



## AFTER APPROPRIATION: EXPLORATIONS IN INTERCULTURAL PHILOSOPHY AND RELIGION

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# comparative philosophy of religion and modern Jewish philosophy: A conversation

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The guiding question for this exploration is: What might a conversation between comparative philosophy of religion and modern Jewish philosophy contribute to each participant? The suggestions that follow intimate that, while this conversation is just at its beginning, there are important insights that each side can bring to the other. This is just a single episode in a series of conversations with particular philosophic traditions that comparative philosophy of religion must embark on, but I believe that this step provides one type of model for this lengthy and important process. I will begin with reflections on the nature of philosophy and Jewish philosophy from a comparative perspective, as well as on comparative philosophy of religion itself. This will be followed with an examination of some problem areas in comparative philosophy of religion and Jewish philosophy, and I conclude with discussions about the potentialities for each side to address these problem areas in the terrain of the other. I want to add that certainly

at this stage in the development of the discipline of the comparative philosophy of religion no effort can possibly be inclusive enough, *c'est à dire*, we are all learning from each other.

An important lesson in the repertoire of feminist philosophers is that the ways that a philosopher identifies, defines, and approaches philosophic issues reflects a host of conditions. These conditions would include: culture, language, class, age, religious tradition, ethnicity, academic training, conscious and unconscious preferences, and, of course, gender. This understanding, termed “feminist standpoint epistemology,” reminds us that each philosopher has a particular horizon with its attendant strengths and weaknesses. These factors both enable and limit the vision of the thinker.<sup>1</sup> A thinker’s approach is like a road; it both facilitates travel and restricts possibilities of movement. Consequently, no person is allowed to offer proposals in the name of objectivity or the universal. It is in the context of this understanding that this male modern Jewish philosopher proceeds.

## REFLECTIONS ON PHILOSOPHY, JEWISH PHILOSOPHY, AND COMPARATIVE PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION<sup>2</sup>

The vast majority of philosophers trained in Europe and the Americas assume that the discipline of philosophy is universal. However, what they have in mind is a particular tradition of philosophy rather than an understanding of the plurality of its traditions. While this problem also dramatically haunts the early history of comparative philosophy, many contemporary comparative philosophers of religion recognize that there is more than one tradition of philosophy. Usually scholars identify three major philosophic traditions, although such identifications are not uncontested.<sup>3</sup> These are discussed in terms of South Asian philosophies, Chinese philosophies, and Western philosophies. Each of these has particular concerns and emphases, reigning questions and issues, including such foci as: logic, mathematics, epistemology, ontology, aesthetics, religion, ethics, and political thought. They exhibit a variety of notions of what constitutes reason (and perhaps even logic), the self or non-self, knowledge, the world, and the appropriate methods and *tele* of philosophy. There is also a great amount of internal diversity,<sup>4</sup> since each philosophic heritage has multiple currents, shows changes over time, and waxes and wanes over

a period of at least fifteen hundred years. In general, the major currents of South Asian or what is often termed Indian philosophy are linked to Hinduism and Buddhism, which have come to influence not only India but also the other countries of South Asia. Chinese philosophy includes Confucian, Taoist, Buddhist, and Neo-Confucian philosophy, and the countries of China, Japan, and Korea. Western philosophy encompasses the period from the ancient Greeks to the contemporary era and includes those traditions that drew upon Greek philosophy, utilizing its nomenclature, definitions, and issues. There are Christian, Jewish, and Islamic traditions of philosophy, as well as modern Western or what might be termed post-Christian philosophy.

Some scholars even contest the use of the term 'philosophy' to cover such diversity, or suggest alternative designations, such as Ninian Smart's term *darsanas* or worldviews.<sup>5</sup> Still, one can generalize, with much circumspection, about those phenomena that we usually group under the term 'philosophy.' In this case, philosophy is a discipline that addresses some of the widest and most profound human questions: the nature of the human, the universe, the true and the beautiful, as well as what constitutes authentic existence, communal life, and relations with others. What is distinctive to each of the three major traditions of philosophy is the culture(s) and history(ies) or the experiences out of which these streams of philosophy arise, the questions that are most prominent, and the methods used to address these questions. In terms of the prominent questions or fields, a number of scholars have noted the Indian philosophical concern with religion, psychology, and dialectics; Chinese philosophical interests with ethical, political, and social thought as well as aesthetics; and Western philosophical considerations about ontology, epistemology, logic, and mathematics.<sup>6</sup>

