

## ARTS & SCIENCE 1A06/ PRACTICES OF KNOWLEDGE (2020-21)

Wednesdays: 1:30pm-2:30pm (online)

Instructor: Dr. Travis Kroeker: [kroekert@mcmaster.ca](mailto:kroekert@mcmaster.ca)

Office hours: Wednesdays, 2:30-3:30pm (online), and by appointment

Teaching Assistants:

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Tutorials: There are 6 tutorials, two taking place during each of the following times led by one of the TAs:

Fridays 10:30-11:20am- Meghan Bird and Sophia Kooy

Fridays 11:30am-12:20pm- Maanvi Dillon and Sophia Kooy

Fridays 12:30-1:20pm- Meghan Bird and Maanvi Dillon

### 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 *Practices of Knowledge* (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, and 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 the works studied in this course 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 of this course, 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 like 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* (David Grene translation, University of Chicago)  
 Plato, *GORGIAS* (Library of Liberal Arts, W.C. Helmbold translation)  
 Annie Dillard, *HOLY THE FIRM* (HarperCollins)  
 Augustine, *CONFESSIONS* (Modern Library, translation by Sarah Ruden)  
 Joseph Conrad, *HEART OF DARKNESS* (Norton Critical edition)  
 Aldous Huxley, *BRAVE NEW WORLD* (Vintage)  
 Richard Powers, *THE OVERSTORY* (Norton)

Students should purchase all the required texts in hard copy and are encouraged to print all texts posted on Avenue to Learn (A2L) in order to mark up the texts and make marginal notes. This is a course in close reading, and close reading requires underlining

and notation as part of the practices of knowledge entailed in “thinking with” the materials we will study. The required texts will be made available via the McMaster campus store; they will also be available in a range of online venues, including used bookstore vendors like Abebooks. Other required reading or viewing materials (or links to them) for POK will be available on A2L, as well as some supplementary materials for those interested in pursuing topics further on your own.

### **Course Format:**

POK will be conducted online for the entire academic year, and this will present challenges—especially in a required first year course in Arts and Science where we are also trying to build “cohort” synergy! Ideally that requires in-person, face to face engagement “in the flesh.” Since we can’t do that we’ll do the best we can under the circumstances. Each week the professor will post lecture materials in advance (on the weekend prior) on A2L to assist students in interpreting the assigned readings and viewings for the week, as well as deliver a synchronous online video presentation every Wednesday, 1:30-2:30 p.m. via Zoom that will be posted on A2L for students to review on their own later. On several Mondays in term two there will be an opportunity to sign up for an office hour session with the prof. via Zoom, 1:30-2:30 (a schedule is forthcoming), and there will be an online “dropin” tutorial on Wednesdays following the lecture, 2:30 to 3:30 for continued discussion of lecture themes. All course assignments will be posted on A2L and students will submit assignments to a drop box on A2L.

**Please Note:** there will be a new schedule for reflection papers in the Winter term, since we can no longer sustain the pace of weekly submissions. We will continue the practice of submitting questions to the TA discussion boxes every Monday on the assigned reading.

### **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 A2L).

**Midterm examination, Term 1: 15%** - Take-home short essay exam handed out on **October 28 2020** based on the assigned readings up to that point.

**Due: November 9.**

**Term exam, Term 1: 25%** - Take-home essay exam (ca. 1500 words, 5 - 6 double-spaced typewritten pages) on term 1 course materials (including lectures)—no secondary materials. Essay questions will be posted in early December on A2L.

**Due: December 15.**

**Midterm Essay, Term 2: 20%** - Take-home essay (ca. 1500 words, 5 – 6 double-spaced typewritten pages) relating philosophy and literature in materials up to and including *Brave New World* (no use of secondary materials). Essay questions will be posted in early March on A2L.

**Due: March 16, 2021.**

**Final Assignment: 25%** - A “ruminating” essay that will engage selected materials from the entire course. Instructions will be posted in early April on A2L.

**Due: April 21.**

**Term 1: Remembering who “we” are**

Sept 9 Introduction, POK orientation

Why do origin stories (cosmogonies and cosmologies) matter?

