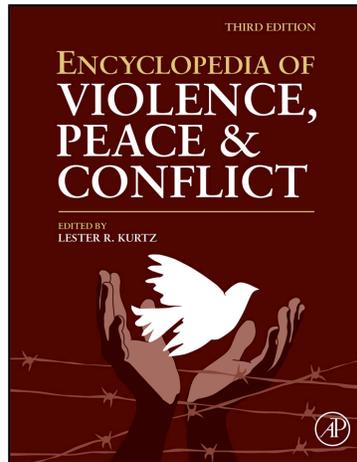


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## Nonharmfulness (Ahimsā) in Classical Indian Thought

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### Overview: Concept and Terminology

Nonharmfulness and *ahimsā* have been fundamental concepts both in Indian morality (traditionally accepted system of values) and ethics (rationalized philosophical system of values) since the 5th century BCE till modernity, and, thanks to Mahatma Gandhi, they acquired a new political dimension in the 20th century and thereby exercised a noticeable impact worldwide in the form of the novel concept of peaceful (nonviolent) resistance (*satyāgraha*; “application of truth”). Neither the idea of nonharmfulness nor the understanding of the term *ahimsā* were uniform in classical India, and the historical development of the concept was rather complex.

Further the relation between the concept of nonharmfulness and *ahimsā* is not a one-to-one relation. The idea of nonharmfulness, or noninjury, was also expressed by other important, and at (early) times even more important, terms than *ahimsā*, such as *anrśamsya* (“noncruelty”), *dayā* (“sympathy, compassion, pity”), or *anukrośa* (“sympathy, compassion”), mostly associated with the Brahmanical tradition, as well as *prāṇātīpāta-prativirati* (“abstinence from taking life”), *jugupsā* (“desire to protect [life]”), and *anārambha* (“nonkilling”), linked to Buddhism, Jainism, and Ajivikism, but also with two other kin ideals of the Buddhist tradition: *karuṇā* (“compassion”) and *maitrī* (“loving kindness”), and *anukampā* (“active empathy”) as a Jaina equivalent. Despite them being synonyms or near synonyms, each of these terms had its unique history and contextual application. The understanding and historical development of nonharmfulness, as well as the terminological means through which it was expressed and conceptualized, took different trajectories in the Brahmanical (Vedic and post-Vedic) and non-Brahmanical (Buddhist, Jaina, and Ajivika) traditions. The importance of nonharmfulness and its foundational function for classical Indian culture can be seen from the fact that any standard list of ethical principles or moral precepts opens with *ahimsā*, and other ethical virtues are often treated as subordinate to it.

The Sanskrit term *ahimsā* is a negation of *himsā* (“injury, violence, harm, harmfulness, cruelty”), which is in turn an abstract noun (but also an action noun, “an act of injury”) derived from the verbal root  $\sqrt{hims}$  (Class 7, *hinasti* (→ also Class 1, *himsati*)), “to injure, harm, wound, inflict pain” (Mayrhofer, 1956: (592), 595) with an affix *a* (A 3.3.103) (Wackernagel–Debrunner, 1930–1957, II, 2: 246, 248). The derivation is as follows:  $\sqrt{hims}$  (“to injure”) → *himsā* (“injury”) → *ahimsā* (“noninjury”). The verbal root  $\sqrt{hims}$  is semantically (but not historically) related to another verbal root  $\sqrt{han}$ , “to strike, kill, destroy.” The negation *a-* (*a-himsā*) expresses either an opposite of *himsā* or the absence of *himsā*. Accordingly, *ahimsā* means “noninjury, nonviolence, nonharm, nonharmfulness” or “an absence of injury/violence/harm/harmfulness.” Despite an oft-repeated view, *ahimsā*, in its basic grammatical derivation, does not express any negated intention or absence of desire in the sense of “the wish not to injure” or “an absence of the wish to injure,” for it is not a desiderative form, just as *himsā* (“injury,” not “the wish to injure”) is not a desiderative form derived from the root  $\sqrt{han}$ ; such desiderative formations would be *jighāmsati* (a desiderative verb: “[he] wishes to kill”) and *jighāmsu* (a desiderative adjective: “wishing to kill”) (cf. Bodewitz, 1999: 18).

### Nonharmfulness in Brahmanical Tradition

The idea of harm and injury, connoted by the verbal root  $\sqrt{hims}$ , is already found in the *Vedas*, but exclusively as formalized entreaties to gods, forefathers, etc., with the goal that they not do any harm to the Brahmins and their properties (various conjugated verbal forms, e.g., “O, Fathers, do not hurt us,” *Rg-veda* 10.15.6; “whom (Indra) thoughts or voices do not harm,” *Rg-veda* 6.34.3; “Oh, [Celestial Bodies], do not harm me,” *Atharva-veda* 5.9.8; “let them not harm [my] father and mother,” *Atharva-veda* 6.140.2–3; “let them not hurt [our] bipeds and quadrupeds,” *Atharva-veda* 11.2.1, etc.; or negated present participle of the same verb: “oh Indra, let your powers be non-harmful (*ahimsantī*),” *Rg-veda* 10.22.13).

At this historical stage, the usage of the verb “(not) to harm” is nontechnical and unspecific, with no theory of nonharmfulness in the background, except for a conspicuous feature that, interestingly, most (if not all) such earliest occurrences of this verb ( $\sqrt{hims}$ , “to hurt, injure”), from which *ahimsā* derives, are consistently used in negative sentences (“do not hurt, should not hurt,” etc.). The claim that *ahimsā* as a term and a correlated notion (or even doctrine) of nonharmfulness is already present or presupposed in

the Vedas is completely unfounded. The term *ahimsā* is first encountered on a few occasions in later Vedic literature, of the *Yajur-veda* tradition. First, it occurs in the *Taittirīya-Saṁhitā* (between 8th and 6th centuries BCE) of the black *Yajur-veda* branch in the context of a regulation of animal sacrifice awaiting their ritual slaughter, when the sacrificer follows injunctions concerning the handling of the ritual fire (“for the sake of non-injury” (*ahimsā*) to him, 5.2.8.7). In the *Śatapatha-brāhmaṇa* (ca. 6th century BCE) of the white *Yajur-veda* branch, we find 18 references to the term (70% in just one chapter (*kāṇḍa*) 6), beside numerous uses of the negated verb  $\sqrt{hims}$  (always in the sense of “so that *x* should not do harm” to the sacrificer of his realm of interest), but always exclusively used in the context of the protection of the sacrificer, his kin, and animals in the same recurring formula “for the sake of non-injury (safety)” of the sacrifice or his realm of interest (Dative, *ahimsāyai*). This usage of *ahimsā* and the correlated (negated) verb  $\sqrt{hims}$  is thus by the 6th century BCE standardized and used in a technical magical-sacrificial sense of “avoidance of injury” that may occur to a sacrificer Brahmin or to his kins, animals, and the realm of his material interests, as a result of divine powers of gods attending the sacrifice, of the nature of sacrificial utensils (probably improperly handled), or a mistake committed by priest during the Vedic sacrifice. The idea of *ahimsā* functions as a protective measure of Brahmin agents acting as sacrificers against a background of magical thinking: the formulas in which the term *ahimsā* occurs perform the role of such protective chants meant to shield the sacrificial agents from incurring ritual-related harm. Till the 6th century BCE, we find no indication that *ahimsā* might imply any sort of ethical principle of nonharmfulness binding on the agent or a moral injunction that would prevent the agent from committing injury or harm to other fellow humans or to other (nonhuman) living beings. In this sense, there was nothing altruistic to *ahimsā*, being essentially a selfish measure to protect one’s own well-being and interests.

The time of the earliest *Upaniṣads* (6th century BCE onward), when Vedic Brahmanical world view is gradually exposed to entirely new ideas, to some extent also indigenous and non-Aryan, from North-East (the realm of the so-called Greater Māgadhā), we observe a gradual shift in the understanding of *ahimsā*. One of these developments of the idea to the political and legal sphere and an explicit prohibition on any harm done to Brahmins: the *Brhad-āraṇyakōpaniṣad* (BĀU 1.4.11) expresses an idea that if the king, at the summit of power, harms “someone superior to him,” namely a Brahmin, “he hurts his own womb,” or his ritual, religious, and social support from which he derives his powers (here, the idea is expressed through verbs, the noun *ahimsā* in not used yet). This penal immunity of the Brahmins will be carried onward in Indian culture in subsequent centuries, supported later by all normative texts (*Dharma-sūtras* and *Dharma-śāstras*).

