

FLORIDA INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY  
Department of Religious Studies  
Special Topics Seminar:  
Karma and Ethics in Indian Philosophy and Religion  
RLG 5937-U02 / REL 4937-U04  
Fall 2015

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Instructor:	Steven M. Vose	Class Hours:	TR 2:00-3:15
Office:	DM 359-A	Classroom:	ECS 136
Office Hours:	T 12:00-1:30, R 3:30-4:45, or by appointment	Grad Session:	T 3:30-4:45
email:	<a href="mailto:svose@fiu.edu">svose@fiu.edu</a>	Grad Room:	ECS 132

*“Although ethics is the foundation of all religions, it finds greater emphasis among the religions of India because of their peculiar doctrine of karma.” ~ P.S. Jaini*

**Course Description:**

This seminar will interrogate the nature and meaning of “karma” in the major religious traditions originating in South Asia—Jainism, Buddhism and ‘Hinduism’—and of selected orthodox philosophical (*darśana*) traditions. The course will investigate the role karma plays in the conception of the self and the world, and will pay special attention to the implications of karma—particularly, the notions of “rebirth,” “karmic bondage” and “karmic retribution”—for how each tradition understands what constitutes proper ethical action. Readings will be drawn from primary sources from these traditions as well as secondary scholarly literature that has sought to theorize karma and translate it into western terms. We will also consider ethnographic descriptions of how karma works in the lived experience of these traditions. Categories such as “philosophy,” “religion,” and “ethics” will in turn be investigated for their applicability to these traditions. Students will take turns leading discussions and will each write a research paper based on their specific interests.

**Course Objectives and Learning Outcomes:**

In this course, students will:

- Become familiar with the doctrines of karma in several Indian religious and philosophical traditions, including their implications for conceptions of the self, the problem of existence, and the relationship between pursuing the soteriological end of that problem and its relationship to “good conduct” or “ethical practice,” as stipulated in scriptures and philosophical works as well as in everyday practice and experience;
- Understand why karma connects cosmology, ontology and ethics; and why it presents unique problems for linking soteriology to ethical action;
- Evaluate and critique scholarly theories about the origins of karma in Indian traditions;
- Articulate differences between western discourses of “theodicy,” “eschatology,” “ethics,” “philosophy” and “religion,” and Indian understandings of analogous topics, thereby engaging with problems in the “comparative study of religion;”
- Lead at least one class discussion based on course readings;
- Develop research interests and contribute to discussion on topics during class discussions;

-Conduct research and write a paper based on questions arising from the problems confronted with the doctrine of karma as it relates to ethical conduct.

### Course Grading, Requirements and Expectations:

1. Class Participation (25%)
2. Discussion Leader (sign-up 1<sup>st</sup> week of class) (25%)
3. Research Paper, minimum 2,500 (ug)/3,500 (grad) words (50%)
  - The grade for the paper will be broken down as follows:
    - a. Paper Topic: Due Fri., Sep. 25 at 11:59 PM (10%)
    - b. Annotated Bibliography: Due Fri., Oct. 23 at 11:59 PM (10%)
    - c. Title & Abstract: Due Fri., Nov. 13 at 11:59 PM (10%)
    - d. Presentation of the paper (20%)
    - e. Final Draft: Due Tue., Dec. 8 at 11:59 PM (50%)

-*Class Participation* is crucial to a successful seminar. This course requires you to work collaboratively with your colleagues to understand the texts and to develop your individual research questions. Come to class with the readings completed; bring questions and make connections with other readings. Mark passages that speak to a particular topic of class or personal interest, or that were difficult to understand. Students are expected to attend all class meetings. There is no official attendance policy; you are on your honor. Class participation is counted, however.

-Each student will *lead discussion* for two weekly class sessions. A sign-up sheet will be circulated during the first week of class. The weekly discussion leader must present a 10-minute summary of the text(s) read for each day's class and generate questions to facilitate class discussion. Students who sign up to share a week may divide duties as they agree upon with each other and the instructor.

-The *Research Paper* will be **due on Tuesday, December 8 at 11:59 PM, posted to the appropriate Turnitin folder on the course Blackboard page**. The final week of class will be a symposium in which students will make 10-minute presentations of their research with 5 minutes for questions. Students are expected to attend all sessions that week and to ask questions of their colleagues. There are deadlines to submit a topic, annotated bibliography, and abstract (all similarly submitted to Blackboard) over the course of the semester (see above). **Students must discuss their paper topics with the instructor by Thursday, October 15**. No extensions will be granted.

### Policies:

1. Late papers will lose a full letter grade per day and will not be accepted after four days beyond the due date.
2. Work will only be accepted for a grade if posted to the proper Turnitin dropbox; the instructor will not grade work submitted by email.
3. All student work must conform to University policies regarding academic honesty. Plagiarism may result in a failing grade for the assignment or course, and may include referral for disciplinary measures.

### Grading scale:

A 93-100	A- 90-92	B+ 87-89	B 83-86	B- 80-82	C+ 77-79
C 73-76	C- 70-72	D+ 67-69	D 63-66	D- 60-62	F 0-59

**Required Texts:**

\*Bold terms indicate how readings will be marked in the Schedule of Readings below.

-Johannes Bronkhorst, ***Karma*** (Univ. of Hawaii Press, 2011), ISBN: 978-0-8248-3591-0.  
(A .pdf file of this book is available on the course Blackboard [Bb] site.)

-All readings are on Blackboard (**Bb**) or are **e-books** available through the library website.

-Recommended Reading (if you need some background information on these traditions):

Gavin Flood, *An Introduction to Hinduism*, Cambridge UP, 1994.

Paul Dundas, *The Jains* 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Routledge, 2002.

