

Topics in Political Theory (Global Politics and Global Political Thought)
POL381H
Winter 2023

Professor: Matthew J Walton
Sidney Smith Hall Rm. 3107
Email: matthew.walton@utoronto.ca
Office hours: Wednesdays 11am-12pm (on Zoom); Thursdays 11am-12pm (in person); or by appointment

Grader: Miko Zeldes-Roth (m.zeldesroth@mail.utoronto.ca)

Class Meetings: Mondays, 2-4pm, OI 2212

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 desirable or even possible.

Many of the readings in the course will be primary source texts of political thought, although 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 a distinctive 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, 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. The many modes of delivery and participation are intended to allow you to engage with course materials through multiple pathways, knowing that some students will face technological or other impediments and that some 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.]

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%): This part of your grade will be calculated through the equal weight of three components:

1. The completion of occasional “Short Write” responses, usually assigned on Quercus, with responses submitted there as well.
2. Attendance at and participation in the weekly small group discussions from Weeks 4-12.
3. Other forms of in-class or online engagement, including: direct participation during full-class discussions; commenting in weekly open discussion threads on Quercus; or talking with me about course ideas over email or during 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 (10%): Each student must sign up to be a discussant at **two** 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. Each of these response papers should 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 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 group discussions in class. 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 4-12, students will be randomly assigned to small groups of 4-6 members, which will rotate every 3 weeks. Each class session will include 25-30 minutes in these small groups to discuss the readings and respond to specific prompts that I will provide. Each student will write **two** 300-500 word reflections on the dynamics and process of the small group discussions, in response to a separate prompt provided by the professor. These will be informal, personal reflections designed to get you to think about how knowledge is generated and how different discussion formats can facilitate learning and understanding. Students will write reflections for the sub-topic period that they have **not** chosen for their second essay (so, Week 7 or Week 10). *All* students will write a reflection due Week 12 (covering Weeks 10-12 of small group meetings). Each of these reflections should be posted to the course page **no later than 11:59pm on the last class day for the period (Week 7, Week 10, Week 12)**. 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 7 or 10**). (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 mini-workshops during class Weeks 2 and 3.

***PLEASE NOTE: Between the Small Group Reflections and the Essays, every student will have something due Weeks 4, 7, 10 and 12. 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 (25%): 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 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 no less than 24 hours to complete it, to take into consideration time differences or other impediments.

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 recognizing and understanding some of the main arguments from each reading)
- 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)
- Class Lecture (each class will begin with a brief, and sometimes more interactive, lecture, introducing the readings and thinkers and their contexts, laying out a framework for discussion)
- Small Group Discussions (beginning Week 4; in class, after a brief introductory lecture, we will split into groups; I will provide 2-3 discussion questions each week to guide 25-30 minutes of small group discussion)
- All-Class Discussions (during lecture and after the small group time, we will reconvene to share insights from the small groups and discuss further implications of the readings)
- Office Hours (held in-person and virtually for 2 hours a week, as indicated above; also available by appointment via Zoom or another platform)
- Announcements (reminders of assignments due, updates on course plans or changes)

Course Policies:

Late Work/Make-up Exams

Please plan to submit your work on time and do your best to meet the set deadlines. Cultivating strong time-management skills is an important part of your university education. At the same time, I know that life can intervene, and this year remains just as uncertain as the last. My goal is to help you learn the

materials and complete the assignments to the best of your ability, even if this takes a few extra days. If you find yourself needing an extension, please reach out as soon as possible. In requesting an extension, please include:

1. The reason for your request (but please note that you are not required to disclose medical or other personal information in detail).
2. A proposal for a new deadline.
3. Additional documentation (like a doctor's note) is not required.

All late work that is not excused in advance will be penalized at a rate of **2% per day of lateness**. I guarantee that I will give every request serious consideration. Your success in this course and your personal well-being are both important to me.

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 attending and participating in class discussions. 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.

Grading Policy

I will be happy to discuss any grades given 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 there is an error in grading, you can take it up 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 an online plagiarism detection tool; 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 9): 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 16): 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 23): Risks of Comparative Political Theory

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.

Rollo, T., 2021. "Back to the rough ground: Textual, oral and enactive meaning in comparative political theory." *European Journal of Political Theory*, 20(3), pp.379-397.

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 (Jan 30): 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 6): 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).

Week 6 (Feb 13): Environment, Justice and the Natural World III (Gandhian Approaches)

Required Readings

- Shiva, V., 2006. *Earth democracy: Justice, sustainability and peace*. Zed Books. [**Introduction: Principles of Earth Democracy; Chapter Four: Earth Democracy in Action]
- Sanford, Whitney. 2013. “Gandhi’s Agrarian Legacy: Practicing Food, Justice, and Sustainability in India.” *Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature and Culture*, 7(1): 65–87.

Additional Reading

- Godrej, F., 2016. “Culture and Difference: Non-western approaches to defining environmental issues.” *The Oxford Handbook of Environmental Political Theory*, (Ed. T. Gabrielson, C. Hall, JM Meyer, & D. Schlosberg), pp.39-56.

****Please Note: No class on Feb 20 for Reading Week****

Week 7 (Feb 27): 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]
- hooks, bell. 1989. *Talking Back: thinking feminist, thinking black*. Boston: South End Press. [**Chapter 16: overcoming white supremacy: a comment]

Additional Reading

- Melamed, Jodi. 2015. “Racial Capitalism.” *Critical Ethnic Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 1, pp. 76-85.
(Second Essay Question/Small Group Reflection due date)**

Week 8 (Mar 6): 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 9 (Mar 13): Race, Identity and Political Thought III (Asian Racialization Dynamics)

Required Readings

- Kim, C.J., 1999. "The racial triangulation of Asian Americans." *Politics & society*, 27(1), pp.105-138.
- Kim, N.Y., 2022. "Globalizing racial triangulation: including the people and nations of color on which White supremacy depends." *Politics, Groups, and Identities*, 10(3), pp.468-474.
- Li, Y. and Nicholson Jr, H.L., 2021. "When "model minorities" become "yellow peril"—Othering and the racialization of Asian Americans in the COVID-19 pandemic." *Sociology Compass*, 15(2), p.e12849.

Additional Reading

- Au, W., 2022. "Asian American racialization, racial capitalism, and the threat of the model minority." *Review of Education, Pedagogy, and Cultural Studies*, pp.1-25.

Week 10 (Mar 20): 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.

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

Week 11 (Mar 27): International and Cosmopolitan Visions II (K'ang Yu-wei's "One-World")

Required Reading

- K'ang, Yu-wei. 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 12 (Apr 3): International and Cosmopolitan Visions III (Non-Human Relations)

Required Readings

- Tsing, Anna, 2010. "Arts of Inclusion, or How to Love a Mushroom." *Manoa*, 22(2), pp.191–203.
- Tsing, Anna, 2012. "Unruly Edges: Mushrooms as Companion Species." *Environmental Humanities*, 1, pp.141–154.

(Second Small Group Reflection due date)**