

Ethics in Christian and Jewish Traditions

Dr. Scott A. Kikland, Trinity
College, Melbourne
scotk@trinity.edu.au

The Situation in the Scholarship

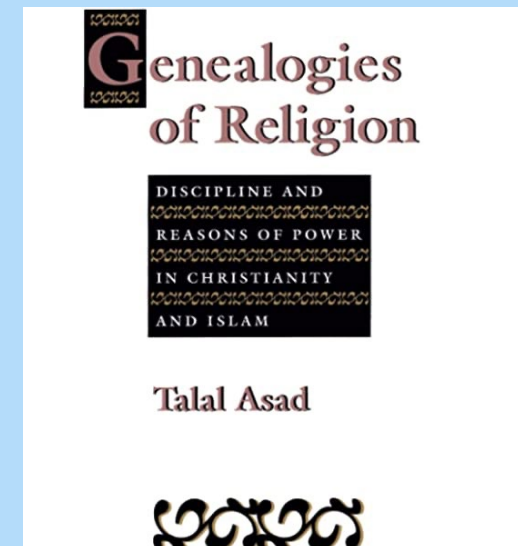
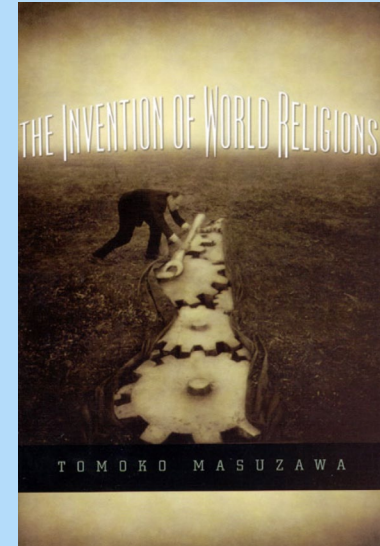
Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion* (John Hopkins University Press, 1993).

Tomoko Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions* (Chicago University Press, 2008).

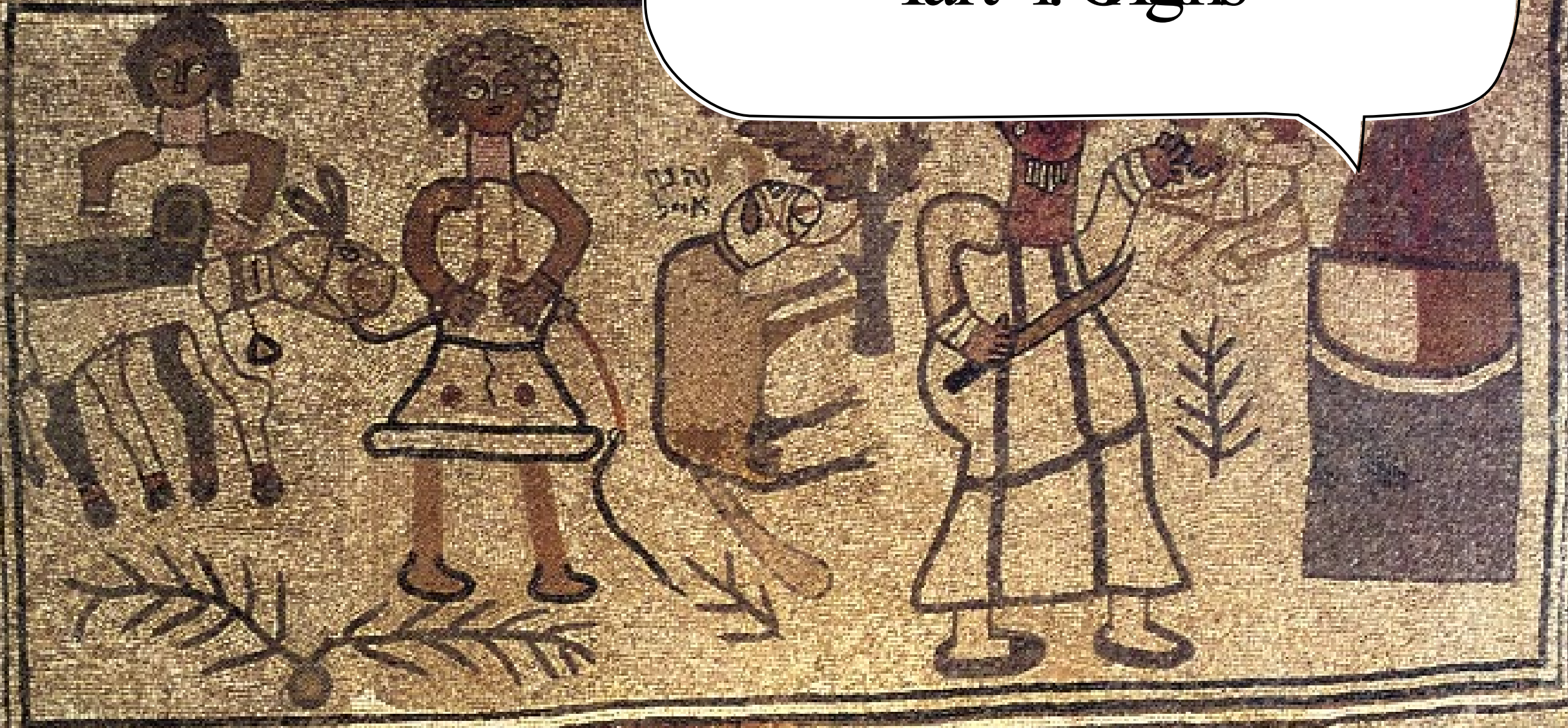
The *object* of study often now is diffuse, and strays into areas not intuitively associated with ‘ethics’ in our vernacular.

