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*rājñō vadhaṃ cikīrṣed yas tasya citro vadho bhavet
ājīvakasya stenasya varṇasaṃkarakasya ca*

Mahābhārata 12.86.21

Ājīvika doctrine reconsidered

(Published in: *Essays in Jaina Philosophy and Religion*. Ed. Piotr Balcerowicz. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass. 2003. (Lala Sundarlal Jain Research Series, 20.) Pp. 153-178.)

One of the mysteries that confront those who study the religious context in which Buddhism arose is the religion of the Ājīvikas, called Ājīvikism by some modern scholars.¹ The Ājīvikas, like the early Jainas and Buddhists, were Śramaṇas, ascetics who left their homes in order to find some kind of highest goal by practising various forms of asceticism. Unlike the early Jainas and Buddhists, however, they left no literature that has survived until today. Worse, there are no Ājīvikas left today. The last Ājīvikas may have lived in the fifteenth century, in the south of India, after which they disappeared. What we know about them mainly derives from Buddhist and Jaina literature, neither of which felt much sympathy for the Ājīvikas, and presents its doctrines in a biased and often caricatural fashion. Ājīvikism is — as A.L. Basham calls it in the subtitle of his classical study — a vanished Indian religion.

The sources of information about the religion of the Ājīvikas have been collected and studied in exemplary fashion by A.L. Basham in his book *History and Doctrines of the Ājīvikas*. This book came out in 1951 and has been reprinted several times since then. No study has appeared during the next half century that substantially adds to its conclusions. The contribution on the Ājīvikas in Mircea Eliade's *Encyclopedia of Religion* (New York and London: Macmillan, 1987) has been written by the same author, A.L. Basham, and does little beyond summing up the contents of the book; the same is true of the article on Ājīvikas in the *Encyclopaedia of Buddhism* (EncBuddh I, 1961-1965, pp. 331-333). More recently, Gustav Roth (1993) has restudied the Jaina sources on Gosāla Mañkhaliputta and arrived at the conclusion that "the most ancient and the most primitive doctrine of the Ājīvikas which originally existed before the development of a more elaborate system" is to be found in the "doctrine of the six 'Unavoidables': Gain and Loss, Happiness and Distress,

¹ In another study (Bronkhorst, 000c) it has been argued that the term *ājīvika* (regularly *ājīvaka* in Pāli) is used in the Buddhist canon to refer to naked ascetics in general. The present article only deals with the "real" Ājīvikas, who presumably constituted a subset of the group of all naked ascetics and shared, beside nudity, a number of beliefs and, perhaps, the habit of referring to themselves as Ājīvikas.

Life and Death" (p. 420); this may be true, but tells us little about the "more elaborate system". Some authors — most notably Claus Vogel in his *The Teachings of the Six Heretics* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner, 1970) — have criticised Basham's exclusive use of the Pāli sources and his neglect of the Tibetan and Chinese translations, but add little to our understanding of Ājīvikism.² What is more, a more recent study by Graeme MacQueen which compares the different versions of the Sūtra which is our most important source (*A Study of the Śrāmanyaphala-Sūtra*, Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1988, p. 195), arrives at the conclusion "that [the Pāli version], of all the versions, preserved the most ancient state of the text".³ In other words, Basham's study is reliable after all, in spite of the fact that he did not take all the source material into consideration.

Does this mean that since Basham no more can be said about this mysterious vanished religion? Has the last word been said about it until and unless some new sources are discovered which throw new light on this particular movement? I intend to show in this article that this is not necessarily the case. There is more to philology — the study of a culture on the basis of literary sources — than the mere linguistic analysis of those sources. The task of interpreting the contents of those sources in the light of what we know about their cultural and religious contexts is at least as important. After the initial task of collecting and reading the sources comes the next one of trying to understand what those texts are telling us. This latter task, I will argue, has not been carried out to the fullest extent possible in this case.

What then did the Ājīvikas do, and what did they believe? To begin with the latter of these two questions, Basham points out that "[t]he cardinal point of the doctrines of its founder, Makkhali Gosāla,⁴ was a belief in the all-embracing rule of the principle of order, Niyati, which ultimately controlled every action and all phenomena, and left no room for human volition, which was completely ineffectual. Thus Ājīvikism was founded on an unpromising basis of strict determinism, above which was developed a superstructure of complicated and fanciful cosmology, incorporating an atomic theory which was perhaps the earliest in India, if not in the world." (pp. 3-4). This is clear, and even though it is not immediately clear why anyone in ancient India should accept such a system of beliefs, it does not by itself present a major problem of understanding.

² Vogel, 1970: 1; see further MacQueen, 1984: 291 f.; 1988: 164 f. Vogel, 1970; Meisig, 1987; and MacQueen, 1988 provide parallel passages from the other traditions.

³ Similarly MacQueen, 1988: 190: "[the Pāli version] stands out as the most archaic of our texts".

⁴ Perhaps the only passage in the Pāli canon that explicitly, though not directly, associates Makkhali Gosāla with the Ājīvikas is AN III.384, where Pūraṇa Kassapa presents — out of six 'classes' — "the white class (*sukkābhijāti*)" as being "the male and female Ājīvikas (?; *ājivakā ājivakiniyo*)", and "the supremely white class (*paramasukkābhijāti*)" as Nanda Vaccha, Kisa Saṅkicca and Makkhali Gosāla.

Such a problem comes up when we consider what the Ājīvikas did. It is clear from the sources that the Ājīvikas practised asceticism of a severe type which often terminated, like that of the Jainas, in voluntary death by starvation. This is peculiar. The Jainas, too, practised asceticism which might culminate in death by starvation, but in their case this made sense, as I will explain shortly. In the case of the Ājīvikas the meaning of death by starvation is by no means obvious. If it makes no difference what one does, why should one choose severe asceticism and death by starvation rather than a more agreeable form of life?⁵

Basham's study throws no light on this riddle. It points out that the Buddhists, too, were perplexed. Basham tries to make sense of the situation in the following passage (p. 228): "The usual Buddhist criticism of the Ājīvika *Niyati* doctrine was pragmatic. ... Since there is no possibility of modifying one's destiny by good works, self-control, or asceticism, all such activity is wasted. The Ājīvika doctrines are, in fact, conducive to luxury and licentiousness. This practical criticism of the Ājīvika philosophy might have been easily countered by the Ājīvikas with the claim that ascetics performed penances and led righteous lives under the compulsion of the same all-embracing principle as determined the lives of sinners, and that they were ascetics because *Niyati* so directed it. This very obvious argument occurs nowhere in the Buddhist scriptures, though it was known to the Jaina commentator Śīlāṅka, who quoted it as one of the arguments used by the *niyativādins*." This argument may seem obvious, yet it is unconvincing. It is and remains difficult to believe that the early Ājīvikas engaged in painful asceticism for no other reason than that they thought that fate obliged them to do so. Even if this position turns out to be correct, it remains unintelligible without additional information as to its intellectual context.

Ājīvikism and Jainism appear to have been very close to each other in the early days. Indeed, early Jaina texts present the founder of Ājīvikism, Makkhali Gosāla, as a pupil of Mahāvīra. Gosāla subsequently broke away from Mahāvīra, but it seems a priori not unlikely that an understanding of the fundamental doctrines and practices of early Jainism will help us to reach a better understanding of Ājīvikism. Our first task therefore is to determine in what essential respects Jainism and Ājīvikism differed from each other.

