Outline of Course Content

Given today’s tendency, within some spheres of academic and broader civic consciousness, toward a decided skepticism for—if not vigorous opposition to—parochial perspectives on political life, it is unsurprising that the past couple of decades or so have seen the burgeoning of a field of inquiry known as ‘comparative political theory’. Broadly speaking, this emergent field might be regarded as seeking to “juxtapose non-Western political ideas with existing Western understandings of the political” [Hassan Bashir, Europe and the Eastern Other: Comparative Perspectives on Politics, Religion, and Culture Before the Enlightenment (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2014), p. 15]. (While the last word of the phrase, ‘comparative political theory’, is sometimes rendered as ‘thought’—as the present course title elects to do, for various reasons that we will explore—the abbreviation CPT has become widely used for either variant). Moreover, it also might seem that, insofar as contemporary global politics appears widely characterized, during these early days of 2020, by little so much as revanchist, sometimes violently manifested parochialism, the imperative for striving to meaningfully, respectfully know a position other than one’s own has scarcely been more urgent.

However, what might be somewhat more surprising is that CPT is a field whose still-emerging stages are marked by telling contestation over what it means, or can or should mean, to engage in the study and practice of comparative political theory/thought, in the first instance. For example, who is to say that there are discrete, identifiable repositories of “non-Western political ideas”, and, supposing that there are, what
qualifies, or fails to qualify—on the basis of culture, geography, language, religion, or otherwise—as such essential vessels: Islamic? Indian? East Asian? Indigenous? (To offer an assuredly non-exhaustive list of possibilities). For that matter, who is to say that “Western understandings of the political” serve to comprise a distinct civilizational tradition with which various groupings of “non-Western” ideas can be juxtaposed? Further, even if political thought traditions capable of being compared with one another can be said to exist, is it possible to capture, therein, roughly equivalent ideas (e.g., the human? Sovereignty? Historical time?), and to place them into translatable dialogue? If so, where would we need to go about searching for those ideas? Within ostensibly canonical texts, whether, for instance, Hobbes’s Leviathan, al-Fārābī’s On the Perfect State, Gandhi’s Hind Swaraj, Arendt’s The Human Condition; or, to take an alternative form and tenor of embodied ideas, within social practices that might bear little resemblance to such recognizable ‘Western’ barometers as the ‘state’, the ‘individual’, and so forth?

Accordingly, POLI 384 strives to neither cleanly map the understandably fluctuating scholarly terrain of CPT, nor to pursue a catalogue of imagined, delineable traditions with which to compare (or contrast, as the case may be) a Western canon—a canon to which those traditions could merely show forth as peripheral, exoticized appendages. Rather, the course proposes an exploratory critical foray into CPT that aims to introduce this intellectually challenging, ethically vital field by contemplating, from the inside out, as it were, what is at stake in each of the three constituent concepts, ‘comparative’, ‘political’, and ‘thought’. With respect to the first concept, we will explore and question how, and why, effective comparisons among fundamentally differing manifestations of political thought can, or cannot be made. With respect to the second, we will work to take into account a variegated range of possible meanings for what might be termed ‘the political’. In the third case, we will ask why it is significant for us to speak of thought—given that term’s intimation of peculiar kinds of abstract ideas—as the basis for comparison; this, while also paying especial attention to the salient, boundary-traversing phenomenon of traveling thought.

POLI 384 will utilize a mixed lecture and discussion format, with the latter being especially vital in any political theory course, not least this one. Please be sure to attend class diligently, as it will establish the framework for your understanding of the curriculum; and you will be held responsible, in the evaluative components of the course (details on this matter follow below), for critically engaging with the content of what has been said in class.