The first actual occurrence of the noun *ahimsā*, which may appear to have a more universal meaning of nonharmfulness, is found in the *Chāndogyōpaniṣad* (ChU). It is found in a sequence to which we may trace the beginnings of the five moral precepts (*yama*, *śila*, *vrata*, *guṇa*) in later Indian traditions: “[Man’s] sacrificial gifts (*dakṣiṇā*) are the following: asceticism (*tapas*), generosity (*dāna*), uprightness (*ārjava*), non-harmfulness (*ahimsā*) and truthfulness (*satya*)” (ChU 3.17.4). The context, however, remains symbolically sacrificial: the passage first enumerates symbolic elements of sacrificial consecration (*dikṣā*), of preparatory rites (*upasāda*), recitation of hymns (*stuta-śāstra*), and then the sacrificial gifts, among them nonharmfulness. Just as the *Upaniṣads* mark a process of an internalization of Vedic ritual that is symbolically transferred into the inner, spiritual, or mental sphere of a person seeking liberation (*mokṣa*) from rebirth, or spiritual self-realization, an entirely new goal, absent in earlier Vedic tradition, similarly here in the case of nonharmfulness we see a symbolic transition from the sphere of the ritual to the mental sphere of the liberation seeker. The passage, however, does not allow for an interpretation that nonharmfulness mentioned in the passage indicates a general prohibition of injury performed by the person to all other sentient beings. Consistent with earlier Vedic tradition, it may rather imply a practice of such a nonharmful conduct by the adept through which he incurs no injury of himself in the future. In other words, what is meant are acts nonharmful to the agent, not necessarily to other humans or sentient beings. What is relevant is that both the *Chāndogyōpaniṣad* and the *Brhad-āraṇyakōpaniṣad* are the texts that introduce ideas previously unknown to the Vedic tradition, that of reincarnation (*samsāra*) and karmic retribution (*karman*) for previous deeds. Combined with these two concepts, the interdiction of conduct potentially harmful to the agent, as expressed the *Chāndogyōpaniṣad*, apparently developed in steps into a more powerful moral principle of universal nonharmfulness, or noninjury toward all sentient beings: the harm causes to other sentient beings might rebound on the agent, bringing harmful consequences to him. In another historical (the latest) layer the *Chāndogyōpaniṣad* itself, in the very last passage appended at the end of the text (ChU 8.15.1) at some much later point of time (post-Buddhistic?) as an interpolation, we can observe a further development of this idea, that marks a gradual shift toward benevolence and altruism. A young Brahmin is advised, after the years of Vedic education spent at his teacher’s house, to return to his home to rear children, recite the Vedas, to bring his sense organs under control, i.e., to practice asceticism, and to pursue “nonharmfulness (*ahimsā*, i.e., nonkilling) with respect to all creatures, except for those worthy of sacrifice (*tīrthya*).” Nonharmfulness with respect to all creatures means that they should not be slaughtered without purpose or otherwise, except for ritually justified situations. This approach to sacrificial animal slaughter remains practically unchanged within orthodox Brahmanism in centuries to come. The justification for such kind of limited nonharmfulness is explained in the next line of the *Chāndogyōpaniṣad*: “[the man] who lives this way all his life attains the world of Brahman, and he does not return again.” It is understood that the principle behind the so prescribed way of life is not necessarily a respect for all other living beings or for the principle of life as such, but rather the intention to prevent unwholesome consequences of the agent’s deeds that might present obstacles to his liberation. The reasons are therefore not necessarily altruistic, but rather egoistic. Surprisingly other early *Upaniṣads*, either pre-Buddhistic (prior to c. 400 BCE) or dating to the first centuries of Buddhism (till 4th–2nd centuries BCE), do not mention the idea of *ahimsā* at all. The actual silence of all other early *Upaniṣads* on the subject of *ahimsā* may lead to the conclusion that the mentions of the term *ahimsā* in the *Chāndogyōpaniṣad* are later interpolations, being an echo of the ideas which Jainism and Buddhism introduced and postdates their emergence (c. 400 BCE) and active promotion of nonharmfulness (*avihiṁsā*) by King Aśoka in the 3rd century BCE. The idea of nonharmfulness per se was thus not a result of a natural development of Brahmanical thought, but rather an ideological import from other, i.e., non-Brahmanical religious systems (Jainism, Ajivikism, and Buddhism),

whereas the *ahiṃsā* in a restricted, sacrifice-oriented sense as it is found in Brahmanical tradition, has a clear magico-ritualistic background (Schmidt, 1968).

Such a conclusion is supported by other evidence, namely that it is only after a centuries-long gap that the term and concept of *ahiṃsā* reoccurs at a much later time in the group of normative texts, the so-called (earlier) *Dharma-sūtras* and (later) *Dharma-śāstras*, that date back to the period between 3rd/2nd century BCE and 4th century CE (cf. Olivelle, 1999: xxx–xxxiv). The concept of nonharmfulness is barely noticeable in the earlier, most important *Dharma-sūtras* (prior to 1st century CE), such as *Apastamba-*, *Gautama-* (GDhS), *Baudhāyana-* (BDhS), and *Vāsiṣṭha-dharma-sūtra* (VDhS), with the term *ahiṃsā* itself occurring in all four of them only three times (entirely absent in *Apastamba-* and *Gautama-dharma-sūtra*). Unlike, the earliest, the *Apastamba-dharma-sūtra* (ca. 3rd–2nd century BCE), the *Gautama-dharma-sūtra* (2nd century BCE–1st century CE) does hint to the idea of nonharmfulness, despite the absence of the term itself. The text specifies that, among a range of other vices, a Vedic student should abstain “from taking what is not given (*adattādāna*) and from injury (*hiṃsā*)” (GDhS 2.17). Of notice is that the first of these prohibitions is standardly known in later Brahmanical literature under other terms: *asteṃya* or *astainya* (“non-stealing”). Instead, the terminology adapted here, viz. abstention “from taking what is not given,” is a direct borrowing from Buddhist and Jaina nomenclature. The same normative text (GDhS 3.11–24) returns to the question of the prohibition of injury and specifies that a mendicant (*bhikṣu*), a stage before a forest anchorite (*vaikhānasa*), should be “equally disposed to all living beings whether they cause injury (*hiṃsā*) or are kind to him.” Again, of note is the use of the term *bhikṣu*, typically denoting a Buddhist monk. These are the only two passages which refer to nonharmfulness taken in a more universal and ethical manner. Terminological borrowings are an indication that a general prohibition of injury (*hiṃsā*) was adopted by the Brahmanical tradition from non-Brahmanical worldviews, and in order to name the interdiction of injury to other beings, the Brahmanical tradition adopted an already existing term, *ahiṃsā*, with conspicuous shift in meaning.

In passages which appear to represent a slightly later historical development, the *Baudhāyana-dharma-sūtra* (BDhS) highlights a more universal aspect of nonharmfulness, even though the context remains related to the sacrificial context of ritual purification, albeit in a more sublime form, in which purification has physical, ethical, and epistemic dimensions: “Body limbs are cleansed with water, understanding with knowledge, the inner self with non-harmfulness (*ahiṃsā*), the mind with truth (*satya*)” (BDhS 1.8.2 = 3.1.27) and “internal purification is non-harmfulness (*ahiṃsana*)” (BDhS 3.1.26). This is how one becomes fit for either actual sacrifice (which involves animal slaughter) with heaven as the ultimate promise or for the sublime, internalized sacrifice within one’s own self, the goal of which is ultimate liberation (*mokṣa*), the *summum bonum*. However, nonharmfulness becomes here directly linked to the spiritual path and salvific goal, and dissociated from its direct involvement in the concrete sacrificial context.

The *Baudhāyana-dharma-sūtra* further enumerates five moral principles to be followed on a spiritual path in a list which is a forerunner of the classical five precepts (modified): when a Brahmin becomes a hermit, renouncing the worldly life, he takes the following vows (*vrata*): “non-harmfulness (*ahiṃsā*), truthfulness (*satya*), non-stealing (*astainya*), abstention from sex (*maithuna-varjana*) and renunciation (of possessions, *tyāga*)” (BDhS 2.18.2). It is apparently for the first time in Brahmanical tradition that we find a five-element list of precepts as a result of a centuries-old evolution of various moral principles to regulate human conduct. Of note is the occurrence of the umbrella term *vrata* (“vow”) in the text, instead of any other standard Brahmanical term later associated with the lists of such precepts, such as *dharma* (“duty, righteousness”), *saṃyama* (“discipline”), *yama* (“restraint”), *tīrtha* (“salvific means”), *sādhana* (“means”), or *dharma-sādhana* (“moral means to moral law”). The term *vrata* (“vow”) in this sense is traditionally connected with Jainism, just as *śīla* (“principle”) with Buddhism. Moreover, the sequence of the vows closely replicates the arrangement of the vows in Jainism (not Buddhism). Not only therefore was nonharmfulness an adaptation of non-Brahmanical ideal but also the whole moral fivefold normative framework in which *ahiṃsā* occurs a borrowing from Jainism, and more generally, from non-Brahmanical traditions.

An alternative, much shorter such a list that also mentions nonharmfulness is found in the *Vāsiṣṭha-dharma-sūtra*: the precepts binding on all four social classes are: truthfulness (*satya*), absence of anger, nonharmfulness (*ahiṃsā*) and begetting offspring (VDhS 4.4). Nonharmfulness is treated here as a means to heaven, replacing thus the standard means of attaining heaven, namely Vedic sacrifice: “a person who practices non-harmfulness (*ahiṃsin*) attains heaven” (VDhS 29.3). The text lists nine means of livelihood (BDhS 3.2) intended for very religious householders, and none of them contains any reference to animal slaughter, either for sacrifice or food. The most modest one allows for the use of (uncastrated) bullocks to furrow the land, but without beating them, whereas all the remaining ones are based on cultivation of cereals or living on forest produce; one of these means of livelihood is even explicitly called “a life given to non-harmfulness” (*ahiṃsikā*) (BDhS 3.2.13). This text is rather an exception inasmuch as in most other cases nonharmfulness remains conditional and restricted. It is stated elsewhere, for instance, that nonharmfulness implies that “one should never harm one’s teacher, instructor, father, mother, elder, Brahmins, cows, and all religious renouncers” (MDhŚ 4.162).

In the post-*Dharma-sūtra* period, coinciding with the empire of the Kuṣāṇas, that *ahiṃsā* becomes a truly significant and morally relevant notion in the Brahmanical and Hindu thought. The period is marked with the composition of the *Mānava-dharma-śāstra* (*Manu-smṛti*; MDhŚ; 2nd–3rd centuries CE; see: Olivelle, 2005: 20–25), considered the oldest of the extant *Dharma-śāstras* but also the most influential of all them all. In the manual, nonharmfulness is considered a means of instruction of the moral law (*dharma*): “[A Brahmin] intent on [promoting] moral law should teach by means of non-harmfulness (*ahiṃsā*) toward all living beings” (MDhŚ 2.159). “Avoidance of harmfulness towards all living beings,” beside meat, perfumes, garlands, women etc., is a precondition of virtuous conduct of any Vedic student (2.177), and—coupled with control of sense organs (asceticism) and passions—opens the way to immortality (liberation) (6.60). Injury done to other living beings prevents one from obtaining happiness in this life and hereafter, whereas renouncing the desire to harm them brings happiness to the agent (and, as one may see as a side effect, also to the living beings concerned); the harm is explained to involve binding, causing pain or killing (5.45–46), viz., standard actions during a slaughter. Religion does not only exculpate one potentially guilty of harm or of killing but even creates an environment in which

no harm or killing can ever formally occur despite what one can ostensibly observe. In line with the abovementioned conviction expressed in the *Chāndogyaopaniṣad* (ChU 8.15.1), we read that “domestic animals are created by god himself for the purpose of sacrifice, and sacrifice is for the prosperity of the whole world; therefore, killing at the sacrifice is not killing” (MDhŚ 5.39). In the same spirit, the text further argues that “when plants, domestic animals, trees, beasts, birds etc. meet their death for the sake of the sacrifice, they reach the best rebirth (in heaven). When a twice-born (upper-class) person, who knows the essence of the *Vedas*, injures (ritually kills) animals for such purposes as sacrifices for gods or for ancestors, he makes himself and the animals reach the highest state (heaven)” (MDhŚ 5.40, 42). Such a vision was not accepted unanimately in India. One of most renowned representatives of the materialist philosophy, Brhaspati criticized this approach by rhetorically asking: “If a domestic animal slain in, say, a Jyotiṣṭoma sacrifice goes to heaven, then why won't the sacrificer not injure (sacrificially kill) his own father?” (Bhattacharya, 2009: 84, 91).