In light of the above, it is difficult to suggest a single method or pursuit inclusive enough to do justice to the variety of philosophies. A tentative suggestion might be that these are approaches characterized by reflection that is *articulate, sustained, critical, and self-critical*. The notion of 'articulate,' which I am borrowing from the work of Charles Taylor, is tied to language itself.<sup>7</sup> The word 'articulate' is from the Latin *articulat-us* meaning jointed. The *Oxford Dictionary* includes such additions as: "distinctly jointed or marked; having the parts distinctly recognizable," and in reference to sound; "Divided into distinct parts (words and syllables)

having each a definite meaning; as opposed to such inarticulate sounds as a long musical note, a groan, shriek, or the sounds produced by animals.”<sup>8</sup> To speak of ‘articulate’ highlights clarity, meaningful distinctions, and connections. Philosophers use language to examine issues and to present arguments and counter-arguments. Issues are addressed by breaking questions into distinct components, looking into relations, and insisting on providing the maximum appropriate clarity and meaning. The term ‘sustained’ just reinforces the tenacity or persistence of the process of examination. The word ‘critical’ refers to uncovering presuppositions and implications of positions and statements. Ideas are not just explored, but, in particular, what both grounds them and leads from them is traced. Finally, philosophy is ‘self-critical.’ The philosopher not only presents arguments but continually reflects on her or his own position, presuppositions, and implications.<sup>9</sup> Philosophy, and this has special relevance to Indian philosophy,<sup>10</sup> is sometimes taught and performed through debates, where one invites or welcomes the other to critically examine one’s own position as part of the process of doing philosophy.<sup>11</sup> The Jewish philosopher Emmanuel Levinas has said that, despite all of Western philosophy’s lapses, it is the feature of being self-critical that is both outstanding and redeeming. In his words, “what I am interested in is precisely this ability of philosophy to think, to question itself, and ultimately to unsay itself.”<sup>12</sup>

The histories of philosophy are filled with self-critical statements about the nature of philosophy. One of the most compelling contemporary Western positions, which reflects the importance of the “linguistic turn”<sup>13</sup> in many disciplines, is expressed by Richard Rorty. Rorty’s much cited essay, “Pragmatism and Philosophy,” describes a shift in how Western philosophy itself is seen. He distinguishes between “Philosophy” and “philosophy.” Thinkers who believe in “Philosophy” search for ultimate truths that transcend cultures, languages, and particular discourses. Adherents of “philosophy” “compare and contrast cultural traditions” and find that “in the process of playing vocabularies and cultures off against each other, we produce new and better ways of talking and acting.”<sup>14</sup> These post-Philosophical philosophers study “the comparative advantages and disadvantages of the various ways of talking that our race has invented.”<sup>15</sup> The relevance of this definition of philosophy to comparative philosophy of religion is obvious.

There are multiple and divergent understandings of the nature and scope of Jewish philosophy. As will be discussed later, some thinkers suggest that Jewish philosophy utilizes the methods of [Western] “philosophy” to explore or interpret specific Jewish issues, while others propose a broader understanding of Jewish philosophy. In harmony with the earlier discussion, coming out of a comparative perspective, of the foci of the discipline of philosophy, Jewish philosophers also explore, again, some of the widest and most profound human questions: the nature of the human, the universe, the true, and the beautiful, as well as what constitutes authentic existence, communal life, and relations with others. One of the best examples of this understanding of the scope of Jewish philosophy is found in Franz Rosenzweig’s *The Star of Redemption*. The *Star* looks at nothing less than God, humans or “man,” and the world, through the integral categories – and Jewish understandings of these categories – of creation, revelation, and redemption. Additionally, in “narrating” a Jewish philosophical view of these topics, Rosenzweig also explores such matters as: mathematics, logic, aesthetics, philosophy, theology, world history, Western intellectual history, world religions, psychology, sociology, political theory, biblical literature, and linguistics.<sup>16</sup>

In addition, Jewish philosophy has always been seen to include, and some even limit it to, the philosophic exploration of specific Jewish topics or issues.<sup>17</sup> For example, in the modern period, Jewish philosophers have addressed such issues as: the essence or character of Judaism, the nature of Jewish identity or what it means to be a Jew, what role Judaism has in the modern world, how continuity with the Jewish past can be maintained or re-established, the importance of Halacha (Jewish law) for individual and communal life, the challenges to religious faith by secularism and the Holocaust, and the impact of both feminism and religious pluralism on Jewish life and thought.

In terms of the broader conception of Jewish philosophy, one of the defining characteristics of this discipline is that its resources emerge out of Jewish history or Jewish experiences. Jewish religion, literature, culture, and history provide the experiences and categories out of which Jewish philosophy is done. Some speak of Jewish experience or Jewish memory,<sup>18</sup> but these terms must always be put in the plural, reminding us of the multiplicity of experiences of Jewish communities and individuals, including the importance of cultural, economic, and social groupings as well

as gender. Religion points to Jewish beliefs, practices, and worldviews. Literature might include such sacred texts as the Hebrew Bible, Mishna, and Talmud, as well as the halachic and aggadic commentaries and reflections, and liturgy that arise out of these religious sources. Literature would also include other writings, such as poetry, stories, and novels that may be religious or “secular.” The term ‘culture’ would include the huge variety of cultural productions including such things as folkways, music, dance, and art. Diachronically, Jewish experiences range from the biblical period to the present, and particularly relevant for contemporary Jewish philosophy are the Holocaust, the establishment of the state of Israel, and the Jewish communities in North America. Jewish philosophy reflects out of these foundations and, following an earlier definition, proceeds in ways that are articulate, sustained, critical, and self-critical.

