

ARTS & SCIENCE 1A06/ PRACTICES OF KNOWLEDGE (2019-20)

Mondays & Wednesdays: 1:30pm-2:20pm, (Term 1: KTH/B132; Term 2: ABB/136)

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Course Description and Objectives

"There's too much information, and information can't lead to knowledge"
(Keith Jarrett, *JazzTimes* March, 2017)

In the *JazzTimes* interview Jarrett goes on: "Maybe I can clarify that. Information is surface, in my opinion. You can get information about chords, you can get information about melodies. You can read scores and get information from that. But as Lester Young asked a young player, "Where is your story?" That's what I mean by knowledge. It would be self-knowledge in that case, right? Instead of you playing your ax, you're expressing who you are at that moment as well as you can as a musician. To do that, any amount of information is still not going to make that happen."

The aim of this course is not to transmit or acquire information. Rather it is to gain self-knowledge with regard to the "larger story" that shapes and expresses our shared imagination. In POK we undertake an interdisciplinary exploration of intellectual and cultural sources from ancient to contemporary times and places on how to think about the perennial human questions: what do we mean by beauty, goodness, love, justice and how do we know? This means that our practices of knowledge in the course will be related to the study, not **about** various other times and places (e.g. information about the Ancient Near East, classical Greece or the Roman empire, medieval or Enlightenment Europe, modernity and postmodernity) but rather **of** primary representative works that "practice knowledge" thoughtfully and memorably. This is not the domain of narrow specialists of knowledge but rather of all thinking persons who practice knowledge through critical, imaginative self-awareness. Some of these works will be more familiar, others less so, depending on your background, training and interests. But the aim is for all of us to gain experience in building up an intellectual imagination capable of thinking sympathetically and critically in relation to a wide range of paradigms, genres, and visions of life that still inform our own practices of knowledge as humans in a complex and diverse world. This will require each of us to bring our full "self" to the exploration: affective, sympathetic, shaped by particular experiences and cultural formations, with already formed commitments and beliefs, specific biases and blindspots, questions inside and outside various "boxes" (sometimes called frameworks or paradigms of thought). Our aim will be to improve our capacity for asking good questions and thinking critically about where they take us.

Among the guiding questions, here are some to consider: What do we mean by "knowledge"? Some other European languages have at least two words to distinguish types of knowing (e.g. *savoir* and *connaître/connaissance* in French; *wissen* and *kennen*, and cf. *können*, in German); all of these words have long histories and a wide range of meanings (not to mention a host of

synonyms: wisdom, information, intelligence, familiarity, awareness . . .). How are these meanings distinct, how are they related, and why does it matter? These words for knowledge and knowing may take the form of a noun or a verb, and the verb-al form is emphasized in the language of “practices.” That is, knowledge is an activity tied to habitual human practices of various kinds and contexts: vocational, institutional, religious, sexual, culinary, political, educational, technological, to name just a few. How do these contexts relate to the various practices of knowledge, and which of these contexts or habitual practices take priority or receive privilege in cultural and linguistic definitions and expressions of knowledge? Sometimes the emphasis is on embodied practices such as various trades and musical training; at other times the emphasis is on intellectual practices of abstraction such as mathematics, logical analysis, or critical argumentation. Aristotle distinguished between 3 types of knowledge: *theoria* (related to theories or visions of truth), *poiesis* (related to artistic making, including literary poetics), and *praxis* (related to action), but of course these types are always also related as well as distinct. We will be interested in paying attention to the distinctions and the relations in the texts and contexts we study.

These are daunting complexities and in our first classes we will begin to think together about how to approach, interpret and better understand them. The aim of this course is that by the end of it students will be much better equipped and trained (through “practice”) to recognize distinct practices of knowledge and to think about how they are related, why they matter, how and why they continue to influence our everyday life—our thought and action—in a complex, diverse, yet interrelated world.

Required texts:

Sophocles, ANTIGONE
 Plato, GORGIAS
 Annie Dillard, HOLY THE FIRM
 Augustine, CONFESSIONS
 Joseph Conrad, HEART OF DARKNESS
 Aldous Huxley, BRAVE NEW WORLD

All of the required texts will be available in the McMaster campus store. Other required reading or viewing materials (or information about them) for this course will be available on the Avenue to Learn website, as well as some supplementary materials for those interested in pursuing topics further on your own.

