

LIFE F33: Our Search for Meaning

Welcome ...

Many years ago I concluded that life could be based on enlightened hedonism. I have since moved on and now see meaning as coming from contribution to communities that I value. What kind of evidence, what kind of argument, could be offered in support of that view? This course is my exploration of that question.

Most of my life has been spent working as a systems professional – first as an academic, then as a consultant and manager. With this course, I'm returning to an early interest in philosophy, ... and to an interest in less quantitative studies.

That's me. *What about you? How do you approach meaning? What do you hope to get from the course?*

The course has a website – LIFECourses.ca. It contains a week-by-week outline of the planned material, with selected articles and book chapters available for download. Those so inclined are encouraged to dip into this material. Come to our sessions armed with arguments for, or against, the material planned for the session. This isn't natural science – most topics are open to multiple interpretations.

[On a technical note, I'm happy to provide a website account for anyone who wants to leave comments on the site.]

As I went in search of relevant material, I was drawn into a grab bag of academic areas - philosophy, psychology, psychotherapy, sociology, anthropology, architecture, and urban planning. The references reflect this diversity.

One important starting point for me is the contextual sensitivity of truth. Outside the natural sciences, there are very few truths that are universal. Truth depends of time, place, and context. Further, we're all required to start with our lived experience. That's the basis on which we build understanding, and it's sensitive to us and our context.

The plan for the course is simple:

Week Two: About the social reality within which we find ourselves.

Week Three: About what motivates us and the tensions we must confront.

Week Four: About our sense of self, us as cultural animals, and transcendence.

Week Five: About making “places” and meaningful contribution.

Week Six: Reflections on what we examined, and possible conclusions.

Next week we'll discuss modernity and the challenges it raises. We'll also touch on the “third age” (when we're still relatively fit, but no longer need to work for money). And we'll look at free will. Without it, questions of meaning have little meaning.

See you next week.