Two fundamental features are deeply embedded within the history of Jewish philosophy and continue to be prominent in the modern period. These are the themes of *community* and *responsibility*. The solitary individual is never a topic in itself. The view that the individual must always be understood in relation to others, in the midst of community is pervasive in Jewish philosophy and in Judaism overall.<sup>19</sup> A full or authentic human life is lived with others. Classically, the relationship to the transcendent is treated within the context of covenant, the covenant between the transcendent and the Jewish people. In more secular positions, the individual is always seen within the umbrella of the people, Israel. Thus, whether the understanding of Judaism reflects a religious, cultural, or national viewpoint, the web of relationships between persons is a central matter of reflection. As the twentieth century Jewish philosopher Martin Buber wrote: “There is no I as such,” but only the I in relation.<sup>20</sup>

A second theme is that of responsibility. That web of relationships that links persons together is constituted by responsibilities or obligations. Classically, once again, the covenant is a love relationship delineated through obligations. Halacha was the instrument to live out these obligations, to the transcendent, to the people, and to the neighbour, stranger, poor, orphan, and widow. The philosophical rubric for this concern is, of course, ethics, and many Jewish philosophers have insisted that the centrality of ethics continually distinguishes Jewish philosophy from others streams of Western philosophy.<sup>21</sup>



My own work as a Jewish philosopher has focused on a tributary that includes those twentieth-century Jewish philosophers of the interhuman: Franz Rosenzweig, Martin Buber, and Emmanuel Levinas. The notion of relationship, characterized primarily by responsibility, is the keystone of their thought. Born into relationships with others, into a community and communities, they speak of how one begins as chosen rather than as choosing. They mean by this that to understand the individual one must first see her or him in terms of obligations that both precede one's freedom and define one's uniqueness. This astonishing insight is not only in contrast to the usual notions of the person in the modern West in terms of autonomy and autarchy but is almost an affront to the reigning stream of philosophy of that time and place.

The beginning of the discipline of comparative philosophy of religion is often traced to those three pivotal modern European philosophers who are credited with founding the philosophy of religion in the West. These are the philosophers Hume, Kant, and Hegel, whose contribution to a truly comparative endeavour is being reassessed today.<sup>22</sup> While this is one way to narrate its origin, in my view, comparative philosophy of religion should not be seen as the property of, and thus not beginning within, any one philosophic tradition. To be comparative it requires the dialogue or conversation among philosophers who are looking at religious phenomena from a variety of philosophic traditions and perspectives.<sup>23</sup> In this sense, despite its limits, comparative philosophy of religion properly begins with the First East-West Philosophers' conference of 1939, which took place in Honolulu.

There are two main foci, one constructive and one critical, for comparative philosophy of religion. First, it seeks to introduce and explore comparative definitions, methods, and categories, problems and solutions through conversations and studies about the diverse traditions, communities, and experiences located within the heuristic category of religion. It ultimately seeks to provide philosophic understandings of the variety of ways that humans express the religious meanings and dimensions of their lives. The second focus follows upon the self-critical feature of philosophy discussed above. Comparative philosophy of religion seeks to uncover the "forces of power, domination, resentment, racism, inferiority, prejudice, and a host of other human characteristics [that] are very much a part of our world views, ideologies, philosophies, and conceptual frameworks."<sup>24</sup> It is



precisely the comparative aspect, that of dialogue or conversation among thinkers of diverse traditions, that provides the best means for uncovering these distortive and repressive features in all “our world views, ideologies, philosophies, and conceptual frameworks.” Additionally, as critics continually insist, just as the impact of these forces is perennial, the process of illumination and correction is interminable. There is a famous admonition in the Mishnah’s *Pirke Avot* or *Sayings of the Fathers* (11:21): “You are not required to complete the work, but neither are you free to desist from it.”

The following sections of this text will provide an example of the philosophic dialogue between comparative philosophy of religion and particular religious traditions, in this instance modern Jewish philosophy. This treatment will highlight the irreplaceable power of conversation to illuminate specific aporia within and possible correctives for both comparative philosophy and Jewish philosophy.

