

ANTH2350/UGED2980 FALL 2019

MEANINGS OF LIFE

Lecture: Thursday 1:30-3:15 MMW LT1

Tutorials: Various times

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In this course, you will learn about the processes through which individual meanings of life are formed and negotiated between individuals and their societies; you will learn this through reading and analysis of individual life stories in Japan and the United States. You will also learn about the evolution of senses of meaning in different societies across human history, from prehistory up until the present and future. These two areas of learning will enable you to think about societies past and present and about lives lived within these societies from a new perspective. You will also perhaps learn about how to think about your own life and meaning in a deeper and more conscious way; although this course is academic, it transcends the academic, to have a potential impact on your own thinking about your life.

Although this course examines meanings of life from an anthropological perspective, no prior knowledge of anthropology is required: you can apply what you learn in this course to a wide range of disciplines and endeavors.

Learning Outcomes

After taking this course, you will be able to

- a) think analytically about meanings of life within your own and other societies, and understand the complex linkages between individuals and society in creating meaning,
- b) comprehend the broad panorama of the evolution of meaning over the course of human history, and
- c) (although this outcome cannot be graded) understand your own life in a more insightful way.

Grading

The course will be graded on the basis of:

- 1) Take-home mid-term examination (6-7 pages long: 40% of grade). This will be handed out on Oct. 17 and due Oct. 31
- 2) Take-home final examination (10 pages long: 60% of grade). This will be handed out on Nov. 21 and will be due Dec. 9.

Required readings as well as “other interesting readings” are all reserved in UL. *What Makes Life Worth Living: How Japanese and Americans Make Sense of Their Worlds* is available at the bookstore, on campus. Readings are available on Blackboard. Students are required by university policy to submit soft copies of all papers to VeriGuide. Check the website <http://www.cuhk.edu.hk/policy/academichonesty/> for how to submit papers through VeriGuide.

Grade Descriptors

A Outstanding performance on all learning outcomes, through work that has creatively synthesized course materials and key ideas, to the extent that you show a depth of understanding as great as or greater than my own. Your arguments in your work are logical and cohesive, the discussion is well-organized, and the writing is clear. All relevant course materials have been fully utilized in your work, and additional material as well has been used from your own research.

A- Outstanding performance on all learning outcomes, through work has creatively synthesized course materials and key ideas. Your arguments in your work are logical and cohesive, the discussion is well-organized, and the writing is clear. All relevant course materials have been fully utilized in your work, and perhaps additional material as well from your own research.

B+ Substantial performance on all learning outcomes. Your arguments in your work are largely logical and cohesive, the discussion is generally well-organized, and the writing is clear. Most relevant course materials have been fully utilized in your work. There are areas for improvement with respect to building a cohesive argument, organizing the discussion, communicating clearly, and/or identifying relevant evidence and using all course materials, but by and large you have turned in good, solid work.

B Satisfactory performance on all learning outcomes, OR high performance on some learning outcomes which compensates for less satisfactory performance on others, resulting in overall satisfactory performance. Your arguments in your work are somewhat logical and cohesive, the discussion is somewhat well-organized, and the writing is somewhat clear. Much relevant course materials have been fully utilized in your work. There are areas for improvement with respect to building a cohesive argument, organizing the discussion, communicating clearly, and/or identifying relevant evidence.

B- Adequate performance on all learning outcomes, OR satisfactory performance on some learning outcomes which compensates for less satisfactory performance on others, resulting in overall largely adequate performance. Your arguments in your work are partially logical and cohesive, the discussion is partially organized, and the writing is somewhat clear. Some relevant course materials have been fully utilized in your work. There are areas for improvement with respect to building a cohesive argument, organizing the discussion, communicating clearly, and/or identifying relevant evidence.

C+ Adequate performance on the majority of learning outcomes. Your written work shows some effort, but course materials have not been sufficiently engaged. The argument and the writing is not clear, and/or there is less than full evidence for statements and claims made. There are areas for improvement with respect to building a cohesive argument, organizing the discussion, communicating clearly, and/or identifying relevant evidence.

C, C- Barely adequate performance on a number of learning outcomes. These grade will be awarded to students who have missed a large number of classes and have failed to use course materials in their written answers.

