



General Report of the External Evaluation Team
for
The Council for Higher Education
on the
Departments of Philosophy in Israel

November, 2009

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Chapter 1 – Background

At its meeting on October 23rd, 2007 the Council for Higher Education (hereinafter: the CHE) decided to evaluate study programs in the fields of General Philosophy during the academic year 2008-2009.

Following the decision of the CHE, the Minister of Education who serves ex officio as a Chairperson of the CHE, appointed a committee consisting of:

- **Prof. Daniel Dahlstrom, Department of Philosophy, Boston University, USA - Chair**
- **Dr. Paul Davies, Department of Philosophy, University of Sussex, United Kingdom.**
- **Prof. Richard Eldridge, Department of Philosophy, Swarthmore College, USA.**
- **Prof. Joshua Jacob Ross, Department of Philosophy (emeritus), Tel Aviv University, Israel.**
- **Prof. Gila Sher, Department of Philosophy, University of California, San Diego, USA.**

Ms. Michal Kabatznik - Coordinator of the Committee on behalf of the Council for Higher Education.

In April and June 2009, the Committee visited the institutions offering General Philosophy study programs. During the visits, the Committee met various stakeholders at the institutions, including management, faculty, staff, and students.

Within the framework of its activity, the Committee was requested to:¹

1. Examine the self-evaluation reports submitted by institutions that provide study programs in General Philosophy, and to conduct on-site visits at those institutions.
2. Submit to the CHE an individual report on each of the evaluated academic units and study programs, including the Committee's findings and recommendations.
3. Submit to the CHE a general report regarding the examined field of study within the Israeli system of higher education, including recommendations for standards in the evaluated field of study.

¹ The Committee's letter of appointment is attached as **Appendix 1**.

Chapter 2 - Committee Procedures

The Committee members received the self-evaluation reports in January, 2009, and discussed them via email.

The Committee held its first meeting on April 19th, 2009, during which it discussed fundamental issues concerning higher education in Israel and the quality assessment activity, as well as General Philosophy study programs.

In April and June, 2009, the Committee members visited the institutions offering General Philosophy study programs. During the visits, the Committee met various stakeholders at the institutions, including management, faculty, staff, and students.

This report deals with the Committee's general impression of the field of General Philosophy within the Israeli system of higher education.

The Committee wishes to thank the management of the institutions and the general philosophy departments for their self-evaluation reports and for their hospitality towards the Committee during its visits.

Chapter 3 – General Overview

Formal university study of philosophy commenced with the establishment of Israel's first philosophy department, the department in Hebrew University, in 1928. The philosophy department at Tel Aviv University was one of its first departments and a part of the faculty of humanities at the inception of the university in 1955. The division of "General Philosophy" in Bar Ilan University's department of philosophy (so dubbed to distinguish it from the study of Jewish philosophy in the same department) also traces its history to the early years of the university (from the late 1950s to the early 1960s). In Haifa University the department of philosophy was among the original departments of the university, established in 1963, under the joint sponsorship of Hebrew University of Jerusalem and the Haifa Municipality. Teaching in philosophy at what was then called "the University of the Negev" was first conducted in 1971 under the supervision of Hebrew University, but a new department of philosophy took shape about the same year that the university was formally accredited by the Council of Higher Education in 1973.

In our studies of the four departments of philosophy (Hebrew University, Tel Aviv University, Haifa University, and Ben Gurion University) and the division of general philosophy (Bar Ilan), we have found strong interest and substantial enrollments in philosophy. While there have been modest declines in some undergraduate programs over the past five years, graduate enrollments (combined MA and PhD) have remained constant or even grown slightly across the board. The following figures, give an approximate breakdown of the enrollment figures in these departments and division for 2008:

Approximate number of students studying philosophy:	more than 1600
Approximate number of BA students:	~1150
Approximate number of MA students	~300
Approximate number of PhD students	~150

3.1 Criteria of assessment: the kind of research and instruction that form the primary objectives of a philosophy department in higher education

In order to provide a general assessment of philosophy departments in Israel, it is necessary to state, at least briefly, our working conception of the roles that philosophy and, by extension, philosophy departments ought to play in higher education. Philosophy has been understood, since its beginnings, as a fundamental investigation of human beings' place in nature and history as well as their responsibilities to one another and to themselves, based upon the most complete, presently available understanding of science, culture, art, and religion. In keeping with this understanding, contemporary philosophy has also developed into a discipline in which conceptual tools and methodologies that arise in connection with particular research areas or areas of practice are frequently criticized and refined, giving rise to such subfields as 'philosophy of science,' 'philosophy of language,' 'philosophy of art,' 'political philosophy,' and so on. Hence, philosophy is a quintessentially interdisciplinary form of research, requiring deep appreciation of various forms of life as well as serious understanding of the contents,

methods, and practices of research in other fields. At the same time, philosophical research is autonomous, unique to the discipline, and by no means a branch of studies grounded in some other science or in a religion. One of a philosophy department's primary objectives is to facilitate the diverse kinds of this unique and arduous sort of research.