Challenging the universality and neutrality of the secular, scholars have begun approaching religion using a variety of methodological tools: literature, philosophy, material culture, economy, etc.

While ‘religion’ might not be a stable object as it once was, religion is a vibrant and diffuse area of study overlapping with the full gamut of human concerns, the very *shape/form* of human life.



Part 1: Origins



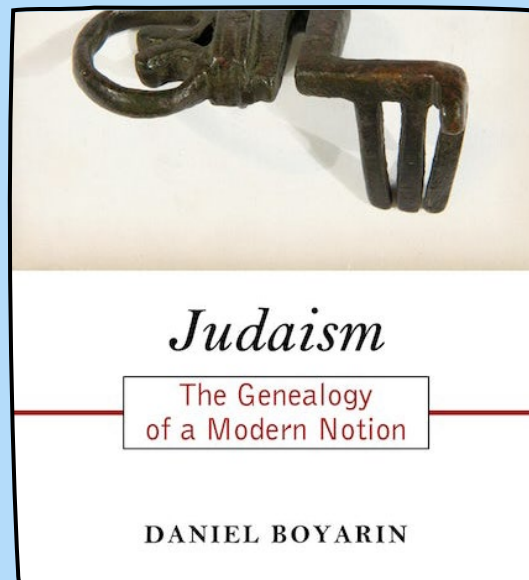
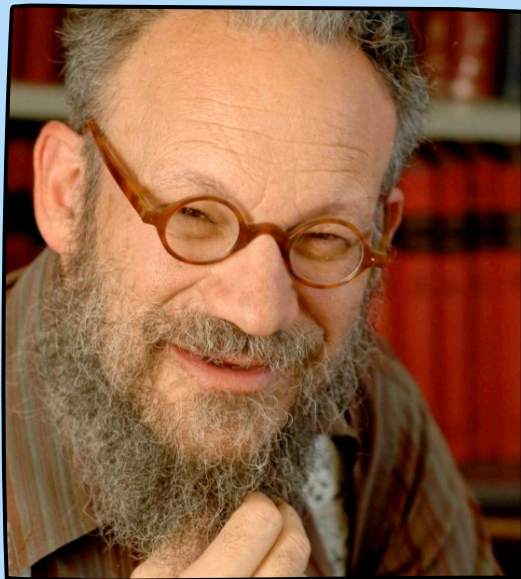
Christian and Jewish Origins: Entanglement

- Christians did not initially identify as such, but rather were from various Jewish traditions who identified Jesus of Nazareth as the messiah
- The subsequent inclusion of the Gentiles (a term for non-Jewish others) was the ground of contention in earliest Jesus traditions. See, Ad Qhir and Ishay Rosen Zi, *Goy: Israel's Multiple others and the Birth of the Gentile* (Oxford University Press, 2018).
- Paul's use of the language of 'gentile' (*ethnos*) is somewhat novel in Jewish traditions.
- The earliest disputes are over *ethnic* inclusion that has to do with the inheritance of covenant promises, and so the 'boundary markers' are circumcision, dietary restrictions, etc

Christian and Jewish Origins: Entanglement

- Earliest Christian and Jewish communities often followed models of association common in the ancient world *Synagoga* and *Ekklesia* being names for other general forms of assembly.
- These followed the pattern of guilds, trade organisations, religious cults, or other social clubs, formations, etc. See John Kloppenborg *Christ's Associations: Connecting and Belonging in the Ancient City* (Yale University Press, 2019).

