Reports of the Fellows

Dr. Roi Benbassat
Junior Fellow
Free University Berlin
Project: Yeshayahu Leibowitz—Strict Orthodox Practice and Unbound Scepticism
Period of Fellowship: October 2015 to December 2016

During my Fellowship term at the Maimonides Centre, I am conducting research into the controversial ethical and religious views of the Israeli intellectual Yeshayahu Leibowitz (1903–1994). Leibowitz is well-known for his provocative notions of Jewish faith, science, and morals, as well as for his social and political criticism. Although an orthodox practitioner of the Jewish religion himself, he brought a radical and unprecedented sceptical approach into the discourse of Jewish faith, which became an essential aspect of his religious position. My research explores this special blend of faith and scepticism in Leibowitz' thought.

My enquiry into Leibowitz' sceptical approach investigates three major themes, which Leibowitz has continually explored in his written articles and books, public lectures, and published conversations: 1) the philosophical distinction between faith and belief; 2) the sceptical treatment of traditional Jewish beliefs and assumptions; and 3) the refutation of the moral status of the Jewish religion. My investigation of these themes and my findings have been presented at several events at the Centre. Articles presenting my work and its findings will be submitted to peer-reviewed journals.

Leibowitz' sceptical stance is initially expressed by his overt doubts regarding beliefs that are rooted in Jewish traditions and which may even seem necessary in order to maintain a faithful orthodox position. Thus, for example, Leibowitz calls into question, among other religious beliefs, the belief in God as the creator of the universe, the belief in providence, and the belief in the occurrence of miraculous events as told in the Bible. These doubts are rendered legitimate by Leibowitz' fundamental distinction between faith and belief: Jewish faith, according to his definition, does not depend on what one knows or believes but is an independent practical decision to be committed to the fulfilment of the *miṣwot* ('halakhic duties').

Philosophical distinction between faith and belief

The philosophical development of the distinction between faith and belief suggests a refined form of scepticism, appropriate to Leibowitz' religious standpoint, namely scepticism in the sense of refraining from knowledge claims and suspending judgment. This classical sceptical attitude is not only possible from the viewpoint of

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the faithful, according to Leibowitz, but also necessary for maintaining genuine faith. The halakhic practice of doing something *lišmah* ('for its own sake') is, according to Leibowitz, the superior form of Jewish faith, which is maintained by a pure practical decision that does not rely on evidence, belief, or any other cognitive justification.

In my work, I review Leibowitz' distinction between faith and belief critically. I attempt to support Leibovitz' distinction by comparing his concept of faith to that of Kierkegaard, and by philosophically confronting his normative assumptions with rival ethical theories—Kantian ethics in particular.

The distinction between faith and belief plays a major role in Leibowitz' sceptical approach towards various traditional beliefs extant in religious Judaism. One can observe that the separation between the realm of values and the realm of cognition renders Jewish religiousness more resilient to historical and scientific claims against it. As a free, independent value-determination that does not in principle rely on cognitive determinations, faith becomes indifferent to scientific developments and historical data.

Sceptical treatment of traditional Jewish beliefs and assumptions

In order to summarise Leibowitz' sceptical attitude, I have reviewed a number of case studies of his treatment of traditional Jewish beliefs. In particular, I studied Leibowitz' discussions of the notions of divinity, creation, and providence. In each case, I explicated his extraordinary interpretations of these notions. My enquiry thus elucidates the nature of Leibowitz' scepticism as well as the way in which he renders scepticism a legitimate and integral aspect of Jewish faith.

Nonetheless, my study shows that there is a limit to Leibowitz' scepticism. When it comes to the specific assumptions of halakhic law as a divine command, Leibowitz does not doubt, nor does he suspend judgment. He acknowledges that the Halakhah is a divine command for a faithful Jew. However, this assumption is not held as a mode of cognition—it is not a theoretical judgment, but a value determination. For this reason, it may be misleading to negate Leibowitz' scepticism with regard to the authority of the Halakhah. There is no sense in talking about 'knowing' or 'believing' that the Halakhah is a divine command—it is only perceived as such through faith, which, in Leibowitz' terms, is a pure determination of one's will.

Refutation of the moral status of Judaism

In the third strand of my enquiry, I confront Leibowitz' efforts to highlight the preferential, non-universal, and non-humanistic character of Judaism by looking at the opposing attitude of the Haskalah movement and its proponents. I tend to find Leibowitz' approach more convincing and appropriate to the nature of Judaism than

attempts to present the Jewish religion as essentially compatible with the moral and humanistic values of the Enlightenment.