Study of philosophy is at the same time uniquely capable of enriching and empowering students by introducing them to rigorous analysis of their ways of thinking and acting. Indeed, what distinguishes a philosophical mind is a habit of weighing the coherence, completeness, and trenchancy of various beliefs, arguments, and theories, and of doing so self-consciously within the historical context that marks our finite, human condition. Hence, another main objective of a philosophy department within a university is to cultivate these habits of mind in students, thereby enhancing their abilities to learn across the curriculum, to contribute to the advancement of institutions, from arts and sciences to governments and global relations, and – not least – to grapple with the challenges and wonder of their own lives.

For all the reasons mentioned, research and instruction in philosophy departments form one of the cornerstones of a university education and, in the process, make a vital contribution to science and to society. We found a particularly apt description of this importance of philosophy in the mission statement of the Ben Gurion department of philosophy:

In societal terms, philosophy is an investment of society in its own well-being, namely, the kind of well-being that comes about by personal reflection, cultural criticism, moral evaluation, and deep thinking on matters of intellectual concern. Although we operate in small and narrow circles, as befits our level of specialization, we believe the whole of society is the beneficiary of our activities, through the education we provide our students, the writings we contribute to public and intellectual debate, and the forms of criticism and reflection we help disseminate.

As this statement suggests, pursuit of a philosophy department's two objectives, research and instruction, necessarily go hand-in-hand. Even when, by necessity, research programs and instruction become highly specialized, the rational self-understanding that they uniquely provide remains, for that very reason, all the more essential to the university and, indeed, to culture at large. In sum, philosophy departments have an essential role in the university as the locus of philosophical research and instruction.

3.2 General Assessment of the Israeli philosophy departments

Given this general statement of the role that research and instruction in philosophy departments ideally play in higher education, how do the philosophy departments in the five major Israeli universities measure up? The short answer is: remarkably well.

3.21 Philosophical research in Israel

On the *research* side, we found that notable research is being conducted in each department. Members of these departments regularly publish work of exceptional quality and the fact that they do so in major, internationally recognized presses and journals

provides objective confirmation of the flourishing state of philosophical research in Israel. Indeed, Israeli philosophers are making significant contributions to research in every major area of contemporary research in philosophy and its history. These contributions have won the Israeli philosophical community a well-deserved reputation across the world for excellence.

Equally notable is the fortuitous way the areas of this research are distributed across departments. Bar Ilan's philosophy department has particular strengths in bioethics, philosophy of action, metaphysics, and hermeneutics; Haifa's department excels in research in the philosophy of science, philosophy of mind, and ethics; Ben-Gurion has experts in the philosophy of cognitive science and mind, the philosophy of language, and the history of German philosophy; the department in Jerusalem enjoys a well-deserved reputation for its philosophers of mathematics, logic, and science, for its ethicists, and for its historians of philosophy; the Tel Aviv philosophy department has no peers in Israel when it comes to research in 20th century continental European philosophy and comparative philosophy, including Chinese and Indian philosophy. This brief resumé is not meant to be comprehensive (it omits the work of professors who have recently retired or will be retiring shortly; moreover, in each department, excellent work is also produced in areas other than those mentioned). Nevertheless, this brief resumé describes what we consider the main research profiles of each department. The distribution of these profiles demonstrates that the excellence of research conducted in Israeli departments ranges over a plethora of sub-fields in philosophy, as diverse as they are complementary. Each department excels in more than one area, that is to say, each department has several experts researching and publishing at high levels. While there is some inevitable overlap in research across the departments, it is safe to say that each department has a niche of its own, not duplicable by any other department in Israel. In sum, the research conducted in the philosophy departments across Israel is excellent, diverse, and complementary and unmistakably meets one of the two primary objectives of philosophy departments in higher education.

3.22 Philosophical instruction in Israel

On the *teaching* side, we also found a record of success (albeit somewhat "mitigated" for reasons outlined below). Each department has demonstrated a strong commitment to providing its undergraduate and graduate students with an excellent philosophical education. In each case, departments strive to introduce students to the fundamental themes in philosophy and its history while cultivating the appropriate habits of critical reflection and rational analysis. Some departments (Tel Aviv, Jerusalem, Ben Gurion) have skillfully introduced large numbers of students to philosophy in lecture courses, supplemented with tutorials (discussion sessions led by teaching assistants). Other departments (Haifa, Bar Ilan) have been particularly adept at finding ways to link contents of course materials with research projects of professors. While students have room to complain about many aspects of their education and freely voiced their complaints to us in interviews, we also found in every department much higher levels of satisfaction than dissatisfaction among students with the quality of the instruction, the accessibility of their teachers, and their teachers' concern for their education. This testimony is perhaps the strongest evidence that the philosophy departments in Israel are meeting their other primary objective – their teaching objective – within higher

education.

3.3 Best practices and policies

There are also several policies and practices in the departments that complement the just-glossed successes in research and teaching.

(1) Heading the list of these “best practices” is the departments’ superb record of hiring. Though the number of searches approved has been insufficient to match the depletion of staffing brought on by retirements (see below), we found that, when departments were permitted to mount searches, they invariably made the most of the opportunity, bringing excellent scholars and teachers into the faculty.

(2) Given Israel’s small size, it is possible for faculty members to participate in institutes (e.g., Hartmann, Van Leer, Cohn Institutes) and similar venues outside the university. We were gratified to learn that members of each department in Israel take advantage of this opportunity, thereby testifying to the vibrancy of the community of philosophical researchers in Israel.

