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Eco-karma: Jainism and the art of living well in the world

REL 420 (Capstone)
Spring 2017
T/Th 2:40–4:20

Course Description:

The purpose of this course is twofold. First, it will provide an in-depth understanding of the Indic religion of Jainism, including Jain history, philosophy, and routine body practices (both lay practices and monastic practices). Second, it will use that understanding—particularly the stringent Jain body-disciplines—in order to analyze and critique modern American lifestyles. Students will then be invited to temporarily renounce different aspects of American consumer culture, in keeping with the principles and practices of Jainism, and will be awarded ‘merit’ in accordance with the stringency of their renunciation.

The premise of the course is that Jain worldviews and practices provide an elegant and useful set of strategies for understanding and limiting many of the environmentally irresponsible practices that are woven into modern American culture, including consumption of factory-farmed meat, carelessness with drinkable water, frivolous travel and use of vehicles, food waste, and extravagant clothing use.

The course will argue, moreover, that the unique Jain understanding of karma, together with the tradition’s emphasis on communal practice, help to mitigate practitioners’ potential perception of its teachings as punitive or guilt-inducing. Through acts that generate positive karma (merit, or *punya*), practitioners are able to perceive their religious practices in immediately affirming ways, while by celebrating each others’ practices (through sympathetic rejoicing, or *anumodana*), they can experience their efforts to attend to and overcome the world as social and collective.

In addition to traditional classroom work and writing, therefore, it will be essential that students undertake renunciatory practices as a class-community, in order to build not just intellectual knowledge, but social and embodied knowledge of the world and their lives.

In sum, then, the course aims to enhance students’ lives by introducing them in both theoretical and practical ways to the spiritual laws and techniques laid down in Jainism.

REQUIRED READING:

Students are requested to purchase copies of the following book, which are available at the Cobber Bookstore:

John E. Cort, *Jains in the World: Religious Values and Ideology in India* (Oxford University Press, 2001)

James Laidlaw, *Riches and Renunciation: Religion, Economy, and Society Among the Jains* (Oxford University Press, 1995)

Jeffrey D. Long, *Jainism, an Introduction*. (I.B. Tauris, 2009)

Other assigned readings will be made available in electronic format on the course's Moodle site. In addition, students will be expected on a weekly basis to make their own inquiries about the impacts of their lifestyles. These inquiries may be done online, but students must be attentive to the reliability of their sources.

LATE POLICIES

- Extenuating circumstances interfering with timely submission of work must be presented to (and cleared by) the professor at least one day in advance of the deadline in order to avoid grade penalties.
- Written work submitted within 24 hours after the deadline will be docked a partial grade.
- Work submitted more than 24 hours late will be docked at minimum a full letter grade, and the grade will continue to drop progressively as the lateness persists.
- Late work will be accepted for consideration up until the professor finishes grading the assignment.

ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADING STRUCTURE:

TESTS	160 points / 40%
Jainism content test (80 points)	
Final exam (80 points)	
WRITING	180 points / 45%
Lifestyle impact reports (6 @ 30 points each)	
CLASSROOM PERFORMANCE	60 points / 15%
Attendance (20 points)	
Participation (40 points)	
	<hr/>
	400 points / 100%
<i>Initial karma deficit</i>	<i>- 100 points</i>

TESTS

- There will be a unit test at the conclusion of the opening content portion of the course, to determine students' mastery of Jain concepts.
- There will be a final exam, reviewing students' basic mastery of Jain concepts and adding a reflective essay that covers material and discussions from the topical and experiential sections of the course.
- The professor will circulate a study guide at least one week in advance of each test.

WRITING

- Each week during the second portion of the course, students will be asked to research different aspects of their lifestyles, in conversation with specific practices from Jainism, and write essays explaining their findings.
 - Each essay will be due before class time on the day assigned, and will be uploaded onto Moodle.
 - There will be 7 weeks when students will be responsible for researching their lifestyles; students will be expected to write on six of those weeks.
 - Students who are struggling with their karma points may write an extra essay, to earn credit beyond the allotted 180 points.
- Students will receive more specific instructions regarding length, format, and research expectations in a separate document.

CLASSROOM PERFORMANCE

- Expectations regarding attendance and participation will be provided in detail in a separate document, circulated on Moodle.

KARMA POINTS

- In order to bring students to a fuller understanding of Jain principles of karma, students will receive a point-grade corresponding to their reported behaviors over the course of the semester outside of the classroom.
 - Students will begin the semester with a 100 point karma deficit.
 - Over the course of the semester, the karma deficit will gradually reduce on its own. It will also decrease in the event students suffer an unexpected life-hardship, such as an illness.
 - The karma deficit will increase if students engage in behaviors condemned by Jains, including eating meat, travelling long distances, and breaking vows.
 - The karma deficit will decrease if students renounce behaviors condemned by Jains, or adopt positive behaviors admired by Jains, such as voluntarily restricting their travel or diet. Each week in the second portion of the course, the class will be asked to take a vow, and those who are able to maintain their vow for the entire week will be awarded positive points the following week to offset their karma deficit.
- A working list of behaviors that will increase or decrease the students' karmic deficits will be provided through Moodle. Students will vote as a group on actions or circumstances that are not envisioned on the initial working list.

