



Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences
Department of Philosophy

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Departmental response to Prof. Sher's Report Regarding Ben-Gurion University's Implementation of the Recommendations made by the External Evaluation Team of Philosophy Departments In Israel, November 2009.

The Department of Philosophy wishes to thank Prof. Sher, and the other members of the External Committee, for their serious and highly professional reports. Below is our response to Prof. Sher's report of June 15, 2012, regarding issues of implementation.

1. **The Report's Conclusion.** The Department of Philosophy concurs with the Prof. Sher's conclusion to the effect that "both the Department and the administration have done a good job in implementing the external team's recommendations." However, it also partly concurs with Prof. Sher's judgment, regarding the recommendations that have not been fully implemented, that "it is of the utmost importance that the administration recognize the urgent need to replace all retirees in a timely fashion as well as to increase the number of FTE's to 12, so the department has the critical mass in order to excel." Below I shall describe further developments through which these recommendations have been implemented, as well as the Department's current position regarding the issues raised by Prof. Sher.
2. **Implementation.** The report lists 7 items of recommendation addressed to the University administration, of which 3 are classified as "implemented," 2 as "partially implemented," 1 as "not implemented" and 1 as being under "reexamination." The report also lists 11 items of recommendation addressed to the Department, of which 9 are listed as "implemented," 1 as "partially implemented," and 1 as pending. Regarding these failures of full implementation by the administration (pts. a-d) and the dept. (pts. e-f), the following should be stressed:
 - a. **Replacing retirees.** The University administration has authorized a number of searches for senior faculty to replace retirees. Two of these searches were undertaken with care and professionalism; a third is still pending. In conformity with the External Committee's recommendations, the Department has sought to replace retirees with experts on Ancient Greek Philosophy and Ethics and Political Philosophy. In both these searches the Department has experienced difficulties, partly due to competition from other universities, but finally managed to recruit two excellent candidates who are expected to join the Department in the coming academic year (2012-13). Of these, one is an expert in Early Modern Philosophy (with competence in Ancient Greek

Philosophy). The other is an expert in Ethics and Bio-Medical Ethics (with competence in Political Philosophy). The Department has another open position (*teken*) to fill, and another search is planned to take place in the coming academic year. With these two additions we shall begin the next academic year with 7.5 positions filled, and with another appointment we expect to reach 8.5 positions. Unfortunately, this is still below retiree-replacement level (9.5 positions), and well below the committee's recommendation of 12 positions for the Department of Philosophy. In particular, over the past few years 6 full time members have retired from the Philosophy Department: Prof. Moked, Prof. Gelman, Prof. Parush, Prof. Lurie, Prof. Marantz, and Prof. Kasachkoff. Three full time members have been recruited in their places, but one has left the Department and moved to the Cognitive Science Department. These are Dr. Geiger, Dr. Benbaji, and Dr. Jacobson (who left). Two new recruits are about to join the Department: Dr. Shein and Dr. Cohen. All in all, 6 people retired, 4 have been recruited, another open position will be filled, hopefully, in the coming academic year, which will bring the number of new recruits to 5. Hence, the Department needs another open position (*teken*) to reach retiree-replacement level, and would welcome any realistic plan, which need not be immediate, to reach this goal.

While we understand the University's budgetary constraints, the Department believes that this overall reduction in the size of the Philosophy Department does not bode well for the future of philosophical and humanistic scholarship in the University. We urge the Dean and the Rector to keep open the horizons of re-growth for the Philosophy Department, at least to retiree-replacement levels.

- b. **Adding Senior Academic Staff.** The Department concurs with Prof. Sher's judgment that "a department needs a 'critical mass' of faculty 'min ha-minyan,' and it's very hard to reach this state with fewer than 12 full-time positions." Nevertheless, we acknowledge this goal to be too ambitious at this stage, and would urge the administration to focus on a more moderate, long-term, plan to reach retiree-replacement levels (as noted above), and bring the Department back to its original size of 9.5 positions. While growth could reasonably be deferred to better economic times, we believe the present reduction in the size of the Department (from 9.5 to 8.5 positions) should be corrected.
- c. **Establishing full time position of the administrative coordinator.** The Department is awaiting the results of the reexamination of its needs. We believe a full time administrative position in the department is required for optimal functioning.
- d. **Library support for acquisition.** While the University has allocated funds for increasing the library collection, the Department concurs with the conclusion that more is needed to turn the philosophy collection in the library into an adequate research tool. In the past couple of years, the Rector has allocated NIS 300,000 (per year) for library acquisitions in the Humanities and Social Sciences. These funds have been used to clear up all outstanding orders of the entire faculty, philosophy included.

- e. **Hiring Priorities.** While the Department has accepted the External committee's recommendations regarding its hiring priorities, it has not been successful in fully implementing them. As noted above, the Department has attempted to make an appointment in Ancient Greek Philosophy, but has not been successful in finding a suitable candidate. Two candidates who were found academically excellent have declined for competitive or personal reasons, and other candidates were not found to be sufficiently attractive. Due to these circumstances, the Department has decided to hire an expert in another (historical) field with mere competence in Greek Philosophy. This is, of course, less than optimal, though the candidate herself is an excellent philosopher in whom we have great confidence. **Our preference in this regard has been for research excellence over coverage of historical material.** It is still open, however, that in a future search, which is likely to be "open" in terms of specifying areas of specialization, an expert in Greek Philosophy will be hired, provided of course he or she will be found academically excellent. The second priority, Ethics and Political Philosophy, has now been fully implemented with a candidate whose excellence has impressed us all.
- f. **Mentoring.** Mentors have now been appointed to the two new members. The mentoring will begin at the beginning of the coming academic year.
3. **Current State of the Philosophy Department.** Having made two new appointments, and expecting to make another one in the coming academic year, the Department is now poised to fulfill its mission as described in its original report to the external evaluation team, namely, to advance both scholarship and teaching in most major areas of Philosophy, "analytic" as well as "continental." We compensate for the lack of "critical mass," as diagnosed by the external committee's report, by hiring part time teachers, and we have been lucky to employ some exceptionally promising philosophers in that capacity.

In conclusion, The Department of Philosophy has implemented virtually all the recommendations of the External committee's report. We hope the full recommendations addressed to the University, particularly regarding the replacement of retirees, will eventually be implemented.

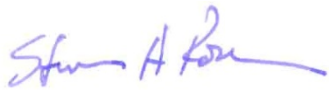
Sincerely,



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