Course assignments and evaluation:

Participation, Term 1 & 2: 15% - Students will participate every week in a tutorial session, in which they are expected to be well-prepared to discuss and raise questions with regard to the assigned course materials for that week (more detailed description of tutorial participation and weekly writing forthcoming). In addition there will be a “media detox” assignment with guided questions on which students will write a reflection, due **September 30** (more information provided on the Avenue to Learn course site).

Midterm examination, Term 1: 15% - Take-home short essay examination handed out on **October 28 2019** based on the assigned readings up to that point. **Due: November 4.**

Term examination, Term 1: 25% - This will be a 2 hour essay format examination on all term 1 course materials to be scheduled in the **December 2019** exam period.

Midterm Essay, Term 2: 20% - Essay topics will be provided after the midterm exam and will refer to material studied after the midterm. You are encouraged to develop your own essay topic. However, any essay topic developed by the student must refer to material after the midterm exam and must be approved by the course instructor. Your essay topic must argue a thesis and pertain only to materials studied in this course. There should be no use of secondary materials in your essays. The essay should be approximately five pages, double spaced in a 12 pt sans-serif font. The essay is due on **March 16, 2020**.

Final Exam: 25% - The final exam will be a 2 hour essay format examination set in the **April 2020** exam period.

Term 1: Remembering who “we” are

Sept 4 Introduction, POK orientation

Why do origin stories (cosmogonies and cosmologies) matter?

Sept 9 Genesis 1-11
 11 Genesis 1-11
 16 Hieronymous Bosch, “Garden of Earthly Delights”
 18 Terrence Malik, “Tree of Life”
 23 *Black Elk Speaks* (chps I-XI)
 25 *Black Elk Speaks* (chps XII-end)
 30 Bruce Beresford, “Black Robe”

Media DeTox assignment due, Sept. 30

How do tragedy and philosophy educate human desire?

Oct 2 Sophocles: *Antigone*
 7 Sophocles: *Antigone*
 9 Sophocles: *Antigone*

Term break: October 14-18

Oct 21 Plato, *Gorgias*
 23 Plato, *Gorgias*

Oct 28: Midterm Exam handed out, due on November 4 (Avenue dropbox)

Methodological interlude: What does it mean to translate knowledge?

Oct 30 Benjamin: “The Task of the Translator”

Confessional knowing: self and nature:

What do I confess when I seek to know who/where/what I am in a mysterious world?

- Nov 4 Augustine: *Confessions*, books I-II (mid-term exam due)
 6 Augustine: *Confessions*, books VIII-IX
 11 Julian of Norwich: *Revelations of Divine Love* (selections)
 13 Julian of Norwich, selections
 18 Annie Dillard: *Holy the Firm*
 20 Annie Dillard: *Holy the Firm*
 25 Rabi'a al-Basri, selected poems
 27 Rabi'a al-Basri
- Dec 2 Bruno Dumont, "Hadewijch"
 4 Exam review

Term 2: Western Trajectories: Modernity and its Critics

The Will to Question Continued

How is "Enlightenment" a way out of childish thinking?

- Jan 6 Kant: "What Is Enlightenment?"
 8 Kant: "What Is Enlightenment?"
 Foucault: "What is Enlightenment?"

A New Origin Story of Knowing Good and Evil?

- Jan 13 Nietzsche: *The Genealogy of Morals* (Essay 1)
 15 Nietzsche: *Anti-Education* (selections)

How do we Know the Meaning of Sex and the Body?

- Jan 20 Freud: *The Interpretation of Dreams* (selections)
 22 Freud: *The Interpretation of Dreams* (selections)
 Jan 27 Foucault: *The History of Sexuality: The Will To Knowledge* (Part III)
 29 Foucault: *The History of Sexuality: The Will To Knowledge* (Part III)

Controlled Thought and Freedom

Is Enlightenment a new kind of darkness?

- Feb 3 Joseph Conrad: *Heart of Darkness*
 5 Joseph Conrad: *Heart of Darkness*
 10 Joseph Conrad: *Heart of Darkness*

- Feb 12 Francis Ford Coppola: "Apocalypse Now"

Mid-term Essay Posted, due March 16 (Avenue Dropbox)

Term Break: Feb. 17-21

Saloman's House: where is the new wisdom to be found?