Sept 14 Genesis 1-11 (Robert Alter translation, A2L)  
 16 Genesis 1-11  
 21 Hieronymous Bosch, “Garden of Earthly Delights” (art link on A2L)  
 23 Terrence Malik, “Tree of Life” (film link on A2L)  
 28/30 *Black Elk Speaks* (chps I-XI) \* Media DeTox due, Sept. 30 (A2L)  
 Oct 5 *Black Elk Speaks* (chps XII-end)  
 7 Bruce Beresford, “Black Robe” (film link on A2L)

Term break: October 12 - 18

How do tragedy and philosophy educate human desire?

Oct 19/21 Sophocles: *Antigone*  
 26/28 Sophocles: *Antigone* & Plato’s *Gorgias*  
 Nov 2/4 Sophocles: *Antigone* & Plato’s *Gorgias*

Oct 28: Midterm Exam questions posted, due November 9 (A2L dropbox)

Methodological interlude: What does it mean to translate knowledge?

Nov 9/11 Walter Benjamin: “The Task of the Translator” (A2L)

Confessional knowing: self and nature

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

Nov 18 Augustine: *Confessions*, books I-II  
 25 Augustine: *Confessions*, books VIII-IX  
 Dec 2 Annie Dillard: *Holy the Firm*

Dec 9 Rabi'a al-Basri poems

Dec 2: Term Essay Exam questions posted, due Dec 15 (A2L dropbox)

## **Term 2: Western Trajectories: Modernity and its Critics**

The Will to Question Continued

How is “Enlightenment” a way out of “childish” thinking?

Jan 13 Kant: “What Is Enlightenment?”; Foucault: “What is Enlightenment?”

A New Origin Story of Knowing Good and Evil?

Jan 20 Nietzsche: “The Madman” & *The Genealogy of Morals*: Essay 1

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

Jan 27 Freud, theories of sexuality (selections)

Feb 3 Foucault: *The History of Sexuality: The Will To Knowledge* (selections)

**Reflection due on A2L**

Controlled Thought and Freedom

Is Enlightenment a new kind of darkness?

Feb 10 Joseph Conrad: *Heart of Darkness* Parts I & II

Feb. 15-21: Term Break

Feb 24 Joseph Conrad: *Heart of Darkness* Part III

Francis Ford Coppola: “Apocalypse Now” (film link, A2L)

**Reflection due on A2L**

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

Mar 3 Aldous Huxley: *Brave New World*

10 Alduous Huxley: *Brave New World*

**Mid-term Essay Questions Posted March 1, due March 16** (A2L Dropbox)

Poetics, Seeing and Embodied Knowledge: “Poetically we Dwell”

March 17 Heidegger: “Memorial Address” & “The Question Concerning Technology”

24 Hölderlin, “The Ister”; Mary Oliver, “At the River Clarion”; “The River”

**Reflection due on A2L**

Are our practices of knowledge killing the Tree of Life?

Mar 31 Richard Powers, *The Overstory*  
 April 7 Richard Powers, *The Overstory*  
 14 Review and Final Assignment

Final Assignment posted April 10, due April 25 (A2L dropbox)

**Sustainable Written Work Submission Guidelines**

The written work submission guidelines have been chosen to support the more sustainable use of paper, energy, and toner of the Office of Sustainability: <http://www.mcmaster.ca/sustainability/>. All written work (except for in-class and university supervised examinations) should be submitted in double-spaced typewritten pages and uploaded to the electronic dropbox on the Avenue to Learn course site.

**Late Penalties**

*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.

**SENATE-APPROVED ADVISORY STATEMENTS**

**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. **It is your responsibility to understand what constitutes academic dishonesty.**

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. For information on the various types of academic dishonesty please refer to the [Academic Integrity Policy](https://secretariat.mcmaster.ca/university-policies-procedures-guidelines/), located at <https://secretariat.mcmaster.ca/university-policies-procedures-guidelines/>.

The following illustrates only three forms of academic dishonesty:

- plagiarism, e.g. the submission of work that is not one’s own or for which other credit has been obtained.
- improper collaboration in group work.
- copying or using unauthorized aids in tests and examinations.

