



# Making Amends: Atonement in Morality, Law, and Politics

*Linda Radzik*

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Can wrongs be righted? Can we make up for our misdeeds, or does the impossibility of changing the past mean that we remain permanently guilty? While atonement is traditionally considered a theological topic, *Making Amends* uses the resources of secular moral philosophy to explore the possibility of correcting the wrongs we do to one another.

Philosophers generally approach the problem of past wrongdoing from the point of view of either a judge or a victim. They assume that wrongdoing can only be resolved through punishment or forgiveness. But this book explores the responses that wrongdoers can and should make to their own misdeeds, responses such as apology, repentance, reparations, and self-punishment. *Making Amends* explores the possibility of atonement in a broad spectrum of contexts--from cases of relatively minor wrongs in personal relationships, to crimes, to the historical injustices of our political and religious communities. It argues that wrongdoers often have the ability to earn redemption within the moral community.

*Making Amends* defends a theory of atonement that emphasizes the rebuilding of respect and trust among victims, communities and wrongdoers. The ideal of reconciliation enables us to explain the value of repentance without restricting our interest to the wrongdoer's character, to account for the power of reparations without placing a dollar value on dignity, to justify the suffering of guilt without falling into a simplistic endorsement of retribution, and to insist on the moral responsibility of wrongdoing groups without treating their members unfairly.

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