Part One: Meanings of Life Between Self and Society

Sept. 5: Introduction to Course

Sept. 12: Meanings of Life in Anthropological Perspective

--Thomas Nagel, *What Does It All Mean?*, p. 95-101

--Gordon Mathews, *What Makes Life Worth Living? How Japanese and Americans Make Sense of Their Worlds*, p. 3-11, 47-53

Sept. 19: Meanings of Life in Work and Love

--Gordon Mathews, *What Makes Life Worth Living?* p. 70-82

--"Why You Will Marry the Wrong Person," *New York Times*, May 28, 2016

--Gordon Mathews, "Being a Man in a Straited Japan: The View from Twenty Years Later." In S. Kawano, G. Roberts, and S. Long, eds., *Capturing Contemporary Japan: Differentiation and Uncertainty*, p. 60-80.

Sept. 26: Youth, Age, and Meaning

--Mary Pipher, *Another Country: Navigating the Emotional Terrain of Our Elders*, p. 39-56;

--Gordon Mathews, *What Makes Life Worth Living?* p. 118-131

--G. Mathews and B. White, "Introduction: Changing Generations in Japan Today." In G. Mathews and B. White, eds., *Japan's Changing Generations: Are Young People Creating a New Society?*, p. 1-12.

Oct. 3: Meaning in Creation and Religion

--Gordon Mathews, *What Makes Life Worth Living?* p. 155-180, 193-203

--FiveThirtyEight, "Religious Diversity May Be Making America Less Religious," Aug. 23, 2016

Oct. 10: Meanings of Death

--Tony Walter, *The Eclipse of Eternity: A Sociology of the Afterlife*, p. 9-25

--Mark Manson, *The Subtle Art of Not Giving a F-ck*, p. 184-204

--"How Psychedelic Drugs Help Patients Face Death," *New York Times*, April 20, 2012

--David Eagleman, *Sum: Forty Tales from the Afterlife*, p. 23-25, 47-49, 52-53

Oct. 17: Self, Society, and Meaning

--Ernest Becker, *The Birth and Death of Meaning*, p. 65-74

--Sheldon Solomon, et al., *The Worm at the Core*, p. 100-123

--Roy Baumeister, *Meanings of Life* p. 360-367

I will hand out take-home mid-term on Oct. 17. It is due Oct. 31

Part Two: Meanings of Life in the Evolution of Human Societies

Oct. 24: Meanings of Life and Cultural Evolution

--Robert Ornstein and Paul Ehrlich, "The World We Made," in *New World, New Mind*, p. 40-65

--Sheldon Solomon, et al., *The Worm at the Core*, p. 63-81

Oct. 31: The History of Meanings in Europe

--Franklin Le Van Baumer, *Main Currents of Western Thought* (fourth edition), selections: p. 190-192, 326-329, 454-455, 576-583, 710-711 (Calvin, Galileo, Condorcet, Huxley, Freud).

Nov. 7: The History of Meaning in Japan and China (There is no class this day because of graduation; this class will be on film on Blackboard)

--Patricia Buckley Ebrey, ed. *Chinese Civilization: A Sourcebook*, 2d edition, selections: p. 17-26, 27-31, 142-145, 258-262, 442-446 ("Confucian Teachings," "Daoist Teachings" "Book of Rewards and Punishments," "Li Zhi's Letters," "Lei Feng")
--Kenkō, *Essays in Idleness* [Tsurezuregusa], pp. 3-12.

Nov. 14: Meanings of Life and Happiness Around the World

--Naomi Adelson, "The Shifting Landscapes of Cree Well-Being," William Jankowiak, "Well-Being, Cultural Pathology, and Personal Rejuvenation in a Chinese City 1981-2005," in G Mathews and C. Izquierdo, eds., *Pursuits of Happiness: Well-Being in Anthropological Perspective*, p. 109-123, 147-166.

Nov. 21: Meanings of Life in Contemporary Societies

--Gregg Easterbrook, "More of Everything Except Happiness," in *The Progress Paradox: How Life Gets Better While People Feel Worse*, p. 163-187

--Yuval Noah Harari, "And They Lived Happily Ever After," in *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind*, pp. 421-444.

