Topics in Political Thought (Comparative Political Theory)
POL485Y/2027Y
Fall 2018/Winter 2019

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Office hours: Wednesdays 2-4pm

Class Meetings: TBC, Thursdays, 2-4pm

Course Description:

Comparative Political Theory (CPT) is a growing subfield that is recognized not only as a “corrective” to the cultural specificity of the Western canon in political theory, but, increasingly, as an important contribution to learning in other fields, particularly in this globalized and interconnected world. CPT scholars study the political thought of non-Western cultural and religious traditions, exploring the ontological and epistemological assumptions that undergird differently situated political perspectives. In some cases, this includes explicitly “comparative” studies, either of thinkers in those traditions or with Western thinkers or concepts, but in other cases, CPT studies might be better understood as “interpretive” political theory.

CPT is an enterprise that contains the possibility of transformative encounters, but also the necessity of risk, either through the potential to destabilize one’s own views or to misrepresent perspectives from another tradition. CPT scholars adopt many different approaches, and one of the purposes of this course will be for students to evaluate the range of methodologies and position themselves within the field. An abiding concern in evaluating this subfield will be on the limits of mutual intelligibility and the possibility of an actual Gadamerian “fusion of horizons.” When conducting comparative projects one must be conscious of over-stating both similarity and difference, and an essential element of CPT is the tension that characterizes attempts to translate and re-present ideas in different cultural and linguistic contexts. In a new and growing field like this there will always be differences of opinion regarding approaches to research, and we will try to highlight the instances where scholars engage with each other, as well as the ways in which they draw on research and insights from other fields, making CPT a truly interdisciplinary endeavor.

Course Readings:

All course readings are available online, either as copyright-compliant postings on the course Quercus site or as links to the University of Toronto Libraries electronic collection. You are responsible for completing all readings by the dates indicated on the syllabus. The additional readings are optional for undergraduates but required for graduate students taking the course.

Course Requirements:

Class Participation (15%): The remaining portion of your grade is based on your overall participation in class discussions. I recognize that not everyone is comfortable speaking regularly in class. As such, I will take into consideration other forms of participation, including discussions with me during office hours and over email. However, it is very important that you attend class regularly and maintain contact with me in order to ensure that you are meeting my expectations regarding course participation.
**Class Discussant (20%):** Each student must sign up to be a discussant at four class sessions during the course of the year, with at least one session each semester. For each discussant session you are expected to read all assigned readings closely (it is recommended that you also read the additional readings) and write a 1,000-1,500 word critical response. This is **NOT** a summary of the reading, but should include questions about the reading that you wish to pose to the class, as well as your provisional responses to those questions. Each of these response papers must be posted to the course page **no later than 12pm the day before class.** These papers do not have to be fully developed essays, but they should demonstrate to me that you’ve prepared for the discussion and considered some of the implications of the reading(s). You do not have to prepare a formal presentation for class. Note that discussants are discussion **leaders;** I still expect all of you to have read the assigned readings, other students’ response papers and to be prepared to participate in our discussions.

**Methods Response Paper (15%, Due Nov 29):** Each student will write a 2,000-3,000 word paper in which they critically assess some of the different methodological approaches to CPT and situate themselves within the field, in preparation for the final paper. Please note that this is a preparatory thought piece, and I expect your positions to change over the course of the year, so you will not be penalized if the final paper adopts a different approach. During the first semester, one week will be dedicated to individual meetings in which we talk about your methods response paper, your annotated bibliography and your plans for the final paper. (**NB: Graduate students will be expected to write a 3,000-5,000 word paper.)

**Annotated Bibliography (10%, Due Feb 14):** Each student will create an annotated bibliography (minimum 10 sources) that will serve as the basis for her or his final paper. An annotated bibliography is a list of relevant sources (books, chapters, or articles) along with a brief summary of each. Because comparative political theory is an inherently interdisciplinary enterprise, these sources should come from multiple disciplines, including (but not limited to) anthropology, history, religious studies, and area studies. The annotated bibliography does not have to be the final bibliography for your paper, but it should be a jumping off point. (**NB: Graduate students must have a minimum of 15 sources.)

**Final Paper Proposal (10%, Due Mar 7):** Each student will write a 1,000-1,500 word proposal for their final paper. This proposal should include your thesis as well as a rough outline of the paper itself. You will also be responsible for providing at least a page of comments on the proposal of one other student (Due Mar 14).

**Final Paper (30%, Due Apr 4):** Each student will write a 6,000-8,000 word paper in which they critically explore a question or topic from the perspective of or relating to a non-Western cultural or religious tradition of thought. I do not expect you to become an expert in any given tradition during this course, so you will have to rely on secondary literature and (if available) translations of primary texts in writing this paper. In part, this is a research paper, where you provide some background on the philosophical underpinnings of a given tradition. However, it is also a “thinking” paper, in which you attempt to draw from another culture’s engagement with politics to reflect on a political question that spans cultural boundaries. I suggest that you begin thinking about topics and sources for the paper relatively early in the semester. (**NB: Graduate students will be expected to write a 9,000-10,000 word paper.)

**Course Policies:**

**Late Work/Make-up Exams**
If you are unable to complete an assignment by its scheduled date for a valid reason, you must inform me before the due date and we will make alternate arrangements. All late work will be penalized at a rate of **2% per day of lateness.**
Accessibility Policy
Students with diverse learning styles and needs are welcome in this course. In particular, if you have a
disability or health consideration that may require accommodations, please feel free to approach me
and/or the Accessibility Services Office as soon as possible. The Accessibility Services staff are available
by appointment to assess specific needs, provide referrals and arrange appropriate accommodations.

