

Middle Age: Setiya's Philosophical Reflections

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Abstract

Philosophers often focus on topics such as death and old age, and much less on other stages of life. The British-American philosopher Kieran Setiya (2017) has recently taken on the topic of middle age from a philosophical perspective and offered suggestions for dealing with the angst often associated with mid-age. His suggestions are based on both his own experiences and practical thoughts based on his readings of other philosophers during their mid-life periods. My own contribution is to describe his thoughts and add a few observations of my own.

Keywords

Middle Age, Midlife, Midlife Crisis, Meaning of Life

While the topics of old age and death have been ever-present topics in the philosophical literature, middle age has not had similar serious attention. In the last few years, only British philosopher [Christopher Hamilton's \(2014\)](#) and British-American philosopher [Setiya's \(2017\)](#) books have dedicated themselves to the topic. In this article I will describe Setiya's philosophical analysis and suggestions for dealing with midlife and its typically associated crisis since it deals with many of life's central (philosophical) concerns. Setiya's considerations in his book exemplify the traditional philosophical task of helping us live our lives well.

This book is both thoughtful and thought-provoking. It is a **philosophical** reflection on the "existential questions of life"—"questions of loss and regret, success and failure, the lives you wanted and the life you have" ([Setiya, 2017: pp. 2-3, 6-7](#)). While such questions can occur at any age, they are more commonly asked during middle age (hence our talk of "the midlife crisis" and the title of his

book)¹. We can sum up these questions under the larger philosophical question “What’s it all about?” or “What’s the point of it all”? A midlife crisis is often experienced as a “dip in life satisfaction” or a “phase of relative unhappiness” that typically occurs in middle age. Setiya distinguishes his book from the plethora of self-help books saturating the book market by focusing on “how to **feel** about your life,” rather than concerns with outward change. Outward change is usually the domain of the therapist or counsellor. In spite of their differing interests, those in counselling, with its emphasis on the practical problems of life, can learn much from this book, since it addresses existential issues that may underlie some of the problematic feelings in the first place.

Chapter One considers the history of what we now call “the midlife crisis,” the “feeling of personal failure” reputedly common in people in the contemporary Western world. The expression “the midlife crisis” was only coined in 1965. Did those living earlier than 1965 experience what we would now call “midlife crises”? Historically, mid-life likely occurred at a much younger age than now – would that make a difference to how one perceives themselves? For example, as we get older, our physical and cognitive ability weakens. When we die in our 40’s, as was historically common, perhaps the body and the mind were more vigorous and there was less angst about the process of *aging* and more on just *survival*. Also, those living in earlier centuries didn’t have the protracted aging period that we have now. Retiring at say, age 65, and then possibly living another 25-30 years forces us to redefine ourselves/our goals in a way that we’ve not experienced in previous generations (Fisher, 2018). While we can identify episodes of people’s lives in past centuries that seem to fit our modern stereotype of feelings of personal failure and missing out, we don’t know how common they were in those earlier times, and further, “it is all too easy to project our [contemporary] image of the crisis back into lives that are radically different from our own” (Setiya, 2017: p. 9)². The latter similarly restricts our theorizing about midlife crises in other non-Western cultures, although there is some evidence that there is a rough U-curve of psychological well-being prevalent across the world, with well-being tending to be lowest around middle age (Rauch, 2018). However, the meaning or shape of the crisis may differ in specific details for different people

¹Indeed, the number of American teenagers who feel useless and joyless seems to have recently increased, along with the number of teen suicides over the last few years. This has occurred in teens across every background. See J.M. Twenge, T.E. Joiner, M.L. Rogers, and G.N. Martin (2018). The authors attribute this situation to the prevalence of on-line activities (notably smart phone usage). The ubiquitousness of constantly being online may also contribute to FOMO (Fear of Missing Out) that is present among many in the 20-30 age group, along with “predictive regret”. This is amplified by the constant social comparisons available on social media such as Facebook and Instagram. Chapter Six of Setiya may be relevant here. It would be of interest to see if this relationship holds in other countries.