I will hand out the Take-Home Final Exam Nov. 21; it is due Dec. 9.

Nov. 28: The Future of Meaning

--Robert Wright, "The Evolution of Despair," in *Technology and Society: A Bridge to the 21st Century*, p. 24-29

--Yuval Noah Harari, "Education: Change is the Only Constant," in *21 Lessons for the 21st Century*, pp, 73-81

--Michio Kaku, *Physics of the Future: How Science Will Shape Human Destiny and Our Daily Lives by the Year 2100*, p. 109-119, 157-165, 191-195.

--Discussion of Take-Home Final Exam

ASSIGNED READINGS

- Baumeister, Roy. 1991. *Meanings of Life*. New York: Guilford Press. BF778.B32
- Baumer, Franklin L. 1978. *Main Currents of Western Thought: Readings in Western European Intellectual History From the Middle Ages to the Present*. Fourth Edition. New Haven: Yale University Press. CB203.M25 1978
- Becker, Ernest. 1971. *The Birth and Death of Meaning: An Interdisciplinary Perspective On the Problem of Man*. Second edition. New York: The Free Press. BD450.B39 1971
- Easterbrook, Greg. 2003. *The Progress Paradox: How Life Gets Better While People Feel Worse*. New York: Random House. HM891.E27 2003
- Eagleman, David. 2010. *Sum: Forty Tales from the Afterlife*. New York: Vintage Books. PS3605.A375 S86 2010
- Ebrey, Patricia Buckley, ed. 1993. *Chinese Civilization: A Sourcebook*. Second Edition. New York: The Free Press. DS721.C517 1993
- Harari, Yuval, Noah. 2015. *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind*. New York: HarperCollins. CB113.H4 H3713 2015
- Harari, Yuval Noah. 2018. *21 Lessons for the 21st Century*. New York: Spiegel & Grau, 2018. CB428 .H36848 2018
- Kaku, Michio. 2011. *Physics of the Future: How Science Will Shape Human Destiny and Our Daily Lives by the Year 2100*. New York: Doubleday. Q175.5 .K257 2011
- Kawano, Satsuki, Glenda S. Roberts, and Susan Orpett Long, eds. 2014. *Capturing Contemporary Japan: Differentiation and Uncertainty*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press. HC462.95 .C365 2014
- Kenkō. 1981. *Essays in Idleness* [Tsurezuregusa]. Translated by Donald Keene. Tokyo: Charles E. Tuttle. PL791.6.T7E48
- Manson, Mark. 2016. *The Subtle Art of Not Giving a F_ck: A Counterintuitive Approach to Living a Good Life*. New York: HarperCollins. BJ1589 .M259 2016
- Mathews, Gordon. 1996. *What Makes Life Worth Living? How Japanese and Americans Make Sense of Their Worlds*. Berkeley: University of California Press. HN723.5.M355 1996
- Mathews, Gordon, and Carolina Izquierdo, eds. 2009. *Pursuits of Happiness: Well-Being in Anthropological Perspective*. New York: Berghahn Books. HN25.P87
- Mathews, Gordon, and Bruce White, eds. 2004. *Japan's Changing Generations: Are Young People Creating a New Society?* London: Routledge. HQ799.J3J364
- Nagel, Thomas. 1987. *What Does It All Mean?* New York: Oxford University Press. BD21.N24

Ornstein, Robert and Paul Ehrlich. 1989. *New World New Mind: Moving Toward Conscious Evolution*. New York: Simon & Schuster, Touchstone. GF50.O76

Pipher, Mary. 1999. *Another Country: Navigating the Emotional Terrain of Our Elders*. New York: Riverhead Books. HQ1063.6.P57 1999

Solomon, Sheldon, Jeff Greenberg, and Tom Pyszczynski. 2015. *The Worm at the Core: On the Role of Death in Life*. New York: Random House. BF789.D4 S66 2015

Walter, Tony. 1996. *The Eclipse of Eternity: A Sociology of the Afterlife*. London: MacMillan. BL535 .W35 1996