Attendance Policy
You are responsible for all of the information that is presented and discussed in class. If you have to miss
class for any reason, please notify me in advance. I also recommend that you ask someone in class to
share their notes for that day with you, since I will not be able to provide you with an update on what we
covered in class.

Grading Policy
I will be happy to discuss any grades that I give on assignments. I will do my best to communicate the
criteria I’ll be grading on in advance but please ask questions if you are confused. If you feel that I have
made an error, you can take it up with me through the following procedure (Please note that I will only
discuss issues with grading during the 7 days after the assignment has been handed back):
1. Wait a minimum of 24 hours after receiving your grade to contact me.
2. Put in writing the reasons why you are dissatisfied with the grade.
3. Bring the exam and your written statement to my office hours and we will
discuss the grade.

Academic Integrity:
Cheating and plagiarism are offenses against academic integrity and are subject to disciplinary action by
the university. Plagiarism is copying someone else’s work and presenting it as your own (by not
attributing it to its true source). If you are uncertain about what constitutes plagiarism, please ask me. I
take this matter very seriously and will NOT tolerate plagiarism. Let me stress again: if you are unsure
about how to properly cite an idea, please ask me. Your Methods Essay, Annotated Bibliography and
Final Paper will all be submitted using turnitin.com; if you would like to request an alternate method of
submission, please let me know and we can arrange this.

Course Readings:

Week 1 (Sept 6): Origins

Required Readings
70-76; 87-114)

Additional Readings
Thought and Practice. New York: Routledge. (**Chapter 2: Conceptualizing Culture: "I, We, and the
Other"**)
2 (2): 249-257.

Week 2 (Sept 13): Scope of the Field (Part I)

Required Readings

Additional Readings

Week 3 (Sept 20): Scope of the Field (Part II)

Required Readings

Additional Readings

Week 4 (Sept 27): Methods of Comparison (Part I)

Required Readings

Additional Readings

Week 5 (Oct 4): Methods of Comparison (Part II)

Required Readings

Additional Readings

Week 6 (Oct 11): Indigenous Political Thought

Required Readings


Additional Readings


**Week 7 (Oct 18): Individual meetings to discuss Methods Response Paper and Final Paper topics**

**Week 8 (Oct 25): Buddhist Political Thought (Part I)**

**Required Readings**

*Agganna Sutta*

*Cakkavatti Sutta*


Additional Readings

**Week 9 (Nov 1): Buddhist Political Thought (Part II)**

**Required Readings**


Additional Readings

**NB: No class on Nov 8 during Reading Week**

**Week 10 (Nov 15): Hindu/Indian Political Thought**

**Required Readings**


Additional Readings

Week 11 (Nov 22): Islamic Political Thought

Required Readings
Milani, Milad. 2017. Sufi Political Thought. New York, NY: Routledge/ Taylor & Francis Group (**Chapters 1, 2, 5**)

Additional Readings

Week 12 (Nov 29): Confucian Political Thought

Required Readings

Additional Readings
El Amine, Loubne. 2015. Classical Confucian political thought: a new interpretation. (remaining chapters)

DUE: Methods Response Paper

**WINTER TERM**

Week 1 (Jan 10): Encounters with the Other

Required Readings

Additional Readings 

Week 2 (Jan 17): Exploring Cross-cultural Intelligibility 

**NB: We will have to reschedule this class, as I will be away**

Required Readings 

Additional Readings 
Browers, Michaelle. 2006. Democracy and civil society in Arab political thought: Transcultural possibilities. Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press. (**Chapter 8: Conclusion: Transcultural Possibilities**) 

Week 3 (Jan 24): Cross-culture/Within-culture 

Required Readings 
*Appiah, K. Anthony, “Akan and Euro-American Concepts of the Person” 
*Adeofe, Leke, “Personal Identity in African Metaphysics” 
*Masolo, D.A., “The Concept of the Person in Luo Modes of Thought” 

Additional Readings 
*Sumner, Claude. “The Proverb and Oral Society” 
*Appiah, K. Anthony. “Ethnic Identity as a Political Resource” 

Week 4 (Jan 31): Language & Translation: Concepts 

Required Readings 

**Additional Readings**
Michaele Browers. 2006. *Democracy and Civil Society in Arab Political Thought.* (**Chapter 3: The Politics of Translating Civil Society into Arabic**)  

**Week 5 (Feb 7): Language & Translation: Context**

**Required Readings**

**Additional Readings**

**Week 6 (Feb 14): Space, Time, Movement**

**Required Readings**
McWilliams, Susan. 2014. *Traveling back: toward a global political theory*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. (**Chapter 1: Instructions for Traveling**)  

**Additional Readings**
McWilliams, Susan. 2014. *Traveling back: toward a global political theory*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. (remaining chapters)

**DUE: Annotated Bibliography**

**Please Note: No class on Feb 21 for Reading Week**

**Week 7 (Feb 28): De-parochializing Political Theory (Part I)**

**Required Readings**

**Additional Readings**  

**Week 8 (Mar 7): De-parochializing Political Theory (Part II)**

**Required Readings**  

**Additional Readings**  

**DUE: Final Paper Proposal**  

**Week 9 (Mar 14): Creolizing Political Theory**

**Required Readings**  

**Additional Readings**  

**DUE: Comments on another Final Paper Proposal**

**Week 10 (Mar 21): Non-human Political Perspectives**

**Required Readings**  

**Additional Readings**

**Week 11 (Mar 28): Manifestos!**

**Required Readings**
Founding proclamation of the Youth League for Revitalizing Buddhism (April 5, 1931)
Sixth Declaration of the Selva Lacandona, Zapatista Army of National Liberation.

Communist Manifesto

**Additional Readings**

**Week 12 (Apr 4): Review and Student Presentations**

**DUE: Final Paper**