Summer School
"Futures of Well-being – Speculative Visions and Critical Perspectives"
Programme and Book of Abstracts
(16 June 2026; changes possible)

Date: July 27–31, 2026
Online kick-off session (mandatory): July 02, 2026, 15.30-17.00 CEST
Online closing session (mandatory): September 14, 2026, 15.30-17.00 CEST

Join under this link:
https://uni-koeln.zoom.us/j/92958190833?pwd=d405nYk5nFbTtD0jDH5iIlbaokMl3J.1
Meeting-ID: 929 5819 0833
Passwort: 373816

Venue at the University of Cologne, main campus, during on-site week:

- Mon, Tue, Thu & Fri: S01 in Seminargebäude, Universitätsstraße 37, 50931 Köln, ground floor
- Wed: S12 in Seminargebäude, Universitätsstraße 37, 50931 Köln, 1st floor

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Time	Activity	Location
Thursday, 2 July 2026, Online kick-off session (mandatory)		
15:30-17:00 CEST	• Introduction to the topic and the summer school • Participants are placed into expert groups (where possible, based on shared interest indicated in their applications), first opportunity to get to know each other & kick-off discussing potential expert group projects (with expected continuous online collaboration in the weeks until the summer school) • After the kick-off until the start of the summer school: Participants remain in contact with their group, narrow down their focus topic, do independent background research on their chosen topic and share relevant reading materials with the other members of their expert group in preparation of the work sessions during the summer school	Zoom https://uni-koeln.zoom.us/j/92958190833?pwd=d405nYk5nFbTtD0jDH5iIlbaokMl3J.1 Meeting-ID: 929 5819 0833 Passwort: 373816

Summer school week in Cologne

(Please note that some changes to the programme may be made closer to the date.)

Monday, 27 July 2026, *Futures of Well-Being: Critical Perspectives*		
13:00-14:00 CEST	*Arrival & Registration*	S01 in Seminar-gebäude, Universitäts-straße 37, 50931 Köln, ground floor
14:00-15:30 CEST	*Welcome & Introduction* (Jade Arbo, University of Birmingham, Ruth Möhlig-Falke & Judith Rauscher, University of Cologne)	
15:30-16:00 CEST	*Coffee break*	
16:00-17:00 CEST	*Session 1*: "Classics for Well-being" (Etienne Helmer, University of Santiago de Compostela)	
18:30-20:30 CEST	*Social programme: Welcome Dinner*	TBD
Tuesday, 28 July 2026, Humanity, Well-Being and the In/Humane		
9:00-9:30 CEST	*Welcome coffee and tea*	S01 in Seminar-gebäude, Universitäts-straße 37, 50931 Köln, ground floor
9:30-11:00 CEST	*Session 2*: "Humanity and Well-being" (Ruth Möhlig-Falke, University of Cologne)	
11:00-11:30 CEST	*Coffee break*	
11:30-13:00 CEST	*Session 3*: "Transhumanism and the Future of Well-being – Futurity, Technology, and the Politics of Enhancement" (Francisco J. Alcalá, University of Santiago de Compostela)	
13:00-14:00 CEST	*Catered lunch*	
14:00-14:30 CEST	Take public transport to Neumarkt and walk to *NS Dokumentationszentrum Köln*	Tram line 9 from Universitätsstraße
14:30-17:30 CEST	*Excursion 1*: "Dystopic Pasts and the Inhumane Rhetorics of Well-Being" (NS Dokumentationszentrum Köln) ○ 14.30-16.00h 90-minute guided tour ○ 16.00-17.15 Reflection round in the Erzählcafé	NS Dokumentations-zentrum Köln Appellhofplatz
Evening	Free time	
Wednesday, 29 July 2026, *Just Futures? Critical Perspectives*		
9:00-9:30 CEST	*Welcome coffee and tea*	S12 in Seminar-gebäude, Universitäts-straße 37, 50931 Köln, 1st floor
9.30-11:00 CEST	*Session 4*: "Interventions in the Local community – Public Health in an Interdisciplinary Perspective in Practice" (Dominik Olejniczak, Medical University Warsaw)	