## SOME BASIC PROBLEMS IN COMPARATIVE PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION AND JEWISH PHILOSOPHY

As indicated above, prior to the 1939 Philosophers’ Conference, one may say that the proto-origins of the discipline of philosophy of religion coincides with the beginning of modern Western philosophy. The subjects in the latter haunt the history of the former. The list of these rejected others is well known. Among them include the primitive, “racial” others, women, Jews, and often religion or the religious itself. In various ways, these others stood for the backward and irrational, those bereft – often constitutionally – of the full endowment of reason that defined both man and civilization.<sup>25</sup> The ethno- or euro-centrism of these origins enshrined through various ideologies of phylogenetic development, colonialism, racism, sexism, and anti-semitism bequeathed practices, definitions, norms, and categories that still mitigate against comparativist tasks.<sup>26</sup> For example, Western philosophy of religion has, in the main, failed to respond to contemporary feminist philosophy, to include Jewish philosophy (as well as Islamic philosophy) as having historic and ongoing roles in its own narrative, and often regards “religious belief” as an unproven presupposition, with Western secularism playing the part of the universal and objective.

Some current efforts in the comparative philosophy of religion retain the same monothetic categories and questions, even if the data has been widened.<sup>27</sup> Those classical issues concerning God's existence, evil, the afterlife, the soul, and the relationship between philosophy and "religion" continue to have currency. The task of "justification,"<sup>28</sup> that is, the examination of the phenomenon of religion in order to decide whether it ought to have a place or value in human life has not been abandoned. Religion is still discussed in terms of a variety of myths of origin, seeing it as an inauthentic projection or an irrational response to particular crisis situations.

Finally, while many of the overt ideologies listed above are rejected, and an open, dialogical quest for multi-factor definitions and more inclusive categories is being pursued, there is an alarming void in terms of the impact of feminist philosophy on comparative philosophy of religion. Some of the most critical and inclusive articles seem to see no need for an examination of the contributions of feminist philosophy to the comparative effort.<sup>29</sup> Ten years ago, Marilyn Thie, in an article that was published as part of a group of essays dedicated to feminist philosophy of religion in the journal *Hypatia*, spoke of feminist philosophy of religion as a "field that does not yet exist."<sup>30</sup> While this field has been developing in the past decade, it has left little or no imprint on comparative philosophic work.

A preliminary discussion of the nature of feminist philosophies will illuminate some of the ramifications of this lack. My point of departure will be Thie's article. The title, "Prolegomenon to Future Feminist Philosophies of Religions," emphasized the plurality of feminisms, feminist philosophies, and feminist philosophies of religions. She begins with a definition of feminism:

Feminist refers to mindsets, consciousness, and so on, which are aligned with liberation struggles that a) take into account the complex interconnections among the various ways peoples' lives are concretely defined, for example, race, class, age, sexual orientation, religion, and ethnicity interacting with gender; b) recognize the structural and institutional nature of interconnected oppressions; and c) acknowledge that only by beginning with the lived experience of multiply-marginalized women

(and those dependent on them) will liberation agendas be sufficiently inclusive, radical, and transforming.<sup>31</sup>

This uses the alliteration of adjectives of “political, practical, pluralistic, passionate, and partial,” to characterize feminist philosophies of religion.<sup>32</sup> Drawing on her explanation and the work of other feminist philosophers, I would suggest that some of the most distinctive and important features of feminist philosophy include a (political) commitment to justice, the salience of gender as a category of experience and an analytic category, and heightened sensitivities for concrete experiences, especially the experiences and voices of those marginalized. There are also other features that are often prominent in feminist philosophy and feminist thought overall. These would include an understanding of humans as embodied, relational, and part of the natural order of living creatures and the environment.<sup>33</sup> In terms of all of these characteristics, the lives and voices of women are central.

While some philosophers may be “gracious” enough to allow the focus on gender to prove itself over time as a central philosophic category of analysis, it might well be the feature of a prior commitment to justice that is the most problematic for those trained (whether men or women) in traditional Western philosophy. For them, philosophy is a love for or commitment to truth that allows the concern for justice at most and only secondarily as ethics. However, many feminist philosophers hold, in Hava Tirosh-Samuelsan’s words, that “the act of philosophizing and the telling of the history of philosophy are always political acts,”<sup>34</sup> and thus that the issue of justice is always at play and cannot be ignored or deferred. Similarly, Emmanuel Levinas, who has had great impact on contemporary philosophy, insisted on “ethics as first [the beginning and foundation of] philosophy,”<sup>35</sup> and defined philosophy as; “the wisdom of love at the service of love.”<sup>36</sup> Levinas saw this love in terms of responsibility and believed that it was precisely the heritage of Judaism that could bring this imperative, in its full priority and urgency, forward.

