

Topics in Political Theory (Global Politics and Global Political Thought)
POL381H
Winter 2021

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Virtual office hours: Wednesdays 12:30-2:30pm, or by appointment

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Class Meetings: Blackboard Collaborate, Mondays, 2-4pm

Course Description:

As we seek to understand political dynamics across the globe, theory from the Western canon is not the only relevant or useful resource. This course will examine three pressing contemporary topics (environmental justice and the natural world; race and identity politics; and international and cosmopolitan visions) through the theoretical and analytical lenses provided by the political thought of non-Western cultural traditions and from particular marginalized identity perspectives. In doing so, we will consider the productive outputs and potential limitations of theoretical communication across cultures, discussing whether the emergence of a global political thought is possible or even desirable.

Many of the readings in the course will be primary source texts of political thought, although virtually none of them come from the Western canon. Some readings also address *practices and affective conditions*, and the political norms or insights they generate. Students will be expected to engage with unfamiliar contexts and concepts, reflecting on the tension between situating particular ideas in specific cultural spaces and adapting them cross-culturally, in more universalizing ways. To do this, we will adopt some of the methods from Comparative Political Theory (CPT), a growing subfield that has developed not only as a “corrective” to the cultural specificity of the Western canon, but, increasingly, as an important interdisciplinary contribution to learning in a globalized and interconnected world.

We will pay particular attention to the ontological and epistemological assumptions that undergird differently situated political perspectives, taking an “interpretive” approach to engagement with these ideas—including when these frames are problematized or rejected. This undertaking 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. An abiding concern will be on questioning the limits of mutual intelligibility; we must be conscious of over-stating both similarity *and* difference, and the course is designed to encourage self-reflection and awareness of positionality and its effects as a regular part of political theoretical practice.

[Please note: while course assignments and delivery/participation methods may seem extensive, I have reduced the number of required readings each week to account for additional time watching lectures. Overall, the number and type of assignments is designed to lower the stakes for any given assignment and to give you an opportunity to practice and develop a range of important skills, including some that are often undervalued in academic settings. The many modes of delivery and participation are intended to allow you to engage with course materials on your own time as much as possible, and to provide multiple pathways for doing so, knowing that some students will face challenges in an online-only platform and that some students are not necessarily comfortable participating in large group settings. Please feel free to talk to me if you have questions or concerns about the course design or assignment structure.]

Course Readings:

All required and additional 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 but strongly encouraged. I also strongly encourage you to look at several of the class discussant responses each week as they are posted by your fellow students.

Course Requirements:

Class Participation (10%): Recognizing the challenge of robust participation in a fully online setting, this part of your grade will be calculated through the equal weight of three components:

1. The completion of short, occasional “in-class” writing responses, usually assigned in a pre-recorded lecture, with responses submitted on Quercus.
2. Participation in the weekly small group discussions from Weeks 4-11.
3. Other forms of in-class or online engagement, including: direct participation during synchronous full-class discussions (by audio, video or chat); during synchronous small group discussions; commenting in weekly open discussion threads on Quercus; or talking with me about course ideas over email or during virtual office hours.

I know that not everyone is comfortable speaking regularly in class, so I hope this range of possible methods provides an option that works for you. I still expect you to attend class regularly and maintain contact with me in order to ensure that you are meeting my expectations regarding course participation.

Class Discussant (15%): Each student must sign up to be a discussant at **three** class sessions during the course of the term. (Sign-up will be online and must be completed by the second class.) 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 500-800 word critical response. This is **NOT** a summary of the readings, but should include personal reflection on what the readings make you think about and could include questions about the readings that you wish to pose to the class, as well as your provisional responses to those questions. These responses must be posted to the course page in the appropriate “Discussions” thread **no later than 11:59pm the day before class**. These papers do not have to be fully developed essays, nor do they need to address all of the readings, 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 and a selection of other students’ discussant responses and to be prepared to participate in our discussions. Discussant responses and the questions and ideas they generate will form part of the framework for our synchronous all-class discussions online during the assigned class period. Discussant responses will be graded on a scale of “check-plus” (87), “check” (75) and “check-minus” (65). Summaries of the readings, without personal reflection or interpretive engagement, will be scored no higher than “check.”