SCHEDULE OF CLASS MEETINGS

Tues Jan. 10	Introduction	
Th. Jan 12	Locating Jainism within the Indian religious milieu (reading: Narayanan, "Hindu Traditions" [web]; Long, Ch. 1)	
Tues Jan 17	Karma and ahimsa (reading: Laidlaw, Ch. 7; Long, Ch. 2)	
Th Jan 19	Body, mind, and soul (reading: Long, Ch. 3 & Ch. 4)	
Tues Jan 24	The renouncer path (reading: Cort, Ch. 4)	<i>In class, watch "Last Life of Nirmala"</i>
Th Jan 26	The householder path (reading: excerpt from Kelting, <i>Singing the Jinas</i> [web])	
Tues Jan 31	Jain puja, temples, and festivals (reading: Cort, Ch. 3 & Ch. 6)	
Th Feb 2	Fasting and food (reading: Laidlaw, ch. 10)	
Tues Feb 7	Vows and religious commitments (reading: Laidlaw, Ch. 8)	
Th Feb 9	Samsara, kevala, moksha (reading: excerpt from Dundas, <i>The Jains</i> [web])	
Tues Feb14	Jainism and Gandhi (reading: excerpt, Gandhi, <i>The Story of My Experiments with Truth</i> [web])	
Th Feb 16	UNIT TEST	

PART II:
JAIN PRACTICES AND CATEGORIES
AS A CRITIQUE OF AMERICAN LIFESTYLES

- Tues Feb 21 Jain critiques of transportation: *vihara*, *caturmas*, and *dig*
(reading: excerpts from Dundas, *The Jains* [web])
- Th Feb 23 American transportation:
How we move & how transportation causes suffering/death to living beings
- Research: Select an aspect of transportation impact; set intention to reduce own transportation during break
- Midsemester Break:*
No class Tuesday Feb 28 & Thursday March 2
- Tues Mar 7 Food 1: Jain commitments to vegetarianism
(reading: Laidlaw, Ch. 5)
- Th Mar 9 American meat-eating:
How animals are raised and killed for American consumption
- Research: Select a specific facet of the American meat industry; set intention to reduce or eliminate meat consumption for coming week
- Tues Mar 14 Food 2: Jain limitations on specific vegetables
(reading: link to Jain dietary guides [web])
- Th Mar 16 American vegetable and fruit cultivation:
How cultivation techniques (including pesticide-use, harvest labor, and transportation) cause death and suffering to living beings
- Research: Select a specific fruit or vegetable, and investigate its cultivation; set intention to eliminate a specific fruit/vegetable or class of fruits/vegetables from diet for coming week
- Tues Mar 21 Food 3: Jain fasting practices
(reading: Cort, Ch. 5)
- Th Mar 23 American food waste and food over-consumption:
Health/environmental impacts of the amounts of food Americans consume
- Research: Select a specific aspect of waste and over-consumption; set an intention to limit food intake for the coming week (no waste; no taste; limited diet; fasting)

- Tues Mar 28 Jain practices limiting clothing: clothes-washing and going 'sky-clad'
(reading: "Monastic Clothing," *Jainpedia* [web])
- Th Mar 30 American clothing culture, and its environmental and social-justice implications

Research: Determine specific impacts of the ways Americans have their clothes produced, or of the ways Americans wash their clothes; set the intention to limit clothing use and laundry for coming week
- Tues Apr 4 Jain perspectives on profession: the forbidden forms of self-sustenance
(reading: Sangave, "Implementation of Ahimsa-Vrata" [web])
- Th Apr 6 American professions: How can we identify whether we are structurally contributing to suffering in the world?

Research: Select a job you have already held or envision holding in the future, and investigate the ways that job may have caused suffering or death to living beings
- Tues Apr 11 Jain perspectives on death: pinjrapoles, animal euthanasia, and *sallekhana*
(reading: excerpts from Lodrick, *Sacred Cows, Sacred Places* [web])

Easter Break:
No class Thursday April 13

- Tues Apr. 18 Jain practices regarding water and bodily waste
(reading: Laidlaw pp. 344-345; reread Laidlaw Ch. 7)
- Th Apr. 20 American water and waste systems

Research: Select an aspect of the American drinking water or sewage system, or patterns of American water use, and explain how it contributes to the suffering or death of living beings

FINAL EXAM
Thursday April 27