The *Mānava-dharma-śāstra* repeats the already known list of five moral precepts, here called summary duty (*dharma*): non-harmfulness (*ahimsā*), truthfulness (*satya*), non-stealing (*asteya*), purity (*śauca*, i.e., celibacy) and control of senses (*indriya-nigraha*), i.e., self-control (MDhŚ 10.63). In most elements and wording, this list coincides with the most classical and best known expression of the moral precepts, called “restraints” (*yama*) in the tradition of the classical Sāṃkhya-Yoga philosophical school, and enumerated by Patañjali in his famous *Patañjala-yoga-śāstra* of the Yoga tradition, popularly known as the *Yoga-sūtra* and *Yoga-bhāṣya* (c. CE 400) as: non-harmfulness (*ahimsā*), truthfulness (*satya*), non-stealing (*asteya*), celibacy (*brahmacarya*) and non-possession (*aparigraha*) (PYŚ 2.30). The list is repeated with a variant in the *Yukti-dīpikā* (c. CE 600) of the Sāṃkhya tradition: non-harmfulness (*ahimsā*), truthfulness (*satya*), non-stealing (*asteya*), honesty (*akalkatā*) and celibacy (*brahmacarya*) (YDi 23bc, pp. 191–192). Still a century later or so, another commentary of the Sāṃkhya tradition, *Jayamaṅgalā* (ca. 700 or later) quotes the five restraints (*yama*) of Patañjali's Yoga as the standard of conduct (Jay 23). It is this list of the five restraints as we find it in the Yoga tradition that became the paradigm, fundamental, and formative for the subsequent Indian culture. It should be remembered however, that originally the five precepts (*yama*) were meant for a Yoga adept, placed outside of the bounds of the society and outside of the sacrificial Brahmanical framework (Chapple, 2008: 110–113). These five Hindu precepts are based on earlier development of the concept, but at the same time represent a direct borrowing from non-Brahmanical traditions, primarily from Jainism, which had conceptualized these five moral precepts and the ideal of nonharmfulness centuries earlier. A reflection of the influence is an alternative name Patañjali uses for *yama*, namely *vrata* (“vow”).

The classical Brahmanical definition of nonharmfulness of Patañjali formulated around CE 400, set a certain standard for how the idea of *ahimsā* came to be understood centuries later: “non-harmfulness is complete absence of wickedness towards all living beings by all means and at all times. All other moral precepts (i.e., restraints (*yama*) and restrictions (*niyama*)) are rooted in it ... inasmuch as their ultimate purpose is the perfection of it: ... they are serviceable only with their nature purified by nonharmfulness” (PYŚ 2.30). Interestingly, nonharmfulness is even believed to have a “contagious” character. As Patañjali explains, “once the Yoga adept is well-grounded in non-harmfulness, alone his presence leads all living beings to renouncing their hostilities” (PYŚ 2.35). Some Hindu thinkers, also within the Sāṃkhya-Yoga tradition, such as the renowned commentator Bhoja (c. 1050), would restrict the application of nonharmfulness only to cases when what is intended is merely the abstention from “harmfulness which is any activity that involves the separation from living forces, and which is the cause of all evils” (RM 2.30), namely abstention from actual killing, not necessarily from all injury and harm. Such interpretation would open up a wide space for speculation whether actual mental or verbal harm or an intention to inflict pain (be it physical or mental) would count as harm to be avoided as well.

It appears that the period spanning the Kuṣāṇa Empire (2nd–3rd centuries CE) and the Gupta Empire (4th–6th century) was crucial for the development of the ideal of nonharmfulness and for setting *ahimsā* on top of the ladder of ethical values, from now on phrased as a quintuplet, any spiritual seeker and any respected noble-born citizen should follow. Prior to c. CE 400, beginning with the abovementioned list of the five “sacrificial gifts” (*dakṣiṇā*) found in the *Chāndogyaopaniṣad* (ChU 3.17.4), the catalog of values varies both in contents and number. For instance, Kauṭilya's treatise on politics and governance, the *Artha-śāstra* (“Treatise on Welfare”), composed in the period CE 50–125 (Olivelle, 2013: 25–38), states that the precepts to be followed by all people are six in total: non-injury (*ahimsā*), truthfulness (*satya*), purity (*śauca*), non-envy (*anasūyā*), non-cruelty (*anrśamsya*), forbearance (*kṣamā*) (AŚ 1.3.13). The *Yājñavalkya-dharma-śāstra* (CE 200–400?) enumerates ten restraints (*yama*), and non-harmfulness is listed in the middle: “celibacy (*brahmacarya*), sympathy (*dayā*), forbearance (*kṣānti*), generosity (*dāna*), truthfulness (*satya*), honesty (*akalkatā*), non-harmfulness (*ahimsā*), non-stealing (*asteya*), gentleness (*mādhurya*), self-control (*dama*)” (YDhŚ 3.312). The same text, of compilatory character, contains an alternative list of nine “means to moral law” (*dharma-sādhana*), headed with non-harmfulness (*ahimsā*) (YDhŚ 1.122), indicates a gradual growth in its importance. In the same period, with its rather indifferent approach to *ahimsā*, the epic *Rāmāyaṇa* (between 1st century BCE and 1st century CE) interestingly reflects an earlier approach, when nonharmfulness is merely one of a number values, such as forbearance (*kṣamā*), self-control (*dama*), renunciation (of possessions, *tyāga*), truthfulness (*satya*), moral law (*dharma*) and non-harmfulness (*ahimsā*) (Ram 6.23.31). With its focus on the virtues of the king, it barely mentions non-harmfulness, except for a “not an insignificant” king Daśaratha, who is said “to derive from non-harmfulness” (Ram 5.29.3).

In the perhaps most influential Hindu scripture, the *Bhāgavad-gītā* (*The Lord's Song*), which belongs to the epic period, non-harmfulness hardly plays any role. *Ahimsā* is merely mentioned as one of a number of both positive and negative dispositions (*bhāva*) of living beings, all having their source in Kṛṣṇa (BhG 10.5), and it is just one of 21 virtues that are objects of salvific knowledge and should be contemplated (BhG 13.7–11), or even one of 26 such virtues (BhG 16.1–3). The text sets non-harmfulness and sacrificial slaughter (*yajña*) side by side as two equally important moral obligations (BhG 16.1–3). In his direct message, the protagonist, Kṛṣṇa, authorizes violence and war, even fratricide, understood as performance of one's own duties of the warrior as prescribed by the moral law (*dharma*), and commands Arjuna, immersed in doubts whether it is moral to kill his own brothers and cousins: “If you do not engage in the battle enjoined by the moral law, you abandon your moral duty and fame, and as a result

you obtain evil" (BhG 2.33). In a feat of apologetics and expanding the ideas contained in the *Bhāgavad-gītā*, the commentator Śaṅkara goes as far as to contemplate whether it is possible to equate the battleground carnage of one's kins and relatives with sacrificial slaughter, both being arguably a realization of the moral duty (*dharma*): "Any act (*karman*) of the warrior class is by definition war-oriented and constitutes their moral duty (*dharma*), even though it involves killing of one's own teachers, brothers, sons etc. and is extremely cruel, and it has nothing to do with immorality, ... just as acts involving killing of domestic animals for sacrifice etc., as enjoined by the scriptures as one's life-long obligation, are not immoral" (BhGBh 2:10), for both could be reasoned to constitute the essence of the moral law. The *Bhāgavad-gītā* offers moral exoneration from violence, battlefield bloodshed, and possibly from what one could consider war crimes, by postulating that as long as one pursues one's duties (*sva-dharma*) that ensue from the commands of the moral law (*dharma*), without being attracted to the results, with mind free from attachment and aversion, and understanding that all good and all evil ultimately proceed from god alone, one commits no violence and no crime. In this way, the burden of individual responsibility for committed violence is lifted from the agent's shoulders. With the literal reading of the text, this might provide a most useful sequence of arguments in defense of those accused of war crimes who could maintain that they simply followed the orders. Subsequent Hindu tradition, however, elevated the context of the debate to the level of internal battlefield on the spiritual path to salvation (*mokṣa*).

Also texts of various philosophical schools attest to the fluid state of the basic moral precepts and a gradual acceptance of the standard model of five precepts, a process that took a few centuries. For instance, in the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika philosophical tradition, any list of this sort or an idea of harmfulness is still unknown in the 2nd or 3rd century, i.e., at the time of the composition of the basic texts of these two schools, the *Nyāya-sūtra* and the *Vaiśeṣika-sūtra* (the former merely mentions the term "restrain," *yāma*). Two centuries later, the *Prāśastapāda-bhāṣya* (c. CE 450) of the *Vaiśeṣika* school lists as many as 13 universal moral means (*sādhana*), 4 of which overlap with the classical restrains (*yama*), such as: faith in moral law, non-harmfulness (*ahiṃsā*), benevolence to living beings (*bhūta-hitatva*), truthfulness (*satya-vacana*), non-stealing (*asteya*), celibacy (*brahmacarya*), honesty, avoidance of anger, ritual ablutions, use of ritually pure objects, devotion to deity, fasting, non-neglect of duties (PBh 2.22a/310). In the school of Nyāya, it is only as late as 10th century that the complete list of the five restraints as we know them from Yoga (NVṪ 4.2.46) is found in the commentary *Nyāya-vārttika-tātpārya-tīkā*, Vācaspati Miśra. The philosophical school of Vedic exegesis, Mīmāṃsā, and its representatives such as Kumārila Bhaṭṭa and Prabhākara Miśra (7th century), seems completely oblivious to the new developments and finds no room for the quintuplet of restraints or for the ideal of nonharmfulness in its system. It is not surprising because Mīmāṃsā represented an orthodox approach to Vedic rituals, which necessarily involved sacrificial slaughter, ethically incommensurable with *ahiṃsā*.