Prof. Dr. Paolo L. Bernardini
Senior Fellow
University of Insubria, Como
Project: Jacob ben Amram, *Porta Veritatis* (1621)–Towards a Critical Edition of a Clandestine and Sceptical Unpublished Latin Treatise
Period of Fellowship: October 2015 to February 2016

My 5-month stay has been extremely positive and successful, for a number of reasons. Competently steered by Prof. Dr. Giuseppe Veltri, the team at the Maimonides Centre offered me constant, professional backup—in daily administrative matters as well as in regard to my research activities. Everything went more than smoothly thanks to perfect internal as well as external organisation, which created an environment that was highly conducive to research and reflection. I mainly used two outstanding academic facilities: the collections of the Hamburg State and University Library Carl von Ossietzky—in particular its collection of manuscripts—and the library of the Institute for the History of the German Jews.

Furthermore, I travelled extensively in Germany, looking for sources relevant to my research, and met a number of colleagues interested in my field of research. The exchange with other Fellows of the Centre, such as Carsten Wilke, Charles Snyder, and Roi Benbassat, proved extremely helpful for my research. Particularly valuable was my contact with Carsten Wilke, the leading expert in Marrano history of the seventeenth century. In the final stage of my time in Hamburg I benefited, both academically and personally, from valuable conversations with the Centre's Fellow David Ruderman and the new junior professor at the Centre, Racheli Haliva. We were able to cooperate in the true spirit of an Institute for Advanced Studies, whose aims are to bring scholars working in similar areas into contact, and to assist them in exchanging ideas and experience. I can say that this was an extremely positive experience, in a vibrant setting, with constant interaction with junior colleagues and peers, and the constant help of Giuseppe Veltri.

I made good progress with my research project, and came close to achieving the results set out in my—possibly too ambitious—original research proposal. According to authoritative printed sources, a fifth manuscript copy of the seventeenth century text *Porta Veritatis*, attributed to Jacob ben Amram, which is the object of my current research project, is held in Hamburg. Unfortunately, I was not able to locate this copy during my stay in Hamburg, in spite of my efforts and the great deal of help I received from librarians at several Hamburg institutions. I learned that manuscripts at the Hamburg State and University Library are currently being re-catalogued, so I have not given up hope that the Hamburg copy of the *Porta Veritatis* might well resurface.

In general, my research progressed according to schedule and bore a number of fruits, in terms of publications and general in-depth analysis of my subject.

In addition to advancing my personal research project, I was able to organise a seminar at the Centre in November 2015, with a guest speaker from the American University in Bulgaria, Diego Lucci, who spoke about scepticism in England in the 1720s and 1730s, with particular reference to the works of Dodwell and his circle. I took part in all the activities, both internal and external, which took place at the Centre during the five months of my stay. On 25 February, 2016, I chaired a session at a one-day workshop dedicated to the work of Isaac Orobio de Castro, which was organised by Carsten Wilke.

Publications

My stay at the Centre has been very productive in terms of publications relevant to my original research proposed. I made good progress with my work on a critical edition of the *Porta Veritatis*. The first paper I am planning to publish is entitled 'Mysteries at the Gate of Truth: A Reappraisal of the *Porta Veritatis* (1634–1660).' It was submitted in January 2016 to the *Nuova Rivista Storica* and will be published in one of the 2016 issues of the journal. In this article I assess the original language of the work (Latin), its date of composition (1634–1640), and its authorship, attributing the work to the Portuguese Marrano Bento Pinhel, whose Italian name was Benedetto Pinelli, and whose Jewish name was Jacob ben Amram. The latter is the name that appears on the frontispiece of the four extant codices of the *Porta Veritatis*.

The second publication related to my research project, entitled '*Hebraica Veritas?* Philosophy, Scepticism, and Politics in the *Porta Veritatis* (1634–1640),' is found in this Yearbook. The third publication, which I am still working on, is a transcription of the UCLA manuscript copy of the *Porta Veritatis*. Ideally, I would like to publish the entire transcription, plus introduction and commentary, in English, as a monograph in the series in preparation at the Centre. The text will be in Latin, with a content summary of each section in English. The final version of my transcription of the UCLA manuscript is now almost complete.

I was also able to complete and publish two additional articles during my stay at the Centre. The first article, relevant to the Centre's focus on scepticism, is entitled 'Lo scetticismo del rabbino. Rileggendo Simone Luzzatto' (published in *Henoch*, 37.2, 2016, 276–304, in Italian). The second article, although unrelated to the topic of scepticism, greatly benefited from the kind advice of Centre's Fellow Carsten Wilke: 'Looking East, thinking West. Isidore Loeb on the Jews in the Ottoman Empire' (published in *The Jews and the Nation-States of Southeastern Europe from the 19th Century to the Great Depression*, eds. T. Catalan and M. Dogo [Newcastle upon Tyne: CSP, 2016], 89–110).