(3) A similar best practice, though not as uniform among the departments, is the organization of and faculty participation in departmental colloquia and other working groups, centers, fora, and the like within the university. The high degree of this participation, particularly in some departments (e.g., Jerusalem and Ben Gurion), is once again a sign of the intensity of collaborative engagement in philosophical research.

(4) In most departments, the number of philosophy majors, relative to the entire student population, is high or at least exceeds the norm by international standards. Even with recent declines in enrollment in the humanities divisions and among philosophy undergraduates in some programs, this remains the case. Indeed, from the relatively large number of students who study philosophy in the universities (above all, in Tel Aviv where there are well over 500 majors), one could justly infer that Israelis have a particular penchant for philosophical thinking. Tutorials and guided or critical readings of texts in the first two years of BA studies (as exemplified by the Tel Aviv and Ben Gurion curricula) clearly constitute one of the best practices that has accounted for this success. Also important, as students in every department urged, is providing an adequate range of offerings.

(5) One of the best policies at work in each department, albeit to varying degrees, is the policy of maintaining specific traditions of research. Even with the wealth of philosophical talent in Israel departments, it is impossible for each department to be prominent in every area of philosophical research and graduate instruction. The present distribution of research strengths among departments, outlined above, is salutary and healthy for the state of philosophical research and teaching in Israel.

(6) Finally, a practice whose benefits for all concerned can scarcely be underestimated is the practice of facilitating openness, dialogue, and co-operation between the respective administration and department. Our general impression of administrative officials and their relations with the departmental chairs and other members of the department was in most cases quite positive. It behooves all concerned that administrative officials conduct frank and open discussions with the philosophy faculty about the possibilities and priorities for the department, especially in face of budgetary realities and retirements, both recent and impending.

3.4 Particular Problems and Shortcomings

For all the reasons mentioned, those regarding research and teaching and those outlining the best practices and policies now in effect, Israeli philosophy departments measure up remarkably well, clearly meeting international norms, when it comes to fulfilling their objectives within higher education outlined in 2.1 above. We write 'remarkably well' to emphasize that this success in research and teaching has been achieved under enormous constraints and pressures. In the two largest departments (Tel Aviv and Hebrew U), the student-to-faculty ratio is inordinately high, doubling or tripling the ratio at comparable research universities in the United States or the United Kingdom. This ratio has been exacerbated by the reduction in the size of the faculties over the past decade, due in large measure to a failure to replace retired professors in a suitably timely fashion. The situation due to shortage of academic staff is also acute in the smaller departments (especially in Bar Ilan, though also in Haifa and Ben Gurion). Not surprisingly, as stellar as the current record of research is, it does not match the renown that many of these departments enjoyed a decade or even five years ago. The depletion of faculty in philosophy departments across Israel over the past decade is, in our minds, the greatest problem facing the departments.

In addition to its detrimental effect on the status of philosophical research in Israel, this lack of staffing no doubt has much to do with what we consider to be grave shortcomings in the quality of undergraduate and graduate education. For all the success achieved in the classroom and in seminars, it is mitigated by deficiencies in curricular offerings and structure, insufficient writing assignments and feedback (at undergraduate and graduate levels), inadequate supervision of teaching assistants, poor support of graduate students, and a union-agreement that effectively prevents many departments from hiring PhD students as teaching assistants. Effectively addressing these shortcomings is, in our view, non-negotiable. Remediating these shortcomings requires, not only additional teaching staff and better financial support, but also sustained departmental initiatives to examine undergraduate and graduate programs, revise curricula, and alter habits of teaching. Still, the single most imposing problem is that of staffing. Attention can be paid to students, courses can be properly staffed, specialization can be combined with general reflection, cooperation with cognate disciplines can be developed, when but only when student/faculty ratios come closer to the neighborhood of 15:1 or 20:1. Failing a significant move in this direction, all five departments will be unable in the long run to sustain themselves as internationally competitive.

Chapter 4 – Conclusions and Recommendations

The following recommendations to the Council of Higher Education are based upon the foregoing considerations as well as upon a review of the evaluation committee's reports on each of the five Israeli philosophy departments. We present these recommendations in the order of what we regard as the urgency of their implementation by the CHE. The most urgent recommendations are those requiring either immediate or steadfast attention by the CHE on behalf of the research and instruction conducted by the departments. In addition, we employ check marks to flag our judgment of the respective level of urgency of a recommendation: three check marks '√√√' for the most urgent, two check marks for the next most urgent, one check mark for a less urgent but nonetheless pressing recommendation. Unchecked recommendations signal practices or policies whose adoption we consider highly advisable.

1. Replacing retirees and increasing the size of the faculty √√√

In every department, the most important issue is that of replacing retirees. Ideally, steps should be taken to replace not only recent and impending retirees, but also those whose retirements have occurred over the past decade of reductions in academic staffing in the universities in general. In the two largest and most renowned departments, those of Tel Aviv and Hebrew, the failure to replace retired professors has severely impaired the programs and their reputations. Both departments have suffered dramatically from the reduction in staffing over the past ten years, leaving them without the personnel in specific areas to offer the range of undergraduate and graduate courses that, by international standards, are normal for a highly ranked philosophy department. Particularly revealing in this connection are the current student-to-faculty ratios in Tel Aviv and Hebrew, i.e., 44:1 and 27:1 respectively. This lack of adequate staffing has immediately palpable and enormously detrimental effects on the quality of the education, both undergraduate and graduate, that these departments are able to offer their students.