Course Texts

The following two texts are required, and are available for purchase at the UVic Bookstore: Roxanne L. Euben, Journeys to the Other Shore: Muslim and Western Travelers in Search of Knowledge (Princeton, NJ and Oxford, UK: Princeton Univ. Press, 2006); and Christopher Coker, The Rise of the Civilizational State (Cambridge, UK and Medford, MA: Polity Press, 2019). In addition, one recommended text is available at the
UVic Bookstore: J. Babb, *A World History of Political Thought* (Cheltenham, UK and Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar, 2018). A number of further readings will be included electronically. In a few instances, this may entail going through CourseSpaces, as indicated in the syllabus; or, in the case of some journal articles, as well as electronically accessible texts (notably Gandhi’s *Hind Swaraj* as a primary text, together with a number of secondary texts), please navigate directly to the electronic resource through the Library catalogue, using the provided citation information.

**Methods of Evaluation**

Your performance in POLI 384 will be evaluated and weighted in the following fashion:

* A five to six page paper in which you critically reflect on the course motif, comparativity, due at the beginning of class on **Thursday, February 6**: 20% of your final grade.

* A six to seven page paper in which you critically reflect on the course motif, ‘the political’, due at the beginning of class on **Thursday, March 12**: 25% of final grade.

* A twelve to fourteen page paper in which you undertake an independent study in comparative political thought, due at the beginning of class on **Thursday, April 2**: 40% of final grade.

* A brief presentation, during one of our class sessions between approximately **Thursday, March 26 and Thursday, April 2** (it is possible that presentations may begin somewhat earlier than this, depending on our ultimate registration numbers; **please stay tuned**), in which you tell course colleagues about your above-mentioned independent study: 5% of final grade.

* Participation in class discussions: 10% of final grade.

**NB:** There will be no exams in this course.

A few words on each of the methods of evaluation:

**In General:**

Failure to complete all assignments will result in a grade of “N” for the course.

None of the papers will be accepted by any electronic means of submission (for example, e-mail attachment, or fax). Therefore, the only acceptable means of submission for these assignments is in hard copy, please.
No written assignments may be handwritten, in the absence of a documented medical reason for why typing is not feasible.

No assignments will be accepted without penalty after the relevant due dates that are stated below for each assignment. The only exceptions will be for documented medical (physical or psychological) reasons or family emergencies. Late assignments will be penalized at the rate of 5% per day.

Further details will be discussed about the assignments below as we get deeper into the term.

UVic Undergraduate Percentage Grading System:

We will employ the UVic Percentage Grading Scale, which is as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Passing Grades</th>
<th>Grade Point Value</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A+</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>90 – 100</td>
<td>Exceptional, outstanding and excellent performance. Normally achieved by a minority of students. These grades indicate a student who is self-initiating, exceeds expectation and has an insightful grasp of the subject matter.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>85 – 89</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A-</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>80 – 84</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B+</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>77 – 79</td>
<td>Very good, good and solid performance. Normally achieved by the largest number of students. These grades indicate a good grasp of the subject matter or excellent grasp in one area balanced with satisfactory grasp in the other area.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>73 – 76</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B-</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>70 – 72</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C+</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>65 – 69</td>
<td>Satisfactory, or minimally satisfactory. These grades indicate a satisfactory performance and knowledge of the subject matter.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>60 – 64</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>50 – 59</td>
<td>Marginal Performance. A student receiving this grade demonstrated a superficial grasp of the subject matter.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Failing Grades</th>
<th>Grade Point Value</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0 – 49</td>
<td>Unsatisfactory performance. Wrote final examination and completed course requirements; no supplemental.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0 – 49</td>
<td>Did not write examination or complete course requirements by the end of term or session; no supplemental.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. The percentage grading scale applies to all Faculties at the University of Victoria.
2. The percentage grades should be associated with a letter grading schema.
3. A percentage grade for an N grade should be assigned in the following manner:
   **N grade percentage range 0-49:** In cases where a student who has not completed the exam or has not completed the course requirements but has submitted course requirements that total more than 49% of the total grade for a course, an instructor will assign a percentage grade of 49%.

