

## PHILOSOPHY IN AND FOR TOUGH TIMES

PHIL 491 (2020-21: Term 1). Seminar for Majors in Philosophy. Credits: 3

Restricted to fourth-year Philosophy Majors Students

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**This Course Will Be Delivered Asynchronously Through Canvas**

Virtual office hours will be held via Canvas. Information will be announced at the beginning of the course.

UBC's Point Grey Campus is located on the traditional, ancestral, and unceded territory of the xwməθkwəyəm (Musqueam) people. The land it is situated on has always been a place of learning for the Musqueam people, who for millennia have passed on their culture, history, and traditions from one generation to the next on this site.

UBC provides resources to support student learning and to maintain healthy lifestyles but recognizes that sometimes crises arise and so there are additional resources to access including those for survivors of sexual violence. UBC values respect for the person and ideas of all members of the academic community. Harassment and discrimination are not tolerated nor is suppression of academic freedom. UBC provides appropriate accommodation for students with disabilities and for religious observances. UBC values academic honesty and students are expected to acknowledge the ideas generated by others and to uphold the highest academic standards in all of their actions. Details of the policies and how to access support are available on [the UBC Senate website](#).

**THIS COURSE WILL BE DELIVERED ASYNCHRONOUSLY THROUGH CANVAS.** This means that there are no scheduled class meetings. Instead, the content will consist of remotely delivered modules, each of which will include a reading assignment and a short video by me telling you some things about the reading. We will use the Discussions tool in Canvas for discussion about the class content.

## PHILOSOPHY IN AND FOR TOUGH TIMES

Times are tough. A year ago, who would have foreseen that we would now be enduring a global pandemic? Over 500,000 people have died worldwide, while the livelihoods of billions of people have been disrupted. Civil society is fractured and politicians are incompetent or worse. Meanwhile, we face an inescapable, planetary climate emergency. Biodiversity experts warn that it makes deadly disease outbreaks increasingly likely.

You might think that philosophy is far removed from such upheavals. But philosophy is often born of crisis and responds to it. Marcus Aurelius wrote his *Meditations* while the Roman Empire was ravaged by a plague that killed over two million people. The founding figures of ancient Chinese philosophy were all responding to the brutal strife of the Warring States Period. The existentialists Albert Camus, Simone de Beauvoir, and Jean-Paul Sartre, as well as the mystic Simone Weil, wrote major works of philosophy and literature while participating in the French Resistance during World War Two.

Crises create opportunities to step back and think about how the world came to be the way it is and how it could be different. Although such thinking isn't limited to philosophy, it needs philosophy.

The aim of this course is to draw from philosophy and literature to help us think about what we're going through and how we can choose to respond to it.

We will read a wide variety of texts by authors from different circumstances, times, and cultures. The readings will be complemented by short video recordings by me talking about the readings. Our organizing themes are: *Climate Crisis, Impermanence, Death, Transformation, The Wild, One (Tsawalk), Solitude, Attention, Meaning, Hope, the Good.*

**All the reading assignments will be available electronically.**

Readings are available through the UBC Library, hyperlink, or Canvas, as indicated on the weekly reading schedule.

**Requirements**

- Weekly reading assignments and short lecture videos about them.
- Three reflective papers, 1500 to 2000 words, responding to assigned prompts. Each paper is worth 1/3 of your final grade. Information with due dates will be posted in Canvas.

**Statement on Plagiarism:** Plagiarism is intellectual theft and occurs when an individual submits or presents the oral or written work of another person as his or her own. Scholarship rests on examining and referring to the thoughts and writings of others. When another person's words (i.e., phrases, sentences, or paragraphs), ideas, or entire works are used, the author must be acknowledged in the text, in footnotes, in endnotes, or in another accepted form of academic citation. Where direct quotations are made, they must be clearly delineated (for example, within quotation marks or separately indented). Failure to provide proper attribution is plagiarism because it represents someone else's work as one's own. Plagiarism should not occur in submitted drafts or final works. A student who seeks assistance from a tutor or other scholastic aids must ensure that the work submitted is the student's own. Students are responsible for ensuring that any work submitted does not constitute plagiarism. Students who are in any doubt as to what constitutes plagiarism should consult their instructor before handing in any assignments. For further information, please see the following link about academic misconduct:

<http://www.calendar.ubc.ca/Vancouver/index.cfm?tree=3,54,111,959>

**PLAGIARISM WILL NOT BE TOLERATED AND WILL RESULT IN AN AUTOMATIC FAILURE OF THE ASSIGNMENT,** as well as possible further disciplinary action by the University.

