



The Ethics of Memory

Avishai Margalit

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Much of the intense current interest in collective memory concerns the politics of memory. In a book that asks, "Is there an ethics of memory?" Avishai Margalit addresses a separate, perhaps more pressing, set of concerns.

The idea he pursues is that the past, connecting people to each other, makes possible the kinds of "thick" relations we can call truly ethical. Thick relations, he argues, are those that we have with family and friends, lovers and neighbors, our tribe and our nation--and they are all dependent on shared memories. But we also have "thin" relations with total strangers, people with whom we have nothing in common except our common humanity. A central idea of the ethics of memory is that when radical evil attacks our shared humanity, we ought as human beings to remember the victims.

Margalit's work offers a philosophy for our time, when, in the wake of overwhelming atrocities, memory can seem more crippling than liberating, a force more for revenge than for reconciliation. Morally powerful, deeply learned, and elegantly written, *The Ethics of Memory* draws on the resources of millennia of Western philosophy and religion to provide us with healing ideas that will engage all of us who care about the nature of our relations to others.

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