⁵ Cp. Dundas, 1992: 26: "it seems doubtful whether a doctrine which genuinely advocated the lack of efficacy of individual effort could have formed the basis of a renunciatory path to spiritual liberation". Dundas suspects "that the Jains and Buddhists deliberately distorted Ajivika doctrine for their own polemical purposes". Regarding the ascetic side of the religion of Makkhali Gosāla we have independent evidence in the following statement by the grammarian Patañjali (2nd cent. B.C.E.): *mā kṛta karmāṇi mā kṛta karmāṇi śāntir vaḥ śreyasīty āhāto maskarī parivrājakaḥ* "because he said 'do not perform actions, do not perform actions, peace is better for you', he is Maskarin the wandering medicant" (Mahā-bh III p. 96 l. 13-14, on P. 6.1.154). Note however Roth, 1993: 422: "A comparison of Jaina Pkt. Gosāle Mankhali-putte and Pāli Makkhali Gosālo with B. Sk. Maskarī Gośālī-putraḥ shows that the latter, though it is closer to the Pāli reading, is of secondary origin. In both cases the words of Jaina Pkt. Mankhali and of Pāli Makkhali, connected with the name of Gosāla, with the ending -li instead of -ri, characterise themselves as variants of the eastern Māgadhī type of Prākṛit."

Our information about early Jainism is not perfect. The earliest Jaina texts — the canon of the Śvetāmbara Jains — were not written down until a millennium after the death of Mahāvīra, and only very few of these texts may date from a period close to that of Mahāvīra. These earliest texts, moreover, are sometimes difficult to interpret. However, a number of early Buddhist texts refer to the Jains — whom they call *nirgranthas* — and tell us things about their beliefs and practices that agree with what the earliest Jaina texts tell us. From a comparison of these passages the following picture emerges.

Early Jaina asceticism was an attempt to stop activity and to put an end to karmic traces acquired earlier.⁶ It was a direct response to the challenge posed by the doctrine of karma, interpreted in a literal way: acts — i.e. physical and mental acts — produce results in this or a next life. Physical and mental immobility discards the traces left by earlier acts, and purifies the soul from all acts, with total liberation as ultimate outcome. The following passages from the Jaina canon illustrate this. The Uttarajjhayaṇa/Uttarajjhāyā, for example, states in its 29th chapter: "By being without activity the soul does not bind new karma and destroys the karma that was bound before."⁷ "Having reached the state [of motionlessness] of the king of mountains, the homeless [monk] destroys the four parts of karma which [even] a kevelin possesses. After that [the soul] becomes perfected, awakened, freed, completely emancipated, and puts an end to all suffering."⁸ Also the Buddhist canon ascribes this belief to the Jains. In the Cūḷadukkhakkhandha Sutta of the Majjhima Nikāya, for example, Nigaṇṭha Nāthaputta (or Nātaputta, i.e. Mahāvīra) is reported to present his teachings in the following words:⁹ "Formerly, Nigaṇṭhas, you performed sinful activities; you must exhaust that [sinful activity] by means of this severe and difficult practice. Being here and now restrained in body, speech and mind, amounts to not performing sinful activity in the future. Thus, as a result of the annihilation of former actions by asceticism, and of the non-performing of new actions, there is no further effect in the future; as a result of no further effect in the future there is destruction of actions; as a result of the destruction of actions there is destruction of suffering; as a result of the destruction of suffering there is

⁶ Bronkhorst, 1993: chapters 1-3.

⁷ Utt 29.37/29.38/1139: *ajogī naṃ jīve navaṃ kammaṃ na baṃdhaī, puvvabaddhaṃ nijjarei*. This and the following passages are also cited in Bronkhorst, 1993: 37, 27.

⁸ Utt 29.61/29.62/1163: *selesim paḍivanne aṇaḡāre cattāri kevalikammaṃse khavei/ tao pacchā sijjhai bujjhai muccai [parinivvāi]^a savvadukkhāṇaṃ aṃtaṃ karei*.

^a This term is not found in Charpentier's edition.

⁹ MN I.93 l. 2-10: *atthi kkho vo nigaṇṭhā pubbe pāpaṃ kammaṃ kataṃ/ taṃ imāya kaṭukāya dukkarakārikāya nijjaretha/ yaṃ paṇ' ettha etarahi kāyena saṃvutā vācāya saṃvutā manasā saṃvutā taṃ āyatiṃ pāpassa kammaṃsā akaraṇaṃ/ iti purāṇānaṃ kammānaṃ tapasā byantibhāvā navānaṃ kammānaṃ akaraṇā āyatim anavassavo, āyatiṃ anavassavā kammakkhayo, kammakkhayā dukkhakkhayo, dukkhakkhayā vedanākkhayo, vedanākkhayā sabbaṃ dukkhaṃ nijjiṇṇaṃ bhavissatīti*. See Bronkhorst, 1993: 29 n. 8 for further references.

destruction of sensation; as a result of the destruction of sensation all suffering will be exhausted."

This brief characterization does not of course exhaust what can be said about early Jainism. Yet it allows us to see the "logic" (if this is an appropriate term in this context) behind the tendency of Jaina ascetics to practise immobility, in the extreme case until death. This practice has a double objective: it destroys the traces of earlier deeds, and it binds no new karma.

It is also clear that Jainism accepted the doctrine of karma in a form in which bodily movement played a central role. Bodily movement leads to results, and in order to avoid those results bodily movement has to be halted. The early Buddhists did not share this understanding of the doctrine of karma. For them desire, or intention, was crucial. An early Buddhist sermon — the Upāli Sutta¹⁰ — contrasts the two interpretations, or attitudes. It points out that for the Jainas physical activity is central, for the Buddhists mental activity. Other passages allow us to interpret this more precisely. The Jainas did not only try to suppress bodily but also mental activity. The Buddhists, on the other hand, did not count mental activity as such as essential, but the intention behind it. Some Buddhist texts do not hesitate to ridicule the Jaina emphasis on bodily motionlessness and its resulting extreme discomfort. In the Devadaha Sutta of the Majjhima Nikāya the Buddha is recorded to have said:¹¹ "If the pleasure and pain that beings feel are caused by what was done in the past, then the Nigaṇṭhas surely must have done bad deeds in the past, since they now feel such painful, racking, piercing feelings." An early Jaina text pays back in kind by pointing out that a Buddhist who grills a child and eats it, but without knowing that he does so, is supposedly free of guilt, whereas that same Buddhist is guilty if he eats a gourd while thinking it is a baby. The passage, which occurs in the Sūyagada (Sūtrakṛtāṅga), reads, in Bollée's (1999: 411-413) translation:¹² "If someone puts a ball of oilcake on a spit and roasts it with the idea: this is a man, or a gourd, thinking it to be a baby, he becomes for us

¹⁰ MN I.371 f. (no. 56).

¹¹ MN II.222: *sace bhikkhave sattā pubbekatahetu sukhadukkhaṃ paṭisamvedenti, addhā, bhikkhave, Nigaṇṭhā pubbedukkatakammakārino, yaṃ etarahi evarūpā dukkhā tippā kaṭukā vedanā vediyanti.* Tr. Ñānamoli and Bodhi, 1995: 832.

