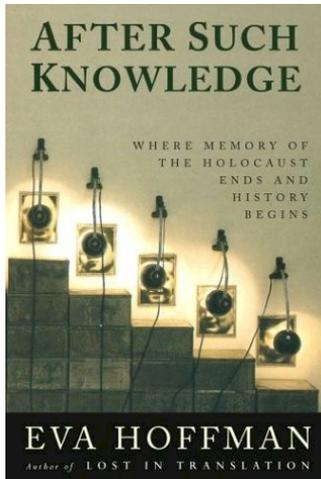


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**After Such Knowledge: Memory, History, and the Legacy of the Holocaust** by Eva Hoffman, PublicAffairs, 2004, 301 pages.



"In the beginning was the war." So begins Eva Hoffman's meditation on the legacy of the Holocaust. Hoffman was born in 1945 in Cracow, of Jewish parents. They had survived the war in the small town of Zaloscie with the help of Ukrainian and Polish neighbors. In 1959 Hoffman emigrated with her parents to Canada, and subsequently to the United States. She wrote about her early years in North America in the very well received *Lost in Translation* (1989).

In the seven short essays which comprise *After Such Knowledge* Hoffman focuses on Holocaust's second generation--the children of survivors. She has gone to Poland and Germany, talked to witnesses, read case histories, memoirs, fiction. She explores the psychological, moral and philosophical implications of the second generation's story. Her observations are highly nuanced and persuasive, especially when she draws on her own experience. There are some instances, however, where the psychological jargon tends to obscure her perceptions.

The essay exploring the effects of emigration on survivors and their children is particularly effective. The West in the 1950s was not interested in the Holocaust. Hoffman's experience in Canada mirrored that of many others. She writes that "the history we transported with us...was a matter of either uneasy embarrassment or eyebrow-raising skepticism." The family felt isolated. Hoffman was often called upon to mediate between her parents and their surroundings. She felt protective towards them. But, like most teenagers, she did not want to be different from her peers, for whom the Holocaust was a matter of total disinterest. Hoffman deftly examines the strands of guilt and exploitation that made up the fabric of family life.

Hoffman examines the controversial subject of Polish-Jewish relations with fairness and sensitivity. She denies the commonly held contention that Nazis placed concentration camps in Poland because they counted on the acquiescence of the local population. She points out that for many centuries before World War II Poland was home to the largest Jewish minority in any country where they were "...a visible...sometimes highly successful and hardly powerless minority." Younger Poles learned nothing about past history of Polish Jews as there was no public discussion of the subject till 1989.

After the death of their parents, Hoffman and her sister decided to visit Zaloscie, the parents' hometown. The sisters were touched by the warm welcome of people who remembered the grandparents they had never known, since all their relatives had perished during the war. They met the family who had hid the parents as well as other Jews. Hoffman strives to understand what motivated rescuers, as well as what motivated the killers. After attending the commemorative ceremony in Jedwabne, she observes that "...what was so horrifically and still puzzlingly done here cannot be undone." But, she concludes "...after all that can be done has been done, it may also be time to turn away, gently, to let this go."

Hoffman has analyzed the literature of second-generation Germans--the children of perpetrators. The children grew up in an atmosphere of secrecy, as most former Nazis did not acknowledge their guilt. The delay in disclosure meant that the eventual confrontations between parents and children were often violent. Just as children of survivors sometimes excessively identified with their parents so the German children of former Nazis "counter-identified." Hoffman grapples with the question of national responsibility. She understands the young Germans who refuse to feel guilty about the deeds of their grandparents and focus on their personal happiness instead. However there are still questions from the past to be alert to, such as a connection between the sources of German xenophobia in the 1930s and the outbreaks of racism today.

In the last essay, "From the Past to the Present," Hoffman summarizes her meditations. She feels that the "statute of limitations on the Holocaust is running out." September 11, 2001 was the beginning of a new era. Hoffman discovers that the awareness of past catastrophes--"after such knowledge"-- do not help us to make sense of new ones. Still, we must try to learn from history. She points out that we have learned that great crimes and wrongs have to be acknowledged and recognized. We have also become more aware of the effects of atrocity on individual victims.

Hoffman concludes that for the children of survivors to separate the past from the present is difficult but necessary. She poses the question: "How to find richness, authenticity, depth in the temperate zones of ordinary life? How to find sources of significance that do not derive from extremity and to endow with value not only great losses but modest gains?"