Daniel Boyarin: Judaism



“the notion that there is a ‘religion’ called ‘Judaism’—or better put, an Ekklesia (Synagoga) called ‘Judaism’—is a product of Christian semantic necessity and production, not that of Jews”

Daniel Boyarin, *Judaism: The Genealogy of a Modern Notion* (Rutgers University Press, 2018).

Similarities

‘What is hateful to you, do not do to others.’ Hillel the Elder (late 1st C)

‘Whatever you hate to have done to you, do not do to your neighbour.’ Rabbi Akiva (late 1st C)

‘Jesus replied: ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind’ This is the first commandment. And the second is like it, ‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’ All the law and the prophets hang on these two commandments.’ Gospel of Matthew (late 1st C)

‘all the commandments are summed up in this word, ‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’ Love does no wrong to a neighbour, therefore, love is the fulfilment of the law’ Apostle Paul (late 1st C)

Part 2
Development
of Traditions
of Moral
Debate



Sources of Authority: Canons of Scripture (Jewish)

- Canon derives from the Greek meaning ‘measuring’ or ‘ruling stick’
- The Rabbis speak of ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ books.
- Christian councils right up until the 16th C are deliberating upon canonicity.
- ‘Authoritative scriptures’ can be more useful language to use prior to the first century, where Josephus (Jewish historian) lists a canon of 22 books. 4 Ezra lists 24 books. This evidence suggests something of a canon of Hebrew Scriptures in the first century.

Sources of Authority: Canons of Scripture (Christian)

Christian scriptures begin to circulate from about 45CE with the writing of Paul's Epistle to the Galatians.

Other oral and written traditions circulate (Q 'quelle', material) and are consolidated in the forms of the gospel narratives.

In the second century this material begins to be fixed up *in its use by authorities in the communities*

Tradition: *tradere* to hand over. Citation produces authority, produces tradition, produces debate.

Development of Traditions: Pre-Medieval

- Through Rabbinic tradition the *Ḥiklei Aot* [Ethics of the Fathers] is produced. A text which details principals of ethical life derived from debate over the interpretation of Torah (law), and its transmission.
- Jewish tradition speaks of *Halakha* (debate over law), and *Aggadah* (non legal exegesis, sometimes homiletic).
- Christian traditions engage in similar forms of reflection on the moral precepts of Jesus and the apostles, often refracting Hebrew traditions through those. See, for instance, Gregory of Nyssa's *The Life of Moses*. These often take the form of sermons, or moral tracts following in the manner of ancient Roman and/or Greek authorities. So we see a synthesis of Hebrew and ancient philosophical traditions in Christianity.

A medieval manuscript illustration depicting a banquet scene. In the foreground, a man in a dark, patterned tunic and a large, dark, curly wig sits on the left, holding a golden chalice. He is looking towards the right. Next to him, a woman in a green and gold patterned dress sits, also holding a golden chalice and looking towards the right. Behind her, another woman in a pink and gold patterned dress is visible. In the background, there are more figures and a large, leafy tree. The style is characteristic of medieval manuscript illumination, with bold outlines and a rich color palette.

Medieval Traditions

- The emergence of Islam from the 7-8th Century.
- Translation movement (12th C) and the encounter with Aristotle in the Latin West. Encounter with *virtue* traditions.

Medieval Jewish Tradition

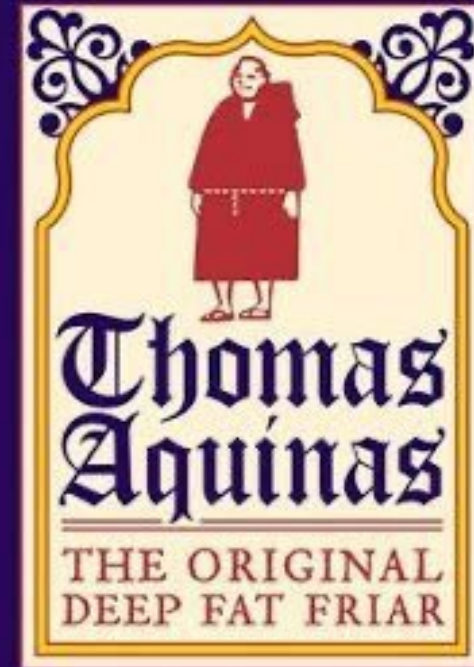
Important again to remember the encounter with Islam, particularly live in Iberia. Lives with us linguistically and culturally. Think, paella, use of saffron, or ~~E~~/~~A~~ (as in ~~E~~-Drach)

Maimonides offers an interpretation of Aristotle, and in turn influences Thomas Aquinas.