¹² Sūyagada (Sūtrakṛtāṅga) 2.6.26-28 (as found in Bollée, 1999): *piṇṇāga-piṇḍī-m-avi viddhā sūle, keḷi paṇḍiṇā "purise ime" tti/alāyayaṃ vāvi "kumārae" tti, sa lippāi pāṇi-vahena amhaṃ// ahavāvi viddhūna milakkhu sūle, piṇṇāga-buddhiḥ naraṃ paṇḍiṇā/ kumāragam vāvi alāyayaṃ ti, na lippāi pāṇi-vahena amhaṃ// purisaṃ ca viddhūna kumāragam vā, sūlammi keḷi paṇḍiṇā-piṇḍam sai-m-āruhetā, buddhāna taṃ kappai pāraṇācē//.* Jacobi translates (1895: 414): "If (a savage) thrusts a spit through the side of a granary, mistaking it for a man; or through a gourd, mistaking it for a baby, and roasts it, he will be guilty of murder according to our views [i.e., according to the views of the Buddhists]. If a savage puts a man on a spit and roasts him, mistaking him for a fragment of the granary; or a baby, mistaking him for a gourd, he will not be guilty of murder according to our views. If anybody thrusts a spit through a man or a baby, mistaking him for a fragment of the granary, puts him on the fire, and roasts him, that will be a meal fit for Buddhas to break fast upon."

soiled/soils himself for us with killing a living being. On the other hand, however, if a non-aryan puts a man on a spit and roasts him, taking him for an oil-cake, or does the same to a child he thinks is a gourd, in our opinion he is not soiled with killing a living being. If (*ca*) someone puts a man or a child on a spit and roasts it on a fire taking it for a lump of oil-cake, it would be fit for Buddhists to end their vow of fasting with." Passages like these, by contrasting the positions of Buddhists and Jainas, allow us to arrive at a clearer picture of early Jainism.¹³

Let us now turn to some of the textual passages that inform us about the doctrine of the Ājīvikas. Basham's *Locus classicus* is the Sāmaññaphala Sutta of the Buddhist Dīgha Nikāya. In this sermon the views of the so-called six heretics are recorded. One of these is Nigaṇṭha Nātaputta, who is the same as Mahāvīra, the last Jaina *tīrthaṅkara* who was a contemporary of the Buddha. His views should correspond to at least some extent to what we know about early Jainism, but the correspondence is not immediately obvious. Basham comments by saying (p. 17): "The teaching ascribed to Nigaṇṭha Nātaputta is very obscure, but, as Jacobi has pointed out, while it is not an accurate description of the Jaina creed it contains nothing alien to it."¹⁴ This may be a somewhat optimistic characterization of the situation,¹⁵ yet it is clear that the teaching attributed to the Jaina leader is recognizably Jaina. We may be well advised to take a similar stance with regard to the teachings supposedly characterizing Ājīvikism: These teachings may not be an accurate description of the Ājīvika creed, but they may contain little that is alien to it.

¹³ Jainism does (come to) pay attention to intention. Note, however, the following remarks by John E. Cort (1999: 49): "The Jain conception of karma is well-known for its attention to both intention and unintentional action as being of equal importance; however, in academic presentations more attention is paid to the former. Scholars tend to focus upon the way in which Jain praxis aims at the transformation of the psychological make-up of the subject, so that both consciously and unconsciously the person is acting in a way that will be karmically beneficial and in the end lead to liberation. But if all this is so much a matter of intention, then how do we account for the energy devoted for many centuries to disagreements over calendrical interpretation, disagreements concerned with ensuring that ascetic practices are performed on the proper days? If asceticism is a matter of intention, what does it matter if a person fasts or undertakes any other ascetic action on the fourth or the fifth of the lunar fortnight? The fervor with which disputants have argued their cases for many centuries indicates that it does matter on which day ascetic practices are observed."

¹⁴ The reference is (indirectly) to Jacobi, 1880, where it is argued that the position described in the Sāmaññaphala Sutta can be identified as belonging to Pārśva, Mahāvīra's predecessor.

¹⁵ There can be no doubt that *cātu-yāma-saṃvara-saṃvuto* of the Sāmaññaphala Sutta alludes to the *cāujjāma dhamma* "the Four Restraints" of the followers of Pārśva, but it has repeatedly been pointed out (e.g. Rhys Davids, 1899: 75 n. 1; Walshe, 1987: 545 n. 115) that the specification of the Four Restraints in the Buddhist Sutta is quite different from the one found in the Jaina texts. The Jaina *Thāṇaṃga* 4.136 (ed. Ladnun), for example, states: *bharaheravaesu ṇaṃ vāsesu purima-pacchima-vajjā majjhimagā bāvisam arahantā bhagavaṃto cāujjāmaṃ pannaṇavayamīti, taṃ jayā: savvāo pānātivāyāo veramaṇaṃ, savvāo musāvāyāo veramaṇaṃ, savvāo adipṇādāṇāo veramaṇaṃ, savvāo bahiddhādāṇāo veramaṇaṃ* "In the Bharahas and the Eravayas the Arhats in the middle, excepting the first and the last, preach the doctrine of the Four Restraints, viz. abstaining from killing living beings, abstaining from false speech, abstaining from taking what is not given, abstaining from sexual intercourse" (cp. Deleu, 1970: 256).

The following is, in Basham's paraphrase (pp. 13-14), the teaching attributed to Makkhali Gosāla:¹⁶

"There is neither cause nor basis for the sins of living beings; they become sinful without cause or basis. Neither is there cause or basis for the purity of living beings; they become pure without cause or basis. There is no deed performed either by oneself or by others, no human action,¹⁷ no strength, no courage, no human endurance or human prowess.¹⁸ All beings, all that have breath, all that are born, all that have life, are without power, strength, or virtue, but are developed by destiny, chance, and nature, and experience joy and sorrow in the six classes (of existence). There are 1,400,000 chief uterine births, 6,000 and 600; 500 *karmas*, 5 *karmas*, 3 *karmas*, a *karma*, and half a *karma*; 62 paths; 62 lesser *kalpas*; 6 classes (of human existence); 8 stages of man; 4,900 means of livelihood (?);¹⁹ 4,900 ascetics; 4,900 dwellings of *nāgas*; 2,000 faculties; 3,000 purgatories; 36 places covered with dust (?); 7 sentient births; 7 insentient births; 7 births from knots (?); 7 gods; 7 men; 7 *pisāca* (births?); 7 lakes; 7 knots (?), and 700; 7 precipices, and 700; 7 dreams, and 700; and 8,400,000 great *kalpas* through which fool and wise alike will take their course, and make an end of sorrow. There is no question of bringing unripe *karma* to fruition, nor of exhausting *karma* already ripened, by virtuous conduct, by vows, by penance, or by chastity. That cannot be done. *Saṃsāra* is measured as with a bushel, with its joy and sorrow and its appointed end.²⁰ It can neither be lessened nor increased, nor is there any excess of deficiency of it. Just as a ball of thread will,

¹⁶ DN I.53-54 (cited by Basham, p. 14-15, n.3): *N'atthi ... hetu, n'atthi paccayo sattānaṃ saṃkilesāya, ahetu-apaccayā sattā saṃkilissanti. N'atthi hetu, n'atthi paccayo sattānaṃ visuddhiyā, ahetu-apaccayā sattā visujjhanti. N'atthi atta-kāre n'atthi para-kāre, n'atthi purisa-kāre, n'atthi balam n'atthi viriyaṃ, n'atthi purisa-thāmo n'atthi purisa-parakkamo. Sabbe sattā sabbe pānā sabbe bhūtā sabbe jīvā avasā abalā aviriyaṃ niyati-saṅgati-bhāva-pariṇatā chass'evābhijātisu sukha-dukkhaṃ paṭisaṃvedenti. Cuddasa kho paṇ'īmāni yoni-pamukha-satasahassāni satthiṃ ca satāni cha ca satāni, pañca ca kammuno satāni pañca ca kammāni tīni ca kammāni kamme ca addhā-kamme ca, dvaṭṭhi paṭipadā, dvaṭṭh'antara-kappā, chalābhijātiyo, aṭṭha purisa-bhūmiyo, ekūna-paññāsa ājīva-sate, ekūna-paññāsa paribbājaka-sate, ekūna-paññāsa nāgāvāsa-sate, vise indriya-sate, timsa niriya-sate, chatimsa rajo-dhātuyo, satta saññi-gabbhā, satta asaññi-gabbhā, satta nigaṇṭhi-gabbhā, satta devā, satta mānusa, satta pesācā, satta sarā, satta paṭuvā, satta paṭuvā-satāni, satta papātā, satta papāta-satāni, satta supinā, satta supina-satāni, cullāsīti mahā-kappuno satasahassāni yāni bāle ca paṇḍite ca sandhāvitvā saṃsaritvā dukkhass'antaṃ karissanti. Tattha n'atthi: "imināhaṃ silena vā vatena vā tapena vā brahmacariyena vā aparipakkam vā kammaṃ paripācessāmi, paripakkam vā kammaṃ phussa phussa vyanti-karissāmīti. H'evaṃ n'atthi. Doṇa-mite sukha-dukkhe pariyanta-kaṭe saṃsāre, n'atthi hāyana-vaḍḍhane n'atthi ukkamsāvakkamse. Seyyathā pi nāma sutta-guḷe khitte nibbethiyamānam eva phaleti, evam eva bāle ca paṇḍite ca sandhāvitvā saṃsaritvā dukkhass'antaṃ karissanti.*

¹⁷ For the nom. sg. in -e (-kāre) see K.R. Norman, 1976: 240 f.

