



Innocence Lost: An Examination of Inescapable Moral Wrongdoing

Christopher W. Gowans

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Our lives are such that moral wrongdoing is sometimes inescapable for us. We have moral responsibilities to persons which may conflict and which it is wrong to violate even when they do conflict. Christopher W. Gowans argues that we must accept this conclusion if we are to make sense of our moral experience and the way in which persons are valuable to us. In defending this position, he critically examines the recent moral dilemmas debate. He maintains that what is important in this debate is not whether there are irresolvable moral conflicts, but whether there are moral conflicts in which wrongdoing is unavoidable. Though it would be incoherent to conclude moral deliberation by deciding to perform incompatible actions, he argues that there is nothing incoherent in supposing that we have conflicting moral responsibilities. In this way, he shows that it is possible to capture the intuitions of those who have defended the idea of moral dilemmas while meeting the objections of those who have rejected this idea. Gowans carefully evaluates utilitarian and Kantian analyses of moral dilemmas. He argues that these approaches eliminate genuine moral conflict only by displacing persons as direct objects of moral concern. As an alternative, he develops a more concrete account in which moral responsibilities to persons are central. The book also includes discussions of Melville's *Billy Budd*, methodology in moral philosophy, moral pluralism, moral tragedy, and "dirty hands" in politics.

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