MEANINGS OF LIFE

ANTH 5315, Fall 2018  MMW LT1
Lecture: Thursday 1:30-3:15
Tutorial: probably Thursday 3:30-4:25
Teacher: Gordon Mathews, NAH 409; cmgordon@cuhk.edu.hk
Office hours: I'm usually in the office 12-7 M-F: drop by or make an appointment.

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 (Learning Outcomes)
After taking this course, you will be able to:
1) think analytically about meanings of life within your own and other societies, and understand the complex linkages between individuals and society in creating meaning,
2) comprehend the broad panorama of the evolution of meaning over the course of human history, and
3) (although you will not be graded on this) 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 (10 pages long: 30% of grade). This will be handed out on Oct. 18 and due Nov. 2.
2) Take-home final examination (15 pages long: 50% of grade). This will be handed out on Nov. 22 and will be due Dec. 10.
3) Class participation (20% of grade)

Grade Descriptors
A Outstanding performance on all learning outcomes.
A- Generally outstanding performance on all (or almost all) learning outcomes.
B Substantial performance on all learning outcomes, OR high performance on some learning outcomes which compensates for less satisfactory performance on others, resulting in overall substantial performance.
C Satisfactory performance on the majority of learning outcomes, possibly with a few weaknesses.
D Barely satisfactory performance on a number of learning outcomes
F Unsatisfactory performance on a number of learning outcomes, OR failure to meet specified assessment requirements.

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.
Part One: Meanings of Life Between Self and Society

Sept. 6: Introduction and Course Overview

Sept. 13: Meaning of Life in Anthropological Perspective
--Thomas Nagel, *What Does It All Mean?* p. 87-101

Sept. 20: Meanings of Life in Work and Love

Sept. 27: Youth, Age, and Meaning

Oct. 4: Meanings in Creation and Religion
--Gordon Mathews *What Makes Life Worth Living?*, p. 155-203
--Look over Ernest Becker, *The Denial of Death*.

Oct. 11: Meanings of Death

Oct. 18: Self, Society, and Meanings of Life
--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. 18. It is due Nov. 2
Part Two: Meanings of Life in the Evolution of Human Societies

Oct. 25: Meanings of Life and Cultural Evolution
--Sheldon Solomon, et al., The Worm at the Core, p. 63-81; look over whole book

Nov. 1: 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); look over whole book

Nov. 8: The History of Meaning in China and Japan
--Kenkō, Essays in Idleness [Tsurezuregusa], pp. 3-12.

Nov. 15: Meanings of Life and Happiness Around the World (There is no class this day because of graduation; this class will be on film on Blackboard)

Nov. 22: Meanings of Life in Contemporary Societies

I will hand out the Take-Home Final Exam Nov. 22; it is due Dec. 10.

Nov. 29: The Future of Meaning
--Discussion of Take-Home Final Exam
ASSIGNED READINGS


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


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