¹⁸ I omit the additions made by Basham on the basis of Buddhaghosa's commentary.

¹⁹ The Nālandā edition of this passage (as well as the PTS edition elsewhere, e.g. SN III. 211) has *ājīvaka-sate*; the translation will then be: 4,900 Ājīvikas. This fits in well with the following *paribbājakas*.

²⁰ Franke's translation (1913: 58) may have to be preferred: "Glück und Leid sind wie mit Scheffeln zugemessen, und die Dauer der Seelenwanderung hat ihren bestimmten Termin".

when thrown, unwind to its full length, so fool and wise alike will take their course, and make an end of sorrow."

Beside this passage from Buddhist literature, there is a passage in the Śvetāmbara Jaina canon that informs us about the teachings of Gosāla. It occurs in the *Viyāhapannatti* (= *Bhagavatī*) and reads as follows:²¹

"All those who have reached or are reaching or will reach salvation must finish in order 8,400,000 *mahākappas*, seven divine births, seven groups, seven sentient births, seven 'abandonments of transmigration' (*paūṭṭa-parihāra*), 500,000 *kammas*, and 60,000 and 600 and the three parts of *kamma*. Then, being saved, awakened, set free, and reaching *nirvāṇa* they have made or are making or will make an end of all sorrow."

A comparison of these two passages leads Basham to the no doubt correct conclusion (p. 219): "The close similarity shows that both passages are garbled borrowings from a common source." It also constitutes an important argument to look upon the passage in the Pali *Sāmaññaphala Sutta* as providing historical information about the Ājīvikas, even though there appear to be no precise parallels in Chinese and Tibetan.²²

An analysis of these two passages induces Basham to conclude that Gosāla opposed the doctrine of free will. All and sundry are completely subject to the one principle which determines all things. He cites here once again the following words from the *Sāmaññaphala Sutta* (p. 224-225): "Just as a ball of thread when thrown will unwind to its full length, so fool and wise alike will take their course, and make an end of sorrow." However, according to Basham "[t]his absolute determinism did not preclude a belief in *karma*, but for Makkhali Gosāla the doctrine had lost its moral force. *Karma* was unaffected by virtuous conduct, by vows, by penances, or by chastity, but it was not denied. The path of transmigration was rigidly laid out, and every soul was fated to run the same course through a period of

²¹ *Viy* 15.101 p. 677 (Ladnun); 15.68 p. 712 l. 1-6 (Bombay): *kei sijjihimsu vā sijjhamti vā sijjhissamti vā savve te caūrāsītiṃ mahākappasayasahassāim, satta divve, satta saṃjūhe, satta saṃṇugabbhe, satta paūṭṭaparihāre, paṃca kammani^a sayasahassāim satthiṃ ca saḥassāim chac ca sae tiṇṇi ya kammamse aṇupuvveṇaṃ khavāittā tao pacchā sijjhamti bujjhamti muccaṃti parinivvāyaṃti savvadukkhāṇaṃ aṃtaṃ kareṃsu vā kareṃti vā karissamti vā*. Tr. Basham p. 219 (modified). Note that something very similar to the end of this passage (*tao pacchā sijjhai bujjhai muccaṃ parinivvāi savvadukkhāṇaṃ antaṃ kareṃ*) occurs several times in *Utt* 29. Cp. note 8, above.

^a On *kammani*, cp. Leumann, 1889: 339 (525); Schubring, 1954: 260 (472). Basham, quoting an edition not accessible to me ("with the comm. of Abhayadeva, 3 vols. Bombay, 1918-21"), reads *kammāni*.

²² Cp. MacQueen, 1988: 167.

8,400,000 *mahākalpas*." He cites in this connection another portion of the passage from the Sāmaññaphala Sutta: "There is no question of bringing unripe *karma* to fruition, nor of exhausting *karma* already ripened, by virtuous conduct, by vows, by penance, or by chastity. That cannot be done."

A closer consideration of this portion suggests that Basham may have overstated his case. The portion speaks of "bringing unripe *karma* to fruition" and of "exhausting *karma* already ripened". We have seen that this is precisely what the Jainas tried to do. Asceticism in Jainism had a double function, as we have seen: "the annihilation of former actions, and the non-performing of new actions". Makkhali Gosāla, we now learn, maintains that the former of these two is impossible. Our two passages do not contradict the view that *karma* does determine the future condition of an individual. They, or at any rate the first one of them, reject the possibility that this process can be precipitated, but this may mean: karmic retribution takes its time, and virtuous conduct, vows, penance, and chastity do not hasten the process.²³

In this way an interesting contrast between Ājīvikism and Jainism becomes visible. The Jaina ascetic, by practising immobility, aspired to bring about a twofold effect: the annihilation of former actions, and the non-performing of new actions. The inactivity of the Jaina ascetic was not only meant to avoid producing karmic effects in the future, but also to destroy actions carried out in the past. The Ājīvika denied that present inactivity can destroy actions carried out in the past. For him these former actions will carry fruit whatever one does. However, there is no reason to believe that he rejected the possibility of non-performance of new actions.²⁴ We may therefore formulate the hypothesis that both Jainism and Ājīvikism interpreted the doctrine of karma in the same way, believing that bodily and mental movements were responsible for rebirth. But whereas the Jainas believed that motionlessness might destroy past karma, the Ājīvikas did not think so.

²³ Cp. Pande, 1974: 344-45: "it appears that once earned, the inheritance of Kaṃma was held to be independent of individual will and supposed to work its way out along its own logic. ... It was considered necessary to exhaust the numerous but enumerated types of Kaṃma prior to the attainment of liberation." Note that something not altogether dissimilar is ascribed (perhaps incorrectly) by Herodotus to the Egyptians. See Kirk, Raven and Schofield, 1983: 219-220, which translates Herodotus II, 123: "the Egyptians are the first to have maintained the doctrine that the soul of man is immortal, and that, when the body perishes, it enters into another animal that is being born at the time, and when it has been the complete round of the creatures of the dry land and of the sea and of the air it enters again into the body of man at birth; and its cycle is completed in 3,000 years. There are some Greeks who have adopted this doctrine, some in former times, and some in later, as if it were their own invention; their names I know but refrain from writing down."

²⁴ As late an author as Kamalaśīla attributes this position to the Ājīvikas: *yac cāpy ucyate/ na kiṃcit kuśalādikarma kartavyam iti/ tatraivaivaṃvadatā karmakṣayān muktir ity ājīvakavā(dābhyupagamo) bhavet/* (Tucci, 1971: 20); "Now as for the statement 'No wholesome or other act need be performed', anyone who speaks like this on this point would be in agreement with the doctrine of the Ājīvikas that liberation results from the ending of karma" (tr. Olson and Ichishima, 1979: 216 (42), modified). I thank Martin Adam for drawing my attention to this passage.

This does not yet solve all the problems surrounding Ājīvikism. The central question remains unanswered: why did the Ājīvikas adhere to their strict determinism? We may understand this question better by studying another position known from ancient India that might be called determinism, a position which is taught in the *Bhagavadgītā*. Let me try to put the message of this text into its historical context.