²A worthwhile read here is E. Sullivan (2016). This book does not address concerns related to what we would now call a “midlife crisis” but ideas of sadness and despondency in an earlier period. Within different frameworks (e.g. Protestant theology) of the time period under study emotions such as sadness and melancholy were often considered important in cultivating knowledge of oneself—quite different from how we view such emotions today. Mapping these differences onto modern conceptions of how life should be lived presents a variety of difficulties.

(and those in different cultures) and indeed, may be absent in some cultures, and a number of Western individuals (Druckerman, 2018).

Why might midlife be the typical time of this crisis? Well, for one thing, we find ourselves at the peak of the hill at that time and things look downward from there on. Another reason might be that many of our earlier idealistic views regarding how life should go have been either shattered or diminished³. Setiya reasonably chooses to focus on the midlife concerns of those living in the last half-century of Western culture(s). **So, what have we learned about the midlife and this crisis?** Finding out about it is not as easy as one might think—we need good research, not just stories/anecdotes, and we have to be careful since our stories are usually influenced by the popular psychological idioms and phrases of the time under consideration⁴. Setiya points out that the idea of the “midlife crisis” in the West became **very** popular in the early 1980’s and was often applied by people in their later 30’s and 40’s to their own difficult experiences along with those of others. If you were going through a difficult time, why not just say you were having a midlife crisis? The label normalized what you were suffering and did not have the more abrasive stigmas associated with many other labels in the mental health field since such a crisis was often considered inevitable or at least common for people of your age. However, once such expressions become central in popular culture they tend to be employed in a loose fashion with the result that there is an inevitable backlash from the academic community against the overly simplistic popular notions.

What should we do to avoid bottoming out in the U-curve? Setiya’s first rule of crisis prevention is “to care about something other than yourself” (Setiya, 2017; p. 34). How might you accomplish this? Here Setiya distinguishes between activities that are *means* (ways to reach ends) and activities that are *ends* or endpoints (self-satisfying activities in themselves). Don’t just make money as a means of going on vacation to Hawaii. Instead, engage in more **activities** you find enjoyable **in themselves** (not aimed at further ends, however laudable they may be): reading history or poetry, learning about wildlife, going to football games, break dancing, attending curling bonspiels, etc. You never know, in advance, what you might find enjoyable⁵. A second preventative tactic (which overlaps with the first to some degree) would be to make sure you engage in more “existential activities,” those that are “sources of inward joy” (Setiya, 2017: pp. 47-48). “Examples range from philosophy and high art to telling funny stories,

³One of these unrealistic illusions is the belief that many of our individual laudable actions will not cause or be allied with suffering (e.g. the belief that if we don’t buy jeans made by poor workers overseas we will be doing our bit). Alas, much of what we do individually will inevitably be tied to harm. None of us can be “pure” or “innocent” in our everyday activities. However, this does not mean that we cannot collectively engage in pursuits that reduce harms and suffering. See Shotwell (2016).

⁴One might remember the overly-excessive focus on co-dependency popular at the end of the 20th century.

⁵The philosopher John Wisdom (Wisdom, 1984: p. 33) alludes to this distinction. Wisdom criticizes our tendency to focus on the success or purpose of activities. Many activities such as “being before a warm fire, playing with a friend a game of draughts [checkers] or ludo [a family board game].... these things aren’t means to [other ends] they are part of what makes our lives worthwhile....our personality finds expression in [many such activities]”.

swimming or sailing, playing games with family or friends” (Setiya, 2017: p. 48).

The above two suggestions concern avoiding the midlife crisis in general. The subsequent chapters confront more specific aspects of the midlife crisis. The third chapter, “Missing out,” confronts the common feeling of “lost opportunity, frustrated longing, and oppressive social constraint” (Setiya, 2017: p. 54). None of us are likely immune from feeling this way at times, however successful our life seems from the outside, but it is a characteristic part of our view of the midlife crisis. This may be partly a result of the trope that we are brought up with that tells us that we can do or be anything we want. This can lead to disappointment for many of us by raising our expectations—we can’t all become football stars, super slam dancers, or millionaires. These feelings are unfortunately, to some extent, “fated from the start” (Setiya, 2017: p. 71), because we can’t do or have everything⁶. By the time we have reached our mid-lives, our options have already narrowed. For most of us, we have already decided on a career, where to live, whether or not to have children, etc. We can feel locked-in to the lives we have.