In terms of Jewish philosophy, I would like to highlight two problem areas: the way the relationship between [Western] “philosophy” and Jewish philosophy is usually depicted, and the failure, once again, to recognize and enter into a dialogue with feminist Jewish philosophy. As noted earlier, there is a great diversity of views concerning the nature and

scope of Jewish philosophy.<sup>37</sup> An influential and diagnostic definition was provided in Julius Guttman's 1936 classic, *Philosophies of Judaism*. He wrote that: "Since the days of antiquity, Jewish philosophy was essentially a philosophy of Judaism."<sup>38</sup> Some decades later, there was a statement of goals of the Academy for Jewish Philosophy (AJP) in 1979, which saw the task of Jewish philosophy as "enabl[ing] individuals actively involved in some form of Jewish religious life who have professional training in philosophy to think about contemporary Jewish faith in new ways."<sup>39</sup> What is understood by philosophy in this regard is clarified by one of the leaders of the AJP in his statement that Jewish philosophy "should use the tools of analytic philosophy in order to rethink and reformulate all of the traditional religious issues of Judaism as well as the new kinds of questions that arise from Jewish secularism."<sup>40</sup> Philosophy, that is, Western philosophy, provides the methodologies and categories to elucidate Jewish philosophy. In this guise, the history of Jewish philosophy is narrated in terms of series of encounters between the leading systems of Western philosophy, whether Platonic, Aristotelian, Cartesian, Kantian, Hegelian, Existentialist and Phenomenological, and Jewish experience and thought. What is characteristic of this "encounter" is that the direction of inquiry is one way. Philosophy provides the categories and Jewish thought the material, or, in other words, philosophy is the subject and Judaism the object. In this case, Jewish philosophy seeks to understand itself and to explain itself to the other through those purported universal categories of reason<sup>41</sup> that philosophy proffers. The model of a mutually transformative dialogue between the two sides, where each can learn from the other, is not regarded as desirable or even possible.<sup>42</sup> The lack of recognition of Jewish philosophy by Western philosophy referred to above is here reflected in the way Jewish philosophers see themselves, which is a familiar feature in the dynamics exposed by postcolonial thought.

In terms of another possible dialogue, between Jewish (male) philosophers and feminist Jewish philosophy, the situation is not dissimilar. It has been a little over ten years since the appearance of an important article on feminist Jewish philosophy, Hava Tirosh-Samuelson's "'Dare to Know': Feminism and the Discipline of Jewish Philosophy."<sup>43</sup> Recently, Tirosh-Samuelson supplemented her original appeal with the publication of *Women and Gender in Jewish Philosophy*, a book that contains both historical studies of and constructive essays about Jewish philosophy by

a variety of authors.<sup>44</sup> Both works challenge contemporary Jewish philosophers, the first by affirming that Jewish philosophy has been impervious to the writings of feminist theorists and philosophers and the second by providing a forum for feminist Jewish philosophers to “re-read” and “re-think” the tradition of Jewish philosophy. While Tirosh-Samuelson’s efforts to initiate a “conversation between feminist philosophy, Jewish philosophy, and Jewish feminism,”<sup>45</sup> and the critical writings of a growing group of feminist Jewish philosophers and historians of Jewish philosophy require responses, very few to date have been forthcoming.

Feminism and feminist philosophies have deeply influenced feminist Jewish philosophy. Feminist Jewish thinkers demonstrate the commitment to justice, and the attention to gender, as well as perspectives that highlight humans as embodied, relational, and within the natural order, which were discussed earlier. They speak of some of the most important issues of human life out of the resources of Jewish experience or memory, especially the experiences and memories of Jewish women. Their commitment to justice would include the critical feature of the recognition of the historical ways that Jewish women have been oppressed, repressed, and marginalized in the Jewish tradition. Feminist Jewish philosophers feature a responsibility to transform those elements within the Jewish experience that have caused this oppression, repression, and marginalization, as well as to bring forgotten and silenced Jewish women’s voices of the past forward and to create room for such voices in the present and future. There is a growing list of those who define themselves as feminist Jewish philosophers, feminist Jewish thinkers, and feminist theologians.<sup>46</sup> Some of those whose work has been especially helpful to me include: Hava Tirosh-Samuelson, Susan Shapiro, Susannah Heschel, Judith Plaskow, Heidi Ravven, Randi Raskover, Claire Katz, Leora Batnitzky, Laura Levitt, and Rachel Adler.

## THE DIALOGUE BETWEEN COMPARATIVE PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION AND JEWISH PHILOSOPHY

What contributions can comparative philosophy make to Jewish philosophy? In a number of ways, some already foreshadowed, looking at Jewish philosophy in the context of comparative philosophy alters its

usual portrayal. First, enigmatically, it sets the stage for a true dialogue, rather than a dictation, between modern Western philosophy and Jewish philosophy. Since the tradition of Western philosophy is only one branch or exemplar of the wider phenomenon of philosophy, the encounter between it and Jewish philosophy is an encounter of particularities. Modern Western philosophy is no longer allowed to portray itself, or to be regarded by Jewish philosophers, as a universal enterprise, the single paradigm of "Philosophy." Modern philosophy can no longer be seen as synonymous with reason or the rational. Modern philosophy is the heir of a tradition and of an ongoing community of thinkers, with their particular practices, presuppositions, definitions, categories, and issues. It is as important for Jewish philosophy to dialogue with, learn from, and critique Western philosophy as it is for Western philosophy to proceed similarly. Since both speak out of histories, experiences, and resources that are at the same time specific to each and overlapping, this dialogue should be fascinating and productive.