It is clear from various sources that there were people in ancient India who were neither Buddhists nor Jainas, but who shared with the Jainas the conviction that the doctrine of karma concerns physical and mental acts; these people had nonetheless found another way to reach liberation. This other way is insight into the true nature of the self. The self is here looked upon as being totally different from all that acts in a person. Knowing the true nature of the self implies: knowing that in reality one never acts. This insight separates one from the acts, which are henceforth known to belong to the body and the mind but not to the self, and leads to, or constitutes, liberation from the effects of one's acts.

This "other way" finds variously expression in numerous texts and traditions in India, and is indeed one of the corner stones of most Brahmanical philosophies. One aspect of this solution is not very often addressed in the earliest texts, but must have confronted all those who took this solution seriously. Knowing the true nature of one's self means: no longer identifying with the activities of body and mind. What happens at that moment to the activities of body and mind? Classical Sāṃkhya — one of the Brahmanical philosophies just referred to — offers the following answer: the material world will stop being active once the self withdraws itself, just as a dancer stops dancing when the spectators lose interest. This does not however provide much help to those who look for practical guidance after obtaining the desired insight.

Some rather different answers are associated with the *Bhagavadgītā*, from where they spread elsewhere, soon to gain widespread recognition. The position (or positions) of the *Bhagavadgītā* deserve(s) detailed attention here, for it (they) may throw light on the religious quest of the Ājīvikas.²⁵

The general theoretical background of the *Bhagavadgītā* is close to Sāṃkhya: the self is different from material nature, and this difference is to be realized. The question presents itself how matter, and more in particular the body accompanying a self (which includes in this discussion the mind), will continue once the difference between self and material nature is realized. Is there such a thing as the own nature of the body, which determines its activity independently of the involvement of a self? For the *Bhagavadgītā*

²⁵ The following reflections also occur in Bronkhorst, 000b.

there is. It is the own duty, the *svadharmā*, of each person. Sometimes it is characterized as the own nature (*prakṛti*, 3.33; *svabhāva*, 18.41) of the person concerned. It is different for Brahmins, Kṣatriyas, Vaiśyas and Śūdras: "Calm, [self-]control, austerities, purity, patience, and uprightness, theoretical and practical knowledge, and religious faith, are the natural-born actions of Brahmins. Heroism, majesty, firmness, skill, and not fleeing in battle also, generosity, and lordly nature, are the natural-born actions of warriors. Agriculture, cattle-tending, and commerce are the natural-born actions of artisans; action that consists of service is likewise natural-born to a serf."²⁶

What counts in the Bhagavadgītā is the attitude with which these duties are to be carried out. A right attitude secures that material nature acts without involvement of the self. Non-involvement is central. It is fundamental that one dissociate oneself from one's actions, or rather from their fruits. Actions which are not inspired by the desire to obtain happiness or to avoid suffering do not produce karmic effects. They are as good as complete inactivity. The Bhagavadgītā poignantly impresses its message upon the warrior (*kṣatriya*) Arjuna who is about to destroy a major part of his family, and this makes the point very clear. Arjuna must carry out this task without concern for the disturbing results. "Holding pleasure and pain alike, gain and loss, victory and defeat, then gird thyself for battle; thus thou shalt not get evil."²⁷ The trick in all this is a certain state of mind, a mental attitude, which we may call non-attachment: "In the mental attitude seek thy [religious] refuge; wretched are those whose motive is the fruit [of action]."²⁸

Obtaining this mental attitude can be facilitated in various ways. Acting as an offering to Kṛṣṇa is recommended: "Whatever thou doest, whatever thou eatest, whatever thou offerest in oblation or givest, whatever austerity thou performest, son of Kuntī, that do as an offering to Me."²⁹ Action is also depicted as a sacrifice: "Except action for the purpose of sacrifice, this world is bound by actions; action for that purpose, son of Kuntī, perform thou, free from attachment [to its fruits]."³⁰ Sacrifice implies giving to the gods, who in return give to the sacrificer. Devotion is a central theme of the Bhagavadgītā. Related to it

²⁶ Bhag 18.42-44 (= Mhbh 6.40.42-44): *śamo damaḥ tapaḥ śaucaṃ kṣāntir ārjavam eva ca/ jñānam vijñānam āstikyam brahmakarma svabhāvajam/ śauryam tejo dhṛtir dākṣyam yuddhe cāpy apalāyanam/ dānam īśvarabhāvaś ca kṣātram karma svabhāvajam/ kṛṣṅaurakṣyavāñijyam vaiśyakarma svabhāvajam/ paricaryātmakam karma sūdrasyāpi svabhāvajam//tr. Edgerton, modified.*

²⁷ Bhag 2.38 (= Mhbh 6.24.38): *sukhaduḥkhe same kṛtvā lābhālābhau jayājayau/ tato yuddhāya yuiyasva naivam pāpam avāpsyasi//tr. Edgerton, 1944: 23.*

²⁸ Bhag 2.49cd (= Mhbh 6.24.49cd): *buddhau śaraṇam anviccha kṛpaṇāḥ phalahetavaḥ//tr. Edgerton, 1944: 25.*

²⁹ Bhag 9.27 (Mhbh 6.31.27): *yat karōṣi yad aśnāsi yaj juhoṣi dadāsi yat/ yat tapasyasi kaunteya tat kuruṣva madarpaṇam//*

³⁰ Bhag 3.9 (= Mhbh 6.25.9): *yajñārthāt karmaṇo 'nyatra/ loko 'yam karmabandhanaḥ/ tadarthaṃ karma kaunteya muktasaṅgaḥ samācara//tr. Edgerton, modified.*

is the notion of casting, or depositing, one's actions on Kṛṣṇa, or on Brahman. In verse 3.30 Kṛṣṇa invites Arjuna to cast all actions onto him, then to fight, free from longing and from selfishness.³¹ Verse 5.10 speaks, similarly, of "putting [all] actions in Brahman".³²

In the Bhagavadgītā the right mental attitude is more important than the activity actually carried out. Once the mental attitude is in order, actions will follow suit: "Even if a very evil doer reveres Me with single devotion, he must be regarded as righteous in spite of all; for he has the right resolution. Quickly he becomes righteous (*dharmātmā*) and goes to eternal peace."³³ This suggests that the evil doer will soon turn to his *svadharma*. Right action is clearly the result of right attitude, not vice-versa.

Though the role of devotion to the Lord should not be underestimated, the Bhagavadgītā often creates the impression that this is just one means, perhaps beside others, for obtaining the right mental attitude. This right mental attitude is, we have seen it before, non-attachment to the fruit of action. The Bhagavadgītā contains passages which present knowledge of the inactive nature of the soul as a means to obtain this mental attitude. "Actions", verse 3.27 explains, "are, all of them, undertaken by the *guṇas* of Original Nature (*prakṛti*). He who is deluded by egoism thinks 'I am the doer'".³⁴ The immediately following verses then continue: "But he, oh long-armed one, who knows the truth about the category *guṇa* and the category action, knowing that the *guṇas* move about among the *guṇas*, he does not get attached. Those who are confused by the *guṇas* of Original Nature (*prakṛti*) get attached to the *guṇas* and their actions. He who knows all should not disturb those dull [people] who do not know all."³⁵ Here, then, the message of the Bhagavadgītā — cultivating a mental attitude of non-attachment with regard to the fruit of one's actions — is no longer an appendage to the way of insight. Insight is here a means (beside others) that may help a person to cultivate this mental attitude.

The method of the Bhagavadgītā is to be distinguished from other contemporary methods. The method of physical and mental immobility demanded extreme physical and mental control. Ideas and emotions played no active role, for they had to be suppressed.

