



## What Really Matters: Living a Moral Life amidst Uncertainty and Danger

By Arthur Kleinman

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In this moving and thought-provoking volume, Arthur Kleinman tells the unsettling stories of a handful of men and women, some of whom have lived through some of the most fundamental transitions of the turbulent twentieth century.

Here we meet an American veteran of World War II, tortured by the memory of the atrocities he committed while a soldier in the Pacific. A French-American woman aiding refugees in sub-Saharan Africa, facing the utter chaos of a society where life has become meaningless. A Chinese doctor trying to stay alive during Mao's cultural revolution, discovering that the only values that matter are those that get you beyond the next threat. These individuals found themselves caught in circumstances where those things that matter most to them--their desires, status, relationships, resources, political and religious commitments, life itself--have been challenged by the society around them. Each is caught up in existential moral experiences that define what it means to be human, with an intensity that makes their life narratives arresting.

These stories reveal just how malleable moral life is, and just how central danger is to our worlds and our livelihood. Indeed, Kleinman offers in this book a groundbreaking approach to ethics, examining "who we are" through some of the most disturbing issues of our time--war, globalization, poverty, social injustice--all in the context of actual lived moral life.

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## **What Really Matters: Living a Moral Life amidst Uncertainty and Danger** By Arthur Kleinman **Bibliography**

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### Editorial Review

#### Review

"This is a fascinating and deeply entertaining book by an eminent anthropologist, psychiatrist, and teacher. It offers the kind of insight that makes you think and think again. But it isn't only analytical. For me at least, the richness of the book comes mainly from the stories Dr. Kleinman tells, about patients and friends and one remarkable historical figure--complicated stories that confront life's miseries and renew the cheapened word 'inspiring.'"--Tracy Kidder

"In this searingly written book, Arthur Kleinman takes us deep into the contrasting worlds of genuine reality and cultural pretense which he has spent so much of his life exploring. I have rarely read such a powerful portrayal of what Kleinman wonderfully calls 'the quality of anti-heroic everydayness.'"--Jonathan D. Spence

"In this luminous new book, master scholar Arthur Kleinman offers a handful of stories that open a channel between personal experience and the broader contexts--such as war or illness--in which we live our short lives. *What Really Matters* is a stern yet humble antidote to the shallow self-help books now crowding bestseller lists. It is also an instructive, deeply affecting and, in the end, transcendent and spiritual book."--Dr. Paul Farmer, Founding Director of Partners in Health, and author of *Pathologies of Power: Health, Human Rights, and the New War on the Poor*

"Arthur Kleinman is one of the most broadly informed and wisest people in the life sciences, bridging medicine and the social sciences in a way that is extremely rare and valuable. Moreover, he is an exceptionally keen observer and writes beautifully about matters of great significance. His new book, *What Really Matters*, is certainly timely when violence is so much in focus and yet it is a contribution of long-term significance." --David A. Hamburg, President Emeritus, Carnegie Corporation of New York

#### About the Author

Arthur Kleinman is Esther and Sidney Rabb Professor and Chair, Department of Anthropology, Harvard University, and Professor of Medical Anthropology in Social Medicine and Professor of Psychiatry, Harvard Medical School. A renowned psychiatrist and anthropologist, he has been awarded the Boas Prize (the highest award of the American Anthropological Association) and is a Distinguished Life Fellow of the American Psychiatric Association. He is a member of the Institute of Medicine of the National Academies and of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences.

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