

# MEANINGS OF LIFE

ANTH2350/UGED2980 Fall 2016 NAH 115 **PRELIMINARY**

Lecture: Monday 9:30-11:15

Further tutorials: TBD

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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.

## Course Objectives

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) 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 OR an interview and analysis of a person as to “life after death and life before death” (6-7 pages long: 30% of grade). This will be handed out on Oct. 24 and due Nov. 7.
- 2) Take-home final examination (10 pages long: 50% of grade). This will be handed out on Nov. 28, and will be due Dec. 12.
- 3) Class participation and attendance: 20% of grade

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. Most readings—except for this book—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 information on how to submit papers through VeriGuide

## **Part One: Meanings of Life Between Self and Society**

### **Sept. 12: Introduction to Course / 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. 70-105

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

--Optional: Gordon Mathews, "Being a Man in a Straitened 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

--Optional: 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: Holiday**

### **Oct. 17: Meanings of Death**

--Tony Walter, *The Eclipse of Eternity: A Sociology of the Afterlife*, p. 9-48

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

--Optional: Gordon Mathews, "Death and 'the Pursuit of a Life Worth Living' in Japan." In Hikaru Suzuki, ed., *Death and Dying in Contemporary Japan*, p. 33-48.

### **Oct. 24: 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

We will hand out take-home mid-term on Oct. 24. It is due Nov. 7

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

### **Oct. 31: Meanings of Life and Cultural Evolution**

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

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

### **Nov. 7: 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. 14: The History of Meaning in Japan and China**

--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. 21: 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. 28: Meanings of Life in Contemporary Societies: Have We Gone Crazy?**

--Erich Fromm, "Are We Sane?" in *The Sane Society*, p. 3-11

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

--"The 'Busy' Trap," *The New York Times*, June 30, 2012.

We will hand out the take-Home Final Exam Nov. 28; it is due Dec. 12.

### **Dec. 5 (Class make-up day): The Future of Meaning**

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

--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.

## 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

Ebrey, Patricia Buckley, ed. 1993. *Chinese Civilization: A Sourcebook*. Second Edition. New York: The Free Press. DS721.C517 1993

Fromm, Erich. 1956. *The Sane Society*. London: Routledge. HM1266.F75

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

Kenkō. 1981. *Essays in Idleness* [Tsurezuregusa]. Translated by Donald Keene. Tokyo: Charles E. Tuttle. PL791.6.T7E48

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 2009

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 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall. T14.5.T44168 2000

**OTHER INTERESTING READINGS DEALING WITH MEANINGS OF LIFE**

Armstrong, Karen. 1994. *A History of God*. London: Mandarin. BT98.A647

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

Fromm, Erich. 1978. *To Have or To Be?* London: J. Cape. BF698.F746

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* (3<sup>rd</sup> 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
- Mathews, Gordon, and Bruce White, eds. 2004. *Japan's Changing Generations: Are Young People Creating a New Society?* London: Routledge. HQ799.J3J364
- Pinker, Steven. 2011. *The Better Angels of Our Nature: Why Violence Has Declined*. New York: Viking. HM1116 .P57 2011
- Roberts, Glenda S., and Susan Orpett Long, eds. 2014. *Capturing Contemporary Japan: Differentiation and Uncertainty*. Hawaii: University of Hawaii Press. HC462.95 .C365 2014.
- Singer, Irving. 1992. *Meaning in Life*. New York: The Free Press. BD431.S578
- Suzuki, Hikaru, ed. 2012. *Death and Dying in Contemporary Japan*. London: Routledge GT3284.A2 D43 2013
- 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. 1994. *The Moral Animal*. New York: Random House. GN365.3.W75 1994
- 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