We have many different kinds of values (e.g. religious/secular, political, personal, etc.) and it will be useful to make a distinction here between two main types of values (and what we can do based on these values)⁷. Some can be realized together such as enjoying cooking and having a career, but other things we value open some doors and simultaneously close others. You can’t, at the same time, be a full-time doctor and a full-time athlete. You can’t (legally, in the West) marry both Bob and Rex at the same time. You often can’t live in the suburbs and not have to commute into town for your job. You may not be able to both **afford** a house and have several children. The problems can get worse—we typically may not be able to rank which value we think is better or more important. A classic example, referred to by Setiya, is with the dilemma faced by a mother (Sophie) who, when entering a concentration camp in World War Two, is forced by Nazi SS guards to choose which of her two children will be killed. She values both children, but is literally forced make a decision (Styron, 1979)⁸. Few, if any, of our choices in our lives will be of such an extremely tragic nature, but still, many of the choices we make cannot be evaluated on a common scale. Should you have chosen to be a doctor, plumber, anthropologist, entrepreneur, or soldier? Whatever choice you make, other doors will be closed. Some choices based on our interests and values at an earlier time will exclude other choices

⁶A somewhat stronger view of “missing out” is taken by the psychoanalyst Adam Phillips (Phillips, 2013). Phillips contends that very often these imaginary wished-for lives are more important to us than our actual lived lives.

⁷This is the philosophical distinction between **incommensurable** values (those values that cannot be compared using a common scale) and **commensurable** values (those values that can be compared to each other and ranked). Traditionally, among the former we might include liberty (freedom) and equality. Among the latter we might include the salaries and benefits for the same work at different companies.

⁸This suggests that in some situations, **whatever we do** will result in loss and might perhaps even be considered immoral. Indeed, there may be times in our lives when we feel we have failed morally even when what we consider the right thing to do impossible! This position is defended by Tessman (2017). Such is the human condition.

based on other interests and values⁹. This means that regret and feelings of missing out will be inevitable to some extent with all of us—“I should have gotten more education/gone into a different field,” “I should have married Sue/Ted,” “I should never have moved from Calgary,” etc. This is the inevitable outcome of having incompatible values in the first place (and we all have these). Whatever choice you make will likely have some regret associated with it later in your life. Whatever you do will exclude other valuable possibilities. This is the price we pay for having many values and the freedom to act on our values. Setiya (2017: p. 60) asks.

Why is midlife missing out? [It is because] we cannot have everything we want, and what we have does not ... compensate for what we don't [have]. ... it follows from the diversity of values in human life, from the fact that there are so many different things worth wanting, worth caring about, worth striving and fighting for, too many ever to exhaust. Only blindness to much that is of value or a pathological narrowness of taste could save you from [feelings] of missing out. And no one should want that.

While acknowledging this won't help us avoid suffering regret and a midlife crisis, Setiya says this awareness can help us cope with it, because our losses are “fair payment for the surplus of being alive” (Setiya, 2017: p. 62).

Chapter Four, “Retrospection,” addresses “how to feel about the ways life is not what you hoped it would be ... the mistakes, misfortunes, failures” (Setiya, 2017: p. 78). When we are young, everything seems possible. We can have it all. Soon enough, we learn that many things are beyond our control, and that our own decisions often do not work out for our own good. Setiya (2017: p. 72) makes the distinction between *mistakes* (“things you should not have done”) and *regrets* (“things you would take back” if you could)¹⁰. Both are inevitable to all of us¹¹. We might try to reduce the number of **mistakes** we make in our lives but cannot eliminate them. We often act on incomplete information with limited cognitive abilities, which include in-built, sometimes misleading biases¹². Feelings of “missing out” and regret are also inevitable to a large extent because of the richness of our actual lives. But let's say, despite the foregoing, you feel you should have chosen to become an entrepreneur rather than do what you are now

⁹Not only can our present values and interests conflict, but our interests and values (and experience) can change over time, making such feelings inevitable. Hence the expression “[What I did] seemed the right thing to do **at the time**”.

