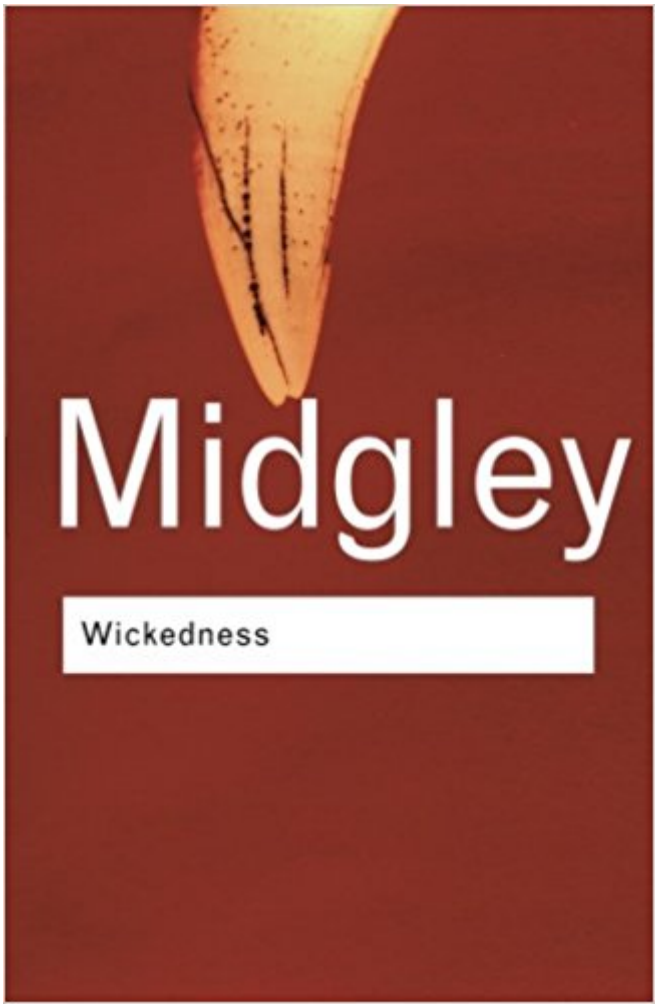
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Wickedness (Routledge Classics) (Volume 137)



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Synopsis

To look into the darkness of the human soul is a frightening venture. Here Mary Midgley does so, with her customary brilliance and clarity. Midgley's analysis proves that the capacity for real wickedness is an inevitable part of human nature. This is not however a blanket acceptance of evil. Out of this dark journey she returns with an offering to us: an understanding of human nature that enhances our very humanity.

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Customer Reviews

' I have now read the book twice, not because it is difficult (on the contrary it reads with the ease and elegance of Bertrand Russell), but because it is so stimulating.' - Brian Masters, The Spectator

Mary Midgley (1919-), a philosopher with a special interest in ethics, human nature and science, has a widespread international following for her work. Other publications include The Ethical Primate, Science as Salvation, Utopias, Dolphins and Computers and, most recently, Science and Poetry

I read this book in a class for school called "The Philosophy of Evil". The book, as I recall, was a historical account of wickedness, what consitutes it and how it difffers from humans and animals. The book was well crafted and created an anchor for the class as we also read Ayan Rand, LaVey and Dawkins, the book "Dark Nature", among other. I suggest the book for those interested in

studying the less than pleasent aspects of human nature.

"Who’s Mary Midgley?""She’s a moral philosopher.""Isn’t moral philosophy dead?""Obviously you’ve not read the book yet." In my unhumble opinion, Mary Midgley has done us a great service by being one of the few to write great books on moral philosophy (others include Philippa Foote, Alistaire McIntyre and Owen Flanagan).Actually, this book couldn’t have come at a better time. Ever since the "war on terror" - as with most morally difficult times - we are quick to condemn bad acts, using the word evil not so much as a label but as a dismissal. Rarely do we a.) face up to the fact that evil tendencies seem inherent and b.) after having done that, be honest enough with ourselves to introspect on what exactly evil "is".MIdgley is an astute introspecter and goes through many arguments that she disagrees with and gives us just as many that she finds satisfying. First, and this is the subtracted star, though, she tells us that our examination of evil as a positive trait (as opposed to the abscence of one) is misguided. The first chapter is spend by in large walking us through why she feels it easier to examine evil as more a degree of abscence of goodness, than as a positive trait unto itself. This I find entirely unconvincing. Not that I think it is a positive trait, just that I’m not sure why it is either. Introspection doesn’t seem to tell us.What is entirely welcome - and this accounts for the four stars - is that her discussion never strays from discussing evil as a natural part of us, rather than dismissing it as either something that we learn via a blank slate effect, or something that only some of us really have. Yes, we’ve come a long way from Rousseau’s natural man and Locke’s tabula rasa.More or less, the book focuses, as apropos of Midgley, on the seemingly endless conflict and irreducibility of the human predicament. We are animals. We are moral. We are self serving. We are altruistic. We are sympathetic. We are ruthless. We are NOT formulas. It’s just amazing that philosophy took this long to figure it out.

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