The issue is also acute in the smaller departments. In these departments, too, a "critical mass" of faculty members is required in order to achieve and maintain a level of excellence. The situation is particularly dire in Bar Ilan where inadequate staffing has put in question the very viability of its graduate program. But even in the departments of Ben Gurion and Haifa, the replacement of recent and impending retirements remains the single most important issue facing them.

We accordingly recommend that the CHE take every step possible to help and encourage university administrations in each case to replace retirees, both recent and impending, with a long-term goal of returning to the level of staffing present prior to the last decade of reductions.

2. Reforming undergraduate education √√√

We found a striking uniformity in the need for reform of undergraduate education among all five departments. Each department needs to do a better job in four, more or less interrelated areas (in order of priority): (1) enhancing student's analytical writing skills and providing feedback for writing assignments, (2) increasing the number of tutorials or

discussion sessions (especially at introductory levels), (3) redesigning curriculum (above all, to ensure that students have exposure to diverse core areas in philosophy), and (4) supervising adjuncts and teaching assistants.

In regard to (1), we found that instructors rely too much upon examinations at the expense of writing assignments and that, even when writing assignments are given, the feedback on them is insufficient. For an education in philosophy, there is no alternative to writing and to receiving critical feedback on the arguments and notions expressed in one's writing. This issue – (1) – is closely related to (2) which signals another primary desideratum of an undergraduate education in philosophy, namely, the opportunity to discuss material in depth with an instructor and one's peers. As long as there is a shortage of tutorials and teaching assistants, there will not be sufficient staffing for students to have this vital encounter and the size of classes will prohibit instructors from giving feedback on writing assignments. The high undergraduate dropout rate in most programs may well be related to shortcomings in regard to (1) and (2).

There are considerable differences among the departments regarding (3), i.e., the degree to which redesign of the curriculum is called for. In some cases, a major overhaul is urgently needed. But even where this is not the case and departments are more successful at undergraduate education, they are the first to note the gaps in coverage provided by the current curriculum.

Finally, in our estimation, each department should take formal steps to supervise the teaching done by teaching assistants (typically MA students but occasionally PhD students). In more than one case, the responsibility for supervising has been relinquished to older teaching assistants. Departments might require one or more senior members of the department (on a rotating basis) to sit in courses or discussion sessions conducted by teaching assistants, provide written reviews of the assistant's teaching in the course or session, and discuss the quality of the teaching with the assistant.

We recommend that the CHE strongly urge each department to address the four areas of concern with undergraduate education, mentioned above.

3. Revising graduate programs and curricula √√√

While each department needs to revise its graduate curriculum in one respect or the other, the scope of the needed revision varies widely from program to program. However, there are some common areas in need of revision. In general, departments need (1) to introduce more structure into the MA program, specifically by introducing distribution requirements that ensure that students receive advanced education in several major fields of philosophy, (2) to require more writing from students and feedback from faculty in graduate courses, and (3) to offer seminars designed exclusively for graduate students. We recommend that the CHE urge the philosophy departments to examine their graduate programs and curricula with a view to making the revisions indicated.

4. Investing departments with main responsibility for PhD programs √√√

In some cases, there is insufficient structure to the department's PhD program, even a lack of control and oversight of the doctoral program by the philosophy department. These shortcomings are largely a result of the structuring of doctoral studies in Israeli universities and any alteration of present arrangements is in the hands of administrations

and humanities faculties. For this reason we also recommend that the CHE encourage universities to give the departments the main responsibility for the PhD programs.

5. Increasing support for graduate students √√√

Mention has already been made of the lack of sufficient teaching assistants. But in our interviews in each department we also encountered the complaint that present teaching assistants are poorly compensated and that both MA and PhD students are underfunded. We wholeheartedly concur with this complaint. Neither the stipend for being a teaching assistant nor the financial support for MA and PhD students generally is adequate by international standards. Given the paltry level of this financial support and given, too, the degree to which the quality of both undergraduate and graduate philosophy programs depends upon the level of support that MA and PhD students receive, we strongly recommend that the CHE explore every possible avenue of encouraging and helping universities to increase that level of support.

6. The autonomy of philosophy √√

In one instance, we evaluated not a “department,” but the division of General Philosophy in a Department of Philosophy that also houses a division of Jewish Thought. But in one other department, the prospect was raised of combining the philosophy department with the department of Jewish thought. Philosophy is a distinctive study, not dependent upon any particular religious tradition or outlook, and major degree-granting universities throughout the world recognize this distinctiveness by according philosophy departments a status as a separate and autonomous department among other departments in the arts and sciences. To depart from this widely recognized practice is to deny philosophy’s distinctiveness and to subvert its potentially invaluable, critical function within the culture and state. We accordingly encourage the CHE to recognize formally this autonomy of philosophy in higher education and the status as a separate department that this autonomy warrants the members of the academic staff who teach philosophy.