¹⁰Regret can take several forms, Davidi and Gilovich (2018) contend that there are two main types of regret we have in our lives: those involving missed opportunities and those involving discrepancies between our actual and ideal selves. The authors provide evidence that the most enduring regrets concern the latter. This might be of interest to philosophers who focus on issues of self-identity over time.

¹¹There's a conceptual distinction between mistakes and regrets (as described by Setiya), but why can't these be largely coextensive? I regret many things I shouldn't have done and wish I could take back some of my mistakes. I don't see the theoretical significance of the distinction in this context, since the salient points seem expressible either way.

¹²These biases are described in most introductory psychology books. At any age we might feel that life is offering us less than other people and this may strike us harder in middle age than at other times. However, this feeling itself might be due to psychological bias (Deri, Davidi & Gilovich, 2017). A good overview of the often misleading consequences of such biases in our thinking and actions can be found in Foresman, Fosl, and Watson (2017).

doing. **In the abstract**, it may seem sensible to feel this way. We do often think our lives would have gone **better** had we taken an alternative route. However, lives are not lived in the abstract and the ideal. Our lives are lived in the world of unpredictable and messy details. There are many different things that constitute our lives (our career, finances, health, family, collegial relationships, children, interests/hobbies, economic ups and downs, etc.), and things can easily go well or badly within one or more of them over time. There are also so many different possibilities **within** each of these aspects of our lives which can go well or untwist in varying directions at different times in our lives. Even if you are wealthy you will likely still have neighbours you don't get along with, or have children that might be bullied in school, or have colleagues at work you don't get along with, or a bad marriage. You won't have it all¹³. What we need to do is focus on the **complexity and specifics of the lives we do have** (Setiya, 2017: p. 101). In the vast majority of our actual lives there are things that have happened that are positive (perhaps your children, your friends, you fill-in-the blanks here). Would you trade or risk those actualities for an unknown-**idealistic** sounding life, knowing that however much better an alternative life **appears**, much of our actual lives will always be beyond our control and unpredictable little things can have large consequences—"the butterfly effect" (Setiya, 2017: p. 85). We, unfortunately, tend to "fantasize about the best-case scenarios" (Setiya, 2017: p. 97).

Chapter Five is entitled "Something to look forward to" and confronts the issue of our mortality. To start off, we need to distinguish between the **process** of dying and death¹⁴. The stoic philosopher Epicurus (4th century BC) thought that

¹³Further, some of our own values can, at times, conflict with each other. The paradigm empirical example here is between work and family. The answer usually given is to find the right balance—alas, the balance point will vary for different people, and how does one determine this balance point? And we may have to revisit this balance point over time in our lives (what works in our twenties may not work in our forties or fifties). The conflicts in other cases may be inherent in the values themselves. Again, this may be fated from the outset for all of us. Recognizing this "fated-ness" may help; after all, we are all in the same boat. Not only may some of our most important values conflict at times, many of the issues we care about may involve largely irresolvable value conflicts. For example, Stanovich (2018: p. 10) contends

Issues like how much inequality of income to tolerate, how much pollution to tolerate, and how much we should sacrifice economic growth for potential future changes in global temperature represent issues of clashing values, not the inability to process information, or the lack of information, or the failure to show wisdom. They are fundamental differences in worldview and on such a large-scale basis are not driven by psychological characteristics that can be normatively evaluated.

The sheer complexity of many such issues may not be realized until later in life, perhaps contributing to some of our feelings of lack of control in midlife.