Peter Harvey, *An Introduction to Buddhism*, Cambridge UP, 1990.

**Schedule of Readings and Class Meetings:**

Week 1: Aug. 25: What is “Karma”? What is “Ethics”? How do South Asian traditions, and we, think of them?

Introductions, Overview of course

Grad Session: Discussion of research interests and readings

Aug. 27: Karma, its meanings and traditions; Ethics in comparative perspective

Sign-up for discussion leaders

Reading: 1) *Karma*, Preface and Introduction, pp. xv-xxi;

2) Aristotle, Book I of *Nicomachean Ethics* (and editor’s introduction) (22 pp.) (Bb).

*Interrogating the Origins of Karma*

Week 2: Sep. 1: Vedic Origins of Karma?

Reading: 1) Tull, “Karma” from *The Hindu World* (up to p. 322)

2) *Rig Veda*, selected hymns

Grad Session: Discussion of Karma in Vedas and Upanisads

Reading: Tull, *The Vedic Origins of Karma*, Introduction, Chs. 1, 4 (e-book)

<http://fiu.catalog.fcla.edu/permalink.jsp?27FI021619820>

Sep. 3: Karma in the Upanisads (“Early Vedanta”)

Reading: 1) *Upanisads*, selected texts;

2) Olivelle, *Samnyasa Upanisads*, Ch. 2 “Renunciation and Society: The Inner Conflict of Tradition” (39 pp.), Ch. 3 “The Nature and Purpose of Renunciation” (24 pp.).

Week 3: Sep. 8: An Alternative History of Karma

Reading: 1) *Karma*, Chs. 1-3 (pp. 3-54);

2) *Ācāraṅga Sūtra*, selections.

Grad Session: Looking in depth at early karma theories

Reading: Bronkhorst, *Greater Magadha*, Pts. 1-2, selections.

Sep. 10: Karma in Early Jainism

Reading: 1) Selections from early Jain texts;

2) Video: Ellen Gough, “Enlightenment and Liberation in the *Acaranga Sutra*” (~40 mins.) Accessible by following this link:

<http://jainstudies.fiu.edu/online-lecture-series/>

Week 4: Sep. 15: Karma in Early Jainism, continued

Reading: Umasvāmi, *Tattvārtha Sūtra*;

Grad Session: Materialist and Mystical Jain Karma Theories  
Reading: K. Wiley, ESSAY ON JAIN KARMA THEORY  
Sep. 17: Kundakunda and Digambara karma theory  
Reading: Kundakunda, *Samayasāra*, selections

Week 5: Sep. 22  
Sep. 24

**Paper Topic Due Friday, Sep. 25 at 11:59 PM on Blackboard**

Week 6: Sep. 29:  
Oct. 1:

Week 7: Oct. 6:  
Oct. 8:

Week 8: Oct. 13:  
Oct. 15:

**Oct. 15 is the last day to consult with instructor about paper topics.**

Week 9: Oct. 20:

Oct. 22: NO CLASS—Instructor at Conference

**Annotated Bibliography Due Friday, Oct. 23 at 11:59 PM on Blackboard**

Week 10 (Oct. 27, 29)

Week 11 (Nov. 3, 5)

Week 12 (Nov. 10, 12)

**Title and Abstract Due Friday, Nov. 13 at 11:59 PM on Blackboard**

Week 13 (Nov. 17, 19)

Week 14 (Nov. 24, 26): NO CLASS—Instructor at Conference and Thanksgiving

Week 15 (Dec. 1, 3): Student Research Paper Symposium

Final Week of Instruction (i.e. the week formerly known as “Finals Week”):

**Final Research Paper due Tuesday, December 8 at 11:59 PM on Blackboard**

(No Final Exam)

Palitana as Vegetarian city <http://www.worldreligionnews.com/issues/jain-monk-hunger-strike-leads-vegetarian-city>

Recent Rajasthan court ruling that makes Sallekhana/Santhara illegal:

<http://www.dnaindia.com/india/report-rajasthan-high-court-holds-jain-practice-of-fast-unto-death-illegal-2113095> and <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/Jain-practice-of-Santhara-illegal-Rajasthan-HC/articleshow/48430004.cms> and

<http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/nagpur/Jain-bodies-cry-foul-over-Raj-HCs-Santhara-ruling/articleshow/48488970.cms>

Op-Ed on the ruling: <http://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/santhara-in-the-eyes-of-the-law/article7541803.ece?homepage=true>

and on santhara in general: William Dalrymple, “The Nun’s Tale” from *Nine Lives*.

and Tukol, Justice T.K., *Sallekhana Is Not Suicide*, LD Series, 1976.

#### *Reading List:*

Chapple, Christopher, *Karma and Creativity*, SUNY Press, 1986.

Glasesnapp, Helmuth von, *Jainism: An Indian Religion of Salvation*, tr., Motilal, 1999 [1925].

———, *The Doctrine of Karman in Jaina Philosophy*, Varanasi: PV Research Institute, 1942.

Jain, N.K. (Justice), “Ahimsa non-violence and Human Rights in Indian Culture: With Special Reference to Jainism,” pamphlet, 2006.

O’Flaherty, Wendy (Doniger), ed., *Karma and Rebirth in Classical Indian Traditions*, UC Press, 1980.

Ohira, Suzuko, *A Study of the Tattvarthasutra with Bhasya: With Special Reference to Authorship and Date*, LD Series, 1982.

Roy, Kaushik, *Hinduism and the Ethics of Warfare in South Asia: From Antiquity to the Present*, Cambridge UP, 2012.

Schubring, Walther, *Doctrine of the Jainas, Described after the old sources*, 2<sup>nd</sup> rev. ed., tr., Motilal, 2000.

Sukhlalji, Pt. *Essence of Jainism*, LD Series, 1988.