³¹ Bhag 3.30 (= Mhbh 6.25.30): *mayi sarvāṇi karmāṇi saṃnyasyādhyātmacetasā/ nirāśīr nirmamo bhūtvā yudhyasva vigatajvarah//*

³² Bhag 5.10 (= Mhbh 6.27.10): *brahmaṇy ādhāya karmāṇi saṅgam tyaktvā karoti yaḥ/ lipyate na sa pāpena padmapatram ivāmbhasā//*

³³ Bhag 9.30-31ab (Mhbh 6.31.30-31ab): *api cet sudurācāro bhajate mām ananyabhāk/ sādhu eva sa mantavyaḥ samyag vyavasīto hi saḥ/ kṣīpraṃ bhavati dharmātmā śaśvacchāntiṃ nigacchati/*

³⁴ Bhag 3.27 (= Mhbh 6.25.27): *prakṛteḥ kriyamāṇāni guṇaiḥ karmāṇi sarvaśaḥ/ ahaṃkāravimūḍhātmā kartāham iti manyate//*. This verse and the verses cited in the next note are also quoted in Bronkhorst, 1993: 55.

³⁵ Bhag 3.28-29 (= Mhbh 6.25.28-29): *tattvavīt tu mahābāho guṇakarmavibhāgayoḥ/ guṇā guṇeṣu vartanta iti matvā na sajjate //28// prakṛter guṇasaṃmūḍhāḥ sajjante guṇakarmasu/ tān akṛtsnavido mandān kṛtsnavin na vicālayet //29//*

The method of insight into the true nature of the self, on the other hand, emphasized the intellectual element. Understanding the true composition of the world, and the place of the soul in it, was here deemed to secure liberation. The method of actions without consequences, propagated in the Bhagavadgītā, finally, put almost exclusive weight on what may be called an emotional state, an attitude of devotion, or sacrifice, of non-attachment with regard to the fruit of one's actions. We have seen that insight into the true nature of the soul may help to obtain this state, and may indeed be a precondition for doing so, yet it would be a mistake to identify the two. The basically intellectual insight may help to bring about an emotional state which is not intellectual.

The Bhagavadgītā addresses an important problem connected with the belief in the possibility of liberation through insight: what happens to the body and its activities once insight is obtained? or perhaps: how do bodies act of their own, when the persons identify with their real selves and no longer with their bodies? The answer of the Bhagavadgītā can easily be interpreted to mean that the body, when left to its own devices, *automatically* carries out its caste duties. In other words, we are not far removed here from a fatalistic view of activity. Acts themselves, since they belong to the material world and not to the self, do not contribute to obtaining liberation. The self obtains liberation, precisely because it leaves acts to the material world, where they will take a certain direction (that of the caste duties) without affecting the self.

There is reason to believe that the Ājīvika shared certain notions with the author of the Bhagavadgītā. Both, it seems, believed that bodies can act according to their own natures. For the author of the Bhagavadgītā this only happens when people realize their true identity; the activity they engage in will then be in accordance with their caste. The Ājīvikas may not have believed that any special insight was called for. The real self being in any case inactive, bodies will always act according to their natures, which for them means that they will pass through all the stages specified in the passages studied earlier, and will reach, after 8,400,000 great *kalpas*, the stage where all karma has run its course.

The reason to think that the Ājīvikas thought so is the following enigmatic passage, which is part of the passage from the Sāmaññaphala Sutta cited earlier:³⁶ "There is no deed performed either by oneself or by others, no human action, no strength, no courage, no human endurance or human prowess." The authenticity of this passage is confirmed by its

³⁶ *N'atthi atta-kāre n'atthi para-kāre, n'atthi purisa-kāre, n'atthi balaṃ n'atthi viriyaṃ, n'atthi purisa-thāmo n'atthi purisa-parakkamo.*

parallel in the Saṅghabhedavastu.³⁷ This passage stands out in comparison to its surroundings, for it does not, unlike its surroundings, speak about living beings (Skt. *sattva*; Pa. *satta*) but about the self (Skt. *ātman*, Pa. *atta*; beside the other: *para*) and the person (Skt. *puruṣa*, Pa. *purisa*). Basham's translation may not draw sufficient attention to this change of terminology, which may yet be vital. *Ātman* and *puruṣa* are precisely the terms used by those schools and thinkers (such as Sāṃkhya) which maintain that the self does not act, and that activity belongs to material nature.³⁸ What the present passage states is precisely this, that the self does not act. The following translation makes this clearer: "There is no deed performed either by [one's own] self or by [the self] of others, no action belonging to the *puruṣa*, no strength, no courage [belonging to the *puruṣa*], no endurance connected with the *puruṣa* or prowess connected with the *puruṣa*."³⁹

It cannot be denied that the choice of terminology of the present passage is suggestive. It also supports the interpretation here proposed. According to the Ājīvikas, the real self does not act. Activity belongs to the material world, which includes body and mind. According to the Bhagavadgītā, a body (and mind) left to its own devices follows its nature, which is the rules of the caste into which one is born. This very Brahmanical and caste-oriented way of looking at the nature of the material world was not shared by the Ājīvikas, who had different ideas about this issue. According to them, a body that is left to its own devices — i.e., for them, every body — will pass through a large number of *mahākālpas*, specified in the passages studied above.

The comparison with the Bhagavadgītā may explain another piece of information about the Ājīvikas as well. Pūraṇa Kassapa, another heretic whose views are described in the Sāmaññaphala Sutta, appears to have been a teacher who was held in respect by the Ājīvikas.⁴⁰ His views, as presented in the Sāmaññaphala Sutta and paraphrased by Basham, are as follows:⁴¹

³⁷ Gnoli, 1978: 221-222; Meisig, 1987: 136: *nāsti puruṣakāraḥ, nāsti parākramaḥ, nāsti puruṣakāraparākramaḥ, nāsty ātmakāraḥ, na parakāraḥ, anātmakāraparakāraḥ*.

³⁸ Sūyagada 2.6.47 criticizes those who believe in "an unmanifest, great, eternal, imperishable and unchanging *puruṣa*" (Bollée, 1999: 426). Śīlānka ascribes this verse to Ekadaṇḍins, which term — as Bollée reminds us — may have covered the Ājīvikas, beside others (Basham, p. 169 f.). Bollée adds the appropriate warning (1999: 435 n. 26): "our commentators are Jains who might have known hardly more of these old and vague views of religious opponents than we".

³⁹ The fact that the following line states that all *satta*, all *pāṇa*, all *bhūta* and all *jīva* are without strength and without courage is no doubt meant to draw the conclusion that living beings, because their real selves have not strength and courage, don't really have them either.

⁴⁰ He alone — unlike the other five heretics, including Maskarin Gośālīputra — is presented as "chief of five hundred Ājīvikas" (*pañcamātrānām ājīvikasātānām pramukhaḥ*) in the Saṅghabhedavastu of the Mūlasarvāstivādins (Gnoli, 1978: 217; the views here attributed to Pūraṇa Kāśyapa (p. 220-221) coincide however with those of Ajīta Kesakambalī in the Sāmaññaphala Sutta). He is several times presented as an Ājīvika teacher in later texts; cf. Basham, 1951: 80 f. He is also the one who held that Nanda Vaccha, Kisa Saṅkicca and Makkhali Gosāla constitute "the supremely white class" (see n. 4, above). Moreover, "[SN III.69] ascribes the first portion of Makkhali's views (as given in [DN I.53]) — that there is no cause, no

"He who performs an act or causes an act to be performed ... he who destroys life, the thief, the housebreaker, the plunderer ... the highway robber, the adulterer and the liar ... commit no sin. Even if with a razor-sharp discus a man reduce all the life on earth to a single heap of flesh, he commits no sin ... If he come down the south bank of the Ganges, slaying, maiming, and torturing, and causing others to be slain, maimed, or tortured, he commits no sin, neither does sin approach him. Likewise if a man go down the north bank of the Ganges, giving alms and sacrificing, and causing alms to be given and sacrifices to be performed, he acquires no merit, neither does merit approach him. From liberality, self-control, abstinence, and honesty is derived neither merit, nor the approach of merit."