11:00-11:30 CEST	*Coffee break*	
11:30-13:00 CEST	*Session 5*: "The Future of Well-being in Education" (Jan Springob & Dagmar Benincasa, University of Cologne)	
13:00-14:15 CEST	*Lunch* (self-paid)	Cafeteria
14:15-17:15 CEST	*Student Workshop Session* (coffee break in between)	S12 in Seminar-gebäude, Universitäts-straße 37, 50931 Köln, 1st floor
17:15-17:30 CEST	Walk over to Studierenden Service Center (SSC)	Albertus-Magnus-Platz
17:30-18:30 CEST	*Group photo* & *"Summer School-in-Cologne-Quiz"* • 8 volunteers for a buzzer quiz with easy-to-answer questions for a social media reportage about our summer school	One-Button-Recording-Studio (OBRS), basement of the Studierenden Service Center (SSC)
18:30-20:00 CEST	Free time over dinner	
20:00-22:00	*Excursion 2*: Movie Screening in local cinema	TBD
Thursday, 30 July 2026, *Sustainable Futures? Projects and Speculations*		
9:00-9:30 CEST	*Welcome coffee and tea*	S01 in Seminar-gebäude, Universitäts-straße 37, 50931 Köln, ground floor
9:30-11:00 CEST	*Session 6*: "Contested Visions of Sustainable Futures" (Anna Seliverstova, Linnaeus University)	
11:00-11:30 CEST	*Coffee break*	
11:30-13:00 CEST	*Session 7*: "A Cybergothic Tale? AI Extractivism and Environmental Injustice" (Burak Sezer, TU Dortmund)	
13:00-14:30 CEST	*Lunch* (self-paid)	Cafeteria
14:30-16:30 CEST	*Student poster presentations/Museum Walk*	S01 in Seminar-gebäude, Universitäts-straße 37, 50931 Köln, ground floor
16:30-17:30 CEST	*Closing & Wrap-up*	
17:30-18:30 CEST	Free time	
18:30-20:30 CEST	*Social programme: Picnic*	*Piccolo*, Seminar-gebäude, ground floor

Friday, 31 July 2026, *Hopeful Visions, Future Knowledges*		
9:00-9:30 CEST	*Welcome coffee and tea*	S01 in Seminar-gebäude, Universitäts-straße 37, 50931 Köln, ground floor
9:30-11:00 CEST	*Session 8*: "*Active Hope* and Joanna Macy's Approach to Well-being and the *Web of Beings*" (Giovanni Scotto, University of Florence)	
11:00-11:30 CEST	*Coffee break*	
11:30-13:00 CEST	*Session 9*: "Well-being and the Future of Knowledge-Making: Reflections on *To Be Taught if Fortunate* by Becky Chambers" (Jade Arbo, University of Birmingham & Judith Rauscher, University of Cologne)	
13:00-14:00 CEST	*Catered lunch*	
14:00-15:00 CEST	*Wrap-up & Outlook to online closing session* • At the wrap-up of the summer school week, students will be given a list of guiding questions to go back to their application text and reflect about what they have written in the light of what they have learned	
16:00-18:00 CEST	*Optional social programme: guided tour of the Old Town* **(registration required)**	TBD
Evening	Free time	
Thursday, 14 September 2026, Online closing session (mandatory)		
15:30-17:00 CEST	• In preparation for this meeting, please prepare a revision or commentary on your initial application text by the help of the guiding questions received on 31 July • Sharing your text & discussing it with the others on a voluntary basis	Zoom https://uni-koeln.zoom.us/j/92958190833?pwd=d405nYk5nFbTtD0jDH5iIlbaokMl3J.1 Meeting-ID: 929 5819 0833 Passwort: 373816

Below, you will find more detailed information on each session, including required (mandatory) and recommended (extra) readings. **Please prepare the required readings before the summer school week starts and always ask yourself the following questions as you prepare them**:

1. What can we learn from this material about well-being?
2. What do you find particularly interesting about this text?
3. What do you find confusing or problematic about this text?
4. How does this material relate to your individual research interests, or how could you relate it to your individual research interests?