¹⁴Setiya focuses on our fear of death itself rather than our concerns about the **process** of dying. There are good reasons for this emphasis on death, rather than dying—while dying for many can be a painful process, it isn't necessarily so (whereas fear of death for oneself or a loved one is universal). Further, many societies have been and are dealing with the process of dying in more palatable ways over time. We now have drugs that can numb the most severe pain, and palliative care where trained staff can look after many of the needs of the dying, and family and friends can visit (consult issues of the Sage Journal of Palliative Care). A comprehensive overview of palliative care around the world, and with respect to patients with varying physical and psychological conditions, can be found in C. Faull, S. de Caestecker, A. Nicholson and F. Black (2012). Other intriguing possibilities are on the horizon. For example, Weijjers and DiSilvestro (2017) contend that plugging terminally ill individuals into virtual reality machines could benefit those in strong pain and with a diagnosis of irreversible future pain. The authors discuss a variety of objections to this view and advocate for its plausible consideration

our fear of death was both universal and irrational (after all, when we are dead, nothing matters to us). Setiya contends that while this way of thinking about death may work for some of us, it strikes many as not good enough to make us not fear death. After all, death deprives us of good things like friends, family, and hobbies we enjoy. The later Roman Stoic philosopher, Lucretius (1st century BC), on the other hand, doesn't know why people get into a frenzy biting the bulrushes about their deaths; after all, we don't freak out about not existing before we were born, so why do so in thinking about not existing after we jump the ship? Aren't these situations logically the same? Again, this may work for some of us, but not for many others; while we might recognize the **intellectual** force of the argument, we might still have emotional/psychological resistance to accepting the argument. We humans tend to be biased toward the future; future pleasures and harms seem to count more to us than past harms and pleasures¹⁵. Setiya cites contemporary philosopher Derek Parfit's "neutral temporal" response to this bias: "As life passes [you] have less and less to look forward to, but more and more [of your past] to remember.... And that is just as good" (Setiya, 2017: p. 116). This particular attempt at acquiring a neutral temporal attitude will, again, work for some but far from all of us. Apart from the difficulty of adopting this attitude, not all of us have pasts we might enjoy reflecting on. Some of us may view our past life (in both our middle-age and beyond) as did Stoner, the main character in the novel by John Williams, who had "little behind him that he cared to remember" (Williams, 2006: p. 181). For those who are unmoved by Epicurus, Lucretius, or Parfit, can philosophy offer more? Well, one possibility is to try and see our desire to avoid death (which corresponds to the wish to live forever) for what it is—an "expression of greed, an intemperate demand for superhuman powers" (Setiya, 2017: p.119)¹⁶. This is why immortality tends to be associated with the supernatural and religion¹⁷. We can also think of immortality

¹⁵Counselor Louise Blanchard tells me that she finds many clients ruminate less about death and dying and more about potential *future suffering and losses*, for example, the fears of illness, loss of parents, children leaving home and even diminished cognitive/physical ability. It's an anxiety based on "what ifs?" that preoccupies the mind, rather than on "what is". Ironically, such future- vs present-focused thinking can make life more miserable **now**.

¹⁶Some might object that they don't want to live forever, **but only longer**. But how much longer? And does this not just put off the problem of confronting death until a future time? Would living 500 years mean that, at the end of that long lifespan, there would be less fear of one's forthcoming death? Wouldn't most still want even more life? One is reminded of Voltaire's humorous tale "Micromegas" (1752), in which two extra-terrestrial visitors to earth discuss their lifespans. One complains that his species lives only 15,000 earth years and observes "which, as you can see, is to die almost the moment one is born; our existence is a point in time, our [life]span is but an instant. ... No sooner do we begin to educate ourselves a little than death arrives before we have any experience of life." His companion says, "... our lifespan is seven hundred times greater than yours, but ... when the moment comes to return our body to the elements arrives... to have lived for an eternity or for a single day amounts to the same thing. I have been in places where they live a thousand times longer than [I do], and find that they still grumbled" (Voltaire, 2002: p. 21).