7. Underrepresentation of women in faculty √√

With arguably one or two exceptions, women are generally underrepresented among the faculty in the departments of philosophy. In order to be more representative of its student population and to reach standards of representations of women in philosophy common throughout the western world, philosophy departments ought to hire more women. We accordingly recommend that CHE urge departments to pursue additional women faculty, so long as they are no less capable than the best male applicants.

8. Hiring PhD students as teaching assistants √√

In our interviews, we frequently encountered a common complaint about the high cost of hiring PhD students as teaching assistants. One administration official informed us that under a current union arrangement, hiring PhD students costs twice as much as hiring adjuncts. As a result, most departments hire MA students instead, despite the fact PhD students are more advanced and experienced. (Only one department – Hebrew University – managed to its credit consistently to hire PhD students as teaching assistants.) It makes little sense that PhD students are typically not able to serve as teaching assistants, owing to this union-negotiated requirement that they be paid more

than MA students. Since the relevant union is apparently nationwide, and we are aware that the agreement is between the graduate student union and the state authorities, we urge the CHE to encourage the Universities to find a solution to this problem in such a way that removes the financial obstacle to hiring PhD students as teaching assistants.

9. Increasing the time frame for supporting Master's students √√

In order to make ends meet, most Master's students are working in some capacity during their studies, frequently in addition to being teaching assistants. In addition, an MA student devotes almost two years to completing the required courses for the degree, ordinarily leaving him/her with less than a year to complete the master's thesis. Given this typical scenario, it is unreasonable to expect MA students to complete their studies within two years. We accordingly recommend that the CHE recognize that MA students should be expected to complete their MA degree **with thesis** within 3 years of first enrolling in a master's program in philosophy.

10. Interuniversity co-operation √√

In our evaluations of departments, we repeatedly recommend that, as a means of broadening students' and professors' horizons, departments encourage or, as the case may be, continue to encourage suitable students to enroll in advanced courses at other universities and even consider pursuing their doctoral studies at another university. For similar reasons, we also recommend that departments recruit undergraduates from other Israeli universities to their philosophy graduate program (with the support of special fellowships for this purpose) and that departments attempt to develop more faculty exchanges with other departments of philosophy, both in and outside Israel.

In view of the fact that exchange of students and faculty among Israeli departments of philosophy requires co-ordination among the respective universities that house them, we recommend that the CHE form a committee with representatives of the various departments, charged with exploring ways to promote exchange of students and faculty among their departments. As part of its charge, this committee should explore more formal lines of co-operation between departments. This co-operation could take the form of a doctorate in a particular field of philosophy that combines the resources of several departments. For example, across the departments in Israel, there are experts in philosophy of science, philosophy of mind, ethics, and aesthetics (to name just a few obvious areas of common expertise). Perhaps it would be in everyone's best interest (student, teachers, and administration) to formalize the arrangement that would allow someone pursuing a PhD in one such area, e.g., philosophy of science, in one graduate department to take a limited number of relevant courses from expert philosophers of science in other graduate departments or institutes. (A similar arrangement could be made for philosophy of mind, ethics, aesthetics, and so on). This sort of arrangement could help address a lack of appropriate staff at the graduate level, particularly under the current budgetary restraints, without undermining the autonomy of each department.

There are potential risks to this sort of co-operation that deserve mention. Unchecked, it can lead to a philosophically unhealthy climate of overspecialization. Commuting time takes a toll on both faculty and students, and overemphasis of such co-operative arrangements can undermine faculty members' commitment to the distinctive character of their program and place. For this reason, it may be necessary to keep some

forms of this cooperation occasional, e.g., a weekend seminar on a special topic or a visiting course taught for a single semester. Nevertheless, while the different departments' distinct philosophical cultures should be sustained, cooperation can also be a benefit, either in an area of shared strength or to supplement weaknesses.

Under any such arrangement, each department would have to retain a "critical" mass of faculty to meet its curricular obligations, undergraduate and graduate, and to maintain its excellence in its traditional areas of research. By no means should this recommendation be construed as undermining the need for replacing retirees and rebuilding departments to levels enjoyed before the reductions over the last decade. The case for those replacements and for returning to those levels is overwhelming. But the case for pursuing co-operation between departments for specific lines of doctoral studies is strong and warrants further consideration.

11. Recognition of Hebrew publications √

The issue of the importance of philosophical publications in Hebrew (including translations of significant texts into Hebrew) is important in two respects, one immediate, the other long-range. In the short-term, the issue arises of the weight to be assigned these publications in tenure and promotion cases. On the whole, we learned that, for cases of promotion and tenure, these publications typically are either not considered at all or considered to be less important than publications in English. More clarity on this subject is crucial to planning and judicious time-management on the part of those seeking tenure and promotion. This jaundiced attitude towards publications in Hebrew may be related to philosophy's perceived need to differentiate itself from Jewish studies. Moreover, there seems to be a certain amount of distrust of the blind reviewing process of Hebrew articles in Israeli publications, given the fact that the Israeli philosophical community is relatively small. Yet, while these difficulties are real, the practice of excluding or even simply undervaluing Hebrew publications cannot be salutary in the long term for the state of Israeli philosophy. When asked recently about the quality of Israeli philosophers, a prominent American philosopher who spends a fair amount of time in Israel responded: "They're excellent; they're no different from any first-rate philosopher you'll find in Oxford or Cambridge, Massachusetts." Whether intended as a back-handed compliment or not, this response illustrates a problem that is only exacerbated by depreciating philosophizing in the native language of Israeli citizens. Accordingly we recommend that the CHE form a committee, composed of members of each department of philosophy in Israel, to evaluate the suitability of current practices of weighing the importance assigned to philosophical publications in Hebrew and to make recommendations.