Similarly, early Vedānta philosophers, such as Gauḍapāda (6th century) or Śaṅkara (8th century), are unconcerned with the new *ahiṃsā*-based axiological model. The former is completely silent on the topic, whereas the latter seems rather cautious. On a few occasions (e.g., in his commentary on the *Brahma-sūtra*), Śaṅkara positively refers to the idea mentioned above and expressed in the *Chāndogya-paniṣad* that one should practice "non-harmfulness (*ahiṃsā*) with respect to all creatures, except for those worthy of sacrifice (*tīrthya*)" (ChU 8.15.1). As explained earlier, the passage in question speaks of the avoidance of nonsacrificial slaughter, not of an all-embracing universal ideal of nonharmfulness toward every single living creature. A reserved exception is his commentary (*Bhāgavad-gītā-bhāṣya*, BhGBh) on the *Bhāgavad-gītā* (2:10), in which he does not endorse animal sacrifice, involving harmfulness (*hiṃsā*), or cruelty (*pīḍā*), i.e., slaughter, as prescribed by the *Vedas*. Śaṅkara's rejection of cruelty, however, is not due to his acknowledgment of nonharmfulness as a paramount ethical principle, which extends to all humans and animals. As he argues, the man (women are not taken into consideration) has two possible distinct paths of rational approach to realizing human goals: one is based on knowledge (*jñāna*), and the other on rituals (*karman*). These correspond, respectively, to the spiritual practice of knowledge (*jñāna-yoga*) that leads to liberation (*mokṣa*), endorsed by Śaṅkara as the ultimate goal, and the spiritual practice of action (*karma-yoga*) as means to attain heaven. However, both cannot be realized simultaneously by one person. Since harmfulness and animal slaughter is necessarily related to the latter path, anyone seeking liberation has to follow the former path, and therefore abandon all rituals. Śaṅkara does not endorse nonharmfulness as such: the actual reason for his rejection of harmfulness is the need to discontinue rituals once one enters the knowledge-based path to liberation as irreconcilable with the path. Harmfulness is incompatible with it simply because rituals no longer play any role. At the same time he concedes that "sacrificial slaughter has been recognized as the essence of religious life (*brahmacarya*) and sacrificial slaughter etc. are the means to attain the ultimate human goals" (ChUBh 8.5.4). No discussion on the value of life of all creatures and its inalienability is ever found among early Vedānta authors.

Interestingly, except for the philosophical tradition of Sāṃkhya-Yoga, which introduced the standard quintuplet of ethical precepts, with nonharmfulness as the primary one, all other classical systems of Brahmanical philosophy, perceiving themselves as guardians of Ārya tradition, seem to be reluctant to embrace such a new ethical ideal. Orthodox Brahmanism and, subsequently, Hinduism had problems to unreservedly embrace the idea of nonharmfulness as a universal principle extendible, outside of the sacrificial context, to all humans or all living beings primarily for two reasons. One was grounded in the social stratification into four social classes (*varṇa*) and numerous castes (*jāti*), and in a correlated concept of moral duties respective to one's class/caste and stage in life (*varṇāśrama-dharma*). This social system that intrinsically was geared to breed and maintain inequalities made any universal ethical principle protecting the well-being and interests of all impossible. The other reason was the importance attached to Vedic rituals and ritual acts (*karman*) in the Brahmanical tradition, which could by no means be dissociated from slaughter and violence. For the actual sources of the ideal of nonharmfulness and *ahiṃsā* in India, one therefore has to turn not to Brahmanical religious writings and Brahmanical philosophers, but rather to, partly, Hinduism and, primarily, to non-Brahmanical religious traditions.

Despite popular opinion, there is no evidence that the ideal of the four ultimate human goals (*puruṣārtha*), viz., moral law and righteousness (*dharma*), prosperity and welfare (*artha*), physical pleasures and sex (*kāma*), and liberation (*mokṣa*), not yet present in

the *Upaniṣads*, but occurring in the period of the epics and normative literature (after 3rd century BCE), was ever directly associated with nonharmfulness, not even in a much later period of Vedānta authors. Such a link seems to be a modern invention.

Hinduism emerged gradually over a longer period of time after the collapse of the Mauryan Empire in the 2nd century BCE, marked by an important paradigm shift in values (cf. Hildebeitel, 2011: 26–29), and took centuries to develop. Once detached from the ritual slaughter in the sacrificial fire (epitomized in its personification, god Agni) from the earliest Vedic times, Hinduism assigned new significance and symbolism to fire, previously the “devourer” of sacrificed animals and items. With its new significance and role, fire became a part of the focal religious ceremony of Hinduism, the complex *pūjā* offering, that replaced the earlier sacrifice-based religiosity of the *Vedas*. In the *pūjā*, the religious devotee worships the deity with the offerings of fire (usually in the form of oil lamp, *dīpa*), incense, flowers, water, fruits, prayer (*mantra*), songs, etc. The ritual is in principle peaceful and involves no form of violence or injury whatsoever.

On the contrary, it is therefore not surprising that the whole category of classical Hindu mythological “Ancient Sacred Writings,” or the (18) *Purāṇas*, that are rooted in such novel devotional practices and *pūjā* ceremonies, contain numerous references to non-harmfulness. The *Purāṇas*, which strongly influenced each other in contents, were foundational for the development of Hinduism as a new kind of scriptures. They emerged within a millennium that spans the 1st century CE and the medieval times and, with various historical layers and accretions, reflect the development of Hindu religiosity over time.

The five standard “restraints” (*yama*), or moral precepts, as laid down in Patañjali’s Yoga system around CE 400, occur repeatedly in almost all *Purāṇas*, with non-harmfulness (*ahimsā*) as the constitutional virtue (e.g., AP 161.19; BhP 3.28.4; DBhP 7.35.6; GP 1.49.30–31; KP 2.11.13; LP 1.8.10–11; NP 1.33.75; ŚP 7.2.37.18; paViP 6.7.36), or as slightly altered lists (e.g., AP 151.3; BhP 7.11.8; BrAP 1.27.120; BrP 56.31; GP 1.44.9, 1.49.30–31, 1.93.8, 1.96.29, 1.105.58; KP 1.29.9; LP 1.8.10; MrP 28.32, 42.20; NP 1.33.35; VāP 3.20, 11.23, 14.1, 16.2; ViP 6.7.36), which in some cases go back to the very similar arrangement of the *Mānava-dharma-śāstra* (MDhŚ 10.63) or to the *Chāndogyaopaniṣad* enumeration (ChU 3.17.4).

The treatment of nonharmfulness in these scriptures is altogether different than in the Vedic literature or Brahmanical philosophical texts. Non-harmfulness is defined as a universally applicable principle: it is an unconditional imperative and embraces all living creatures (BrAP 2.23.51; BrP 56.31; GP 1.49.30; KP 2.11.14). *Ahimsā* is defined as kindness (*anugraha*) towards living creatures (AP 151.3), or the avoidance of all harmful acts towards animals (*paśu-himsā*) (BhP 7.15.7), and postulates such an approach to the world of living beings that produces no pain, distress or anguish (KP 2.11.14). It should be practiced with body, mind and speech alike towards all beings and all the time with no exception (KP 2.11.14), for these are three channels through which one can harm others. It also brings inner tranquility (NP 1.3.55). The highest joy the wise could ever experience is the one derived from the avoidance of harmful acts towards animals (*paśu-himsā*) (BhP 7.15.7).

Repeatedly, *ahimsā* is glorified as the absolute, highest moral law (*ahimsā paramo dharmah*) (e.g., GP 1.93.8; KP 2.11.15; NP 2.10.7) and said to be the essence of the moral teaching of the *Purāṇas* (NP 2.10.7), which goes back to the seminal saying of the epic *Mahā-bhārata* (“The Great Story of the Bharata Clan,” the core of the text between 2nd century BCE and 1st century CE, with numerous earlier and later historical layers): “non-harmfulness is the highest moral law, known as [non-injury] towards all living beings. Therefore a Brahmin should never harm any living beings” (MBh 1.11.12; also 3.198.69, 13.116.1). The epic restricts the role of nonharmfulness to the highest class of the Brahmins, and seems to exempt all others from this injunction. Later Hinduism, as reflected in the *Purāṇas*, extends it to all social groups. The texts emphasize that even if one follows his or her religious obligations, but the actions involve violence and harm, all actions and rituals are vain (NP 2.10.7). Non-harmfulness is the essence of (BrAP 2.23.51), the gateway to (BrAP 1.30.35) and the precondition for (KP 2.11.1) the eternal moral law (*dharmā*). It is not only the foremost among all virtues (GP 1.49.30), “the prime flower” of morality (SPR 84.15), but also the *conditio sine qua non* of all other moral principles and restraints (*yama*) (LP 1.8.10). *Ahimsā* is also the means to the control of the mind, as a precondition to liberation (ViP 2.13.8): those who practice non-harmfulness are truly virtuous, their conduct is grounded in truth (BrAP 1.7.134; MP 104.16), and they either go to heaven or achieve liberation (BrAP 1.30.35). One is encouraged to practise non-harmfulness also because through it one’s wishes can be fulfilled (MP 104.17; NP 1.16.26) and well as one can attain supernatural powers (*yoga-siddhi*) (NP 1.33.76). An intrinsic relation obtaining between non-harmfulness is highlighted on various occasions, an idea that can be traced back to the *Mahā-bhārata* (MBh 3.198.69).

Even though the *Purāṇas* emphasize the universal application of nonharmfulness toward all that breathes, and specifically mention all animals, we never find any mention of similar universally practiced nonharmfulness toward fellow humans, in particular low-born people, non-Ārya, and foreigners (*mleccha*). Likewise, there is no discussion, or even awareness, that caste-based, strongly stratified social structure with the untouchables could also be a source of harmfulness (*himsā*) to avoid. This kind of social myopia is characteristic of most (if not all) Brahmanical literature. The authors sweepingly say that non-harmfulness alongside other moral precepts ordained by the moral law (*dharmā*) is enjoined for all classes and castes (*varṇa*) as well as for all stages in life (*āśrama*) (MrP 28.31–32). However, they see no contradiction with the limitations imposed through the same moral law (*dharmā*) on the individual, family, clan, or caste freedoms within the caste system, unequivocally sanctified by all scriptures and normative texts (the *Vedas*, *Dharma-sūtras*, *Dharma-śāstras*, the *Artha-śāstra*, etc.) and centuries-old tradition, and ensuing social violence against and exploitation of the members of disempowered groups. Such problems are never discussed, not even taken cognizance of. On the contrary, normative literature permit—unrestricted by the state—beating and violence, including physical assault, or even grave physical injury and killing, for upper class persons, including Brahmins, in dealing with low-caste persons and their dependents, such as wife, children, slaves, students, etc., if they disobey or violate customary rules (McClish, 2018).