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Book of Abstracts

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Introduction:
Well-being, the "Good Life", Speculative Visions and Critical Perspectives

Jade Arbo, University of Birmingham
Ruth Möhlig-Falke, University of Cologne
Judith Rauscher, University of Cologne

In this session we will introduce you to some of the core concepts of this summer school: we will discuss the concept of *well-being*, its relation to notions of the "Good Life" as well as the role speculative visions and critical perspectives play in shaping the future.

Linguistically speaking, the English noun *well-being* is but a nominalisation of the verb phrase 'to be well'; it's notorious complexity as a concept stems from the fact that the question what makes us be or feel well does not have a single and straightforward answer. It is as much a medical and psychological as a philosophical, religious, social, political, economic, and ecological question. In essence, as Ruth Möhlig-Falke will suggest, it is the question (or quest) for our individual and collective life satisfaction, the level of which may be influenced by a wide array of internal (e.g. biological, psychological) and external (e.g. economic, societal) factors. Well-being, or life satisfaction, is thus strongly tied to notions of the "Good Life," "good living" and the "common good."

As Judith Rauscher will show, philosophers have long been debating notions of the "Good Life," "good living" and the "common good"; so have theologians, psychologists and other medical professionals, along with other social and political actors. During her introductory comments, Judith Rauscher will thus briefly discuss some definitions and debates surrounding the "Good Life" and its relation to well-being as well as a few points of critique that thinkers have mounted against purely hedonistic and individualised notions of "good living" on the one hand, and against politicised and universalised notions of "good living" on the other.

Last but not least, Jade Arbo will lay out part of the reasoning for why our summer school combines discussions about well-being and the "Good Life" with the idea of critical speculation and why we have decided to discuss with you not just well-being as an aspect of life/living but as a matter of speculation and as an idea articulated and debated in a variety of texts, including literary ones.

Preparatory reading

Recommended:

(1)[1] Fletcher, Guy (2021). Philosophy of well-being for the social sciences. In: Matthew T. Lee, Laura D. Kubzansky & Tyler J. VanderWeele, eds. *Measuring Well-Being*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. (DOI: 10.1093/oso/9780197512531.003.0008)

(2) VanderWeele, Tyler J. & Byron R. Johnson (2025). Multidimensional versus unidimensional approaches to well-being. *Nature Human Behaviour* 9: 857–863. (https://doi.org/10.1038/s41562-025-02187-5)

[1] Numbers in front of readings refer to the order in which they appear in the attached PDF-Reader.

Session 1:
"Classics for Well-being"

Etienne Helmer, University of Santiago de Compostela

"Classics for Well-Being" explores how the great thinkers of antiquity can still offer valuable guidance for living a balanced, meaningful, and fulfilling individual and collective life today. Philosophers such as Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Epicurus, the Cynics and the Stoics devoted much of their work to fundamental questions about happiness, virtue, friendship, self-mastery, justice, and the search for inner peace. They understood well-being not only as personal fulfilment, but also as something deeply connected to the community, the common good, and our relationship with the natural world.

Ancient philosophy shows that individual well-being cannot be separated from social and political life. Plato and Aristotle reflected on justice as the foundation of a good society, where education, equality, and civic responsibility contribute to collective flourishing. The Stoics emphasised universal human dignity and the idea that all individuals belong to a shared moral community, offering an early vision of social justice and solidarity. At the same time, many classical thinkers saw nature not as a resource to dominate, but as an order with which human beings must live in balance.