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Academic Integrity Policy:

Plagiarism and Academic Integrity (adapted from Learning and Teaching Centre material): Academic integrity is intellectual honesty and responsibility for academic work that you submit individually or as a member of a group. It involves commitment to the values of honesty, trust and responsibility. It is expected that students will respect these ethical values in all activities related to learning, teaching, research and service. Therefore, plagiarism and other acts against academic integrity are serious academic offences.

The responsibility of the institution - Instructors and academic units have the responsibility to ensure that standards of academic honesty are met. By doing so, the institution recognizes students for their hard work and assures them that other students do not have an unfair advantage through cheating on essays, exams, and projects.

The responsibility of the student - Plagiarism sometimes occurs due to a misunderstanding regarding the rules of academic integrity, but it is the responsibility of the student to know them. If you are unsure about the standards for citations or for referencing your sources, ask your instructor. Depending on the severity of the case, penalties include a warning, a failing grade, a record on the student’s transcript, or a suspension. It is your responsibility to understand the University’s policy on academic integrity, which can be found on pages 45-47 of the undergraduate calendar: https://web.uvic.ca/calendar2020-01/pdfs/undergraduate-202001_Part4.pdf.

Any problems regarding the academic integrity of a submitted essay or exam will be referred directly to the Chair of Political Science and University policy will be followed.

For good advice about how to avoid plagiarism, please see: http://www.writing.utoronto.ca/advice/using-sources/how-not-to-plagiarize

Comments About Specific Assignments (Subject to Adjustment):

First Paper, on Comparativity: This paper should be approximately 1250-1500 words/5-6 double-spaced, numbered, twelve-point type pages, in addition to title page, and bibliography or list of works consulted. In it, please develop a thesis in which you critically reflect on the significance of how one understands, or approaches the notion of comparativity, when one engages in the study and practice of comparative political thought. Please be sure to integrate no fewer than three of our required or recommended sources from topics 1 through 4, together with any further sources that you deem appropriate.

As will also be the case with your second and third papers, you should strive in this essay for clear and incisive writing that is grammatically and syntactically sound, and that has correct spelling. Structural aspects will count significantly in the grading of all writing in the course. Moreover, all three papers must cite every
source upon which you rely for quotations, or specific ideas or factual material. Either a humanities (i.e., *Chicago Manual of Style*) or social sciences means of citation is acceptable for your writing in this course, but whichever of these methods you choose to employ within a given assignment, please be sure to maintain consistency throughout the paper.

**Second Paper, on ‘the Political’:** This paper should be approximately 1500-1750 words/6-7 double-spaced, numbered, twelve-point type pages, in addition to title page, and bibliography or list of works consulted. In it, please develop a thesis in which you critically reflect on the significance of how one understands, or approaches the notion of ‘the political’, while engaging in the study and practice of comparative political thought. Please be sure to integrate no fewer than **four** of our required or recommended readings in POLI 384, focusing in the first instance on those from topics 5 through 8. You are also welcome to utilize sources that arose in topics 1 through 4, including the reintegration, among your minimum **four** sources, of no more than **two** sources that you cited in your first paper; you are also welcome to integrate any further sources that you deem appropriate.

**Final Paper, an Independent Study in Comparative Political Thought:** This paper should be approximately 3000-3500 words/12-14 double-spaced, numbered, twelve-point type pages, in addition to title page, and bibliography or list of works consulted. In it, please develop a thesis arising from your engagement with any embodiment of comparative political thought that is of interest to you. Please be sure to integrate no fewer than **seven** scholarly sources (course readings may be among them, but should not constitute the full extent, or even the majority of those sources, as you will be evaluated in part on the basis of your outside research), as well as no less than **one** additional primary source. Significant attention should be given to the analysis of primary source(s), as well as to the elaboration, as aided by scholarly literature, of relevant contextualizing, interpretive, and methodological considerations.

