

# Society of Jewish Ethics 2014 Annual Meeting

*Theme: Pushing the Boundaries of Tradition*

**January 9 - 12, 2014**

**Seattle, Washington**

## *Schedule*

### Thursday, January 9, 2014

- 9am - 9pm**            **Conference Desk Open**
- 11:45am-1:15pm**      **SJE Bioethics Group Steering Committee Meeting**
- 1:00-5:30pm**        SCE Board Meeting
- 1:20-3:00pm**        **Jewish Bioethics Session I**

**Presenter: Y. Michael Barilan, Sackler School of Medicine, Tel Aviv**

**Title:** "Jewish sick care societies and 'wise-women:' Pushing the boundaries of religious law by means of recovering lost communal traditions"

**Abstract:** The academic and rabbinic literature give the impression that "Jewish bioethics" is synonymous with the Halakhah on health care. In this talk I will present three complementary bodies of normativity: the traditional sick-care societies, the genre of "sick care manuals", and the feminine oral traditions of healthcare and religious practice. Focusing on the problem of "brain-death" and on infertility medicine, I will argue that broadening the focus of Jewish ethics so as to include the civic and feminine traditions of practice and normativity allows contemporary Judaism to "push the boundaries of tradition" and "to recover tradition" at the very same time.

**Presenter: Marielle S. Gross, University of Florida**

**Title:** "A Just Ransom: A Jewish Ethics Approach to a Responsibility-Sensitive Distribution of Healthcare"

**Abstract:** Jewish bioethicists have commonly advanced the notion that the halakhic obligation to redeem captives can be viewed as a metaphor for the just distribution of healthcare. I will first explore the argument from analogy stipulating that a person in need of healthcare is in essence a captive in need of redemption. By virtue of their likeness, we can then extrapolate a model for the provision of healthcare from the prescribed protocol for captive redemption. This model stands to contribute to the

broader dialogue because it features a sensitivity to individual responsibility with a resulting mechanism for attenuating the collective obligation.

**Convener:** Michal Raucher, Jewish Theological Seminary

**Respondent:** Elliot Dorff, AJU

**2:00-6:00pm**      **The University of Chicago**  
**Writers**

**3:30-5:00pm**      **Jewish Bioethics Session II: Keynote**

*This session is open to the public*

**Keynote Speaker:** Rabbi Elliot Kukla, Bay Area Jewish Healing Center

**Title:** “The Tumtum in the Waiting Room: Towards a Jewish Ethic of Care for Transgender and Intersex People”

**Abstract:** Rabbinic texts are filled with stories of the tumtum and androgynos, figures who are neither wholly male nor female. The Halachic importance of these characters for modern transgender and intersex individuals is debatable – on one level they challenge binary understandings of gender; at the same time, they are also used as a theoretical vanishing point to reinforce rabbinic gender norms. However, their status as humans deserving basic care and protection from danger was never questioned. In this session we will focus on the homiletic potential of these texts to argue for a Jewish ethic of care for transgender and intersex people and use case studies from the 21st century hospital floor to explore the challenges that prevent gender non-conforming people from having their basic needs for care met when facing serious illness.

**Convener:** Alyssa Henning, Northwestern University

**Respondent:** Rev. Kelby Harrison, St. John's Episcopal Cathedral, Los Angeles, CA  
*Ordination with Metropolitan Community Church*

**5:30-7:00pm**      **Jewish Bioethics Session III: Jewish Bioethics and Metzizah B’Peh**

*This session is open to the*  
*public*

**Presenter:** Elizabeth Reis, University of Oregon

**Title:** "Rights, Rites, and Wrongs: What Metzizah B'peh Means for Jews Today"

**Abstract:** The previously obscure ultra-Orthodox Jewish rite of metzitzah b'peh (oral suction) has burst into the news lately and raised questions about circumcision, consent, First Amendment rights, tradition, and the representation of Jews. I will place its health concerns in historical context in the United States and discuss how Jews might respond to the controversy. Both ritual and "medical" circumcision challenge us to balance religious freedom and other rights (privacy and equal protection, for example) with public health claims and individual autonomy. If Jews take a stand against metzitzah b'peh, to what extent would (or should) this opposition encourage criticism of circumcision more generally?