Through the study of classical texts and ideas, students are invited to connect these ancient perspectives with contemporary issues such as inequality, social justice, ecological responsibility, and the search for meaning in a rapidly changing world. This course demonstrates that ancient wisdom is not merely historical knowledge, but a living resource that can inspire ethical action, political reflection, and a deeper understanding of well-being for both individuals and societies.

The session will focus on the two following examples:

1) Cynic philosophy makes it possible to think of an alternative figure of the human being as a social and political animal for sake of Well-Being in the current context of economic, environmental and political crises. By refusing to define the human being through needs, the Cynics deactivate the social valorisation of the desire to possess, the violence it entails, and power relations based on domination that sustain it. Far from being antisocial and anti-political, they propose an emancipatory and egalitarian politics founded on frugality and on the construction of ways of life in the first person, aimed at fulfilling the joy of being oneself and of being in the world.

2) Ancient Greek economic thought, mostly regarding household management, provides alternative pattern for rethinking what economy could be and its impact on social relationships and human flourishing. Although it is rooted in a slave-owning society founded on unequal social relations, Xenophon's reflection on economic practices invites us to rethink the domestic sphere as a place of intellectual and moral fulfilment, and as a space of cooperation between different individuals working toward a common goal. In this sense, the household once again becomes a truly shared political space.

Preparatory reading

Required:

(3) Book 6 of Diogenes Laertius: *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*. Edited and translated by S. White. Austin: University of Texas, 2021.

(4) Xenophon. *Economics*, with focus on chapters 1-6 and 7-10.

Session 2:
"Humanity and Well-being"

Ruth Möhlig-Falke, University of Cologne

Both positive (utopian) and negative (dystopian) visions of the future reflect on basic characteristics of humans. While utopian visions tend to serve a humane and humanitarian perspective, dystopian visions usually show us what may happen if we lose our humanitarian perspective, i.e. our kindness towards others, and allow inhumane behaviour. This session serves to discuss the complex interactions between our conceptions of being "human", being "humane", well-being, and promises of the "Good Life". What characterises being a human, and how do cultural conceptions, values, and beliefs shape how we think about and behave towards others? What can we learn from history about humanity, and which future visions of humanity may we want to foster, and why? Following a short input, we will go into group work about these questions and finally discuss them together.

Preparatory reading

Required:

(5) Finneron Burns, Elizabeth (2024). 'Humanity': constitution, value, and extinction. *The Monist* 10: 99-108. (https://doi.org/10.1093/monist/onae001)

(6) Martela, Frank (2024). Being as having, loving, and doing: a theory of human well-being. *Personality and Social Psychology Review* 28/4: 372-397. (https://doi.org/10.1177/10888683241263634)

Session 3:
"Transhumanism and the Future of Well-being – Futurity, Technology, and the Politics of Enhancement"

Francisco J. Alcalá, University of Santiago de Compostela

The principal aim of this course is to critically examine transhumanism as a contemporary cultural and sociopolitical movement whose central argumentative resource is the future. Transhumanism presents itself as an emancipatory project aimed at overcoming human biological limitations through technological enhancement. However, the course approaches this promise of a posthuman future not as a neutral forecast, but as a normative construction that actively shapes present political, economic, and ethical decisions.

A core thesis explored throughout the course is that transhumanism deploys the future ideologically to legitimise a specific present. The future is portrayed as an inevitable horizon of enhancement and optimisation, thereby functioning as a justificatory device for existing social arrangements. Far from challenging dominant structures, this projected future tends to reinforce both neoliberal and post-neoliberal logics: enhancement is framed as an individual good, access to which is mediated by market mechanisms, while resulting inequalities risk being naturalised at the biological or genetic level. The future thus becomes a means of stabilising the status quo rather than opening space for collective or egalitarian alternatives.