Some tension between the imperative of nonharmfulness and Vedic tradition of sacrificial slaughter can occasionally be observed, when the authors feel certain unease about and distance themselves from the ritual slaying. However, they never outrightly

condemned it. On the contrary, occasionally, sacrificial slaughter is even commended in the *Purāṇas* as Brahmin's moral duty, on par with the much earlier approach observed in the epic and normative period, as reflected in the *Mahā-bhārata*, which explains that "one should perform rituals of animal slaughter according the Vedic injunction, for sacrifice is the highest moral law (*dharma*), similarly to non-harmfulness" (MBh 13.128.40–41), which should be practised outside of the ritual context. The text also explains that "non-harmfulness is the entire moral law, however harmfulness is enjoined for the sake of sacrificial slaughter" (MBh 12.264.19). Taking the same method of exoneration of the guilt and demerit involved as did authors of the normative texts (*Dharma-sūtras* and *Dharma-śāstras*) and of the two epics, the authors of the *Purāṇas* attempt to compromise the animal sacrifice with the imperative by claiming that "any kind of injury and harmfulness (*hiṃsā*) enjoined by Vedic injunction (*vidhi*) should be reckoned as non-harmfulness (*ahimsā*)" (KP 2.11.15; LP 1.8.20). Also medieval Hindu theistic philosophers seem to accept that even though "sacrifice is the cause of demerit because it involves injury (*hiṃsā*)" (BSA 2.2.156), it is nonetheless acceptable as long as it is enjoined by divine authority, or god.

Brahmanical tradition, first in the Vedic ritualism and later in various forms of Hinduism, took centuries till it eventually, and perhaps never completely, dissociated itself from some forms of harm and violence, including sacrificial slaughter, in the Medieval period. Prior to that, it seems that, the catalyst that completely reshaped the system of values with nonharmfulness as the primary one in the 1st millennium CE came not from within in a form of inner and natural evolution of the Vedic tradition practiced by the immigrant Āryas, but rather was prompted by various ethnic and religious indigenous non-Ārya groups, which were gradually integrated within the new Ārya society, but which brought with them ideals previously unknown to the Brahmanical tradition, including nonharmfulness. The tradition of Yoga was linked to various non-Āryan practices and groups. Similarly, the new impetus which led to the formation of Hinduism, viz., to the transformation of the Vedic cult into new Hindu religiosity, was closely related to such indigenous cults. Likewise, the emergence of all non-Brahmanical religious and philosophical traditions, such as Buddhism, Jainism, and Ajivikism, was directly related to such non-Ārya groups and their unique systems of values. An awareness of the historical role of non-Brahmanical tradition in promotion of nonharmfulness in India is reflected in the *Devī-bhāgavata-purāṇa*: "[In a next incarnation, Viṣṇu] assumed the form of the Buddha in order to stop cruel sacrifices and to put halt to the injury to (killing of) animals" (DBhP 10.5.13–14).

The perception of *ahimsā* has significantly changed since the 19th century with new (mostly anticolonial) movements, such as the Bengali Renaissance and Neo-Hinduism, which gave the idea a strong humanitarian and universal dimension. This transformation largely occurred in response to the emerging problems of the contemporary world, such as British occupation, colonialism, wars, communalist conflicts, etc. As a result, nonharmfulness has acquired a political dimension as a nonviolent measure to promote peaceful self-defense, peace, nonaggression, equality, or social justice. It has also become a value associated with a range of other concepts, such as peacefulness, true love, tolerance, and unreserved respect for all humans alike, but also for the nonhuman animate world. It has also come to be understood as the quintessence of spirituality. Very recently, *ahimsā* has even been given an entirely new ecological dimension in response to the climate catastrophe. However, in the last three decades or so, a new approach to *ahimsā* can be observed in the milieu associated with Hindu nationalism and the concept of "Hindudom" (*hindutva*), who link it to the idea of just war and the fight for the sacred eternal moral law (*sanātana-dharma*) against the threats of non-Hindus, in particular Muslims. Under the influence of extreme nationalist ideology, the application of nonharmfulness becomes restricted to the genuine members of the Hindu nation, and a new "cultural history" is reinvented. The traditional maxim "non-harmfulness is highest moral law" (*ahimsā paramo dharmah*) is popularly augmented with a new apocryphal phrase: "and so is harmfulness such a moral law" (*dharmo hiṃsā tathāiva ca*), never attested in the whole body of Indian literature. This textual fabrication is expected to provide justification for violence perpetrated against all those who are considered a threat to the Hindu nation and the *hindutva*-based identity.

### Nonharmfulness and Noncruelty (*anrśamsya*) in Brahmanical Tradition

An important phase in the development of the concept of nonharmfulness was the idea of *anrśamsya*, or noncruelty, also translated as "non-wickedness, kindness, compassion, empathy." This abstract noun derives from the adjective *anrśamsa*, "uncruel," opposite of *nrśamsa* ("cruel"), which in turn is compounded of *nr-* ("man; people") and *-śamsa* ("injuring," from the verbal root  $\sqrt{\text{śams}}$ , "to hurt, to injure"), thus literally: "people-injuring; men-hurting."

It may appear that noncruelty is synonymous with nonharmfulness, but it is not. Etymologically it implies the absence of cruelty toward men (*nr*), or human beings in general, and the concept, unlike *ahimsā*, does not seem to extend to the animal world at all. Noncruelty does not merely involve giving up all desire to injure men, in particular, or an absence of bad feelings against fellow humans in a more general sense, but it carries positive connotations of benevolence, good will, sympathy or commiseration, and implies a strong wish to stop the cycles of violence, including conflicts and wars, in which people are engrossed (Lath, 1990: 115; Hildebeitel, 2001: 211–13).

We come across this value primarily in the paradigm-shift period after the collapse of the Mauryan Empire (2nd century BCE) and before the emergence of the Gupta Empire (4th century CE). It is mostly present in the two epics: the *Mahā-bhārata* and the slightly later *Rāmāyaṇa* (between 1st century BCE and 1st century CE). In both of them, it is noncruelty that is mentioned as "the highest moral law (*dharma*)" (Ram 5.36.34; MBh 3.67.15, 3.97.55, 3.297.71, 12.220.109, 12.316.12, 13.47.20) much more often than *ahimsā* (never mentioned in such a context in the *Rāmāyaṇa*). It is treated as an expression of the moral ethos of the *Vedas* that always bears desired fruits (MBh 3.97.55), and its opposite, cruelty, is tantamount to evil conduct (*duṣṭa-cāritra*) (Ram 2.10.33), unworthy of an Ārya (*anārya*) (MBh 12.1.28). Thus, one who follows *anrśamsya* epitomizes all moral virtues and proves to be

a genuine noble Ārya. When there is no non-cruelty, there can be no moral law (*dharma*) (Ram 3.50.37). Noncruelty appears to be given more importance than nonharmfulness; however, in the post-epic times, it is replaced with the more universal idea of *ahimsā*. It is enumerated among the most important moral virtues: “The Āryas call forbearance (*kṣamā*), truthfulness (*satya*), uprightness (*ārjava*) and non-cruelty (*anrśamsya*) the best” (MBh 12.288.12; cf. also Ram 2.30.11–12), a list that resembles that of the *Chāndogyaṅpaniṣad* (ChU 3.17.4), where we have nonharmfulness instead of noncruelty.

Like *ahimsā*, noncruelty (*anrśamsa*) is cataloged among “the six moral virtues (*guṇa*): non-cruelty, compassion, moral integrity, self-control, calmness and valour” (Ram 2.30.11–12) or among: steadfastness, purity, non-cruelty, uprightness and firmness (Ram 4.54.2). The context is decisive: it is non-cruelty—not non-harmfulness (Hiltebeitel, 2011: 476–477)—that is frequently associated with the virtues of the ruler, king. Thus, this virtue is also strictly elitarian, in contradistinction to nonharmfulness (*ahimsā*). Nonharmfulness either has an egalitarian dimension and is expected to be followed by all, or is associated with the ascetic milieu and can only be practiced by recluses in its most ideal form. The recurrent commendation of noncruelty as the highest moral law occurs in similar contexts as does confidence (*asamsaya*; “entertaining no doubt”) (MBh 1.97.013) or royal power (MBh 12.56.2), likewise considered the highest moral laws. These are consistently discourses which describe monarchical ethos and proper conduct: “Oh King Yudhiṣṭhira, pursue your goals, let there be no obstacles to it—for this is the highest moral law of kings-seers (*rāja-rṣi*)” (MBh 15.8.11). No one can, should, or is expected to actualize the virtue of noncruelty except for the members of the royal class or the best among warriors (*kṣatriya*). Through noncruelty and truthfulness, one materializes the principles of the moral law (*dharma*), which guarantee victory in the battle field (MBh 6.21.10–11). Non-cruelty is a monarch’s particular manner of dealing with people of low birth, one among other means to preserve law and order in the society consisting of various groups. As the *Mahā-bhārata* narrates, an exemplary king pleases gods with sacrifices, the afflicted with kindness, the Brahmins with offerings and fulfilling their wishes, middle-class people with providing them protection, the low-born people (*śūdra*) with non-cruelty (*anrśamsya*), social outcasts (*dasyu*) with suppression, and all people alike with the moral law (*dharma*) (MBh 1.80.2–5). Noncruelty can thus coexist with suppression, outright violence, and subjugation, but is directed to divergent groups. However, the association of non-cruelty with the king is not exclusive (Hiltebeitel, 2011: 220). On occasions, non-cruelty is listed side by side with non-harmfulness (*ahimsā*) among thirteen universal moral duties (*samānya-dharma*) common to all classes and castes (*sadharana*) (MBh 12.285.22–24). This may suggest that nonharmfulness is a more universal principle that stipulates that one renounce all harmful and violent activities, including malevolent intentions, toward all the living world, including humans and animals, whereas noncruelty is primarily concerned with benevolence toward humans, often considered subordinate, inferior, or under the power sway of the agent who could potentially harm them.