**Brief Presentation:** Please be prepared to give your POLI 384 colleagues a presentation of approximately five minutes (with time for questions and discussion, if feasible in terms of our scheduling) on the in-progress—or completed, if you draw the April 2 straw!—work for your independent study in comparative political thought. I will let you know of the presentation schedule ASAP, once we near the home stretch of the term.

**Participation in Class Discussion:** Contributions to class discussion will be judged primarily on the basis of their insightfulness and critical attention to the course curriculum, rather than their frequency. Therefore, please do not monopolize discussion time. Key criteria that will be employed in evaluating contributions to discussion are the extent to which they help to advance other students’ understanding of the material being studied; and whether the contributions are not only intellectually fruitful, but congenial, and committed to a spirit of open, friendly, and respectful inquiry. Regular, engaged attendance of class will count for a portion of this element of your grade.
Course Experience Survey (CES)

Towards the end of the term, as in all other courses at UVic, you will have the opportunity to complete a confidential course experience survey (CES) regarding your learning experience (CES) in POLI 384. The survey is vital in providing feedback to us regarding the course and our teaching, as well as to help the Department of Political Science provide an optimal program for students in the future. When it is time for you to complete the survey, you will receive an e-mail inviting you to do so. If you do not receive an e-mail invitation, you can go directly to http://ces.uvic.ca. You will need to use your UVic NetLink ID to access the survey, which can be done on your laptop, tablet, or mobile device. I will remind you nearer the time, but please be thinking about this important activity, especially the following three questions, during the course:

1. What strengths did your instructor demonstrate that helped you learn in this course?
2. Please provide specific suggestions as to how the instructor could have helped you learn more effectively.
3. Please provide specific suggestions as to how this course could be improved.

List of Topics and Associated Readings

(Subject to Adjustment)

Please note: all listed dates corresponding to topics and readings are tentative. So that we can maintain flexibility throughout the term with respect to setting the dates on which specific topics are treated, it is essential that you maintain regular attendance, so that you are aware of our schedule, as it unfolds.

With all readings, please make sure to include the relevant endnotes/footnotes.

Any of the required and recommended texts can be usefully read straight through, at your leisure; this is especially relevant for J. Babb, A World History of Political Thought, for which specific pages are not necessarily listed below.


Recommended: Rajeev Bhargava, What is Political Theory and Why do We Need It? (New Delhi: Oxford Univ. Press, 2010), pp. 3-26 [‘What is Political Theory?’] [through CourseSpaces].

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THINKING CRITICALLY ABOUT COMPARATIVITY


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**THINKING CRITICALLY ABOUT ‘THE POLITICAL’**


***NB: Paper One (Reflection on Comparativity) due Thursday, February 6***

(6) Guest Lecture: Dr. Avigail Eisenberg, Professor, UVic Department of Political Science (Feb. 10).


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***NB: The entire week of Feb. 17 is Reading Break; no classes***

***NB: Saturday, February 29 is the last day for withdrawing without penalty of failure***


THINKING CRITICALLY ABOUT THOUGHT (AND THEORY)

***NB: Paper Two (Reflection on ‘the Political’) due Thursday, March 12***

(9) What Is at Stake in Presupposing that Thought (or Theories) Are What We Are Comparing? (March 12): Euben, Journeys to the Other Shore, pp. 20-45; Bhargava, What is Political Theory and Why do We Need It?, pp. 27-55 [‘Why do We Need Political Theory?’] [through CourseSpaces].


**BRIEF PRESENTATIONS BY COURSE PARTICIPANTS**

(11) It is anticipated that these will occur on approximately March 26 & 30, and April 2; if our registration numbers demand, we would begin presentations on, e.g., March 23, and adjust preceding dates in our course coverage accordingly, so please stay tuned.

***NB: Final Paper (Independent Study in Comparative Political Thought) due Thursday, April 2***