The course also interrogates the implicit anthropology underlying transhumanist futurity. Decisions about radical future transformations are guided by the values, aspirations, and conceptions of well-being of present human subjects – typically modelled on a Western, first-world individual. This generates a circular and self-legitimating logic: a movement that claims to transcend the human nonetheless projects the future in the image of the present, neglecting cultural, historical, and intergenerational variability in life projects.

Finally, the course addresses the tension between transhumanism's technological determinism and its simultaneous claim that technological development can be ethically controlled. By promising technical solutions to fundamentally social, political, and cultural problems, transhumanism obscures the inseparability of technology from power relations and values. The course therefore equips students to critically assess how futures are imagined, mobilised, and governed, and to question whose interests such futures ultimately serve.

Preparatory reading

Required:

(7) Alcalá, Francisco Javier (2024). A critique of the post-neoliberal techno-utopia of transhumanism drawing on Deleuze and Guattari's philosophy, In: Saswat Samay Das, Ananya Roy Pratihar & Emine Gorgul, eds. *Deleuze, Guattari and the Schizoanalysis of Post-Neoliberalism*. London & New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 74-92.

(8) Bostrom, Nick (2011). A history of transhumanist thought. In Michael Rectenwald & Lisa Carl, eds. *Academic Writing across the Disciplines.* New York: Pearson Longman, 1-29 (Reprinted & revised from *Journal of Evolution and Technology*, 14/1 (2005). (www.nickbostrom.com)

Recommended:

(9) Alcalá, Francisco Javier (fc.) Why do we need posthumanism in the 21st century?

Session 4:

"Interventions in the Local community – Public Health in an Interdisciplinary Perspective in Practice"

Dominik Olejniczak, Medical University Warsaw

The concept of well-being is connected with many areas. For achieving a high level of well-being, many factors must be considered. Amongst other aspects, health and access to health-care are crucial for experiencing a high level of well-being, or life satisfaction. The promotion and protection of the health of all people and their communities is realised through Public Health interventions. Public Health interventions are interdisciplinary and require many different professions to work together. Reaching those citizens who may be particularly vulnerable to adverse health conditions is crucial. Actions should be based on identifying and changing unfavorable health determinants. These efforts must be grounded in developing the competencies of healthcare workers active in the local community and the appropriate use of resources.

In this workshop, we want to look at public health interventions from an interdisciplinary perspective. The workshop will include the following tasks: (a) how to build public health interventions in the local

community, (b) how to adapt activities to the needs and capabilities of the population, and (c) how to build an intervention with limited resources. The goal is to build skills in assessing health needs, teaching hierarchy and sequence of actions, and to learn how to justify interventions.

We will work in four subgroups, each of them addressing a different type of health situation and being tasked with selecting the type and sequence of interventions for selected members of their local community. After completing the group task, the subgroups discuss their cases with the others and justify their actions.

Preparatory reading

Required:

https://www.who.int/teams/health-promotion/enhanced-wellbeing/ninth-global-conference/healthy-cities

(10) Jansson, Elisabeth V.G. & Tillgren, Per E. 2010. Health promotion at local level: a case study of content, organization and development in four Swedish municipalities. *BMC Public Health* 10:455 (http://www.biomedcentral.com/1471-2458/10/455)

Session 5:
"The Future of Well-being in Education"

Jan Springob, University of Cologne
Dagmar Benincasa, University of Cologne

Debates on well-being in education are often shaped by individualising approaches such as resilience or self-care. This workshop understands well-being instead as a social, political, and cultural vision of the "good life" that informs educational practices and future imaginaries. In line with the summer school's focus on "Futures of Well-being", the workshop combines a short conceptual input with a speculative group exercise. Participants are invited to imagine education in the year 2050 and to develop future scenarios focusing on institutions, learning spaces, curricula, teachers, and technology. These scenarios will be discussed as competing utopian, dystopian, or ambivalent visions of educational well-being, justice, and collective flourishing.

