**A mid-length list of summer reading and viewing suggestions**. (updated 5/6/16)

Here are a few of my favorite relatively recent books and films, plus a couple of favorite websites. I originally created this list in response to requests from students for interesting miscellaneous (not only philosophical) summer reading, and it soon mutated to include other media. I hope to update it periodically in the future. I’m not sure I could make a manageably short list of favorite books exclusively in philosophy, but students who would like further suggestions in a specific philosophical area (including areas in which I offer courses, for example in aesthetics and art theory, philosophy of film, philosophy of religion, environmental philosophy, and philosophy of mind) are welcome to ask. CH

**Nonfiction**

* Rebecca Solnit, *The Faraway Nearby* (Solnit has an unusual gift for interweaving commentary on all kinds of serious political, aesthetic and philosophical issues with autobiography, in a voice like no other. Another of my favorites by her is *A Field Guide to Getting Lost*)
* David Abram, *The Spell of the Sensuous: Perception and Language in a More-Than-Human World.* (A beautifully crafted discussion of how our basic identity with the nonhuman world is revealed through sensuous appearances and language. It’s a passionately “neo-romantic” exhortation to the inhabitants of postmodern developed consumer culture to care about wild nature rather than measure and exploit it.)
* Thich Nhat Hanh, *Essential Writings* (Thich Nhat Hanh, a Vietnamese Zen monk, has been a major figure in Buddhism since the Cole War era. He has a remarkable gift for expressing deep and complicated ideas in beautifully simple sentences.)
* Pema Chödron, *Living Beautifully With Uncertainty and Change* (Chödron, another major Buddhist writer from the US, draws on Tibetan teachings in her insightful explorations of human existential realities. A good complement or antidote to the more suspiciously cheery versions of Positive Psychology.)
* Jonathan Haidt, *The Happiness Hypothesis: Finding Modern Truth in Ancient Wisdom* (The best and deepest book in the literature of Positive Psychology, by a leading figure in moral psychology, with something for everyone. Very highly recommended.)
* Philippa Perry, *How to Stay Sane*. (A smart, concise, reader-friendly overview of how contemporary psychotherapy understands psychic health, with useful suggestions for getting or keeping it oneself.)
* Irvin Yalom, *Staring at the Sun: Overcoming the Terror of Death*. (Yalom, an existential psychotherapist, draws on his own professional experience in discussing the psychological complexity of the prospect of death. He has some fascinating collections of case studies also, such as *Love’s Executioner*. )
* Stanley Cavell, *Pursuits of Happiness: The Hollywood Comedy of Remarriage* (A now classic study, by the eminent Harvard philosopher, of a group of popular 30’s and 40’s era romantic comedies—eg It Happened One Night, The Lady Eve, The Philadelphia Story- that on the surface may seem light entertainment but also deal with deep existential and epistemological themes. )
* Charles Duhigg, *The Power of Habit*. (A fascinating study of how we form and change habits; good reading for anyone trying to do the latter themselves.)
* Michael Greger, M.D., and Gene Stone, *How Not to Die: Discover the Foods Scientifically Proven to Prevent and Reverse Disease* (This encyclopedic treatment of its vital subject has won massive praise—see its Amazon reviews—since its 2015 publication. Supplies yet further nutritional arguments for why we’re healthier eating more plants and less meat. For ethical arguments, watch the film *Earthlings* [also listed below].)

**Websites**

* The Book of Life. A unique online encyclopedia of short articles dealing with various issues at the interface of psychology/personal growth/philosophy. [http://www.thebookoflife.org ]
* Brain Pickings. A wonderful online blogazine, updated weekly, which presents thoughtful reviews of books and art dealing with philosophical and psychological and aesthetic subjects. [ https://www.brainpickings.org ]
* Edge.org. A website featuring updated articles and interviews and symposia with leading contemporary figures in the sciences and philosophy. [https://www.edge.org ]

**Fiction** (see Amazon listings for descriptions)

* Margaret Atwood, *Oryx and Crake*
* Milan Kundera, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*
* China Mieville, *Embassytown*
* Teju Cole, *Open City*
* Hilary Mantel*, Wolf Hall*
* Irvin Yalom, *When Nietzsche Wept; A Novel of Obsession*

**Films**

* Ingmar Bergman, *The Seventh Seal* (The most famous film by one of the 20th century’s indisputably great directors. )
* Ingmar Bergman, *Persona* (Another essential Bergman classic--I recommend watching *The Seventh Seal* first, just to get a sense of Bergman’s involvement with existential themes in a more conventional narrative. Persona, on the other hand, has a less conventional “modernist” style of storytelling—not a conventional narrative, but if you can suspend Hollywood habits of fast linear watching, and show up for it, it will show up for you .
* Andrei Tarkovsky, *Stalker* (Tarkovsky is up there with Bergman among great European directors. For those whose brains and senses of time haven’t been thoroughly colonized by the Hollywood style of rapid cutting, the cinematography is gorgeous. This film draws on political and spiritual themes that abound in Russian literature also. )
* Kryzstof Kieslowski, *Decalogue*.(Kieslowski is another giant. These ten one-hour self-standing dramas, originally shown on Polish television in the 80’s, are loosely based, respectively, on the themes of the Ten Commandments. Each is brilliant.)
* Patrick Shen, *The flight from Death: the quest for immortality* (Brilliant documentary about how different cultures confront the reality of death and how so much of our Western consumerist culture tragically denies it. Based on themes in Ernest Becker’s important book *The Denial of Death*. Everyone should see it….)
* Shaun Monson, *Earthlings* (narrated by Joaquin Phoenix; score by former Purchase Philosophy student Moby) A brilliant, disturbing documentary about how human beings treat other species. Many scenes are shocking—and for me certainly eye opening-- beyond description. Being shocked isn’t a reason to stop watching, if you believe a vital function of art is to provoke fresh feelings and thoughts in its audience about the morality of practices that they (including, in this case, all of us who eat or wear animal products) otherwise happily enough engage in. Peter Singer—the most important and interesting moral philosopher writing now in my opinion—says “If I could make everyone in the world see one film, I’d make them see Earthlings.” After seeing Earthlings, check out Michael Greger, M.D., *How Not to Die: Discover the Foods Scientifically Proven to Prevent and Reverse Disease [listed above]* You can see it and other related documentaries online at [ http://www.nationearth.com]; these require a fee, but you can elsewhere watch it online for free.
* Frank Capra, *It Happened One Night* (My favoriteof the romantic comedies discussed by Cavell in Pursuits of Happiness [see above])
* Akira Kurosawa, *Ikiru* (A classic by the great Japanese director which presents another powerful story about the relation of life to death. This isn’t a samurai film…)
* Florian Henckel von Donnersmark, *The Lives of Others* (Tragically beautiful story of art, politics, love, and betrayal in Cold-War East Berlin.)
* Wim Wenders, *Wings of Desire* (A poignant and classic tale--also set in Cold War Berlin—of an angel who longs to have the full range of embodied mortal human experience, including especially human love.)
* Woody Allen, *Crimes and Misdemeanors* (Allen’s best film in my opinion; simultaneously serious and hilarious)