### Nonharmfulness in Non-brahmanical Traditions

For the actual sources of the idea of nonharmfulness in India one should turn to non-Brahmanical religious traditions, namely Buddhism, Jainism, and Ajivikism, all of which came in existence in fifth century BCE in the same region of North-Eastern India (the so-called Greater Māgadha) under strong influence of indigenous, non-Āryan worldviews. It is precisely within this tradition that we find the value of the life of any living creature at the pinnacle of all values. To abstain from harm and injury toward any living beings, with mind, speech, and body, is unanimously the basic teaching of the three founders of these religions, respectively: Siddhārtha Gautama, the Buddha; Vardhamāna Mahāvīra, the Jina; and Gośāla Maṅkhaliputra (Prakrit: Gośāla Maṅkhaliputta; Pali: Makkhali Gośāla), albeit with difference in emphasis.

The terminology denoting nonharmfulness in this tradition varied over time. The earliest attested is “desistance/abstinence from taking life” (Pali: *pāṇātipāta-paṭivirati*, *pāṇātipāta-veramaṇī*; Sanskrit: *pṛāṇātipāta-prativirati*, *pṛāṇātipāta-vīramaṇī*; Prakrit:*pāṇātipāta-vīramaṇam*) and “desire to protect life” (*jugupsā*), followed by nonharmfulness (*ahimsā*) as a slightly later terminological innovation.

Abstention from injury and nonharmfulness could not be properly understood without the conviction, expressed by all these religious teachers, that the basic and existential experience of every sentient being is suffering and pain. This is an underlying idea of the Buddha’s most essential teaching of the four noble truths, namely that everything is suffering (*duḥkha*), suffering has particular causes, cessation of suffering is possible and there is a particular way to bring suffering to an end. Similarly, the Jina says: “The world is filled with suffering, devastated, hard to instruct, foolish. ... in such a world, full of suffering, tormented living beings inflict pain on other living beings in various ways. Tormented creatures are bound [in the circle of rebirth]” (Āy 1.1.2.1–2). For the early Jainas and Ajivikas, the roots of one’s own suffering are primarily external: the pain one suffers is chiefly inflicted by other agents, albeit this can ultimately be traced to one’s own actions in the past. For the Buddhists, the causes of one’s own suffering are immanent: they result from nescience (Pali: *avijjā*; Sanskrit: *avidyā*), or ignorance of the nature of the world and oneself, and from thirst (Pali: *taṇhā*; Sanskrit: *trṣṇā*), i.e., incessant craving and desire either to obtain or avoid things. Although the explanations offered for the role and causes of the pervasive suffering equally common to living beings are somewhat different in these religious traditions, the conclusion is very similar: one should by all means refrain from injuring others and the paramount virtue is that of nonharmfulness.

Historically the earliest thinker to express the interdiction to harm or kill any living beings was one of the founders of Jainism, Pārśva (c. 600–500 BCE). The imperative of nonharmfulness is the first of the moral precepts formulated by him, known as “the moral law of fourfold restraint” (Prakrit: *cāujjāma-dhamma*; Sanskrit: *cātur-yāma-dharma*), or “the control of fourfold restraint” (Pali: *cātuyāma-saṃvara*; Sanskrit: *cātur-yāma-saṃvara*). The first, most important of these moral precepts is “a complete abstention from taking life” (Prakrit: *savvāo pāṇātivāyāo veramaṇam*), also expressed in a more complex manner: “the ascetic does not harm living

beings, does not cause others to harm living beings and does not consent to others to harm living beings" (*Udumbarikā-sīhanāda-sutta*, DN 25.16/iii.48–49). These precepts included also equivalents of truthfulness, nonstealing, and what was formulated as "abstention from external things," which apparently included moderation with respect to possession and sexual continence. They were later extended by Mahāvīra to the five great vows (Prakrit: *pañca-maha-vvaya*, Sanskrit: *pañca-mahā-vrata*) that, instead of the fourth, specify celibacy and nonpossession, and the quintuplet was a part of the initiation formula into the religious order:

- [1] I renounce taking life (Prakrit: *pāṇātivāyam*; Sanskrit: *prāṇātīpāta*) in all form.  
 [2] I renounce false speech (Prakrit: *musā-vāyam*; Sanskrit: *mṛṣā-vāda*), offense in speech (Prakrit: *vacī-dosaṃ*; s. *vacī-doṣa*) in all form.  
 [3] I renounce taking what is not given (Prakrit: *adiṇṇādāṇam*; Sanskrit: *adattādāna*) in all form.  
 [4] I renounce sex (Prakrit: *mehuṇam*; Sanskrit: *maithuna*) in all form.  
 [5] I renounce possession (Prakrit: *pariggahaṃ*; Sanskrit: *parigraha*) in all form" (Āy 2.3.15).

One should not be misled by the sheer wording of the most fundamental precept: "abstention from taking life." It is explained that "all living beings ... should not be killed, should not be treated with violence, should not be destroyed, should not be tormented, should not be got rid of" (Āy 1.4.2.4/1.4.1.1). The initiation formula of Jaina monks began (probably that of Ajivika monks was identical) with the wording: "As long as I live, I renounce taking life in all form ... with the mind, speech and body" (UvD 1.13; Āy 2.3.15). This prohibition includes any kind of harm, injury, or violence done with the mind, speech, and body. Of note are three aspects of a potentially harmful deed: active (acts done by the agent), causative (acts done by others but instigated by the agent), and approbative (acts done by others but consented to by the agent). It appears that the Jainas (and probably the Ajivikas) were the first to work out a catalog of fixed five moral principles or vows (*vrata*) to be followed, and these five later found their way, albeit with modified terminology, into the Brahmanical tradition.

We find identical wording ("abstinence from taking life") and understanding of the principle of "not taking life," i.e., non-harmfulness, in early Buddhist rules, as well. Among the earliest four excommunication rules (*pārājika*) for Buddhist monks, which should be unconditionally obeyed at all times, is the condition that "one abstains from taking life" (Pali: *pāṇātīpātā paṭivirato hoti*), beside stealing, sex, and false speech (AN II,83), phrased identically as the vows of the Jainas and Ajivikas. These evolved into basic moral principles (*śīla*). Among the seven (sometimes ten) perfections of moral principles (Pali: *śīla-sampadā*; Sanskrit: *śīla-sampadā*) to be practiced by Buddhist monks (beside abstinence from taking what is not given, sex, false speech, slander, abuse, and prattle), listed as the first is consistently the same principle: "abstinence from taking life" (AN I,269). In a modified form, these constitute the five moral principles (*pañca-śīla*) of the Buddhist householder: abstinence from taking life, from taking what is not given, from improper sex, from false speech and from taking intoxicants (AN II,66). The number of the moral virtues to be practiced within Buddhism remained in certain flux, until also Buddhism reached the standard five principles.

Beside the complete abstention from taking life, almost consistently mentioned as the first moral precept in a standardized formula, we find another term, equally ancient, which also expresses the idea of nonharmfulness, namely *jugupsā* (Sanskrit; Prakrit: *dugumcchā*; Pali: *jigucchā*, and related derivatives). It is an abstract noun derived from the desiderative form of the verbal root  $\sqrt{gup}$  ("to refrain, abstain from, renounce, avoid; to guard, protect"), in the sense of "desire to protect, intention to guard," and the object of protection is, as the context suggests, the life of all sentient beings (Balcerowicz, 2016: 301–302, 317–319, 323–324). It often comes close in meaning to the detestation of or desisting from any harm or destruction of living beings, disgust or loathing of any injury done to fellow creatures (Rhys Davids, 1899–1921: II, 237, n. 2), or simply non-hurting. Such a moral renouncer "desist from any harm even done to wind, because he can see the torments of living beings, having understood that to hurt them is improper" (Āy 1.1.7.1). This desire to protect life, or desistance, from any harm has at least two aspects: active and causative, but also is considered a *conditio sine qua non* for liberation. As long as one is devoted to asceticism, but does not cultivate this most important moral principle, namely desire to protect life in all forms, cannot progress on the spiritual path, but once one realizes the importance to protect all living beings, the path to liberation is open: "Those who desist from any harm to living beings do not act, do not make others act. Self-restrained, they continuously practise asceticism, they are wise. However, some of them—having recognized the truth—become the victors," i.e., attain liberation (Sūy 1.12.17). The meaning, usage, and implication of this concept are nearly the same as in the case of *ahiṃsā*.

The term *ahiṃsā*, and its Prakrit and Pali equivalents: *avihiṃsa/avihiṃsā*, is first used in non-Brahmanical traditions in a more general sense as early as in the mid-3rd century BCE and attested in the edicts of King Aśoka (ca. 268–233 BCE). He first condemns "animal slaughter (*prāṇārambha*) and violence (*vihiṃsā*)" (4th Rock-Edict) and then introduces a number of regulations in the name "of abstinence from animal slaughter" (*prāṇānārambha*) and "of non-violence (*avihiṃsā*)" (Delhi–Toprā pillar edict). As primary, he takes the term *anārambha* to refer to nonkilling of animals. It occurs in the edicts relatively frequently, whereas *avihiṃsā*, nonviolence, occurs only twice as an expletive addition to "the abstinence from animal slaughter," and merely means "nonkilling." Even though *ahiṃsā/avihiṃsā* is not found in the earliest layers of early Buddhist and Jaina scriptures, the verbs  $\sqrt{hiṃs}$  and related one  $\sqrt{vi}$   $\sqrt{hiṃs}$  do occur. It appears, however, that the word *ahiṃsā* assumes its independent status as a technical term and a corresponding specific concept some time later (100 BCE–CE 100?), and replaces rather cumbersome compounds such as "desistance/abstinence from taking life" in the lists of moral virtues still later. Perhaps it is even as late as after 2nd century that *ahiṃsā* becomes the standard term in the sense of nonharmfulness that occurs in the five moral precepts of the non-Brahmanical traditions. This might indicate some terminological influence from the Brahmanical tradition, in which *ahiṃsā* had already been used as a technical term, albeit in a restricted meaning.