Small Group Reflections (10%): During Weeks 4-11, students will be randomly assigned to small groups of 4-6 members, which will rotate every 2-3 weeks. Each class session will include some time in these small groups to discuss the readings and respond to specific prompts that I will provide. Each student will write **two** short reflections on the dynamics and process of the small group discussions, in response to a separate prompt that I will provide (different from the weekly question prompts). These will be informal, personal reflections designed to get you to think about how knowledge is generated, the impact of positionality and personal experience on knowledge production, and how different discussion formats can facilitate learning and understanding. Students will write reflections for the two sub-topic periods that they have **not** chosen for their second essay. Each of these reflections must be posted to the course page **no later than 11:59pm on the last class day for the period (Weeks 6, 8 or 11)**. I encourage you to think about submitting these earlier than the deadline, as you are allowed to reflect on small group work from

any or all of the weeks in a particular topic. Reflections will also be graded on a scale of “check-plus” (87), “check” (75) and “check-minus” (65).

Essay Questions (20% first essay, 25% second essay): Each student will submit essays of 1,500-2,000 words responding to given prompts **two** times throughout the term. All students will respond to the first essay option (**due on Quercus no later than 11:59pm on Week 4**) and can then choose another essay option (**due on Quercus no later than 11:59pm on Weeks 6, 8 or 11**). (Sign-up will be online and must be completed by the second class.) For these papers, I expect a level of organization and clarity of argument that is *different* than the more informal or speculative reflection that characterizes the Class Discussant responses. You will be required to cite something from the relevant readings (and you are welcome to use additional sources); you may use any standard citation style but you must be consistent. We will provide more guidance on essay writing in a mini-workshop during Week 3’s class.

***Please note: Between the Small Group Reflections and the Essays, every student will have something due Weeks 4, 6, 8 and 11. Also note that Class Discussant Responses are due by 11:59pm the day before class, so I can have time to incorporate your ideas into our class discussion. All other assignments are due by 11:59pm the day of class.*

Final Exam (20%): The final will be an open book, take-home exam that is a mixture of 1) short answer explanation questions that ask you to apply course concepts to topics we have not explicitly studied or ask you to reflect on the implications of some of our readings in connection with your own experiences and 2) longer comparative and exploratory essays that invite you to put the authors we have read in conversation in creative ways. It will draw on all the required readings from the course but you will have a choice of which questions to answer and I will provide a review guide several weeks in advance. The final will take place during the April exam period and, although it is intended to be completed in 2 hours, you will have 48 hours to complete it, to take into consideration time differences or other impediments.

Course Policies:

Delivery/Participation Methods:

- Readings (available through Quercus; to be done in advance of the scheduled class meeting)
- Reading Questions (*optional*; posted weekly on Quercus; designed to help guide your study and provide confidence that you are understanding the main arguments from each reading)
- Background Lecture (short, pre-recorded lecture; posted occasionally on Quercus; providing context and background on each author or set of ideas in the readings; ideally watch/listen to this lecture *before* you do the readings)
- Class Lecture (longer, pre-recorded lecture(s); posted weekly on Quercus; providing an overview of the readings and their arguments; ideally watch/listen to this lecture *after* you do the readings but *before* the scheduled class meeting)
- Short Writes (counting for participation and contributing to our in-class discussions, occasionally assigned *in the weekly lectures*)
- Class Discussant Posts (assigned short response papers—described above—that are posted publicly on Quercus to share students’ reactions to and analysis of the readings; I will read all of these in advance of the scheduled class meeting and use them to plan our group discussion)
- Open Discussion Thread (*optional*; for posting brief questions, ideas, responses or concerns about the readings that you’d like to share with classmates and incorporate into our group discussion)
- Small Group Discussions (after meeting together on Bb Collaborate during the scheduled class time, we will go to small breakout rooms; I will provide 2-3 discussion questions each week to guide 20-30 minutes of small group discussion)
- All-Class Discussions (after the small group time, we will reconvene on Bb Collaborate to share insights from the small groups and discuss further implications of the readings)

- Office Hours (held virtually for 2 hours a week, on Bb Collaborate; also available by appointment via Skype or another platform)
- Announcements (reminders of assignments due, updates on course plans or changes)

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 that is not excused in advance 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

I do my best to welcome students with diverse learning styles and needs 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 am also open to hearing about ways in which the course environment or structure might unintentionally exclude or disadvantage certain people and will work to respond to any such concerns.