12. Direct track √

In Israel universities, graduate students typically have two paths or tracks to the doctorate: (1) the standard or indirect track which requires an MA degree and an MA thesis, and (2) the direct track which requires two years of course work with no MA thesis, followed by the composition of a dissertation proposal under the direction of an adviser, to be defended by the end of their third or fourth year, with the aim of completing the entire doctoral program within six years. In most departments, the direct track is available, at least in principle, and in some cases there is financial support for those who opt for it, though the department at Hebrew University has recently suspended

its direct track. In contrast to the United States, most philosophy PhD students take the indirect track to the PhD. They pursue the indirect track in spite of the fact that (a) most PhD students in philosophy are very well prepared when they join the graduate philosophy program (most have a BA in philosophy and have taken at least half of their BA classes in philosophy), (b) most PhD students begin their academic studies at a later age than in universities abroad, (c) completion of the PhD in the direct track is (or should be) shorter than in the indirect track, and (d) the university administration typically supports and encourages the direct PhD track, often in the form of fellowships. In short, in spite of the obvious advantages of taking the direct PhD track, both for students and for the university, in terms of efficiency, support, and time, most PhD students prefer the indirect track, and the philosophy faculty recommend the direct track only to a selective few.

We are not sure why philosophy graduate students at Israeli universities more generally do not opt for the direct PhD track. In some cases, choosing the indirect track may have something to do with a tradition of longer term attachment to higher education in Israel and to a vibrant philosophical community with a substantial number of non-career philosophers. Students also cite the need to write an MA thesis as preparation for the rigors of writing a PhD thesis and they also indicate a preference for making a short-term commitment to graduate studies over a long term commitment (take one step at a time). It is possible that the expressed need on the part of graduate students to write a master's thesis reflects the current lack of training in analytic writing within both BA and MA courses; this might be addressed by reforming those programs to incorporate more analytical writing, as suggested above (see Recommendations #2 and #3). Overall, it remains unclear to us whether choosing the indirect PhD track is mainly a matter of tradition and habit or a matter of rational decision-making.

On the one hand, it is unreasonable to think that Israeli students require more preparation for a PhD thesis than American students. If anything, Israeli students, who are older than typical American students, have a greater interest than American students in shortening the duration of their graduate studies. Moreover, Israeli students are often better prepared for graduate studies in philosophy since they usually devote a full half of their undergraduate studies to philosophy courses. Graduate students are, at least in some programs, better supported when they take the direct track and experience abroad suggests that the quality of PhD theses is not negatively affected by taking the direct track.

On the other hand, it is possible that young Israelis face greater uncertainties than their peers abroad, and as a result it is rational for them to prefer short- rather than long-term educational commitments.

In view of these contrary indications and the seemingly patent advantages of the direct track, more investigation of the matter is warranted. Hence, we strongly suggest that the CHE, in concert with the departments, investigate the desirability of adopting measures to provide stronger encouragement than currently exists for students to pursue the direct track in PhD programs. These measures might include, for example, a more concentrated effort by faculty to identify suitable candidates for the direct track in a timely fashion and a commitment of financial aid, e.g., fellowships, for students taking the direct track. This recommendation of investigating the desirability of providing more motivation for the pursuit of the direct track is not intended to eliminate the current

practice of completing a master's thesis before pursuing doctoral studies, should students, in consultation with their advisors, decide that this practice is preferable for them.

13. Library support √

Budgetary cuts in library acquisitions have been drastic, as much as 50% in some cases. Budgetary cuts for library staff have also begun to take their toll on the quality of the management of library materials. In view of the fact that this problem is nationwide, it behooves the CHE to consider ways to alleviate the plight of the library's philosophy holdings. The increasing availability and use of electronic media may provide a valuable recourse. There may also be ways to facilitate co-operation between the various libraries for the sake of making texts more available to researchers in philosophy. As in the case of interuniversity co-operation mentioned above, there is need for imaginative ways of working together, without undermining any specific library's independence and responsibilities to the students on its campus. We recommend that the CHE (a) form a committee that includes a faculty member and a library staff member from each department and university and (b) charge this committee with making recommendations to meet the challenges presented by the cuts in support.

14. Tenure and mentoring √

Not surprisingly, complaints about the process of tenure and promotion surfaced in each department. Nevertheless, the complaints ranged from minimal to quite severe, as did the responses that we gave to these complaints in our particular reports. In some cases, it sufficed to repeat the usual admonition that candidates for tenure and promotion be well-informed from the outset of the process and the expectations of the department and the university. In other cases, standard practices may not have been followed and confidentiality regarding deliberations of the evaluating committee was breached. But we leave these details to the individual reports. In general, we recommend that CHE encourage department to state formally their requirements for tenure and make these requirements known to all tenure-track faculty members and that they recognize, along with research and publications, both excellence in teaching and service to the department and university as part of the criteria for tenure. We also recommend that the CHE encourage departments to introduce mentoring programs as a means of helping tenure-track faculty members. Under such a program, a different member of the senior faculty is assigned to be the mentor of each untenured, tenure track faculty member, with the responsibility of counseling him or her on departmental and university practices, requirements, and expectations, including those for promotion and tenure.