**Presenter:** Dena S. Davis, Lehigh University

**Title:** "Ancient Rites and New Laws: Should the State Regulate Metzitzah b'peh?"

**Abstract:** How should state authorities respond to the religious practice of metzitzah b'peh (mbp), which puts children at risk of death? New York State recently responded to the deaths of a handful of infants from mbp, in which they contracted herpes from infected mohels. NYS required parental informed consent before mbp is performed. The ultraorthodox Jewish community responded with a lawsuit alleging violation of the right to free exercise of their religion. Informed consent is, for many reasons, not an appropriate response to the problem of mbp. The salient question is whether or not to make mbp illegal. When considering this question, we must take into account the riskiness of mbp as compared to other risks to which parents are allowed to subject their children.

**Convener:** Doug Diekema, Seattle Children's Hospital

**Respondent:** Laura Carpenter, Vanderbilt University

**7:15-10:00pm**      **SJE Board Meeting**

**Friday, January 10, 2014**

**7:00am-6:00pm**      **Conference Desk Open**

**7:15-8:45am**      **Breakfast with an Author**      *Grand Ballroom III*

**Buffet opens at 7:15; Discussion 7:45-8:45 (Pre-registration is required.)**

**8:00am-7:15pm**      **Exhibits Open**      *Grand Ballroom I and II*

**9:00-10:30am**      **Jewish Ethics Session I: Jewish Ethics of Non-Violence**

**Presenter: Aryeh Cohen, American Jewish University**

**Title:** "The foremost among the divine attributes is to hate the vulgar power of violence: Aharon Shmuel Tamares and recovering nonviolence for Jewish ethics"

**Abstract:** Aharon Shmuel Tamares (1869-1931) a powerful and unique figure, has not been given his voice in the contemporary academy. In a manner similar to Abraham Isaac Kook, Tamares forged a new conceptual vocabulary and theological system. While Tamares' pacifism has been noted, especially in relation to his split from the Zionist movement after attending the fourth Zionist Congress, its thoroughgoing nature has not been appreciated. In this paper I am going to attempt to recover Tamares for contemporary ethical discourse by putting his non-violence and pacifism in dialogue with Levinas' "pacifism" in *Totality and Infinity* and Abraham Isaach HaKohen's response to World War I in *Orot Hamilchamah*. I will then claim that this thoroughgoing nonviolence as a central religious precept can have utility in the current discourse around gun violence.

**Convener:** Lila Kagedan, Yeshivat Maharat and Harvard University

**Respondent:** Jeffrey Helmreich, UC Irvine; Andrew Flescher, Stonybrook

**10:30-11:00am**      **Break**      *Grand Ballroom I and II*

**11am-12:30pm**      **Plenary**      *Grand Ballroom III*

**Presenter: Lisa Sowle Cahill, Boston College**

**Respondent:** Stacey Floyd-Thomas, Vanderbilt University

**Convener:** TBA

**12:30-2pm**      **Lunch**

**12:45-2pm**      **JRE Editorial Board**

**12:45-2pm**      **Student Caucus**      (Pre-registration needed for lunch.)      *Puget Sound*

**Conveners:**      Sofia Betancourt, Yale University

Agnes Chiu, Fuller Theological Seminary

**12:45-2pm**

**Junior Faculty Caucus**

*Elliott Bay Anteroom*

(Pre-registration needed for lunch.)