Preparatory reading

[N/A]

Session 6:
"Contested Visions of Sustainable Futures"

Anna Seliverstova, Linnaeus University

What does a sustainable future actually look like, and who gets to define it? This session invites participants to explore sustainability not as a fixed goal, but as a contested vision of the "good life".

Across disciplines and public debates, sustainability is often presented as a shared aspiration. However, ideas about well-being, justice, progress, and responsibility vary significantly, leading to very different

futures. For some, sustainability is primarily about technological innovation, efficiency, and green growth. For others, it implies ecological limits, redistribution, or a deeper rethinking of consumption, work, and social priorities. Some visions put human flourishing at the centre; others emphasise ecological balance, non-human life, or intergenerational responsibility. These differences are not only technical but also fundamentally political and normative, shaping which needs are prioritised and which costs are deemed acceptable.

During the workshop, participants will engage with these competing imaginaries through a structured and collaborative scenario. Working from different perspectives, they reflect on how diverse actors, including communities, policymakers, businesses, and social movements, might articulate and defend their own understanding of sustainable well-being. The aim is not to reach consensus, but to surface tensions, value conflicts, trade-offs, and the implicit assumptions that often remain hidden behind seemingly universal sustainability language.

The session is designed for an interdisciplinary group and encourages participants to draw on their own lenses, literary, philosophical, historical, cultural, social, or political. By connecting conceptual ideas about well-being with concrete choices and constraints, the workshop creates a space to examine how futures are imagined, justified, and negotiated.

Preparatory reading

Required:

(11) Rajić, Jovan, Tibor Moldvai, Mirko Popović, Johanna Sydow & Katja Giebel (2025). *The Jadar Project, Serbia: History, Context and Concerns.* E-paper briefing. Berlin: Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung.

Recommended:

(12) Ivanović, Stojan, Jelena Tomičević-Dubljević, Ivana Bjedov, Ilija Đorđević & Ivana Živojinović (2023). "Cultural Landscape Management in Context: Local Communities' Perceptions under Jadar Mineral Extraction Project in Serbia." *The Extractive Industries and Society* 16 (101361).

(13) Müller, Melanie, Lea Strack & Marina Vulović (2025). "The EU's Raw Materials Diplomacy: Serbia as a Test Case: The Rule of Law and Sustainability as Benchmarks for Europe's Raw Materials Cooperation." *SWP Comment* 10. Berlin: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik.

Session 7:
"A Cybergothic Tale?
AI Extractivism and Environmental Injustice"

Burak Sezer, TU Dortmund

In the face of the recent surge in AI hype, it is easy to overlook the enormous planetary and material costs that sustain AI's seemingly immaterial operations. As Kate Crawford and Karen Hao, among others, have shown, AI is deeply entangled with central concerns of the environmental humanities, including extractivism, pollution, land appropriation, and neocolonial forms of indentured servitude in the Global South. Building on these insights, I propose a literary and cultural studies perspective for making sense of AI's material underpinnings: the cybergothic. Silvia Moreno-Garcia's novel *Mexican Gothic* (2020)

extends a vision already anticipated by early cyberpunk author William Gibson – namely, that AI emerges as a colonialist, power-hungry, energy-intensive, and dynasty-sustaining cybernetic monstrosity. In a similar vein, the cyberpunk afrofuturist movie *Neptune Frost* (2021, dir. Uzeyman/Williams) highlights the repressed colonialist and extractivist aspects inherent in the technological boom in the Global North. In borrowing and rehashing classic gothic tropes such as "vampirism" or "necromancy", these cybergothic works offer a political aesthetics of what many authors have labelled "AI extractivism".