Wright, Robert. 2000. "The Evolution of Despair," in L. Hjorth, B. Eichler, A. Khan, and J. Morello, eds., *Technology and Society: A Bridge to the 21st Century*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall. T14.5.T44168 2000

OTHER INTERESTING READINGS DEALING WITH MEANINGS OF LIFE

Baggini, Julian. 2004. *What's It All About? Philosophy and the Meaning of Life*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. BD431.B23 2004

Baumeister, Roy F. 2005. *The Cultural Animal: Human Nature, Meaning, and Social Life*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. BF57.B35 2005; online

Becker, Ernest. 1973. *The Denial of Death*. New York: The Free Press. BD444.B36

Brim, Gilbert. 2000. *Ambition: How We Manage Success and Failure Throughout Our Lives*. Lincoln NE: iUniverse.com. BF503.B75 2000

Cooney, Brian. 2004. *Posthumanity: Thinking Philosophically About the Future*. Lanhan: Rowan and Littlefield. T14.5.C667 2004

Evans-Pritchard, E. E. 1976. *Witchcraft, Oracles, and Magic Among the Azande*. Oxford: Clarendon. GN475.8.E9 1976

Frankl, Viktor. 1963. *Man's Search for Meaning: An Introduction to Logotherapy*. New York: Washington Square Press. D805.G3.F7233 1963

Freud, Sigmund. 1962. *Civilization and its Discontents*. New York: W. W. Norton. BF173.F682 1962

Fukuyama, Francis. 2002. *Our Posthuman Future: Consequences of the Biotechnology Revolution*. London: Profile. TP248.2.F84 2002

Gawande, Atul. 2014. *Being Mortal: Medicine and What Matters in the End*. New York: Henry Holt. WB310 .G39 2014

Gerber, William. 1994. *The Meaning of Life: Insights of the World's Great Thinkers*. Amsterdam: Rodopi. BD431. G46. 1994

- Giddens, Anthony. 1991. *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*. Stanford: Stanford University Press. HM706.G398
- Gilbert, Daniel. 2006. *Stumbling on Happiness*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf. BF575.H27 G55 2006
- Hochschild, Arlie. 1990. *The Second Shift*. New York: Avon Books. HQ536.H62 1990
- Jackson, Michael. 2012. *Lifeworlds: Essays in Existential Anthropology*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. GN33 .J273 2013
- James, William. 1956. *The Will to Believe and Other Essays*. New York: Dover. B945.J23.W5 1956
- Juergensmeyer, Mark. 2003. *Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence*. Berkeley: University of California Press. BL65.V55.J84
- Kleinman, Arthur. 2007. *What Really Matters: Living a Moral Life amidst Uncertainty and Danger*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. BJ1547.4 .K54
- Klemke, E. D. and Steven Cahn, eds. 2008. *The Meaning of Life: A Reader* (3rd edition). Oxford: Oxford University Press. BD431 .M4688 2008
- Larimer, David, ed. 2004. *Science, Consciousness, and Ultimate Reality*. Exeter UK: Imprint Academic. Q175.S336 2004
- Layard, Richard. 2005. *Happiness: Lessons from a New Science*. New York: Penguin Press. BJ1481 .L28 2005
- Lifton, Robert J. 1993. *The Protean Self: Human Resilience in An Age of Fragmentation*. New York: Basic Books. BF697.5.S65.1993
- Suzuki, Hikaru, ed. 2012. *Death and Dying in Contemporary Japan*. London: Routledge GT3284.A2 D43 2013
- Pinker, Steven. 2011. *The Better Angels of Our Nature: Why Violence Has Declined*. New York: Viking. HM1116 .P57 2011
- Tolstoy, Leo. 1971. "The Death of Ivan Ilyich." In *The Death of Ivan Ilyich and Other Stories*. London: Oxford University Press. PG3366.A15.M3 1971
- Wright, Robert. 2009. *The Evolution of God*. New York: Little Brown. BL473 .W75 2009
- Zuckerman, Phil. 2008. *Society Without God: What the Least Religious Nations Can Tell Us About Contentment*. New York: New York University Press. BL2775.3 .Z83 2008
- Zuckerman, Phil. 2012. *Faith No More: Why People Reject Religion*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. BR517 .Z83 2012