Dr. Charles Snyder
Junior Fellow
Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson
Project: The Secret of the Sceptical Academy
Period of Fellowship: October 2015 to March 2016

The purpose of my research is to uncover and defend the esoteric nature of Academic scepticism in the ancient Greek and Roman philosophical tradition. My latest project begins by arguing for the indiscernibility of Academic and Pyrrhonian scepticism. The argument is a reply to a pair of influential papers written by Gisela Striker, 'On the Difference between the Pyrrhonists and the Academics,' and a revised version of this paper, 'On the Difference between the Pyrrhonists and the Academics, Reconsidered.' The titles are adaptions of a lost treatise composed by Plutarch. Both Academic and Pyrrhonian sceptics argued for an indiscernibility thesis (Cicero, *Academica* 2.84–5; Sextus Empiricus, *Adversus Mathematicos* 7.408–10), a thesis that seems to indicate, according to Striker and many others, an attempt to refute Stoic epistemology. For Stoics thought that they could explain how a human comes to know, rather than simply believe, human and divine matters. Knowing, rather than believing, is a matter of assenting to a distinct kind of perceptual impression Zeno of Citium named a 'cognitive impression' (SVF 2.130; D.L. 7.47).

In response, sceptics developed a battery of arguments for an indiscernibility thesis: that for every true impression it is possible for there to be some false impression exactly like it. I argue that while Academic and Pyrrhonist sceptics advance arguments for an indiscernibility thesis, Academic scepticism is unique in deliberately contriving a method, or strategy, for articulating the counterarguments in oral cross-examination in a way that made the function of these arguments 'indiscernible' to Stoic philosophers. In a recently published article on 'The Socratic Benevolence of Arcesilaus' Dialectic' (*Ancient Philosophy* 34, 2014), I tried to explain the hidden benevolence of Arcesilaus' challenge to Stoic philosophy according to a maieutic interpretation of Academic scepticism. The maieutic interpretation is elaborated in relation to the dialogues of Plato in a forthcoming paper that is currently under review for publication. Research for the paper was generously supported by the Maimonides Centre. For further details on the maieutic interpretation, see the paper in this volume titled 'Two Kinds of Belief for an Academic Sceptic.' The method of Academic scepticism is structured so as to elude the Stoic's power of discrimination or discernment in the actual cross-examination. This is an important methodological difference between Academics and Pyrrhonists, and it forces us to re-examine the widely discredited view of esoteric dogmatism in the Academy of Arcesilaus.

During my stay at the Centre, I revisited the principal ancient sources for the discredited view that Academic sceptics concealed their own dogmatic Platonism, having secretly taught Platonic doctrines to initiated students in the Academy. The primary source for this reading of esoteric Platonism in the sceptical Academy is Augustine's *Contra Academicos*. Though Augustine's presentation of the Academy's

esoteric dogmatism has been universally rejected, scholars have overlooked the identification of Academic scepticism with a philosophical practice of 'esoteric scepticism.' In my view, Augustine's testimony contains an important insight into the methodology of Academic scepticism: even though Academic sceptics openly exercised their disputations against the beliefs and doctrines of other philosophical schools, and did so without concealing any doctrines, Academics did conceal or refrain from an open discussion of their philosophical strategy, or methodology. Augustine's account was therefore correct in detecting a kind of concealment; though his account misidentifies Academic esotericism in terms of dogmatic teaching.

In addition, I organised and chaired the first Maimonides Lecture on Scepticism held at the Centre on 23 February, 2016. Harold Tarrant (University of Newcastle, Australia) spoke about 'The use and abuse of argument on both sides of the question: where Platonism and Scepticism could find common ground.'

Prof. Dr. Carsten Wilke
Senior Fellow
Central European University, Budapest
Project: Abraham Gómez Silveyra (1656–1741): An Amsterdam Sephardi Controversist in Search of a Theological Truce among Faiths
Period of Fellowship: October to November 2015, January to February 2016

Main project

My main research project is entitled 'Abraham Gómez Silveyra (1656–1741): An Amsterdam Sephardi Controversist in Search of a Theological Truce among Faiths.' I have focused on Gómez Silveyra's unpublished polemical writings, a collection of more than four thousand manuscript pages written in Spanish between 1700 and 1738, in which this learned Amsterdam businessman reports on the theological and philosophical controversies of his time, which corresponded to the Early Enlightenment, from a Jewish religious experience. At the time of my application for a Fellowship at the Centre, I knew that Gómez Silveyra was the last important figure in the history of anti-Christian literature among the early modern Portuguese Jews, that he was well read in Christian texts and thought, and that he formulated a plea for mutual tolerance among the monotheistic creeds. In the course of my research in Hamburg, I turned towards the more philosophical dimensions of his polemical writing. My time at the Centre has given me the opportunities to read a large part of the original manuscripts, and discussing my observations with other members of the Centre, in particular with Senior Fellows Paolo Bernardini and David Ruderman, has permitted me to develop a number of far more concrete plans.