**Conveners:** Laura Johnston, Emanuel College, Victoria University

Brian Matz, Carroll College

**2:00-3:30pm**

**Jewish Ethics Session II: Jewish Gender Ethics**

**Presenter: Bonna Devora Haberman, YTheater Project Jerusalem**

**Title:** "Toward CEDAW without reservations--Beyond the wall of Jewish Orthodoxy"

**Abstract:** Civil rights end at the gates of mosques, churches, temples, and synagogues. Western democracies uphold religious prerogatives to oppress women, instituting a gender regimen that vitiates core ethical tenets of our societies, including equality, freedom, justice, health, and peace. Religion is a master key to women's public participation and leadership, and to the betterment of the human condition. The initiator of the 25-year strong Israeli activist movement, *Women of the Wall*, I demonstrate strategies for grappling with patriarchal power--in texts and society. This paper contributes toward liberating Judaism from its oppressions, and toward rendering religion a liberating force among people.

**Presenter: Shraga Bar On, Shalom Hartman Institute**

**Title:** "A Woman's Voice (Kol B'Isha)--A Sin or Pleasure?"

**Abstract:** A number of public debates have arisen in Israel concerning the issue of listening to women singing. These polemics have brought to the surface the general question of women in the public domain and specifically that of the halakhic status of women's singing. My lecture will reexamine the central textual sources which relate to women's singing – biblical and talmudic, medieval rabbinical sources and modern halakhic rulings. I will seek to uncover the ethical considerations of halakhic ruling. Then I will propose an alternative halakhic direction which seeks to extend the boundaries of the stringent halakhic tradition, and which, in contrast to the widespread halakhic standpoint among orthodox rabbis, celebrates the enjoyment of "*Kol B'Isha*" and regards it as a pleasure of religious value.

**Convener:** Jennifer Thompson, California State University, Northridge

**Respondent:** Irene Oh, George Washington University

**3:30-4:00pm**

**Break**

*Grand Ballroom I and II*

**4:00-5:30pm**            **Jewish Ethics Session III: Jewish Sexual Ethics**

**Presenter: Rebecca Levi, University of Virginia**

**Title: "Risky Business: Reexamining Risk and Benefit in Jewish Sexual Ethics"**

**Abstract:** Has Jewish ethics tended to make the acceptable risk-benefit threshold higher regarding sexuality than it has in other areas of life? If, for many people, sexual fulfillment (or at least a reasonable opportunity to pursue it) is part of what makes one's overall life pleasurable, then that fulfillment should be understood as a legitimate and significant factor in risk-benefit calculation. This paper examines resources within Jewish texts and traditions that may allow a reevaluation of the acceptable balance of risks and pleasures surrounding sexual activity, and argues that engaging in non-normative sexuality may involve more than a failure to resist bodily urges. It may, in many cases, be a rationally considered moral choice.