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**Email Policy**

The following guidelines apply to email communication during this course:

- I will make every effort to reply to legitimate email inquiries within 24 hours during weekdays but will likely take longer to respond to email during the weekend.
- Each email message should include in the Subject line the course identifier and a clear statement of purpose (e.g., PHIL 491: Question about Paper); otherwise, it may be deleted along with spam messages.

### Copyright

All materials of this course (readings, videos, lecture slides, handouts, etc.) are the intellectual property of the course instructor or licensed to be used in this course by the copyright owner. Redistribution of these materials by any means without permission of the copyright holder(s) constitutes a breach of copyright and may lead to academic discipline.

### Schedule

**Note:** each reading will have one or more short videos about it, highlighting key concepts, ideas, arguments, analyses, insights, etc. It's your choice whether to watch the videos first, as an orientation to the readings, or to do the readings first, so that you can encounter them on your own terms in advance of hearing what I have to say about them.

#### Before Term 1 starts, please read this short article:

Bruno Latour, "What Protective Measures Can You Think of So We Don't Go Back to the Pre-crisis Production Model?" <http://www.bruno-latour.fr/sites/default/files/P-202-AOC-ENGLISH.pdf>

#### Week 1. Climate Crisis

Roy Scranton, *Learning to Die in the Anthropocene* (UBC library).

Robert Bringham & Jan Zwicky, *Learning to Die: Wisdom in the Age of Climate Crisis* (Canvas)

Kyle P. White, "Indigenous science (fiction) for the Anthropocene: Ancestral dystopias and fantasies of climate change crises." *Environment and Planning E: Nature and Space* 2018: 1(1-2): 224-242. DOI: 10.1177/2514848618777621. (UBC Library)

#### Week 2. Impermanence

Kamo no Chōmei, *Hōjōki (An Account of My Hut)*. (Canvas)

<https://washburn.edu/reference/bridge24/Hojoki.html>

"The Sūtra on Impermanence (*Anityatāsūtra*)," <https://chungtai.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/Sutra-4-Sutra-on-Impermanence.pdf>

Steven Heine, "Zen Master Dōgen: Philosopher and Poet of Impermanence," *The Dao Companion to Japanese Buddhist Philosophy*, pp. 381-405. (UBC Library).

**Week 3. Death**

“Maranassati Sutta: Mindfulness of Death” (1) & (2)

<https://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/an/an06/an06.019.than.html> and

<https://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/an/an06/an06.020.than.html>

“Kisagotami Theri”

<https://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/kn/thig/thig.10.01.than.html>

“Skinny Gotami & the Mustard Seed” (this is the traditional commentary on the above passage, “Kisagotami Theri”)

<https://www.accesstoinsight.org/noncanon/comy/thiga-10-01-ao0.html>

“Gotami Sutta: Sister Gotami”

<https://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/sn/sn05/sn05.003.than.html>

**Week 4. Death**

Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*. Many translations are available. Online versions:

<http://seinfeld.co/library/meditations.pdf>

<http://classics.mit.edu/Antoninus/meditations.html>

<http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/2680>

**Week 5. Transformation**

*Zhuangzi: Basic Writings*, translated by Burton Watson. (UBC Library)

**Week 6. Wild**

Gary Snyder, *The Practice of the Wild* (UBC Library)

**Week 7. One (Tsawalk)**

E. Richard Atleo, *Tsawalk: A Nuu-chah-nulth World View* (UBC Library), selections to be announced

**Week 8. Solitude**

Thomas Merton, *Thoughts in Solitude* (Canvas)

Sara Maitland, *How to Be Alone* (Canvas)

**Week 9. Attention**

Simone Weil, *Gravity and Grace* (UBC Library)

**Week 10. Meaning**

Viktor Frankl, *Man’s Search for Meaning*

[https://edisciplinas.usp.br/pluginfile.php/3403095/mod\\_resource/content/1/56ViktorFrankl\\_Mans%20Search.pdf](https://edisciplinas.usp.br/pluginfile.php/3403095/mod_resource/content/1/56ViktorFrankl_Mans%20Search.pdf)

**Week 11. Hope**

Gabriel Marcel, *Homo Viator: Toward a Metaphysic of Hope* (Canvas), selections to be determined

**Week 12. Hope**

Jonathan Lear, *Radical Hope* (UBC Library)

**Week 13. The Good**

Iris Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Good* (UBC Library)