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:
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) 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)

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/](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. 6: Introduction and Course Overview

Sept. 13: Meaning of Life in Anthropological Perspective
-- Thomas Nagel, What Does It All Mean? p. 87-101
-- Julian Baggini, What’s It All About? Philosophy and the Meaning of Life, p. 89-105

Sept. 20: Meanings of Life in Work and Love
-- Gordon Mathews, What Makes Life Worth Living?, p. 57-105

Sept. 27: Youth, Age, and Meaning

Oct. 4: Meanings in Creation and Religion
-- 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, and so this class will be on film)

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

Nov. 22: Meanings of Life in Contemporary Societies

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