Three other important altruistic concepts of the Buddhist tradition are directly related to the notion of nonharmfulness. These are listed among the so-called four supreme inner conditions (*brahma-vihāra*), or infinitudes (*apramāṇa*), of a person of purified heart (*citta-vimutta*). Loving kindness (Sanskrit: *maitrī/maitrā*; Pali: *mettā*; “amity, friendliness”) is “a mental disposition of the wish to bring others goodness and happiness,” as a 4th-century Buddhist commentator Buddhaghosa explains (SNAK 73). Compassion (*karuṇā*; “pity, empathy”) is “a mental disposition of the wish to free others from misery and suffering” (SNAK 73), or “trembling of the heart of good people when other suffer” (ViM 318). Joy (*mudītā*; “soft-heartedness, selfless love”) is defined as “a mental disposition of the wish to sustain goodness and happiness of others” (SNAK 73). They all ultimately indicate mental altruistic attitudes to safeguard the happiness and well-being of others. In particular, compassion is directly related to nonharmfulness (*avihimsā*), which is defined as “mental disposition to produce absence of vexation in others, i.e., mental states accompanied by compassion” (SNAK 295). Under Buddhist influence, these three virtues were also adopted by Jainism and defined as follows: loving kindness (*maitrī*) is “the wish that no suffering befalls others,” compassion (*kāruṇya*) is “the mental state of kindness towards (willingness to help) the afflicted,” and joy (*pramoda*) is “the inner contentment that manifests itself through kindness in speech etc.” (SSi 7.11). The catalog of nonharmfulness-relevant notions is enlarged by a specific contribution of Jaina tradition, namely active empathy (*anukampā*), defined as “experiencing the anguish of others as one’s own of an agent whose heart is pervaded with kindness” and willingness to help them to alleviate their suffering (SS 6.12).

Who is the patient to be protected by, viz., the object of non-harmfulness? For the Jainas and Ajivikas, one should not harm anything that inhales and exhales, endowed with “life breaths” (*prāṇin*), viz., an embodied soul (*jīva*, *ātman*, *śārīrin*), which could theoretically include all beings that are born in four “rebirth destinies” (*gati*), namely: hellish beings, animals, etc., humans, and celestial beings. However, both hellish and celestial beings are practically beyond reach for humans in the cosmical structure of the universe, and therefore the imperative not to harm others refers to all living beings endowed with sense organs from one to five and with the mind, viz., to all four types of elements, such as minerals and other earth bodies, water, fire, and air bodies (provided a soul has reincarnated in these particles), as well as to all kinds of plants and animals and, of course, to all humans. The imperative was interpreted very rigorously by Jaina and Ajivika mendicants, who were not supposed to injure any plants or animals, but was kept more lax for lay followers. Jaina mendicants were required even not to injure elements, and therefore were prohibited from dealing with, e.g., fire, or required to drink water that contained no living beings (i.e., boiled water prepared by the lay followers). However, the absolute ban on any injury to animals was, and has remained to date, one of most conspicuous elements of everyday conduct of the Jainas, who emphasize the supreme ideal of nonharmfulness and the most principle moral directive. They are therefore strict vegetarians, and follow complex dietary restrictions that also include certain categories of plants (e.g., those that contain plenty of seeds). For the Buddhists, nonharmfulness concerns primarily humans, but also animals, albeit vegetarianism has not necessarily been strictly imposed. There is some evidence that the earliest Buddhism may have also included plants into the sentient world of living beings (Schmithausen, 1991, 2000 and 2009), and therefore they should be accorded more attention. This belief, however, soon disappeared.

All the traditions, viz., Buddhism, Jainism, and Ajivikism, agree that harm or injury can be inflicted with the mind, speech, and body, in an active, causative, or approbative manner. What is the moral (but also legal) responsibility of the agent? Buddhism and Jainism are frequently contrasted with each other, and the former is represented to emphasize the intentionality of the harmful act, whereas the latter to be preoccupied with the actual harm, irrespective of intentions. Such a simplified picture is not quite accurate. The emphasis on intentionality in the case of Buddhism can be noticed in the case of the fifth moral principle banning taking intoxicants, which may cause lapse of mental clarity and lead to inattention (*pramāda*), which is conducive to harmfulness: an inattentive person is likely to commit violence, even unintentionally, whereas a person fully attentive will not. However, also the Jainas emphatically underscore the role of intentions which have an equally deplorable moral status as an actual deed. An expression of Jaina emphasis on intentionality is a set of additional regulations, namely the threefold control (*guṇṭi*) of the mind, speech, and body, and fivefold attention (*samiti*) while walking, speaking, begging and eating, handling objects, and excreting. The approach of both these religions with respect to the role of intentionality in a harmful act and the agent’s moral responsibility depending on one’s inattention is ultimately not so much different.

The Buddhist protective approach both to humans and animals, as an expression nonharmfulness, acquired a political dimension as early as the 3rd century BCE during the reign of King Aśoka, under a strong influence of Buddhist ideas specifically adapted by him to serve his political goals. In his rock and pillar edicts, he introduced special rules to alleviate the fate of the vulnerable ones, such as courteous treatment of slaves and servants, obligation to treat prisoners in an impartial and just manner, special 3-day respite to those condemned to death or prohibition of arbitrary imprisonment or harsh treatment (torture), as well as provisions for medical service for people in need. He also proclaimed an amnesty to criminals at least 25 times during his rule, almost on annual basis. As regards animals, he imposed a complete ban on hunting a number of categories of wild animals, birds, and fish that were declared “inviolable” (Prakrit: *avadhiya*; Sanskrit: *avadhya*), and a ban on killing animals with their young or in milk as well as young animals. He prohibited feeding animals with other animals and animal sacrifices altogether (which had directly anti-Brahmanical implications), encouraged general reduction in hunting and fishing, introduced special protection periods when animals were not supposed to be killed or castrated, banned burning forests with wildlife inside, except for justified economic reasons, and established provisions for medical treatment (but not hospitals, as it is often misreported) for cattle, but not for all animals (this rule must have also had its economic dimension). With the well-being of both humans and animals in mind, he ordered to plant (banyan) trees to provide shade and shelter as well as to dig water tanks and wells along the roads. All these special arrangements should be understood as a practical expression of nonharmfulness practiced by Aśoka, albeit the technical term is missing. Usually, the explicit reasons given by Aśoka are religious: out of the inspiration by the moral law (*dharma*), prompted by his religious pilgrimage (Prakrit:

*dhamma-yātā*; Sanskrit: *dharma-yātrā*) to a sacred place of Sambodhi (Bodhgayā?), or for the good of all people (*sarva-loka-hita*). It would be mistaken to take the moral justification for all these regulations at its face value: some of these provisions, especially shaded transit routes, water reservoirs along the roads, etc., must have had an even more important economic and military dimension because the highways were the circulatory system of his centralized empire that allowed caravans, tax collectors, and army troops to reach all provinces. Apparently, a number of these provisions remained in force till the assassination of Aśoka's last descendant and ruler of the Maurya dynasty, Brhadratha, around 185/180 BCE.

The emphasis on benevolence and nonharmfulness is not unconditional though. In his 13th Major Rock Edict, Aśoka refers to his bloodbath conquest of Kalinga on the East coast, and boasts that "150,000 people were deported [as enslaved labor], 100,000 were slain, and as many died" as a result of the war (numbers exaggerated). The king then expresses his remorse on the slaughter and violence, but at the same time warns all forest tribes and potential enemies that, if they do not accept his conquest through the moral law (*dharma-vijaya*), and his conditions of peace, i.e., *pax Aśokae*, and do not succumb to his rule, the king has all the power to repeat the carnage. It may therefore seem justified to consider that Aśoka's appeal to nonharmfulness was rather pragmatic and declarative than genuinely moral, and various provisions introduced by him had a political, military, or economic rationale behind.

Interestingly, the edicts of King Aśoka, associated with Buddhism, stand in stark contrast to a lengthy rock edict of King Khāravala (1st century BCE), the first ruler in the history that is directly linked to, and himself professes to be, a follower of Jainism. In the inscription, in which the ruler predominantly prides himself on his military conquests and destruction wreaked on all kingdoms, we find no mention of his concern for the well-being of humans or animals and no allusion to the ideal of nonharmfulness whatsoever. This may come as a surprise considering that Jainism is, in general perception, associated with nonharmfulness to a much greater degree than Buddhism.

Nowadays the idea of *ahiṃsā* is commonly linked to the Jaina theory of multiplexity of reality (*anekānta-vāda*), sometimes also understood as a theory of relativism or the metaphysics of perspectivalism. The theory allows to assign contexts in which various propositions are treated as true, especially the views of rival thinkers. As a consequence, this unique epistemological theory of Jainism is interpreted as an expression of Jaina nonharmfulness and genuine tolerance elevated to the intellectual level. However, such link is first established by the modern Jainas after the 1920s–1930s, and historically these two ideas—nonharmfulness and multiplexity of reality—were never related in any manner prior to the 20th century (Cort, 2000; Balcerowicz, 2015: 229–231 and 2020: 854–855).

### Arguments for Nonharmfulness

There is hardly any elaborate and philosophically consistent discussion to be found in classical literature on the question as to why one should pursue the virtue of nonharmfulness. Neither do we find strictly logical proofs or formal, rationally argued explanations (of the standard structure containing a thesis, logical reason, etc.) why nonharmfulness is so important and should be unconditionally cultivated, analogous to, say, arguments for the existence of god or soul. Its importance is taken for granted. There was a general conviction that humans are by nature selfish, harmful, aggressive, and murderous, living in a natural state of enmity and violence following the so-called "fish principle" (*matsya-nyāya*), according to which the big fish devour the small fish. Such a natural state is not inescapable, and can be curbed in two ways. One is external control by the society to prevent violence by the means of an enlightened, just, and wise ruler (a king-seer, *rāja-ṛṣi*, an Indian equivalent of the philosopher-king), who institutes justice, law, and order on earth. This is a method by way of the elimination of the *symptoms* of violence. The other strategy is the internal control exercised from within by enlightened living beings who have understood the nature of suffering and follow a set of moral principles, the most important among them being nonharmfulness. This, in turn, could be interpreted as the elimination of violence by way of the eradication of its *causes*. It is generally associated with the ascetic ideal that gained widespread popularity in India after 6th–5th centuries BCE.