**Convener:** Laurie Zoloth, Northwestern University

**Respondents:** Christine Gudorff, Florida International University

Elliot Dorff, American Jewish University

**4:20 pm**            **Shabbat Candle Lighting**            *On your own*

**5:45-6:00pm**            **Lifetime Achievement Award**            *Grand Ballroom III*

**Recipient:** Daniel Maguire, Marquette University

**6:00-6:45pm**            **SCE Presidential Address: "Could Jesus Get Tenure?"**    *Grand Ballroom III*

**President:** Allen Verhey, Duke University Divinity School

**6:45-7:45pm**            **SCE Presidential Reception**            *Grand Ballroom I and II*

**7:00-7:45pm**            **Kabbalat Shabbat Services**            *Elliott Bay Reception*

*Followed by Kiddush and Hamotzi (Please bring your own siddur.)*

**Service is in Hebrew; all are welcome.**

**7:45-9:30pm**      **Shabbat Dinner**      *Puget Sound*

SJE Presidential Greetings: Jonathan Crane, Emory University

**(Pre-registration required for dinner. Meal is Kosher vegetarian.)**

***Remembering Adrienne Asch: A Discussion of Her Work***

**Title: "Will We Need Abortion in Utopia?"** [\(click here to open article\)](#)

**Convener:** Laurie Zoloth, Northwestern University

**(All Are Welcome; No Dinner Registration required for Discussion only)**

**Saturday, January 11, 2014**

**7:15-8:45am**      **Breakfast with an Author**      *Grand Ballroom III*

**Buffet opens at 7:15; Discussion 7:45-8:45**      **(Pre-registration is required.)**

**8:15am-6pm**      **Exhibits Open**      *Grand Ballroom I and II*

**8:15am-6pm**      **Conference Desk**  
**Open**

**9:00-10:45am**      **Shabbat Service**      *Elliott Bay Reception*

**Service is in Hebrew; all are welcome. (Please bring your own *siddur*.)**

**D'var Torah: Jonathan Crane, Emory University (Parashat Beshalach, Exod 13:17-17:16)**

**10:30-11:00am**      **Break**      *Grand Ballroom I and II*

**11:00am-2:00pm**      **Jewish Ethics Session IV: Race and Jewish Ethics**      *Elliott Bay Anteroom*

***This session continues into Shabbat Lunch***

***(Pre-registration required. Meal is kosher vegetarian. Session is open to all)***

**Panelists:**

**Elliot Ratzman, Swarthmore College**

**Title:** "Towards a Jewish Discipline of Anti-Racism:"

**Abstract:** Twentieth century Jewish discourses assert a ubiquitous, essential, and normative tradition of Jewish anti-racism. Yet we lack a sustained body of distinctly Jewish reflection on racial issues or extensive suggestions for a nuanced practice of anti-racism. Persistent accusations of Jewish racism--from theological Judaism to the essence of Zionism--and the emergence of an actual racist Jewish right-wing in America, Israel, and Europe make explicating Jewish anti-racist arguments all the more pressing. In this paper, I set out a Jewish account of anti-racism in theory and practice. Informed by the *Mussar* tradition, I suggest a series of protocols for considering anti-racism as an issue of character cultivation, a hermeneutical lens, and a Jewish program for social-political action.

**Annalise Glauz-Todrank, Wake Forest University**

**Title:** "Jews and 'Others:' Identity Construction as an Ethical Question"

**Abstract:** Drawing on two scholarly fields that are rarely in conversation--Jewish Studies and Critical Race Theory--this paper will address the racialization of Jews in the contemporary United States and the ethical dimension of Jewish responses to this process. First, I examine the discourses that inform the racialization of Jewish Americans as well as some ways that Jewish communities and individuals have chosen to situate their identities in relation to these discourses. I then consider how ethical aims engaged by critical race theorists might be applied to Jewish Americans as a racialized group.

**Sarah Imhoff, Indiana University Bloomington**

**Title:** "Race and the Ethics of Jewish Identity"

**Abstract:** Since the Shoah, the language of race is no longer a socially acceptable way to conceive of Jewish identity, but contemporary discourses nevertheless recall aspects of racial discourse. What are the ethical implications this indebtedness to racialist constructions? By analyzing testimonies of Americans who identify as Jewish because of crypto-Jewish family roots or certain Hebrew Israelite groups who claim parts of the Ten Lost Tribes as ancestors, it becomes clear that each of these groups uses biological and geographical evidence to claim Jewish identity for themselves. The persistent physiological idea of who "looks Jewish" likewise affects the ascribed identities of Jews of color and some converts.

**Convener:** Aaron Gross, University of San Diego

**Respondent:** Susannah Heschel, Dartmouth College

**11am-12:30pm**

**SCE Business Meeting**

*Grand Ballroom III*

**2:00-3:30pm**            **Plenary**                            *Grand Ballroom III*

**Presenter:** Gilbert Meilaender, Valparaiso University

**Respondent:** Michael Cartwright, University of Indianapolis

**3:30-4:00pm**            **Break**    *Grand Ballroom I and II*

**4:00-5:30pm**            **Jewish Ethics Session V: Meta Ethics**

**Presenter:** Louis Newman, Carleton College

**Title:** "What Are We Doing When We Do Jewish Ethics?: Halakha, Aggadah and Contemporary Jewish Ethical Discourse"

**Abstract:** This paper explores the status of the moral judgments we make when we invoke traditional Jewish sources as warrants for contemporary Jewish moral norms. By closely examining the discourse of some prominent contemporary Jewish ethicists, I will argue that what appears to be halakhic discourse in which new norms are derived from older ones can more accurately be described as a midrashic enterprise. Contemporary Jewish ethicists use these texts as "signs" from which to make meaning rather than in which to find meaning. I conclude by suggesting that this shift is not as disruptive as we might initially suppose.

