Comparative Political Theory (CPT) is a growing subfield that has developed 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 (and sometimes, marginalized or subaltern traditions within the Western canon and Western geographical spaces). They pay particular attention to 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 questioning the limits of mutual intelligibility and the possibility and utility 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 and necessary self-reflection 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 critically 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.

As it is impossible to cover several traditions of political thought in sufficient depth in a short time, this course will include attention to diverse methods and aims of CPT work as well as more focused primary source readings in Buddhist, Islamic and Indigenous political thought.

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.
Class Participation (20%): This 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; we will also have occasional in-class writing periods and small group discussions. 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 (30%): Each student must sign up to be a discussant at three class sessions during the course of the semester, with at least one session prior to Week 7. For each discussant session you are expected to read all assigned readings closely (I recommend 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 your analysis of one or more of the readings, questions about the readings 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 on Quercus 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, but you should be a particularly active participant on days when you’ve written a Class Discussant response. Note that discussants are discussion leaders; I still expect all of you to have read the assigned readings, other students’ discussant papers and to be prepared to participate in our discussions every week. I also suggest that you try to plan some of your discussant weeks strategically, to align with the topics of your other assignments.

Methods Response Paper (20%, Due Oct 10): You will write a 2,000-3,000 word paper in which you critically assess one or more of the different methodological approaches to CPT and situate yourself within the field. (**NB: Graduate students will be expected to write a 3,000-5,000 word paper.)

Annotated Bibliography (10%, Due Nov 7): You will create an annotated bibliography (minimum 10 sources) focused on either a particular tradition or a topic related to CPT. This could include a topic commonly addressed within the Western canon, but addressed from different perspectives. An annotated bibliography is a list of relevant sources (books, chapters, articles or other materials) along with a brief (original) summary of each. Because comparative political theory is an inherently interdisciplinary enterprise, these sources can come from multiple disciplines, including (but not limited to) anthropology, history, religious studies, and area studies. (**NB: Graduate students must have a minimum of 15 sources.)

Exegetical Essay (20%, Due Nov 28): You will choose a short primary source text of political thought either written from a non-Western tradition or a marginalized perspective within the Western tradition and write a critical, interpretive essay of 2,000-3,000 words. This should be more than simply a summary of the author’s arguments and should reflect your own understanding of its insights and relevance. I do not expect this to be an exhaustive analysis, but you will need to develop your own reading of the text through engaging with additional contextual and secondary interpretive sources. Ideally your annotated bibliography feeds into the exegetical essay. (**NB: Graduate students will be expected to write a 3,000-5,000 word essay.)

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 unexcused late work will be penalized at a rate of 2% per day of lateness. Assignments submitted more than 1 full week late will not be
accepted, unless excused in advance through accommodation, illness or other documented reason. Please contact me in advance if you expect you will be late submitting an assignment.

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. I know that this formal process can be slow, so I want to encourage you to come to me in advance to talk about any accommodations you might need or challenges you might be facing; I’m always willing to work with students to help facilitate your participation and success in this course.

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 a full 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 assignment and your written statement to 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. I expect university students to know proper citation methods, styles and norms. Your written assignments other than class discussant responses will all be submitted using turnititin.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 5): Introduction

Required Readings
Hpo Hlaing. 1979 [1878]. Rajadhammasangaha. U Htin Fatt (ed.), L.E. Bagshawe (trans). [**Pages 5-8; 70-76; 87-114]

Additional Readings
Week 2 (Sept 12): Encounters with the Other

Required Readings

Additional Readings

Week 3 (Sept 19): What is Comparative Political Theory?

Required Readings

Additional Readings

Week 4 (Sept 26): Methods and Comparison (Part I)

Required Readings

Additional Readings

Week 5 (Oct 3): Methods and Comparison (Part II)

Required Readings

Additional Readings

Week 6 (Oct 10): Religion, Morality & Legitimacy in Buddhist Political Thought

Required Readings
Agganna Sutta (transl. Collins)
Cakkavatti Sutta (transl. Collins)

Additional Readings

Week 7 (Oct 17): Religion, Morality & Legitimacy in Islamic Political Thought

Required Readings

Additional Readings
Week 8 (Oct 24): Language & Translation

Required Readings
Michaele Browers. 2006. Democracy and Civil Society in Arab Political Thought. [**Chapter 3: The Politics of Translating Civil Society into Arabic]

Additional Readings

Week 9 (Oct 31): Recognition, Refusal & Resurgence in Indigenous Political Thought

Required Readings

Additional Readings

(**No class on Nov 7 due to Reading Week)

Week 10 (Nov 14): De-Parochializing Political Theory

Required Readings

Additional Readings
Week 11 (Nov 21): Creolizing Political Theory

Required Readings

Additional Readings

Week 12 (Nov 28): Non-Human Political Perspectives

Required Readings

Additional Readings