Second, Jewish philosophy is now open to more than one dialogue partner in this conversation between philosophic traditions. This will deeply influence its self-understanding, as well as multiply its possibilities for development. In addition to the renewal of the medieval discussion with Islam, encounters with different tributaries of Indian and Chinese philosophy should prove rewarding. For example, the centrality of ethics for Jewish philosophy, over ontological and epistemological concerns, may now be seen, not as a break with "Philosophy," but as a legitimate option taken by others. It might be compared with the role of *mokṣa* in many Indian philosophies. The valence given to community within Jewish philosophy might, once again, no longer be seen as a deviation from the single defining norm, but as comparable to the sophisticated treatments of social and political thought within Chinese philosophies.

What contributions can Jewish philosophy make to comparative philosophy? First, the encounter of Indian and Chinese philosophies with Jewish philosophy will reinforce the lesson about the plurality of traditions even within the three main philosophic heritages. Western philosophy will no longer be taken as a single stream of Greek, Christian, and post-Christian philosophy, but one of three traditions coming out of Greek roots. Equally, this recognition will further an understanding

of the diversity (of experiences, histories, communities, practices, presuppositions, definitions, categories, and issues) within Indian and Chinese philosophy.

Second, the emergence of feminist Jewish philosophy should prove to be a very significant development for other traditions of philosophy. This might well problematize the notion that feminist philosophy is but a single stream with Christian and post-Christian foundations. Feminist philosophies can not just be dismissed as another colonial effort, synonymous with a homogeneous and dominant West. The critical and creative projects of feminist Jewish thinkers may encourage similar still nascent undertakings. Their commitment to justice, unearthing the historical ways that Jewish women have been oppressed, repressed, and marginalized in the Jewish tradition, should stimulate and contribute to comparable efforts. Their dedication to bringing forward forgotten and silenced Jewish women's voices of the past and to create room for such voices in the present and future should further motivate both female and male philosophers in other traditions to similar questioning and commitments.

Finally, the possible contribution of Levinas's insight about ethics as the foundation for philosophy is intriguing. How would one discuss and what would be the consequences of thinking about "Ethics as First Comparative Philosophy"? How is the new discipline changed when responsibilities and obligations to the other replace the quest for knowing the other – the other as object – as the point of departure for the comparative philosophic endeavour? How does one translate this wisdom in the service of love into specific theoretical breakthroughs and methodological practices?

The conversation between comparative philosophy of religion and modern Jewish philosophy promises to be fruitful for both sides. It stands as an important effort in itself, as well as a model. It reminds us of the vast difficulties in doing justice not only to major philosophic traditions but to the plurality of histories and communities that participate in each one: daunting on the one hand, yet hinting at a plethora of creative possibilities on the other.



## Notes

- 1 The modern Jewish philosopher Franz Rosenzweig provided a colourful rendition of this idea. I would not use the terms “objective” and “subjective” as he does, but the overall meaning is clear. He wrote: “To achieve being objective, the thinker must proceed boldly from his own subjective situation. The single condition imposed upon us by objectivity is that we survey the entire horizon; but we are not obliged to make this survey from any position other than the one in which we are, nor are we obliged to make it from no position at all. Our eyes are, indeed, only our own eyes; yet it would be folly to imagine we must pluck them out in order to see,” *Franz Rosenzweig: His Life and Thought*, ed. Nahum N. Glatzer (New York: Schocken, 1961), 179.
- 2 Portions of this and the following sections have been adapted from my earlier article, “Feminist Jewish Philosophy: A Response,” *Nashim* 14 (2007): 209–32.
- 3 Discussion about great philosophic traditions as well as “world religions” are always problematic in terms of their exclusivity and disparagement of the expressions of other traditions and communities. For a discussion of the attempt to widen understandings of philosophy’s traditions, see: Thorsten Botz-Bornstein, “Ethnophilosophy, Comparative Philosophy, Pragmatism: Toward a Philosophy of Ethnoscapes,” *Philosophy East and West* 5, no. 1 (2006): 153–71.
- 4 A number of writers have alluded to Western philosophy’s dominant narrative, which falsely portrays its history as unitary. See the two chapters, Daya Krishna, “Comparative Philosophy: What It Is and What It Ought to Be,” 76, and Ninian Smart, “The Analogy of Meaning and the Tasks of Comparative Philosophy,” 176, both in the volume *Interpreting across Boundaries*, edited by Gerald Larson and Eliot Deutsch (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1989).
- 5 Ninian Smart, *World Philosophies* (London: Routledge, 2000), 7.
- 6 See Smart, *World Philosophies*, 1–11, and also Ben-Ami Scharfstein, “The Three Philosophical Traditions,” in *A Comparative History of World Philosophy: From the Upanishads to Kant* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1998).
- 7 Charles Taylor has two fine essays on the role of articulation in philosophy in “The Person,” in *The Category of the Person*, edited by Michael Carrithers, Steven Collins, and Steven Lukes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 272, 275, 280; and “Comparison, History, Truth” in *Myth and Philosophy*, edited by Frank E. Reynolds and David Tracy (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1990), 41, 48.
- 8 *The Compact Edition of the Oxford English Dictionary*, vol. I (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 118. By the way, I am uncomfortable with the example of animals for a variety of reasons.
- 9 These reflections on the nature and methods of philosophy share a number of features with