¹⁷Setiya does not examine the various options that religions offer regarding the specific form an afterlife might take, and rightly so, given this is secondary to the topic of the book. However, for those interested, there is philosopher Steven Cave's book (2012)], which provides a very engaging introduction to the topic. Cave is a skeptic about an afterlife. He points out that the desire to live forever has a long history, and claims that all of our proposals for living forever can be encompassed in four types: a special fountain/potion, resurrection, an immortal soul, and, lastly, through some kind of famous achievement(s). All four of these narratives are given a philosophical workover and found wanting. An entertaining history of recent (more scientific) attempts to extend lives over the past two centuries can be found in John Gray (2012). Gray considers the scientific attempts to circumvent death in a number of different ways over the past two centuries. Gray's book covers spiritualism in its various guises, parapsychological attempts to prove the immortality of the soul, the Communist Russian "God-builders" who preserved Lenin's remains, and contemporary technological attempts to freeze our bodies or upload our minds into cyberspace.

as likely not being as good as we idealistically believe. While having projects and goals contributes meaning to our lives it might, after a while (maybe a few million years), become pretty boring and repetitive¹⁸. To actually enjoy (in some sense) an endless life, we would have to become a very different kind of being, far different from the human being that we are now. The almost magical changes required would be, “akin to growing wings or reproducing by fission... it is one thing to dream of living as a timeless deity, another thing to feel swindled by the fact that this is just a dream” (Setiya, 2017: p. 119).

Chapter Six (“Living in the present”) is a central chapter in the book. It discusses a serious contributing factor not only to midlife crises in the West, but also to the feelings of “repetition and futility and emptiness” (Setiya, 2017: p. 128) that often occur later in life. This factor is the continuous focus of so many of us on pursuing goals and projects (however worthwhile they seem). In everyday life we often call this situation “the rat race.” Setiya tells us that, while projects and goals can contribute meaning and purpose to our lives (after all, who would not feel that combatting poverty or helping the homeless were not meaningful activities or projects?), the dominance of a project/goal driven **mindset** also has its downsides and can contribute to feelings of discontentment and emptiness. How can this be the case? Here Setiya alludes to nineteenth century German philosopher Schopenhauer’s point that a project driven life endlessly leads to other projects, and every satisfied desire or completed project gives rise to a new one. We are caught between the endless engagement of projects and unendurable boredom. Setiya goes between the horns of Schopenhauer’s dilemma by pointing out that goal-less activities also contribute meaning to our lives and we don’t have to follow the project-driven life in all of its aspects to have a meaningful life. Other activities contribute meaning to our lives. Setiya (2017: p. 134) suggests many of us may be able to overcome this debilitating sense of being driven by a series of goals and projects (however laudable) by introducing **more goal-less** activities into our lives:

listening to music, hanging out with friends or family, or thinking about midlife ... you can stop doing these things ... but you cannot complete them. They have no limit, no outcome, whose achievement exhausts them and thereby brings them to an end.

Watching sports, parenting, playing video games, going to movies/theatre plays would be other examples. Setiya suggests we include **more** of these activities into our lives. In the capitalist Western world, this may be complicated. Part

¹⁸Some might claim that this ignores all the possible new interests and hobbies one might develop in such a life. Maybe not. Are we that plastic? I’m not sure if our human temperaments are that malleable. Many of us get bored pretty quickly even though there are many different possibilities always available—we **just don’t** find most of the alternative possibilities that attractive. Hence, for many, our boredom on Sunday afternoons and holidays. Of course, genetic modifications or computerized implants might be used to modify our responses to new activities and promote new interests, but how far can such changes go before we are no longer the same person or even no longer a member of the human species?

of the reason may be that envy and competition has been shaped from birth to be powerful motives for most of us. Further, some of us have what are sometimes called Type-A personalities (a label associated with being competitive, aggressive and ambitious). However, even here, such project-driven individuals can “find meaning in **the process**, not the project” (Setiya, 2017: p. 140), that is, they can try and focus on the process/journey, not the end. Meditation may help here by allowing us to refocus our attention on our own thoughts and feelings that are counterparts to the projects. Still, given the society that we live in, with its emphasis on productivity and “worthwhile activities,” this will still be difficult to do for many of us: our not being engaged in “productive activities” that is, those related to goals, is discouraged and stigmatised. The image of the “couch potato” or labels such as “doing nothing with his/her life” are always hanging over our heads. Setiya does not recommend we spend all our time on such goal-less activities, but we need to find the right balance. Finding the right balance between goal-related and goal-less activities will differ among people, including partners and family members who may not view such a change positively. Many will likely need additional help from other approaches or other people in finding this balance¹⁹.

