that living creatures are not inadvertently crushed: a practice of non-violence so radical as to defy easy comprehension. Yet for all its apparent exoticism, Jainism is still little understood in the West. What is this mysterious philosophy which originated in the 6th century BCE, whose absolute requirement is vegetarianism, and which now commands a following of four million adherents both in its native India and diaspora communities across the globe? In his welcome new treatment of the Jain religion, Long makes an ancient tradition fully intelligible to the modern reader. Plunging back more than two and a half millennia, to the plains of

northern India and the life of a prince who--much like the Buddha--gave up a life of luxury to pursue enlightenment, Long traces the history of the Jain community from founding sage Mahavira to the present day. He explores asceticism, worship, the life of the Jain layperson, relations between Jainism and other Indic traditions, the Jain philosophy of relativity, and the implications of Jain ideals for the contemporary world. The book presents Jainism in a way that is authentic and engaging to specialists and non-specialists alike.

""This highly readable book provides an excellent introduction to an ancient and complex tradition that predates the birth of the Buddha. The author skillfully explores Jain doctrines regarding the nature of the soul and the observance of nonviolence, placing Jainism within the context of Hinduism and Buddhism. He also highlights the influence that Jainism had upon the life and work of Mahatma Gandhi. The book corrects misperceptions that have characterized Jain ethics as extreme, and discusses how Jainism is being practiced globally, including in the US heartland."-- Christopher Key Chapple, Doshi Professor of Indic and Comparative Theology, Loyola Marymount University, Los Angeles""Jeffery Long's book admirably accomplishes two goals. The first half of *Jainism: An Introduction* does exactly what his subtitle indicates. Long provides a succinct and accurate overview of the history, beliefs and practices of the Jains that draws in an excellent manner upon the most recent scholarship. The second half of the book - in a fine example of the practice of comparative theology and comparative philosophy of religion - moves beyond description to engage with what Jainism has to say to anyone living on Planet Earth in the twenty-first century. In particular, Long is concerned to explore what the Jain philosophical doctrines of ""relativity"" can contribute to the pressing problem of how people respond to the fact of profound religious diversity. *Jainism: An Introduction* will therefore be of interest to anyone interested in the global religious history of humanity, and additionally to anyone striving to construct a morally responsible stance on how humans can learn to live together in all their religious differences. The book will also be a fine choice for undergraduate students in a variety of fields, including religious studies, south Asian studies, the history of religion and comparative philosophy."--John Cort, Professor of Asian and Comparative Religions, Denison University, and author of *Jains in the World: Religious Values and Ideology in India*