**Convener:** Michal Raucher, Jewish Theological Seminary

**Respondent:** Paul Lauritzen, John Carroll University

**5:31pm**            **Havdallah**                            *on your own*

**6:00-7:30pm**            **Jewish Ethics Session VI: Rabbinic Texts and Jewish Ethics**

**Presenter:** Emily Filler, University of Virginia

**Title:** "Classical rabbinic literature and the making of Jewish ethics: a formal argument"

**Abstract:** How should ancient Jewish texts (particularly Mishnah, Gemara, and classical rabbinic Midrash) function in the production of contemporary Jewish ethics? While scholars have explored the complicated role of textual content in Jewish ethics, this paper strives to expand the conversation by asking how the classical texts' unique literary *form* might influence contemporary Jewish ethical reasoning as well. I argue that the particular formal features (such as wordplay, indeterminacy, and

unresolved disputes) of rabbinic literature may in fact be as central to the activity of Jewish ethics as any textual content – and that increased attention to these characteristics may aid in producing ethics more deeply rooted in the Jewish tradition.

**Presenter: Noam Zohar, Bar Ilan University**

**Title:** "Values conveyed through a mosaic of legal teachings: deciphering a mishnaic message on the embryo as non-person"

**Abstract:** It has been claimed that *halakhah* cannot serve as a source for Jewish ethics, since its norms reflect neither values nor reasons, but rather inscrutable divine authority. The prevalent view, however, (rightly) regards *halakhah* as embodying values; but deciphering them is often difficult, especially in the Mishnah (Rabbinic Judaism's core document) which generally offers no grounding for its instructions. Yet Mishnah's values can be discovered through studying its redaction; I will illustrate this method through analyzing M. BQ 4-5:1, seemingly a series of laws concerning the "goring ox". In fact, however, a central message of this section addresses the status of a human embryo as a non-person.

**Convener:** Geoffrey Claussen, Elon University

**Respondent:** Jonathan Schofer, University of Texas, Austin

**7:45-9:00pm Graduate Students and Early Career Scholars Gathering**

**Sunday, January 12, 2014**

**7:45-8:45am SJE Business Meeting**

***Open to all SJE Members***

**8:30-11:15am Exhibits Open** *Grand Ballroom I and II*

**8:30-11:30am Registration Desk Open**

**9:00-10:30 am SJE Plenary** *Grand Ballroom III*

**Keynote Speaker: Susannah Heschel, Dartmouth College**

**Abstract:** My talk will begin by describing recent developments in the field of critical race theory, and then turn to analyses of anti-Semitism, and conclude with a brief discussion of the ways theologies collaborate with racism. I will argue that studies of racism have shifted in recent years, influenced by a

Foucauldian understanding of power, postmodern discourse analyses, theoretical developments in biopolitics (Roberto Esposito), feminist theory, and studies of neoliberalism. Sharp distinctions are no longer as obvious as they once were – for example, between theological anti-Judaism and racial antisemitism – and racism is understood as intertwined with gender, class, and multiple other variables. I also argue that analyses by scholars of racism have a historiosophy: their work is affected by factors both personal and political. The politics of race will be my concluding point. I will speak about imbrication of Jews in European imperialism and orientalism, in both Eurocentric and Zionist ideologies, as protagonists, victims, and bystanders.

**Convener:** Aaron Gross, University of San Diego

**Respondent:** Jonathan Tran, Baylor University

[Seattle Kosher Restaurants & Synagogues](#)