I'm always willing to work with **any** student to help facilitate your participation and success in this course, whether you have a formal accommodation granted or not. I recognize that a range of other circumstances might affect your ability to engage fully with course expectations. Please feel free to come to me to discuss any difficulties you are experiencing and we can work together to address them.

Attendance Policy

I expect you to be engaged with course matters as much as you are able, including doing the weekly readings, listening to pre-recorded lectures, and participating in discussions during the scheduled class time. I also recognize that your ability to access materials or participate in discussions might fluctuate, due to technological limitations, environmental stresses or other factors. If you're having trouble keeping up, please get in touch with me and we can work together to find a suitable way forward.

While I recognize that you might be dealing with technological challenges that prevent you from participating with audio or video, *I want to strongly encourage students to use audio and video for our synchronous meetings as much as possible*. The ability to see and interact with each other plays an important role in facilitating open and productive discussions and the creation of a learning community, especially under these conditions.

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/exam and your written statement to my office hours to discuss.

For assignments graded by the Grader, the same policy applies, and *your first submission to discuss a grade should be to the Grader*. If you are still dissatisfied with the resolution, you may contact me, providing the previous communication with the Grader and a further explanation of why you think the assigned grade was not appropriate.

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. Otherwise, I expect university students to know proper citation methods, styles and norms. Your Essays 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 (Jan 11): Introduction

Required Readings

Christian, B., 1987. "The race for theory." *Cultural Critique*, (6), pp.51-63.

Mbembe, Achille Joseph, 2016. "Decolonizing the University: New Directions." *Arts and Humanities in Higher Education: An International Journal of Theory, Research and Practice*, 15(1), pp.29-45.

Additional Reading

Tully, J., 2016. "Deparochializing political theory and beyond: A dialogue approach to comparative political thought." *Journal of World Philosophies*, 1(1).

Week 2 (Jan 18): Methods & Promise of Comparative Political Theory

Required Readings

Godrej, F. 2009. "Towards a Cosmopolitan Political Thought: The Hermeneutics of Interpreting the Other." *Polity*, 41 (2): pp. 135–65

Williams, Melissa S., and Mark E. Warren. 2014. "A Democratic Case for Comparative Political Theory." *Political Theory*. Volume 42, Issue 1, pp. 26 – 57.

Additional Reading

Haraway, D., 1988. "Situated knowledges: The science question in feminism and the privilege of partial perspective." *Feminist studies*, 14(3), pp.575-599.

Week 3 (Jan 25): Risks of Comparative Political Theory/Mini Writing Workshop

Required Readings

Idris, Murad. 2016. "Political Theory and the Politics of Comparison." *Political Theory*. [**pp.1-6]

Watts, Vanessa. 2013. "Indigenous Place—Thought and Agency amongst Humans and Non-Humans (First Woman and Sky Woman Go on a European Tour!)." *DIES: Decolonization, Indigeneity, Education and Society* 2(1): 20–34.

Additional Reading

Povinelli, E.A., 2001. "Radical worlds: The anthropology of incommensurability and inconceivability." *Annual review of anthropology*, 30(1), pp.319-334.

Week 4 (Feb 1): Environment, Justice and the Natural World I (Indigenous Views)

Required Readings

Ladner, K.L., 2003. "Governing within an ecological context: creating an alternative understanding of blackfoot governance." *Studies in Political Economy*, 70(1), 125-152.

McGregor, Deborah. 2018. "Reconciliation and environmental justice." *Journal of Global Ethics*, 14:2, 222-231.

Additional Reading

Simpson, L.B., 2014. "Land as pedagogy: Nishnaabeg intelligence and rebellious transformation." *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society*, 3(3), pp.1-25.
(**First Essay Question due date)

Week 5 (Feb 8): Environment, Justice and the Natural World II (Buddhist Tree Ordination)

Required Readings

Keomahavong, Nick. 2020 ["The Buddhist Way of Protecting the Forest: Tree Ordination."](#) *YouTube*, Nov 19.

Darlington, S.M., 2007. "The good Buddha and the fierce spirits: protecting the northern Thai forest." *Contemporary Buddhism*, 8(2), pp.169-185.

Sivaraksa, S., 2005. *Socially Engaged Buddhism*. BR Publishing Corporation. [**Chapter 18: Restore the Earth]

Additional Reading

Tannenbaum, N., 2000. "Protest, tree ordination, and the changing context of political ritual." *Ethnology*, 39(2).