15. Placement

Positions within Israel for students completing graduate degrees in philosophy are at a premium, as are other possibilities of employment. This situation is not, however, an excuse for dispensing with a placement service (as some departments contend). Indeed, our impression from interviews with graduate students in each department is that they are not aware of all the job opportunities available to them even in Israel, for example, teaching positions in Israeli colleges (which do not have philosophy departments yet offer philosophy classes), fellowship opportunities (such as the Alon, Lady Davis, and Kreitman fellowships), and so on. Each department should have (on a rotating basis) a

faculty member who serves as director of placement. The director of placement is someone to whom students can turn for counsel as they apply for jobs, graduate study elsewhere, post-doctorates, research positions, and other placement opportunities on completion of their studies. We urge the CHE to encourage each department to establish a director of placement for its students.

It has also come to our attention that in some institutions either a university-wide placement or career service for all students, including undergraduates, does not exist or students are quite ignorant of its existence. We urge the CHE to encourage university administrations to rectify this situation.

Supplementary Observation: Arab-Israeli philosophy students and Muslim thought

This recommendation is purposely not numbered because it is in certain respects different in kind from the others but no less pressing. Rather than assign it a rank, we have decided to let it stand apart as a supplementary observation.

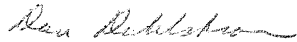
While perhaps understandable and hardly exceptional for Israeli universities, the relative lack of Arab-Israeli professors and students in philosophy is particularly lamentable. It is particularly lamentable for at least two reasons. First, as a matter of historical fact, Western philosophy was dependent upon Muslim thinkers for the transmission of Greek thought to the Latin West. Through their translations and interpretations of Aristotle's logic and philosophy of science, his philosophies of nature and mind, his ethics and politics, Islamic thinkers shaped the received view of Aristotle and, as a consequence, standard European approaches to these subjects so central to the dawn of modernity. Here is a genuine context and theme for mutual research and understanding among Islamic and Israeli scholars of the history of philosophy. Second, philosophy has a unique capacity to question and evaluate commitments (cognitive, moral, artistic, and so on), without privileging a particular religious outlook or tradition, whether Jewish, Islamic, Christian, or otherwise. In this respect, too, it represents a potential place for a critical meeting of minds on neutral turf. In each of the aforementioned respects, philosophy offers a particular promise for reaching out to a younger generation of Arab-Israelis and bringing them into significant scholarly dialogue in the university with other Israelis. Given Israel's demographics and the philosophical penchant of its citizenry (mentioned earlier), it is easy to imagine that Israel's interests would be well-served by programs that enhanced the prospects of Arab-Israelis studying philosophy in Israel's departments. We encourage CHE to consider ways to develop and implement such programs.

Concluding observation

Despite the difficulties and challenges currently facing the Israeli philosophy departments, we conclude this report with guarded optimism about its future. The optimism is guarded because of the prospect that the lack of support given to philosophy departments over the past decade will not abate. Constraints on resources that can be provided to departments may be genuinely beyond the control of the government itself and the Council of Higher Education. Equally likely is a political short-sightedness that fails to appreciate the importance of thriving philosophical departments to higher

education and, by extension, the importance of philosophy itself to the well-being of the nation and its citizens. But the optimism is founded upon our view of the personal and intellectual qualities of the individuals we have encountered in these departments. They have enormous reserves of good will, sound judgment, and concern for the state of philosophical research and education in Israel – in short, all the ingredients necessary to meet the challenges mentioned, given an adequate level of support. We urge the CHE to do everything in its power to insure that the philosophy departments in Israel receive that support.

Signed by:



Prof. Daniel Dahlstrom, Chair



Prof. Paul Davies



Prof. Richard Eldridge



Prof. Jacob Joshua Ross



Prof. Gila Sher

Appendix 1- Copy of Letter of Appointment



מדינת ישראל

STATE OF ISRAEL

Minister of Education

Tuesday May 5th, 2009

Professor Daniel Dahlstrom
 Department of Philosophy
 Boston University
 USA

Dear Professor Dahlstrom,

The State of Israel undertook an ambitious project when the Israeli Council for Higher Education (CHE) established a quality assessment and assurance system for Israeli higher education. Its stated goals are: to enhance and ensure the quality of academic studies; to provide the public with information regarding the quality of study programs in institutions of higher education throughout Israel; and to ensure the continued integration of the Israeli system of higher education in the international academic arena. Involvement of world-renowned academicians in this process is essential.

This most important initiative reaches out to scientists in the international arena in a national effort to meet the critical challenges that confront the Israeli higher educational system today. The formulation of international evaluation committees represents an opportunity to express our common sense of concern and to assess the current and future status of education in the 21st century and beyond. It also establishes a structure for an ongoing consultative process among scientists around the globe on common academic dilemmas and prospects.

I therefore deeply appreciate your willingness to join us in this crucial endeavor.

It is with great pleasure that I hereby appoint you to serve as Chair of the Council for Higher Education's Committee for the Evaluation of General Philosophy Studies.