An important point to make is that Setiya’s book addresses the Midlife Crisis largely from a Western male perspective. The author points out that his interest in the topic stems from his own crisis in his thirties where he achieved what he wanted, but was not happy. Setiya does not say much about how women might experience a Midlife Crisis, only that life satisfaction for many women and men bottoms out during the middle years. Further, he adds, for women the crisis (if it happens) seems to occur a bit earlier and does not last as long as it does with men. However, one might expect the crisis to be more complex regarding women, despite some overlap in concerns with men. Women have additional concerns to deal with such as overt and implicit negative cultural biases, harassment at work, the ever-present cultural focus on appearance along with ageist

¹⁹The problems associated with allowing oneself to be dominated by a project-driven life have been long recognized and addressed in a number of different ways throughout history. Setiya’s approach is more philosophical and **existential** in nature. It would be worthwhile to be cognizant in greater depth of other approaches, as a larger repertoire will make one more adaptable. Different approaches or mixtures of approaches will likely work with different people: adopting a Stoic life-style or a simpler life-style focus on one’s outward responses/behaviours than feelings. For example, some have found adopting a stoic approach applicable to their lives. Stoic approaches have influenced several commonly used approaches to psychotherapy such as Rational Emotive Behavioural Therapy (REBT) and Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT). For those unacquainted with CBT, a useful introduction can be found in Sbarra (2017). Recent thoughtful books on Stoicism are Pigliucci (2017) and Irvine (2008, 2017). A main feature of Stoicism is on focusing on things under your control rather than those aspects of your life that are beyond your control. A recommended book by a philosophical counsellor integrating elements of both Buddhist and Stoic wisdom is Macaro (2018). Others have successfully adopted a simpler life by trying to avoid becoming saturated with stuff they don’t really need. See E. Westacott (2016a). Those interested in living a more frugal life may also find the article by Westacott of interest: (Westacott, 2016b). Recent developments in counselling also addresses such issues. For example, ACT (Acceptance and Commitment Therapy) helps clients detach from anxiety and project driven struggles. (ACT has much in common with Buddhist beliefs). The classic reference is S. Hayes, K. Strosahl & K. Wilson (2016).

stereotypes more prominent for women. We need to also emphasize the larger background family pressures on women.

This book was an enlightening read. While philosophy cannot terminate the aging process, philosophy **can** provide us with a new or enlarged perspective in which to consider the pros and cons of our midlife. It will be interesting to discuss Setiya's writings on midlife with those from other cultures across the globe.

Not only would I recommend this book to those entering or already in middle age, but also to counsellors (philosophical or psychological) and therapists who are dealing with clients of all ages. Students in counselling will find many of the topics relevant to their future practice. It will also give them a broader background in confronting and thinking about many of the personal issues that their clients experience, as well as their own future lives²⁰.

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²⁰Philosophers, along with those in counselling/psychotherapy will also find the jargon-free philosophy article by Setiya (2018) worth reading. This article overlaps with Setiya's (2017) book in many aspects but considers many of the existential issues people contend with under the larger issue of the **meaningfulness of life**. See also Landau (2017). Landau ties having a meaningful life with finding sufficient **values** in what we do. The overlap with Setiya is evident. But the concerns of Landau are wider, our living in a world where nothing is said to be absolutely certain, free-will is questioned, death confronts us all, and we are told we are insignificant specks in the universe. These issues will come up in discussions with a number of friends, colleagues and counsellor clients and this book, along with Setiya's writings will provide a larger philosophical framework that covers a gap ill-covered in most counselling programs.

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