Christian Medieval Traditions

- Virtue (*arête*) in Aristotle hinges on the development of habit (*hexis*) directing us toward our proper end (*telos*).
- Theological virtues are developed in the chief Christian thinker of the middle ages, St. Thomas Aquinas. These include prudence, justice, temperance, courage.
- Contemporaneously a natural law tradition begins to develop, in which nature is ordered toward the good, but requires the aid of grace. This develops a tradition stemming from Augustine of Hippo (5th C)
- "Godness and being are really the same." *Summa Theologiae* Ia 5.3.



Threshold of Modernity

The reformation in Europe and the breakup of Empire

Emergence of ***rationalism*** which is continually a problem for Jewish populations

“The book of the world is written in mathematical script.” Galileo The relativization of latin, of natural law traditions, and the entrance of ‘history’ as a category organizing philosophy and theology.

The *displacement* of fons of authority.



Part 3: Modern
Theological and
Philosophical
traditions



Duty

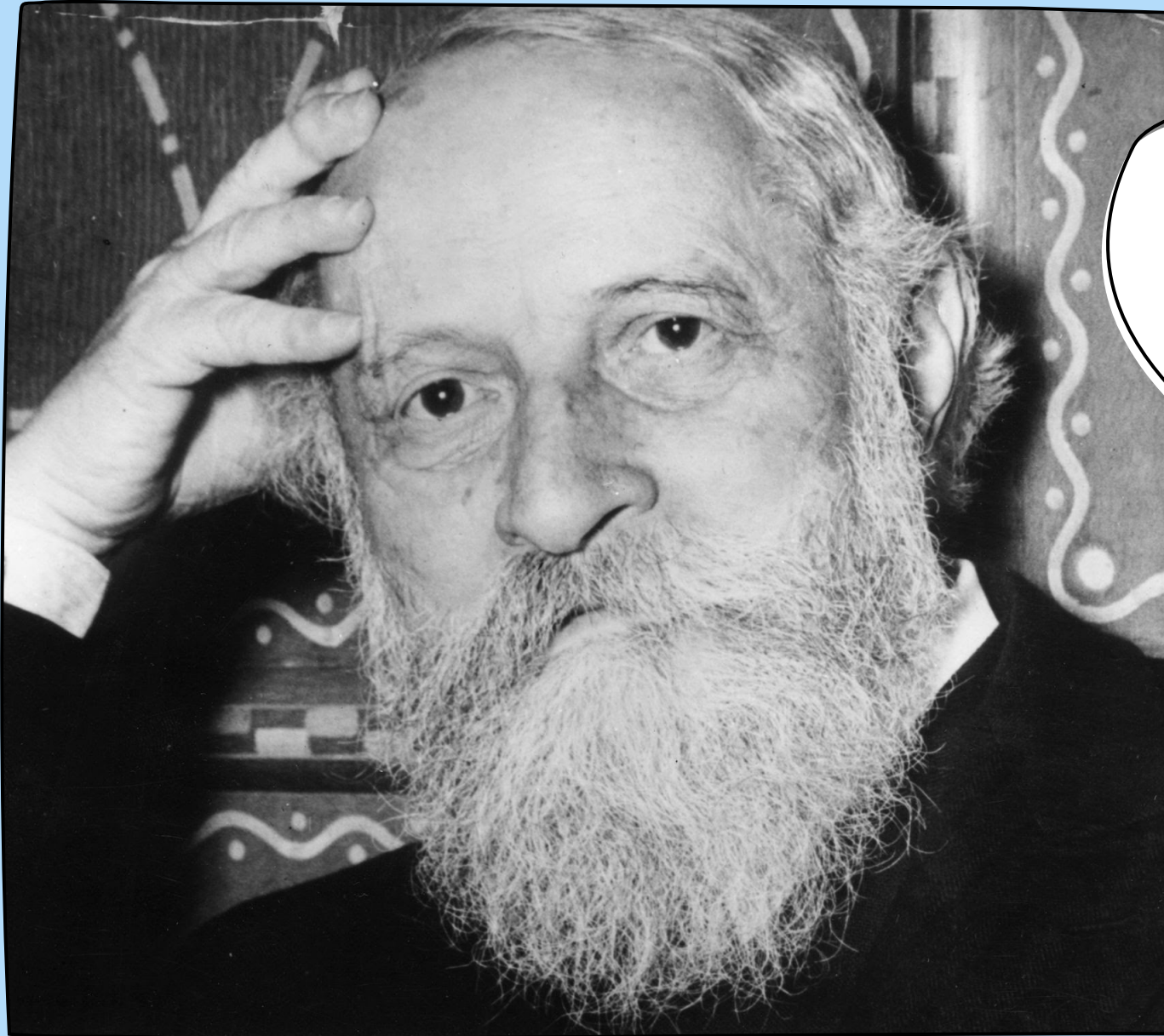
Immanuel Kant derives ethics from duty, from the categorical imperative. "Act according to that maxim whereby you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law"