The composition of the Committee will be as follows: Prof. Daniel Dahlstrom - Chair, Prof. Paul Davies, Prof. Richard Eldridge, Prof. Jacob Joshua Ross, and Prof. Gila Sher. Ms. Michal Kabatznik will coordinate the Committee's activities.

In your capacity as Chair of the Evaluation Committee, you will be requested to function in accordance with the enclosed appendix.

I wish you much success in your role as Chair of this most important committee.

Sincerely,

Gideon Sa'ar

Gideon Sa'ar

Minister of Education

and Chairperson of the Council for Higher Education

Enclosures: Appendix to the Appointment Letter of Evaluation Committees

cc: Ms. Riki Mendelzvaig, Secretary of the Council for Higher Education

Ms. Michal Neumann, Head of the Quality Assessment Unit

Ms. Michal Kabatznik, Committee Coordinator



October 07

Appendix to the Letter of Appointment for Evaluation Committees (Study Programs)

1. General

On June 3, 2003 the Council for Higher Education (CHE) decided to establish a system for quality assessment and assurance in Israeli higher education. Within this framework, study-programs are to be evaluated every six years and institutions every eight years. The quality assessment system came into effect in the academic year of 2004-2005.

The main objectives of the quality assessment activity are:

- To enhance the quality of higher education in Israel;
- To create an awareness within institutions of higher education in Israel of the importance of quality evaluation and to develop internal self-evaluation mechanisms on a regular basis;
- To provide the public with information regarding the quality of study programs in institutions of higher education throughout Israel;
- To ensure the continued integration of the Israeli system of higher education in the international academic arena.

It is not the CHE's intention to rank the institutions of higher education according to the results of the quality assessment processes. The evaluation committee should refrain from formal comparisons.

2. The Work of the Evaluation Committee

- 2.1 The committee shall hold meetings, as needed, before visiting the institution, in order to evaluate the material received.
- 2.2 The committee shall visit the institution and the academic unit being evaluated – if possible - within 3-4 months of receiving the self-evaluation report. The purpose of the visit is to verify and update the information submitted in the self-evaluation report, clarify matters where necessary, inspect the educational environment and facilities first hand, etc. During the visit, the committee will meet with the heads of the institution, faculty members, students, the administrative staff, and any other persons it considers necessary.
- 2.3 In a meeting at the beginning of the visit, the committee will meet with the heads of the institution (president/rector, dean), the heads of the academic unit and the study-programs, in order to explain the purpose of the visit. At the end of the visit, the committee will summarize its findings, and formulate its recommendations.
- 2.4 The duration of the visits (at least one full day) will be coordinated with the chairperson of the committee.
- 2.5 Following the visit, the committee will write its final report, including its recommendations, which will be delivered to the institution and the academic unit for their response.
- 2.6 In the event that a member of the committee is also a faculty member in an institution being evaluated, he/she will not take part in discussions regarding that institution.

3. The Individual Reports

- 3.1 The final reports of the evaluation committee shall address every institution separately.
- 3.2 The final reports shall include recommendations on topics listed in the guidelines for self –evaluation, such as:
 - The goals and aims of the evaluated academic unit and study programs.
 - The study program.
 - The academic staff.
 - The students.
 - The organizational structure.

- The broader organizational structure (school/faculty) in which the academic unit and study program operate.
- The infrastructure (both physical and administrative) available to the study program.
- Internal mechanisms for quality assessment.
- Other topics to be decided upon by the evaluation committee.

4. The structure of the reports

4.1 Part A – General background and an executive summary:

- 4.1.1 General background concerning the evaluation process, the names of the members of the committee, a general description of the institution and the academic unit being assessed, and the committee's work.
- 4.1.2 An executive summary that will include a description of the strengths and weaknesses of the academic unit and program being evaluated.

4.2 Part B – In-depth description of subjects examined:

- 4.2.1 This part will be composed according to the topics examined by the evaluation committee, and based on the self-evaluation report submitted by the institution.
- 4.2.2 For each topic examined the report will present a summary of the findings, the relevant information and analysis.

4.3 Part C –Recommendations:

- 4.3.1 Comprehensive conclusions and recommendations regarding the evaluated academic unit and the study program according to the topics in part B.
- 4.3.2 Recommendations may be classified according to the following categories:
- ***Congratulatory remarks and minimal changes recommended, if any.***
 - ***Desirable changes recommended*** at the institution's convenience and follow-up in the next cycle of evaluations.
 - ***Important/needed changes requested for ensuring appropriate academic quality*** within a reasonable time, in coordination with the institution (1-3 years)
 - ***Essential and urgent changes required, on which continued authorization will be contingent*** (immediately or up to one year).
 - ***A combination of any of the above.***

4.4 Part D - Appendices:

The appendices shall contain the committee's letter of appointment and the schedule of the on-site visit.

5. The General report

In addition to the individual reports concerning each study program, the committee shall submit to the CHE the following documents:

- 5.1 A general report regarding the status of the evaluated field of study within the Israeli institutions of higher education.

We urge the committee to clearly list its specific recommendations for each one of the topics (both in the individual reports and in the general report) and to prioritize these recommendations, in order to ease the eventual monitoring of their implementation.
