

# Call for Papers

International conference

## Comparative Universalisms: Jewish and Other Perspectives

July 7-9, 2025

Institute of Jewish Studies  
University of Antwerp, Belgium

We invite scholars and researchers who are or intend to become members of the Network *European Philosophy and the Jewish Tradition* to submit proposals for a conference on "Comparative Universalisms: Jewish and Other Perspectives" planned for July 7-9 2025, at the University of Antwerp. This inaugural conference of the new Network aims to explore the multifaceted concept of universalism through the lens of Jewish thought and its interactions with other cultural, religious, and philosophical traditions.

The relation between the particular and the universal, and the very possibility of universals altogether, are fundamental philosophical problems involving questions of epistemology, ethics, and politics. In times of increasing war and human enmity, these questions are particularly urgent as they relate to the recognition of a common humanity – in all its diversity and particularity – as a condition of peace between different groups.

Greek philosophy is often referred to as the birthplace of universal thought and has had a longstanding paradigmatic status with regard to the universal. Given the apparent paradox in the notion of more than one universal, a comparative approach to the term “universalism” challenges this status, its genealogy, and its legacy in European philosophy since the Enlightenment. The project of comparing universalisms invites a critical reconsideration of these traditional claims and a discussion of its premises and implications, its criticisms and possible alternatives.

In the history of Jewish thought, Jews and Judaism have consistently understood themselves as a distinct particularity engaged in a profound and meaningful relationship with universality. Jewish intellectual traditions across various historical, philosophical, and political contexts have examined this dynamic from multiple perspectives, offering significant philosophical approaches to understanding the intricate interplay between universality and particularity. Drawing inspiration from a rich textual tradition—ranging from the Bible, Talmud, and medieval Jewish thought to a diverse array of modern philosophers—this conference aims to explore how Judaism can inspire nuanced conceptualizations of the relationship between universalism and particularism, moving beyond simplistic dichotomies. It seeks to investigate the various possibilities for recognizing both the strengths and limitations of universalism and particularism, highlighting thinkers and texts that engage with these themes. The conference will examine the potential of the Jewish tradition to offer alternatives to the ostensibly universal message of Christianity and the homogenizing

tendencies of Enlightenment thought, while also providing frameworks for acknowledging and valuing cultural specificity and historical concreteness without succumbing to the sterility, exclusivity, or supremacy often associated with self-enclosed worldviews and systems of thought.

By bringing together diverse viewpoints, this conference aspires to foster a deeper understanding of universalism's possibilities and limitations, to reveal its multiple and often contradictory definitions and to conceptualize new approaches to the universal in light of insights gained from the Jewish scriptural and philosophical tradition. Questions to be addressed include: How do universalist claims relate to other aspects of a certain philosophical work or tradition? How do Jewish texts and thinkers of different philosophical traditions navigate the tension between particular identities and universal values? Which values are prioritized and which are relinquished in different versions of universalism? What follows from distinguishing between the content and the addressee when making a claim to the universal? What can be learned from the Jewish tradition of balancing particularism and universalism, both in its theoretical dimensions and its practical applications in diverse contexts? How can Jewish approaches to universalism communicate with or possibly apply to other European and non-European traditions and identities?

The conference will provide a platform for interdisciplinary and interreligious academic discussion, networking, and collaboration among scholars from around the world.

**Deadline for Applications: December 10, 2024.**

**Proposals should include a title and an abstract of no more than 300 words, along with a brief bio of the presenter. They should be submitted in English or French to [ijs@uantwerpen.be](mailto:ijs@uantwerpen.be) by December 10, 2024.**

**We have a limited number of bursaries available for postgraduate students and early-career researchers. If you would like to be considered, please state this in your proposal.**

**For any questions, please contact the organizers.**

**Academic Organizing Committee:**

**Prof. Vivian Liska** (University of Antwerp / The Hebrew University of Jerusalem), **Prof. Arthur Cools** (University of Antwerp), **Ass. Prof. Willem Styfhals** (KU Leuven).

[ijs@uantwerpen.be](mailto:ijs@uantwerpen.be)

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