Quite similar types of justification of nonharmfulness can be found in non-Brahmanical and Brahmanical traditions alike, although with different emphasis. The acceptance of nonharmfulness in a universal, unqualified sense, as the paramount virtue by force of which all sentient beings were to be protected followed the adoption of certain core beliefs that had first occurred in the earliest *Upaniṣads*, most probably under a strong influence of indigenous, originally non-Āryan beliefs, and were definitional for the emerging new non-Brahmanical religious movements. These include the beliefs in transmigration (*saṃsāra*), in the existence of a range of sentient living beings that are at the same time moral agents, in the intrinsic equality of all sentient beings and in karmic retribution (*karman*), i.e., the conviction that every action has its respective result contingent on its moral value and the past actions determine one's fate and the hierarchies in the universe. This complex body of beliefs led to the conviction that we all live in a sentient world inhabited by various forms of living beings all of whom jointly form one large ethical community, and humans are its integral part. With cross-species reincarnation commonly taken for granted, we just happen to be reborn as humans or in other life forms, which also makes all living beings ultimately equal. While wandering in innumerable incarnations from immemorial times, each and every sentient being was at one point another being's kin, as expressed in early Theravāda and later Mahāyāna texts in identical wording: "This living being in this form reborn is not someone who, after a course of an infinitely path, earlier in the previous rebirths, was not for me a mother, or father, brother, sister, son, daughter teacher, preceptor, respectable master, or a person in a position of a respectable master" (SN 15.14–19; II 189–190 ≈ Bbh, Chap. 11, p. 131). There is nothing that would intrinsically distinguish any one among them and allow for a genuinely hierarchical system, including a social caste-based

hierarchy, and there is no criterion to discriminate among the living beings except for their moral qualities, each and every of them being capable of acquiring and putting in practice.

This ethical egalitarianism should justify why all living beings are to be equally protected, and not harmed; however, the idea received different treatment in different traditions. In Brahmanical tradition, caste-based (but also interspecies) inequalities were both accepted as a result of people's previous deeds and sanctioned, or even sanctified, as an expression of the sacred eternal moral law (*sanātana-dharma*) promulgated in scriptures and normative texts. In non-Brahmanical traditions, it was accepted that living beings are reborn in different forms as a result of karmic retribution, but this explanation expressed no approval for the inequalities or exploitation of and harm done to those humans and animals ranked lower in the social or cosmic hierarchy. On the contrary, the belief that all sentient beings suffer equally and should by no means be injured or mistreated is repeatedly emphasized.

An argument based on the egalitarian idea is occasionally formulated in Brahmanical texts to the effect that all living beings partake in the essence of god and therefore should not be harmed: "Seeing god equally present everywhere, one does not harm oneself with oneself, and thus attains the paramount goal (liberation)" (BhG 13.28). Due to the divine omnipresence, all living beings have the same divine nature: through the harm done to others, the agent harms both oneself and the god inside. In this way, a harmful deed becomes an act of sacrilege. The argument is not that the life and well-being of any other human being or creature represents a value in its own right and is equal to that of the agent, and therefore one should not harm them. Rather, one should abstain from injury to others because they are permeated with same divine presence and to the same extent as the agent is. This argument may perhaps go back to the idea expressed in the famous Upaniṣadic maxim "thou art that" (*tat tvam asi*; ChU 6.8.7), namely every individual self (*ātman*) is essentially the same as the absolute spirit (*brahman*). It is suggested that this recognition of the immanent universal spirit within oneself and within any other sentient beings prompts one to renounce all harmfulness toward all others (Kane, 1930–1962 II, I: 7–8). A certain kind of non-Brahmanical counterpart to this line of argumentation can be found in later Mahāyāna tradition connected with the doctrine of the embryonic Buddha nature (*tathāgata-garbha*; lit. "the Buddha's embryo") according to which all sentient beings are intrinsically possessed of the Buddha nature and therefore have the capacity of attaining Buddhahood. As Mahāyāna text *Āṅgulimāliya-sūtra* explains, one should never resort to violence or harm other sentient beings because they all, in addition to being each other's kins and relatives in previous existences, possess the same embryonic Buddha nature (Ruegg, 1980: 236).

With the cultural presuppositions based on the belief in reincarnation and karmic retribution in mind, we may distinguish two explanatory trajectories for nonharmfulness: the actual application and justification of the principle of nonharmfulness could be either egoistic, in the self-interest, or altruistic, although both often overlap. In the former case, we find explanations that one should not harm others, be it humans, animals, or even plants, so that one may eventually not be harmed by them in return in the future. Further, with violence committed against other species one may also end up harming one's own ancestors or deceased loved ones, etc. As nonharmfulness cultivated out of egoistic reasons, one should also classify such explanations as the appeal to negative mental consequences of harmful acts: through injury inflicted on others, one harms oneself in the first place by maintaining evil and auto-destructive mental states under the influence of various passions, anger, wrath, hatred, etc. (*rāga, dveṣa, krodha, kaṣaya*). Therefore, it is in one's own interest to cultivate such mental states that are pure, tranquil, and free from destructive affections, which outwardly lead to injuring other living beings, and inwardly keep one in the mental circle of spiritual disturbance and disquietude. Once one's mind is tranquil and attentive, its concomitant effect yields such a conduct through which it is no longer possible to injure others either willingly or unwillingly. In addition, in consonance with the belief in *karman*, or morally qualified acts that necessarily bear fruits in the future contingent upon their initial moral value, since every harmful act leads to evil consequences and determines the harmful agent's most inauspicious future rebirths, in order to avert undesirable consequences one should renounce their causes at all cost. Nonharmfulness in such cases could be interpreted as either selfishly motivated or as positive side effects of one's conduct. A variant of the egoistic argument, found in jurisprudential literature, is that based on reciprocity: "One should learn the quintessence of the moral law, and having learned it, one should take it to heart: one should not do to others what is disagreeable to oneself" (CRNŚ 1.7).

The altruistic and selfless motivation stems from the understanding of the true nature of harm and suffering and of the structure of the world "mechanics." It leads to unconditionally selfless sympathy, compassion, and empathy for all sentient beings that feel pain and may be harmed. Nonharmfulness inescapably results from virtuous mental states of sensitivity and empathetic perceptivity when one literally suffers together with the suffering ones, and consequently abhors all kinds of injury and withdraws one's consent to it. The aim becomes the escape of all beings from the perennial circle of violence. A unique expression of such an attitude is provided by Buddhism that finds no parallel in other Indian religious and philosophical traditions. It is the Bodhisattva vow when the advanced spiritual adept takes an oath to forgo his or her own personal *nirvāṇa* and dedicates all his or her future to help all sentient beings achieve final liberation from suffering. As a justificatory model, Buddhists apply the doctrine of dependent origination (*pratītya-samutpāda*), in which two primary causes are identified in a 12-link causal sequence that leads to the resultant complex of suffering: ignorance, or nescience (Sanskrit: *avidyā*; Pali: *avijjā*) and thirst, or desire (Sanskrit: *trṣṇā*; Pali: *taṇhā*): once these two are completely eliminated, suffering and rebirth permeated with permanent pain cease completely. An echo of such altruistic approach is sometimes found in the *Purāṇas* where "non-harmfulness is understood as the conduct for the good of all beings, like for one's own, and through it one achieves self-knowledge" (LP 1.8.12).

Nonharmfulness is also argued for on the grounds that it plays a regulatory, normative role as the most fundamental of all moral principles and all other virtues are derived from it. It is *ahimsā* that is sometimes spoken of as the absolute moral law (*parama dharma*) (GP 1.93.8; KP 2.11.15) and the foremost among all virtues (GP 1.49.30). It is the essence of (BrAp 2.23.51) and the

conditio *sine qua non* for the moral law (*dharma*) per se (KP 2.11.1) as well as the gateway to it (BrAP 1.30.35): without *ahiṃsā*, all morality would collapse, and no moral principles and restraints (*yama*) (LP 1.8.10) would retain their meaningfulness.

The importance of nonharmfulness is regularly justified as an instrumental in achieving paramount bliss and eternal freedom, i.e., liberation from reincarnation, from the very moment it is ever discussed. The *Chāndogyōpaniṣad* explains that the man who cultivates nonharmfulness and “who lives this way all his life attains the world of Brahman, and he does not return again” (ChU 8.15.1). Those who practice *ahiṃsā* go to heaven or achieve liberation (BrAP 1.30.35, ViP 2.13.8). Being the means to the control of the mind (ViP 2.13.8), its instrumental role lies in engendering mental tranquility and inner joy (MDhŚ 4.161; NP 1.3.55), and the highest joy for the wise is sometimes said to be the avoidance of harmfulness towards animals (*paśu-hiṃsā*) (BhP 7.15.7).

Since nonharmfulness is a precondition for all other virtues, a direct, intrinsic link between *ahiṃsā* and truth is established: both non-harmfulness and the moral law (*dharma*) are grounded in truth (BrAP 1.7.134; MP 104.16), and those truly virtuous never resort to violence but their conduct necessarily rests on truth (MBh 3.198.69; BrAP 1.30.35). Truth and nonharmfulness are two aspects of virtuous conduct, and the relationship between *ahiṃsā* and truth seems very similar to the essential link obtaining between truth and virtue (*aretē*, ἀρετή) as it was understood in ancient Greece and emphasized by Socrates, for whom to know the good meant to do the good. Analogously, in the Indian context, it would be impossible to know that consequences of one's acts may cause *hiṃsā* (injury) to other sentient beings and at the same time to pursue the harmful path nonetheless. An echo of this intimate link between nonviolence and truth can be found in Mahatma Gandhi's idea of “application of truth” (*satyagraha*), i.e., peaceful resistance (Tähtinen, 1964; Sharma, 1999).

It would be quite natural to relate nonharmfulness to vegetarianism; however, we discover that vegetarianism is a much later development and the seemingly obvious link was not yet established at the time when the ideal of nonharmfulness was preached by the founders of Buddhism, Jainism, and Ajivikism. We have much evidence that the founders of these religions, Vardhamāna Mahāvīra and Gautama Buddha, ate meat, and consumption of flesh under certain circumstances was permitted for monks even as late as the beginnings of the common era (Alsdorf, 1961: 5–14, 49; Alsdorf, 2010: 3–15, 51–52; Schmidt, 1968; Jha, 2009; Balcerowicz, 2020: 284–285). Vegetarianism becomes gradually established in the period spanning the Kuṣāṇa and the Gupta Empires, i.e., between 2nd and 5th centuries, when it becomes a recommended norm among the higher classes. The arguments in favor of vegetarianism are in most cases quite similar to those that justify nonharmfulness, and the ideal of *ahiṃsā* as such is the central rationale for renouncing flesh and animal slaughter.

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ChU = Chāndogyaopaniṣad. See: Olivelle (1998: 166–287).

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