WHY GROW UP?
Subversive Thoughts for an Infantile Age
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Moral philosopher and Einstein Forum director Neiman (Moral Clarity: A Guide for Grown-Up Idealists, 2008) examines the conundrum of juvenescence versus coming of age. While a select few glide into maturity with a sense of privileged ease, the author surmises, others dread it and opt for years in denial. Throughout her erudite defense of adulthood, Neiman emphasizes that "growing up is more a matter of courage than knowledge" since it takes a certain bravery to eschew the "dogmas of childhood" and, however disillusioned one may become by it, thrive within the world as it truly exists. Tailored for the highly literate reader more than the casual, Neiman's intuitive assertions reference the lives and works of 18th-century Enlightenment thinker-philosophers Immanuel Kant and Jean-Jacques Rousseau, whose opposing viewpoints on coming of age bolster her greater central theme. Kant philosophized that immaturity resulted from a lack of personal fortitude, and for those stuck in the "mire of adolescence," there's a resistance to acknowledge the gap between an idealistic and a reality-based worldview. Rousseau claimed that the creation of a well-adjusted adult begins with the re-evaluation of the child-rearing process, as evidenced in his outspoken treatise Emile. Neiman articulates the differing aspects affecting maturity, such as education, travel and employment, while arguing against painting adulthood as the "dimming of sparkle" because "by describing life as a downhill process, we prepare young people to expect—and demand—very little from it." The author, whose previous books delved into the prospects of both moral nobility and wickedness, juxtaposes these divergent philosophies with dexterity and clarity. Her opening declaration that Peter Pan is "an emblem of our times" remains a resonant—if debatable—statement imploring our culture to act its age regardless of cultural influence or emotional convenience. A scholarly, persuasive assessment of the significance of achieving mental and social maturity.