****Please Note: No class on Feb 15 for Reading Week****

Week 6 (Feb 22): Race, Identity and Political Thought I (White Supremacy & The Racial Contract)

Required Readings

Mills, Charles W. 1997. *The racial contract*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press. [**Introduction and Chapter 1: Overview]

bell hooks. 1989. *Talking Back: thinking feminist, thinking black*. Boston: South End Press. [**Chapter 16: overcoming white supremacy: a comment]

Additional Reading

Moreton-Robinson, A., 2004. "Whiteness, epistemology and Indigenous representation." *Whitening Race: Essays in Social and Cultural Criticism*. (Ed. Aileen Moreton-Robinson) Canberra, ACT: Aboriginal Studies Press.

(**Second Essay Question/Small Group Reflection due date)

Week 7 (Mar 1): Race, Identity and Political Thought II (Blackness and Whiteness)

Required Readings

Sharpe, C., 2016. *In the wake: On blackness and being*. Duke University Press. [**Chapter 1: The Wake]

Perry, Imani. 2020. ["Racism is Terrible. Blackness is Not."](#) *The Atlantic*, June 15.

DiAngelo, Robin. 2011. "White Fragility". *The International Journal of Critical Pedagogy*. 3(3): 54-70.

Additional Reading

Perea, Juan F. 2013. "The Black/White Binary Paradigm of Race." in *Critical race theory: the cutting edge*. Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic (ed.), Philadelphia, Pa: Temple University Press, 3rd edition.

Week 8 (Mar 8): Race, Identity and Political Thought III (Mestizaje in Latin America)

Required Readings

Vasconcelos, José, and Didier Tisdell Jaén. 1997. *The cosmic race: a bilingual edition*. Baltimore, Md: Johns Hopkins University Press. [**pp.3-40]

Anzaldúa, Gloria. 1999. *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books. [**Chapter 7: *La conciencia de la mestiza/Towards a New Consciousness*]

Additional Reading

Moreno Figueroa, Mónica G. and Emiko Saldívar Tanaka. 2016. "'We are Not Racists, we are Mexicans': Privilege, Nationalism and Post-Race Ideology in Mexico." *Critical Sociology* 42 (4-5): 515-533.
(**Third Essay Question/Small Group Reflection due date)

Week 9 (Mar 15): International and Cosmopolitan Visions I (Afropolitanism)

Required Readings

Selasi, Taiye. 2005. "[Bye Bye Babar.](#)" *The Lip*, March 3.
Mbembe, Achille. 2007. "Afropolitanism." In *Africa Remix: Contemporary Art of a Continent*. (Edited by Njami Simon and Lucy Durán) Johannesburg: Johannesburg Art Gallery, 26–30.
Eze, Chielozona. 2014. "Rethinking African culture and identity: the Afropolitan Model." *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, 26:2, 234-247.

Additional Reading

Gehrmann, S., 2016. "Cosmopolitanism with African roots. Afropolitanism's ambivalent mobilities." *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, 28(1), pp.61-72.

Week 10 (Mar 22): International and Cosmopolitan Visions II (Kang Youwei's "One-World")

Required Reading

Kang, Youwei. 2007 [1913/1935]. *Ta t'ung Shu: The One-World Philosophy of K'ang Yu-wei*. (Transl. Laurence G Thompson) London: Allen & Unwin. [**Parts I, II (to p.104), VIII, IX, X]

Additional Reading

Wang, Ban. 2017. "The Moral Vision in Kang Youwei's *Book of the Great Community*." *Chinese Visions of World Order: Tianxia, Culture, and World Politics*. (Ed. Ban Wang) Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press.

Week 11 (Mar 29): International and Cosmopolitan Visions III (Bandung's Legacy)/Exam Review

Required Readings

"President Sukarno's Opening Speech, Afro-Asian Conference, Bandung, 18-24 April 1955"
"Final Communique of the Asian-African Conference, Bandung, 24 April 1955"
Chakrabarty, D., 2005. "Legacies of Bandung: Decolonisation and the politics of culture." *Economic and Political Weekly*, pp.4812-4818.

Additional Readings

Pasha, M.K., 2013. "The "Bandung Impulse" and international relations." *Postcolonial theory and international relations: A critical introduction* (Ed. Sanjay Seth) New York: Routledge.
(**Fourth Essay Question/Small Group Reflection due date)