Christian-Jewish dialogue has burgeoned in recent decades, with increased public and scholarly attention being paid it. This dialogue has primarily involved exponents of the more open wings of both Christianity and Judaism, those with a religious approach typically viewed as “liberal” in the sense that they share a similar political and cultural vision which transcends the differences between them. It seems likely that this dialogue is the outcome of the weakening of the radical wings generally viewed as hostile to dialogue with other religions, as well as of more moderate religious views which foster rational and pragmatic inter-faith debate. Jewish-Christian dialogue, in other words, is seen as pertaining to the secular/liberal post-war Western world, and its language is a modernized and moderated universal religious one.

However, this common perception of the nature and scope of Jewish-Christian dialogue is limited in two respects. Firstly, it fails to account for the whole range of dialogue. As the studies discussed at the workshop suggested, describing a number of the initiatives encompassed by the debate as liberal–namely based on rational consensus around the place of religious belief and its contribution to a diverse society–is misleading. In actual fact, a propensity to dialogue is also to be found in surprisingly illiberal contexts. Secondly, the focus of the liberal Jewish-Christian dialogue narrative has been confined primarily to Europe and North America, overlooking dialogue stemming from other parts of the world and the unique concerns deriving from these. These non-Western initiatives are grounded on alternative religious frameworks and oriented towards very different political agendas, many of which explicitly reject liberal values.

With a view to transcending this narrow approach to religious dialogue, the focus of our workshop is a twofold one. Firstly, we aim to empirically analyze a variety of projects whose contexts are not normally deemed amenable to dialogue, in its narrower sense. Shedding light on initiatives frequently neglected by the liberal dialogue framework itself increases our understanding of the variety of Christian-Jewish dialogue. Secondly, critically examining the multiplicity of forms dialogue can take enables us to enquire into the logic behind the very notion of dialogue. The aim of the workshop is to formulate a theoretical lexicon better suited to the variety of forms dialogue can take, and to develop a fresh approach encompassing have, to date,been looked at primarily through the lens of liberalism