- two twentieth-century Chinese philosophers, Hu Shi and Feng Youlan, discussed in Carine Defoort, "Is 'Chinese Philosophy' a Proper Name?: A Response to Rein Raud," in *Philosophy East and West* 56, no. 4 (2006): 625–60. The former defined philosophy as; "In general, a discipline that studies the most important questions of human life, a fundamental reflection that wants to find a fundamental solution to these questions: this is called philosophy," 634. Defoort paraphrases the latter's definition as: "something to do with a rational, systematic, original, subdivided inquiry into fundamental matters of human life and the world," 635.
- 10 Scharfstein, "The Three Philosophical Traditions," 31.
- 11 Rosenzweig spoke of a philosophic "New Thinking," that is "in need of the other," *Franz Rosenzweig's "The New Thinking,"* edited by Alan Udoff and Barbara E. Galli (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1999), 87.
- 12 Emmanuel Levinas, "Dialogue with Emmanuel Levinas," in *Face to Face with Levinas*, edited by Richard A. Cohen (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1986), 22.
- 13 See Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), 60.
- 14 Richard Rorty, "Pragmatism and Philosophy," in *After Philosophy: End or Transformation?*, edited by Kenneth Baynes, James Bohman, and Thomas McCarthy (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1987), 54.
- 15 Rorty, "Pragmatism and Philosophy," 58.
- 16 See Franz Rosenzweig, *The Star of Redemption*, trans. Barbara E. Galli (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2005). This understanding of Jewish philosophy is also discussed by Heidi Ravven in her "Observations on Jewish Philosophy," *Judaism* 46, no. 4 (1997): 422–38. As I read her essay, she speaks of the two aspects of Jewish philosophy as "philosophical exploration and Jewish elaboration," 425, or "Philosophical accounts that explore universal aspects of a shared humanity as well as cultural particularities," 427.
- 17 See author's article, "Some Underlying Issues of Modern Jewish Philosophy," in *Truth and Compassion: Essays on Judaism and Religion in Memory of Rabbi Dr. Solomon Frank*, edited by Howard Joseph, Jack N. Lightstone, and Michael D. Oppenheim (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1983), 91–109.
- 18 Heidi Ravven, in an insightful and nuanced discussion, describes the resources for Jewish philosophy in terms of Jewish memory. Memory has the advantage of including Jewish identity and allowing for the continual reassessment and reconfiguration of the Jewish past. See "Observations on Jewish Philosophy," 196–200.
- 19 Israeli philosopher Eliezer Schweid has argued that the individual's ties to her or his family, people, culture, and history provide the platform for both authenticity and creativity, in *The Solitary Jew and His Judaism* [Hebrew] (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1974), 17.