Preparatory reading

Required:

(14) Crawford, Kate (2021). *Atlas of AI. Power, Politics, and the Planetary Costs of Artificial Intelligence.* New Haven and London: Yale UP. (Introduction)

Choose one of the following texts (the other one is recommended):

(15) Hao, Karen (2025). *Empire of AI: Dreams and Nightmares in Sam Altman's OpenAI*. London: Penguin. (Chapter 12: Plundered Earth)

(16) Morengo-Garcia, Silvia (2020). *Mexican Gothic*. London: Arcadia Books. (Chapter 12)

Session 8:
"*Active Hope* and Joanna Macy's Approach to Well-being and the *Web of Beings*"

Giovanni Scotto, University of Florence

The point of departure of this session is the concept of global polycrisis, understood as the causal entanglement of multiple interconnected crises affecting climate, ecosystems, armed conflict, social well-being, and global governance. Drawing on systems thinking, the seminar examines the epistemological roots of contemporary crises through the contributions of Gregory Bateson, Boaventura de Sousa Santos, and feminist and indigenous approaches to knowledge. Particular attention is devoted to Joanna Macy's "Work That Reconnects" and the concept of Active Hope as pathways for addressing despair, restoring connectedness, and fostering collective well-being. The presentation also discusses the role of imagination in social transformation, highlighting John Paul Lederach's moral imagination and the idea of a *nonviolent imagination*. By connecting personal, cultural, ecological, and political dimensions of change, I argue that responding to the polycrisis requires regenerative, nonviolent, and collaborative approaches, rooted in new forms of agency, broader conceptions of community and time, and the capacity to envision desirable futures.

Preparatory reading

Recommended (*please obtain via your home university library*):

Kimmerer, Robin Wall (2013). *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teachings of Plants*. Minneapolis, MN: Milkweed Editions.

Lawrence, Michael, Thomas Homer-Dixon, Sarah Janzwood, Johan Rockström, Ortwin Renn & Jonathan F. Donges (2023). *Global Polycrisis: The Causal Mechanisms of Crisis Entanglement*. Version 1.0. Cascade Inst.

Lederach, John Paul (2005). *The Moral Imagination: The Art and Soul of Building Peace*. Oxford: OUP.

Macy, Joanna & Chris Johnstone (2012). *Active Hope: How to Face the Mess We're in without Going Crazy*. Novato, CA: New World Library.

Session 9:
"Well-being and the Future of Knowledge-making: Reflections on *To Be Taught if Fortunate* by Becky Chambers"

Jade Arbo, University of Birmingham
Judith Rauscher, University of Cologne

This session takes Becky Chambers' solarpunk novella *To Be Taught, If Fortunate* (2019) as a starting point for a discussion of knowledge-making, well-being, and the future of scientific practice. Chambers' novel follows Ariadne O'Neill, a flight engineer aboard the Merian, who, together with a small interdisciplinary team of researchers, has been sent to undertake ecological surveys of four exoplanets orbiting the red dwarf star Zhenyi by a collectively-funded space programme. Structured as a personal mission report addressed to an interested public back on Earth, Ariadne's narrative documents the team's scientific observations as well as their emotional, ethical, and relational experiences as they encounter unfamiliar ecosystems and navigate the conditions of long-duration space exploration.

Working with this speculative text, this fiction-based session invites participants to engage critically with Chambers's narrative to reflect on how scientific knowledge is produced, how it might be produced differently, and what knowledge-making has to do with questions of well-being and conceptions of the good life. Through a guided discussion, participants will be encouraged to consider how personal relations affect practices of scientific and scholarly inquiry and how values such as care, sustainability, and relationality are reshaping research practices across disciplines. The session positions speculative fiction as a methodological tool for eliciting awareness and fostering dialogue about alternative epistemologies as well as the social and ethical dimensions of knowledge-making, emphasising the role of the imagination and critical thinking in reconfiguring how we, as producers of knowledge working in different disciplines understand both science and its social responsibilities.

Preparatory reading

Required:

Becky Chambers:*To Be Taught, If Fortunate* (2019)

Please purchase a paper or digital copy of this novella.