It is more than probable that Pūraṇa's position is not here presented in the most favorable light. Moreover, we have seen that the Jainas did not shy away from accusing the Buddhists of being able to eat babies without incurring sin. The Jainas had a point there, which they however exaggerated beyond all reasonable proportions. It makes sense to assume that the Buddhist texts that describe the position of Pūraṇa Kassapa do the same. They exaggerate beyond reasonable proportion a position, or the consequences of a position, which yet belonged, in this or in a closely similar form, to Pūraṇa Kassapa, and therefore probably to the Ājīvikas.

reason for depravity or purity — to Pūraṇa Kassapa" (DPPN II p. 398 s.v. Makkhali-Gosāla n. 1). — It is noteworthy that Maskari(n) and Pūraṇa are mentioned by Bhāskara I as earlier mathematicians (Pingree, 1981: 59); see Shukla, 1976: liii-lv, 7 l. 7 (on Āryabhaṭīya Daśagūṭikā 1), 67 l. 4 (on Āryabhaṭīya Gaṇitapāda 9).

⁴¹ DN I.52-53 (partly cited by Basham, p. 13 n. 1): *Karato kho mahārāja kārayato chindato chedāpayato pacato pācayato socayato kilamayato phandato phandāpayato pāṇaṃ atimāpayato, adinnaṃ ādiyato, sandhiṃ chindato, nillopaṃ harato ekāgārikaṃ karoto paripantho tiṭṭhato, paradāraṃ gacchato, musā bhaṇato, karoto na karīyati pāpaṃ. Khura-pariyantena ce pi cakkena yo imissā paṭhaviyā paṇe eka-mamsa-khalaṃ eka-mamsa-puññaṃ kareyya, n'atthi tato-nidānaṃ pāpaṃ, n'atthi pāpassa āgamo. Dakkhinañ ce pi Gaṅgā-tīraṃ āgaccheyya hananto ghātentō chindanto chedāpento pacanto pācento, n'attho tato-nidānaṃ pāpaṃ, n'atthi pāpassa āgamo. Uttarañ ce pi Gaṅgā-tīraṃ gaccheyya dadanto dāpento yajanto yajāpento n'atthi tato-nidānaṃ puññaṃ, n'atthi puññaṃ āgamo. Dānena damena saṃyamena sacca-vajjena n'atthi puññaṃ, n'atthi puññaṃ āgamo.* A résumé of this position in verse is given SN I.66. Essentially the same position is attributed to Sañjaya Vairatīputra in the Mūlasarvāstivādin Saṅghabhedavastu (Gnoli, 1978: 222-223; Meisig, 1987: 144): *kurvataḥ, kārayataḥ, chindataḥ, chedayataḥ, pacataḥ, pācayataḥ, hiṃsato, ghātayataḥ, prāṇino hiṃsataḥ, adattam ādataḥ, kāmeṣu mithyā carataḥ, saṃprajānan mṛṣāvādam bhāṣamānasya, madyapānam pibataḥ, sandhiṃ chindataḥ, granthiṃ muñcataḥ, nirlopaṃ harataḥ, paripantham tiṣṭhataḥ, grāmaghātam kurvataḥ, nagaraghātam, janapadaghātam, kṣuraparyantikṛtena vā cakreṇa ye 'syāṃ mahāprthivyāṃ prāṇinas tān sarvān saṃchindataḥ, saṃbhindataḥ, saṃkuṭṭayataḥ, saṃpradālayataḥ, tān sarvān saṃchindya, saṃbhindya, saṃkuṭṭya, saṃpradālya, ekamāmsakhalam kurvataḥ, māmsapiṇḍam, māmsapuñjam, māmsarāsim; idaṃ pratisamśikṣato nāsty atonidānaṃ pāpaṃ; nāsty atonidānam pāpasyāgamaḥ; dakṣiṇena nadiṃ gaṃgāṃ chindan bhindan vāgacchet, uttareṇa vā nadyā gaṃgāyā dadat yajamānaḥ āgacchet, nāsty atonidānam puṇyapāpaṃ; nāsty atonidānaṃ puṇyapāpasyāgamaḥ; yaduta dānena, damena, saṃyamena, arthacaryayā samānārthatayā iti kurvataḥ na kriyate eva puṇyam iti.*

Let us now draw the Bhagavadgītā into the picture. Kṛṣṇa encourages Arjuna not to avoid battle and the killing of his relatives, and says:⁴² "He who thinks of him (i.e., the soul inhabiting the body) as killer, he who deems him killed, both of these possess no knowledge; he does not kill and is not killed. Never is he born or dies; he has not come to be, nor will he come to be; unborn, permanent, eternal, ancient, he is not killed when the body is killed." Here we meet with a statement — not this time from a critic but from the author of the Bhagavadgītā himself — to the extent that killing is allowed in certain circumstances, or more appropriately, that killing has no karmic consequences — is no sin — in Arjuna's situation.

It would seem, then, that both Ājīvikism and the Bhagavadgītā allow for the possibility that the body, when left to its own devices, will kill its fellow human beings. For both there is nothing wrong with this; the Bhagavadgītā goes to the extent of warning Arjuna not to try to stop this process. Pūraṇa may have thought that there was no way this process *could* be stopped. The parallelism appears to go further. The Bhagavadgītā, as we have seen, denies that actions are carried out by the self; they "are, all of them, undertaken by the *guṇas* of Original Nature (*prakṛti*). He who is deluded by egoism thinks 'I am the doer'". The account of Pūraṇa is, similarly, resumed in the one word *akiriyā* "non-action".⁴³

What is the place of asceticism in the Ājīvika vision of the world? If our reflections so far are correct, the answer must now be evident. Asceticism cannot destroy the traces of acts committed in earlier lives, or even earlier in the present life. But asceticism in Jainism had a double function: "the annihilation of former actions, and the non-performing of new actions". Annihilating former actions is not recognized as possible by the Ājīvikas, but non-performing new actions is possible. It is even essential at the end of the long series of lives during which, at last, all former actions have borne fruit. The Ājīvika takes longer, much much longer, than his Jaina confrère to annihilate former actions, because he does not recognize asceticism as a means to accomplish this. He has to live through 8'400'000 great *kalpas* to bring this about. But at the end he too, like the Jaina monk, has to abstain from further activity. Like the Jaina ascetic who is close to his goal, also the Ājīvika who is close to it must starve himself to death, without doing anything whatsoever.

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⁴² Bhag 2.19-20 (Mhbh 6.24.19-20): *ya enaṃ vetti hantāraṃ yaś cainaṃ manyate hatam/ ubhau tau na vijānīto nāyaṃ hanti na hanyate //19// na jāyate mriyate vā kadācin, nāyaṃ bhūtvā bhavitā vā na bhūyaḥ/ ajo nityaḥ śāśvato 'yaṃ purāṇo, na hanyate hanyamāne śarīre //20//*. On the interpretation of verse 20b, see Bronkhorst, 1991: 303.

⁴³ DN I. 53 (§ 18): ... *Pūraṇo Kassapo sandiṭṭhikaṃ sāmāññaphalam puṭṭho samāno akiriyaṃ vyākāsi*. The Gilgit Saṅghabhedavastu attributes this position (*akiriyā*) to Sañjayī Vairattīputra (Gnoli, 1978: 223).

