

IF ISRAEL IS LIVING A LEGAL DRAMA, WHERE DO I FIT IN? I AM NEITHER ISRAEL'S PROSECUTING ATTORNEY NOR ITS DEFENSE ATTORNEY. I AM CERTAINLY NOT ITS JUDGE. THE ONLY ROLE I CAN SERIOUSLY CONSIDER IS THAT OF WITNESS. BUT WHAT SORT OF WITNESS? I AM NOT A STATE WITNESS. I BELONG TO ISRAELI SOCIETY AS AN ENGAGED CITIZEN, BUT IN NO WAY CAN I PROVIDE INSIDE INFORMATION IN RETURN FOR IMMUNITY FROM PROSECUTION. I AM NOT AN EXPERT WITNESS, BECAUSE I AM NOT AN EXPERT. I AM NOT A MORAL WITNESS IN THE SENSE THAT, SAY, ANNA AKHMATOVA WAS IN STALIN'S RUSSIA, AND I HAVE NO SPECIAL MORAL STANDING—I AM NEITHER PERSECUTED NOR A SUFFERER. I AM NOT EVEN AN EYEWITNESS TO MUCH OF WHAT I WRITE ABOUT; I AM A WITNESS MOSTLY THROUGH LISTENING AND READING.

BUT I REALLY DO NOT LIKE THE ROLE OF WITNESS AT ALL. I DO NOT LIKE THE IDEA OF DESCRIBING ISRAEL THROUGH AN EXPLICIT OR IMPLICIT LEGAL DRAMA. I SEE MYSELF IN A DIFFERENT GUISE, IN THE ROLE OF AN ANTHROPOLOGIST'S NATIVE INFORMANT, A MEMBER OF THE TRIBE WHO TELLS THE ANTHROPOLOGISTS ABOUT THE TRIBAL CUSTOMS AND, ESPECIALLY, ABOUT ITS LANGUAGE. A NATIVE INFORMANT IS NOT A MEASURING DEVICE: I AM NOT A SEISMOGRAPH RECORDING SOCIAL EARTHQUAKES. BUT I DO HAVE OPINIONS ABOUT THEM, AND I DO HAVE WORRIES ABOUT THE DIRECTION IN WHICH THE TRIBE IS GOING. I DO NOT HIDE MY OPINIONS OR WORRIES IN WHAT I REPORT. MY WORRIES ARE INCREASING AND MY OPINIONS ARE BECOMING MORE EXTREME BECAUSE MY TRIBE IS NOW IN BAD HANDS.

—AVISHAI MARGALIT



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VIEWS IN REVIEW

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POLITICS

AND CULTURE

IN THE

STATE

OF THE JEWS

AVISHAI

MARGALIT

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**W**hen Zionists first advocated a national home for the Jewish people, they also propounded a revolution in the values that Jews should live by, a whole new way of thinking about Jewish life and Jewish history. Has this revolution in fact occurred? And what have the consequences been for Jews and their neighbors? Especially given the extraordinary circumstances that link the United States and Israel, Americans may find the answers to such questions vexing—but the remarkable work of Avishai Margalit goes far to clarify the issues and enlighten the debate.

Over the past two decades, Margalit has written major essays for American readers about the political leaders, cultural crises, and historical background of the contemporary Israeli scene. In *Views in Review* these essays are brought together with new commentary and observations, and their publication in one volume clearly shows that the whole is much more than the sum of its parts. From Ben-Gurion to Netanyahu, from “Israeli kitsch” to the meaning of the Holocaust for “the seventh million,” Margalit’s work traverses the terrain of Israeli life and history and brings a tragically conflicted country into sharp and memorable focus.



AVISHAI MARGALIT, a native of Jerusalem, is professor of philosophy at Hebrew University and the author of many books, most recently *The Decent Society* (1996). A regular political columnist in the Israeli press, he has been a visiting professor at Harvard, Princeton, and a number of other American universities. He lives in Jerusalem with his wife and children.

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