

Problems of Living: Perspectives from Philosophy

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CITATION

Philosophy has long asked the big questions of life, including what can we know, and how should we live. Psychiatry is a newer field of medicine, where problems of living often are posed with anguish, and require practical answers. And most recently, advances in neuroscience have begun to influence contemporary answers to these big questions and hard problems. In his volume, “Problems of Living: Perspectives from Philosophy, Psychiatry, and Cognitive-Affective Neuroscience”, Dan Stein, who is Head of UCT’s Dept of Psychiatry and Mental Health, and who has doctoral level training in both clinical neuroscience and philosophy, tackles the big questions and hard problems of life, providing an insightful and integrative approach.

“Problems of Living” is a wide-ranging volume that draws on philosophy, psychiatry, and the cognitive-affective sciences, and which includes an exploration of the mind-body problem, the relationship between reason and emotion, happiness and suffering, good and evil, truth and skepticism, and the meaning of life. The volume underlines how much we still have to learn about human nature and the world, emphasizes that our answers to the big questions and hard problems of living can only be partial and tentative, and nevertheless encourages readers to persist in trying to live meaningful lives – finding a balance between overly optimistic Panglossian and unremittingly pessimistic views of life.

Philosophers, mental health clinicians, and neuroscientists around the globe have reviewed the volume positively. The editor of the *British Journal of Psychiatry*, Kameldeep Bhui writes in the journal that the volume “is an engaging and courageous piece of writing that raises fundamental questions about the nature of mind and brain ... [Stein] communicates a sense of awe and of wonder about our precious and transient lives, as well as a synopsis of a more authentic and progressive scientific account of the mind and brain wetware”. Peter Zachar, a psychologist who has written extensively on philosophy of psychiatry, writes in *Psychological Medicine* that “[Stein’s] integrative attitude is scientific (emphasizing facts), pragmatic (taking human purposes and values into account), and pluralistic ... Stein brings a down-to-earth academic’s sensibility to topics often addressed in the self-help literature.” And a doyen of South African philosophy, Anton van Niekerk, writes in the *South African Journal of Science* that “reading Stein’s book is a journey through a masterpiece. It is one of the most enriching experiences that this reviewer has had in a long time.”