- Feb 24 Francis Bacon: *The New Atlantis*
 26 Francis Bacon: *The New Atlantis*
 March 2 Aldous Huxley: *Brave New World*

- 4 Alduous Huxley: *Brave New World*
 March 9 Heidegger: “The Discourse on Thinking”
 11 Heidegger: “The Question Concerning Technology”

Poetics, Seeing and Embodied Knowledge

Poetically We Dwell

- March 16 Holderlin: “The Ister”
 18 Heidegger: “Holderlin and the Essence of Poetry”

Midterm essay due, March 16

Knowing the Secret

- March 23 Tarkovsky: “The Bell” (Final Section of *Andrei Rublev* – Stream Through Library)

The Image and/is the Word

- March 25 Marie-Jose Mondzain: “Tarkovsky: Embodying the Screen”

Are our practices of knowledge killing the Tree of Life?

- March 30 Richard Powers, *The Overstory*
 April 1 Richard Powers, *The Overstory*
 6 Richard Powers, *The Overstory*

Final Exam scheduled by the Registrar

Arts & Science Course Outline Statements

Sustainable Written Work Submission Guidelines

The written work submission guidelines have been chosen to support the more sustainable use of paper, energy, and toner, and meet the Bronze standard of the Office of Sustainability; <http://www.mcmaster.ca/sustainability/>. All written work should be submitted in the following format: sans-serif font, double-spaced typewritten pages and uploaded to the electronic dropbox on the Avenue to Learn course site.

Academic Integrity Statement

McMaster Policy on Academic Integrity:

You are expected to exhibit honesty and use ethical behaviour in all aspects of the learning process. Academic credentials you earn are rooted in principles of honesty and academic integrity. Academic dishonesty is to knowingly act or fail to act in a way that results or could result in unearned academic credit or advantage. This behaviour can result in serious consequences—e.g., the grade of zero on an assignment, loss of credit with a notation on the transcript (notation reads: “Grade of F assigned for academic dishonesty”), and/or suspension or expulsion from the university. It is your responsibility to understand what constitutes academic dishonesty. For information on the various types of academic dishonesty, please refer to the [Academic Integrity Policy](http://www.mcmaster.ca/academicintegrity), located at: <http://www.mcmaster.ca/academicintegrity>.

The following illustrates only three forms of academic dishonesty: 1) Plagiarism—e.g., the

submission of work that is not one's own or for which other credit has been obtained. 2) Improper collaboration in group work. 3) Copying or using unauthorized aids in tests and examinations.

MSAF Statement and Late penalties

McMaster Student Absence Form (MSAF):

In the event of an absence, students should review and follow the Academic Regulations in the Undergraduate Calendar "Requests for Relief for Missed Academic Term Work." Please consult the MSAF statement on our website (<https://artsci.mcmaster.ca/forms-requests/>) and direct any questions or concerns to Shelley Anderson or Madeline Van Impe in the Arts & Science Program Office. It is important to follow up immediately with the course Instructor in the case of an MSAF.

Late Penalties of 10% per day (weekends count as one day) will apply to work that arrives after the assignment deadline specified on the syllabus.

Academic Accommodation of Students with Disabilities Statement

Academic Accommodation of Students with Disabilities:

Students who require academic accommodation must contact [Student Accessibility Services \(SAS\)](#) to make arrangements with a Program Coordinator. SAS can be contacted by phone 905-525-9140 ext. 28652 or email sas@mcmaster.ca. For further information, consult McMaster University's [Academic Accommodation of Students with Disabilities](#) policy.

Academic Accommodation for Religious, Indigenous, or Spiritual Observances (RISO) Statement

Academic Accommodation for Religious, Indigenous, or Spiritual Observances (RISO):

Students requiring academic accommodation based on religious, indigenous, or spiritual observances should follow the procedures set out in the RISO policy. Students requiring a RISO accommodation should submit their request to their Faculty Office (i.e. to Shelley Anderson or Madeline Van Impe in the Arts & Science Program Office) normally within 10 working days of the beginning of term in which they anticipate a need for accommodation or to the Registrar's Office prior to their examinations. Students should also contact their instructors as soon as possible to make alternative arrangements for classes, assignments, and tests.

Email Contact and Student Responsibility Statement

Please Note:

The instructor and university reserve the right to modify elements of the course during the term. The university may change the dates and deadlines for any or all courses in extreme circumstances (e.g., severe weather, labour disruptions, etc.). Changes will be communicated through regular McMaster communication channels, such as McMaster Daily News, A2L, and/or McMaster email. It is the responsibility of students to check **their McMaster email** and course websites regularly during the term and to note any changes. Announcements will be made in class and by using the course email distribution list.