This maxim is understood by Kant to be the ground of autonomy.

This has roots in older forms of ethics in Thomas Aquinas. The "instrumental cause", effective in the office of the priest, but generalizable in the problem of "offices".

The problem of duty extends to the problem of obedience in Nazi Germany. The Edmanian defense. "I was just obeying orders."





Contra-Kant: I-Thou

20th Jewish philosophy contains an emphasis on *alterity*, otherness, and obligation

Obligations are not sought through inner moral law but in the concrete obligation to the other:

Examples of this include Martin Buber's *I-Thou*, Emmanuel Levinas' *Totality and Infinity*, or Hans Jonas' work

This tradition is in *dynamic* engagement with non-Jewish philosophical traditions, particularly Kant and Martin Heidegger.



The Shadow of modernity

Hannah Arendt: "Justice is a matter of judgement." *Eichmann in Jerusalem* (Viking Press, 1965).

"The trouble with Eichmann was precisely that so many were like him, and that the many were neither perverted nor sadistic, that they were, and still are, terribly and terrifyingly normal."

Arendt's controversial text raises the problem of the *absence* of thought, and so the absence of *judgement* under conditions in which one is *ordered* to act.

Moral consciousness becomes then, an obligation to think



The shadow of modernity

Catholic Social Teaching and the “preferential option for the poor.”

The emergence of post-colonial nation states and the involvement of figures of liberation in struggle, e.g, Oscar Romero

The obligation to see, judge, and act (Cardinal Joseph Ruffini), an exercise of the intellectual virtue of prudence.

Conclusion

Christianity and Judaism *now* consist of a plurality of *traditions*

Plurality is *constitutive* of these traditions, and has been there all along

Hannah Arendt, 'Plurality is the human condition such that each human being is human precisely insofar as they are not identical with anyone who has existed, exists, or will exist.' If this is the ground of moral action, then, it is deeply bound up with what Arendt calls 'Sharing the earth.' The 'refusal to share the earth', the accusation made against Eichmann, is the supreme moral failing

Bibliography

Asad, Talal. *Genealogies of Religion* (John Hopkins University Press, 1993).

Boyarin, Daniel. *Judaism: The Genealogy of a Modern Notion* (Rutgers University Press, 2018).

Buber, Martin. *I and Thou* (Continuum, 2004).

Kloppenborg, John. *Christ's Associations: Connecting and Belonging in the Ancient City* (Yale University Press, 2019).

Levinas, Emmanuel., *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority* (Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1991).

■ *Ethics and Infinity* (Duquense University Press, 2009).

Long, D. Stephen. *Christian Ethics: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford University Press, 2010).

Lovin, Robin. *An Introduction to Christian Ethics: Goals, Duties, and Virtues* (Abingdon Press, 2011).

Newman, Louis. *An Introduction to Jewish Ethics* (Routledge, 2003).

Masuzawa, Tomoko. *The Invention of World Religions* (Chicago University Press, 2008).

Ophir, Adi, and Rosen-Zvi, Isahy. *Goy: Israel's Multiple others and the Birth of the Gentile* (Oxford University Press, 2018).

Eds. *Pirke Avot: A Modern Commentary on Jewish Ethics* (Behrman House, 1999).