The above considerations, it is hoped, have made Ājīvika doctrine somewhat more comprehensible in its historical context than it has been so far. Basham's excellent study had left us with the idea that a fatalistic doctrine — whose links with other contemporary doctrines and with the ascetic practices of the Ājīvikas themselves remained unclear — had somehow been able to establish itself as the core of a new religion. Basham may not be blamed for this, for the textual evidence is incomplete, biased, and far from perfect. Yet it is to be kept in mind that religious currents do not normally crystallize around just any idea. More often than not religious doctrine — especially the doctrines of "new religions" — shares features with other contemporary religious currents, or addresses issues that are somehow felt to be important in the society concerned. Ājīvikism, it now appears, shared a concern for the doctrine of karma with the other religious currents known to have existed in its time: Buddhism, Jainism, and even some of the contemporary developments of Vedic religion. From among these religious currents it was closest by far to Jainism, which is hardly remarkable in view of the fact that the Jaina tradition presents Makkhali Gosāla as a one-time pupil of Mahāvīra. The most important difference between Ājīvikism and Jainism appears to have been the Ājīvika view that asceticism cannot annihilate former karma. The automatic consequence of this position is that the Ājīvikas, in order to reach liberation, will have to wait for former karma to run its own course. This takes long, but not forever: the Ājīvikas somehow arrived at a total duration of 8'400'000 great *kalpas*. Once arrived at the end of this period, the Ājīvikas, like their Jaina counterparts, will have to engage in asceticism, more precisely: in the non-performing of new actions. They, like the Jaina ascetics, will choose a way of dying that is as inactive as possible: the Jainas through starvation, the Ājīvikas, it appears, through thirst.

Linked to this particular notion as to how liberation can be attained, the Ājīvikas appear to have believed in the inactive nature of the self. This, if true, would point to a resemblance between the main message of the Bhagavadgītā and the doctrine of the Ājīvikas. Both would then recognize in each individual a self that does not act, and a bodily part (which includes the mind) that does act. Knowing that one's self is essentially different from one's body induces people to let the body follow its own nature; this own nature of the body is in the Bhagavadgītā one's *svadharma*, one's caste duties, and for the Ājīvikas something else, most probably expressed in the long list of incarnations one has to pass through.

The main reason for believing that the self, for the Ājīvikas, was by its nature inactive, is the phrase preserved in the Sāmaññaphala Sutta describing their position:

"There is no deed performed either by [one's own] self or by [the self] of others, no action belonging to the *puruṣa*, no strength, no courage [belonging to the *puruṣa*], no endurance connected with the *puruṣa* or prowess connected with the *puruṣa*." However, it is not impossible that earliest Jainism, too, had a similar conception of the self. Classical, i.e. later, Jainism has a different conception of the soul, as is well known. This classical conception, however, appears to have developed at a later time.⁴⁴

Dalsukh D. Malvania (1981) and others have pointed out that the early Jaina concept of the soul was indeed very different from the classical concept which developed in the course of time. Āyāra 176, he points out, describes the soul in the following terms:⁴⁵ "It is not long nor small nor round nor triangular nor quadrangular nor circular; it is not black nor blue nor red nor green nor white; neither of good nor bad smell; not bitter nor pungent nor astringent nor sweet; neither rough nor soft; neither heavy nor light; neither cold nor hot; neither harsh nor smooth. It does not have a body, is not born again, has no attachment and is without sexual gender. While having knowledge and sentience, there is nonetheless nothing with which it can be compared. Its being is without form, there is no condition of the unconditioned. It is not sound nor form nor smell nor flavour nor touch or anything like that." (tr. Jacobi, 1884: 52, emended as in Dundas, 1992: 38). Āyāra 171, moreover, states:⁴⁶ "That which is the soul is that which knows, that which is the knower is the soul, that by which one knows is the soul." (tr. Dundas, 1992: 38). It is not therefore impossible that the soul at this early period was not believed to participate in the activity of the body. A passage in Āyāra 3 which describes the Jaina as *ātmavādin*, *lokavādin*, *karmavādin* and *kriyāvādin* is not necessarily in conflict with this.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ On the development of this concept, see Bronkhorst, 0000.

⁴⁵ Āyāra I.5.6.176 (B p. 56-57) / I.5.6.170 (D, p. 153 f.) / I.5.6.4 (S p. 26) / I.5.6.127 f. (L p. 47): *se na dīhe na hasse na vaṭṭe na taṃse na caṭṭamse na parimaṇḍale na kiṇhe na nīle na lohīe na hālidde na sukkile na surabhi-gandhe na dūrabhi-gandhe na tīte na kaḍue na kasāe na ambile na mahure na kakkhaḍe na maūe na garue na lahue na sīe na uṇhe na niddhe na lakkhe na kāū na ruhe na saṅge na itthī na purise na annahā parinne sanne uvamā na vijjai, arūvī sattā, apayassa payaṃ n'atthi, se na sadde na rūve na gandhe na rase na phāse icc-eyāvanti.* (the reading follows ed. Schubring).

⁴⁶ Āyāra I.5.5.171 (B p. 55) / I.5.5.165 (D p. 151) / I.5.5.5 (S p. 25) / I.5.5.104 (L p. 45): *je āyā se vinnāyā, je vinnāyā se āyā, jeṇa vijjānā se āyā* (the reading follows ed. Schubring).

⁴⁷ Āyāra I.1.1.3-5 (B p. 3) / I.1.1.5-7 (D, p. 15-16) / I.1.1.5 (S p. 1) / I.1.1.5-7 (L p. 4): *se āyā-vāi logā-vāi kammā-vāi kiriyā-vāi. 'karissam c'aham, kāravessam c'aham karao yāvi samaṇunne bhavissāmi' — cyāvanti savvāvanti logamsi kamma-samārambhā parijāṇiyavvā bhavanti* (the reading follows ed. Schubring). Jacobi (1884: 2) translates: "He believes in soul, believes in the world, believes in reward, believes in action (acknowledged to be our own doing in such judgments as these): 'I did it;' 'I shall cause another to do it;' 'I shall allow another to do it.' In the world, these are all the causes of sin, which must be comprehended and renounced." Schubring's translation (1926: 67) shows that no activity of the soul is necessarily thought of: "Er glaubt [also] and ein Ich, an eine Welt, an die [Rückwirkung aller] Handlungen und an die Willensfreiheit. [Weil er an diese glaubt, sagt er:] 'ich will handeln, ich will zu handeln veranlassen, und ich will dem zustimmen, der da handelt.' Alle diese Betätigungen durch Handlung in der Welt müssen [als schädlich] erkannt werden."

Malvania draws attention to the similarity with Upaniṣadic ideas, and believes that the Āyāra "is not free from the influence of the Upaniṣads". This may or may not be true. It may not however be superfluous to recall that these Vedic texts themselves appear to have borrowed⁴⁸ (and adjusted)⁴⁹ these ideas from others. Unfortunately we have no precise information about the religious movements from which these Upaniṣads borrowed. Could it be that the Ājīvikas and the Jainas (which both appear to have existed well before Buddhism came into being) were among them?

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⁴⁸ Bronkhorst, 1998: chapter 7.

⁴⁹ Cp. Bronkhorst, 000a.

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Abbreviations:

ANISt	Alt- und Neuindische Studien, Hamburg
B	Bombay edition
Bhag	Bhagavadgītā
D	Delhi edition
DN	Dīghanikāya, ed. T.W. Rhys Davids, J.E. Carpenter, 3 vols. 1890-1911 (PTS)
EncBuddh	Encyclopaedia of Buddhism, ed. G.P. Malalasekera, vol. 1 ff., Colombo 1961 ff.
JIP	Journal of Indian Philosophy
KISchr	Kleine Schriften [in der Serie der Glasenapp-Stiftung], Wiesbaden, Stuttgart
L	Ladnun edition
Mahā-bh	Patañjali, (Vyākaraṇa-)Mahābhāṣya, ed. F. Kielhorn, Bombay 1880-1885
Mhbh	Mahābhārata, crit. ed. V.S. Sukthankar u.a., Poona 1933-66 (BORI)
MN	Majjhima-Nikāya, ed. V. Trenckner, R. Chalmers, 3 vols., London 1888-1899 (PTS)
Pa.	Pāli
PTS	Pali Text Society, London
S	ed. Schubring
SBB	Sacred Books of the Buddhists Series, London
Skt.	Sanskrit
Utt	Uttarajjhayaṇa / Uttarajjhāyā
Viy	Viyāhapannatti
WZKM	Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde des Morgenlandes, Wien
ZDMG	Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft, Leipzig, later Wiesbaden