**AUTHENTICITY / PLAGIARISM DETECTION**

**Some courses may** use a web-based service (Turnitin.com) to reveal authenticity and ownership of student submitted work. For courses using such software, students will be expected to submit their work electronically either directly to Turnitin.com or via an

online learning platform (e.g. A2L, etc.) using plagiarism detection (a service supported by Turnitin.com) so it can be checked for academic dishonesty.

Students who do not wish their work to be submitted through the plagiarism detection software must inform the Instructor before the assignment is due. No penalty will be assigned to a student who does not submit work to the plagiarism detection software. **All submitted work is subject to normal verification that standards of academic integrity have been upheld** (e.g., online search, other software, etc.). For more details about McMaster's use of Turnitin.com please go to [www.mcmaster.ca/academicintegrity](http://www.mcmaster.ca/academicintegrity).

### **COURSES WITH AN ONLINE ELEMENT**

**Some courses may** use online elements (e.g. e-mail, Avenue to Learn (A2L), LearnLink, web pages, capa, Moodle, ThinkingCap, etc.). Students should be aware that, when they access the electronic components of a course using these elements, private information such as first and last names, user names for the McMaster e-mail accounts, and program affiliation may become apparent to all other students in the same course. The available information is dependent on the technology used. Continuation in a course that uses online elements will be deemed consent to this disclosure. If you have any questions or concerns about such disclosure please discuss this with the course instructor.

### **ONLINE PROCTORING**

**Some courses may** use online proctoring software for tests and exams. This software may require students to turn on their video camera, present identification, monitor and record their computer activities, and/or lock/restrict their browser or other applications/software during tests or exams. This software may be required to be installed before the test/exam begins.

### **CONDUCT EXPECTATIONS**

As a McMaster student, you have the right to experience, and the responsibility to demonstrate, respectful and dignified interactions within all of our living, learning and working communities. These expectations are described in the [Code of Student Rights & Responsibilities](#) (the "Code"). All students share the responsibility of maintaining a positive environment for the academic and personal growth of all McMaster community members, **whether in person or online**.

It is essential that students be mindful of their interactions online, as the Code remains in effect in virtual learning environments. The Code applies to any interactions that adversely affect, disrupt, or interfere with reasonable participation in University activities. Student disruptions or behaviours that interfere with university functions on online platforms (e.g. use of Avenue 2 Learn, WebEx or Zoom for delivery), will be taken very seriously and will be investigated. Outcomes may include restriction or removal of the involved students' access to these platforms.

### **ACADEMIC ACCOMMODATION OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES**

Students with disabilities who require academic accommodation must contact [Student](#)

[Accessibility Services](#) (SAS) at 905-525-9140 ext. 28652 or [sas@mcmaster.ca](mailto:sas@mcmaster.ca) to make arrangements with a Program Coordinator. For further information, consult McMaster University's [Academic Accommodation of Students with Disabilities](#) policy.

### **REQUESTS FOR RELIEF FOR MISSED ACADEMIC TERM WORK**

**McMaster Student Absence Form (MSAF):** In the event of an absence for medical or other reasons, students should review and follow the Academic Regulation in the Undergraduate Calendar “Requests for Relief for Missed Academic Term Work”.

### **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 should submit their request to their Faculty 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.

### **COPYRIGHT AND RECORDING**

Students are advised that lectures, demonstrations, performances, and any other course material provided by an instructor include copyright protected works. The Copyright Act and copyright law protect every original literary, dramatic, musical and artistic work, **including lectures** by University instructors.

The recording of lectures, tutorials, or other methods of instruction may occur during a course. Recording may be done by either the instructor for the purpose of authorized distribution, or by a student for the purpose of personal study. Students should be aware that their voice and/or image may be recorded by others during the class. Please speak with the instructor if this is a concern for you.

### **EXTREME CIRCUMSTANCES**

The University reserves the right to 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.

### **NOTES FOR ALL ARTS & SCIENCE COURSES**

1. Some of the statements above refer to a “Faculty Office”; please note that the Arts & Science Program Office serves in this capacity.
2. It is the responsibility of students to check their McMaster email regularly. Announcements will be made in class, via A2L, and/or via the course email distribution list <d-as1A06@mcmaster.ca>.