- Also see the article “Community,” by Everett E. Geller, *Contemporary Jewish Religious Thought: Original Essays on Critical Concepts, Movements, and Beliefs*, edited by Arthur A. Cohen and Paul Mendes-Flohr (New York: The Free Press, 1987), 81–85.
- 20 Martin Buber, *I and Thou* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1970), 54.
- 21 Steven S. Schwarzschild has expressed the centrality of ethics throughout the history of Jewish philosophy as: “The view held here ... is that philosophy is Jewish by virtue of a transhistorical primacy of ethics,” in “Modern Jewish Philosophy,” *Contemporary Jewish Religious Thought*, 629.
- 22 See David Tracy, “On the Origins of Philosophy of Religion: The Need for a New Narrative of Its Founding,” in *Myth and Philosophy*, ed. Frank E. Reynolds and David Tracy (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1990), pp. 11–36.
- 23 Krishna’s definition of comparative studies, the attempt to look at what “is ‘another reality’ from the viewpoint of that which is not itself,” underscores the significance of dialogue, “Comparative Philosophy,” 72.
- 24 Gerald Larsen, “Introduction: The ‘Age-Old Distinction between the Same and the Other,’” in *Interpreting across Boundaries*, 16.
- 25 Celia Brickman traces a parallel history in her treatment of psychoanalysis, in *Aboriginal Populations in the Mind: Race and Primitivity in Psychoanalysis* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003). Additionally, Morny Joy examines the similar dynamics of the “othering” of non-Western cultures and of women, when she writes: “For, as many women authors have indicated, the process of ‘othering’ that has been inflicted by dominant Western values on other cultures, is similar to the way women (in both Western and many other societies) have been judged and found wanting according to the prevailing standards of masculinity and/or rationality,” in “Beyond a God’s Eyeview: Alternative Perspectives in the Study of Religion,” in *Perspectives on Method and Theory in the Study of Religion*, edited by Armin W. Geertz and Russell T. McCutcheon (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 112.
- 26 Larsen sees the core of “ethnocentrism” as a Hegelian legacy through which the non-West is either assimilated or surpassed, “Introduction: The ‘Age-Old Distinction between the Same and the Other,’” 8.
- 27 See, for example, Joseph Runzo, *Global Philosophy of Religion: A Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2001). His book also has some helpful innovations, including a chapter on “Love and the Meaning of Life.”
- 28 See David Tracy’s article, “On the Origins of Philosophy of Religion,” 14–15.
- 29 For example, two fine articles on critical problems in comparative philosophy of religion fail to introduce any discussion of feminist issues in the study of religion: Gerald Larson’s “Introduction: The ‘Age-Old Distinction between the Same and the Other,’” and Daya Krishna’s “Comparative Philosophy: What It Is

- and What It Ought to Be.” On a more positive note, Morny Joy, in “Beyond a God’s Eyeview: Alternative Perspectives in the Study of Religion,” explores the challenges and insights that feminists, particularly through the voices and perspectives of non-Western women, contribute to the contemporary study of religion.
- 30 Marilyn Thie, “Epilogue: Prolegomenon to Future Feminist\* Philosophies of Religions,” *Hypatia* 9, no. 4 (1994): 229.
- 31 Thie, “Epilogue,” 229.
- 32 Ibid., 231.
- 33 A number of feminist philosophers could be cited who show the integration of all of these features, one of the most important is the French feminist philosopher Luce Irigaray. Additionally, Hava Tirosh-Samuelson provides an excellent description of central characteristics of feminist philosophy in [Hava Tirosh-Rothschild] “Dare to Know: Feminism and the Discipline of Jewish Philosophy,” *Feminist Perspectives on Jewish Studies*, edited by Lynn Davidman and Shelly Tenenbaum (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1994), 85–96.
- 34 Hava Tirosh-Samuelson, “Editor’s Introduction: Jewish Philosophy in Conversation with Feminism,” *Women and Gender in Jewish Philosophy*, edited by Hava Tirosh-Samuelson (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), 7.
- 35 One of Levinas’s most famous essays is titled, “Ethics as First Philosophy,” in *The Levinas Reader*, edited by Sean Hand (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), 75–87.
- 36 Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being Or Beyond Essence* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1981), 162.
- 37 See the discussion of the nature of Jewish philosophy in *Studies in Jewish Philosophy: Collected Essays of the Academy for Jewish Philosophy, 1980–1985*, edited by Norbert Samuelson (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1987).
- 38 Julius Guttmann, *Philosophies of Judaism* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1964), 4.
- 39 Norbert Samuelson, “The Death and Revival of Jewish Philosophy,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 70, no. 1 (2002): 117.
- 40 Samuelson, “The Death and Revival of Jewish Philosophy,” 121. Although the lack of consensus about the nature of this topic is highlighted in Tirosh-Samuelson’s “Editor’s Introduction,” this description seems to cover many of the viewpoints that she identifies. In “Dare to Know,” she defines Jewish philosophy as: “a systematic reflection about Judaism by means of philosophical categories and in light of philosophical questions,” 98.
- 41 For example, Tirosh-Samuelson speaks of “the secular, universal truth-claims of philosophy,” in “Dare to Know,” 98.
- 42 Emil Fackenheim is one example of those who see the possibility and necessity for a more balanced dialogue. In the essay, “Jewish Philosophy in the Academy,” in *Emil Fackenheim, Jewish Philosophers and Jewish Philosophy* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 189–92, he discusses three contemporary areas where Jewish philosophy might

critique or contribute to (Western) philosophy, which are tied to the Holocaust, the establishment of the state of Israel, and the nature of Jewish identity.

- 43 Tirosh-Rothschild, “‘Dare to Know.’”
- 44 Tirosh-Samuelson, *Women and Gender in Jewish Philosophy*.
- 45 Tirosh-Samuelson, “Dare to Know,” 85.
- 46 At this time, such titles as feminist Jewish philosopher, feminist Jewish thinker, and feminist Jewish theologian have no consistent usage.

