Why Grow Up? Subversive Thoughts for an Infantile Age


Accessible philosophy doesn't get much better than this insightful review of what Enlightenment thinkers such as Kant and Rousseau have to offer people today. Neiman (Moral Clarity), director of the Einstein Forum in Potsdam, tackles questions that are widely relevant: How do different kinds of experience help and hinder "our understanding of the way the world is, and the way it should be?" And "how do we prepare a child for a world that is not the way it should be?" Along the way, she offers piercing critiques of consumerist culture, illustrating how luxury creates "false needs that make us dependent," and of American society, in which citizens are distracted from the real issues by a bewildering array of choices about relative trivialities. Neiman's sense of humor ("Yes, even Kant could write straightforward sentences") is a plus, but her greatest strength is her ability to distill centuries of thought to their essence, provoking her readers along the way. Neiman convincingly makes the case that growing up is not tantamount to "inevitable decline," and that the hard work to make maturity fulfilling is worth the effort.

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