I decided to identify authors quoted by or alluded to by Gómez Silveyra, producing an exhaustive bibliography of his post-biblical sources which showcases the

cross-confessional literary panorama of his reading. I presented these results on 27 January, 2016, at an Academic Retreat organised by the Centre. In rabbinic literature, Gómez Silveyra quotes from the *Targum*, the Jewish prayer book, twelve treatises from the Babylonian Talmud, *Pirqei Avot*, eight Midrashim, the *Yalquṭ*, and the *Toledot Yeshu*. Of ancient and medieval Christianity, he quotes the Vulgate, four Church fathers, and six scholastics. From the non-Judaeo-Christian world he mentions the *Qur'ān*, Chinese and Japanese religions, Confucius and Seneca. Gómez Silveyra refers to fourteen medieval Sephardi authors, the most important of them being Maimonides and Abravanel, and to the following Ashkenazic authors—Rashi, the Tosafists, and Yomtov Lipman Mühlhausen. He discusses the work of more than two hundred contemporary authors, including Catholics (126), Protestants (42), Jews—mainly of Hispano-Portuguese expression (22), Anglicans (14). The category 'Atheists' is occupied by a single name: Spinoza.

I had the good fortune to be able to present my findings concerning the philosophical tendency of Abraham Gómez Silveyra during two Reading Evenings at the Centre, on 24 November, 2015, and on 12 January, 2016. My presentation of translations of passages from Abraham Gómez Silveyra (1656–1741), 'Silveyradas: Translations from the Prologues' was followed up by in-depth discussions with my colleagues. These discussions made me more aware of the complex philosophical position assumed by this author. Gómez Silveyra was a Pyrrhonian sceptic insofar as he interpreted the variety of religious teachings as a decisive argument against claims for dogmatic truth. He was a fideistic sceptic insofar as he saw religious truths as tied to tradition and individual socialisation, not to science and rational demonstration. He was a dogmatic scripturalist insofar as he defines the biblical message (understood in connection with the rabbinic tradition) as the only absolute truth accessible to humankind, while suggesting that all other sorts of knowledge could only be true if they were its faithful reflections. He was a dialectical thinker insofar as he repeatedly asserted that humans could only be disabused of their errors through dialogue with other thinkers who did not share their opinions. He was a pacifist insofar as he rejected any use of force and violence to control religious convictions; according to him, force could only be used against atheists, who lacked such convictions. Religious tolerance is buttressed here by the persecution of irreligion. Discussions with other members of the Centre have helped me considerably to understand the author's eclectic way of thought, in which sceptic reasoning is a means rather than a principle.

During my stay in Hamburg, I invited Professor Harm den Boer (University of Basel) to give a lecture at the Centre. We had the opportunity to advance our plans for a digital edition of Gómez Silveyra's works, exploring the technological feasibility of digitising his manuscripts, which are written in a fairly even hand, with the help of optical character recognition (OCR). A great sense of humour and reasoning by paradoxes are part of the author's style of expression. However, Gómez Silveyra's style and intellectual personality may not be conveyed adequately to non-Hispanophone readers in my planned Spanish edition and doxographic presentation. In pri-

vate discussions with colleagues at the Centre, in particular with Giuseppe Veltri, I was convinced by the suggestion that a promising practical way of presenting my results would be through the publication of an anthology of selected texts, translated into English, with an elaborate presentation and annotation. I have turned my attention increasingly towards this short-term project as a result of my Fellowship in Hamburg.

Other projects

During my stay, I have contributed to events held at the Centre and submitted research for publication on texts from the ancient, medieval, and early modern history of Jewish scepticism.

1. Monograph 'Farewell to Shulamit: Spatial and Social Diversity in the Song of Songs'

I began working on this short book manuscript shortly before my sabbatical, completed it in Hamburg and presented its first finished draft to the Centre's editorial committee on 2 February, 2016. The text of approximately 142 pages has been accepted for publication as the second volume in the new publication series of the Centre 'Jewish Thought, Philosophy, and Religion' at De Gruyter Publishers.

2. Dialectical Evening 'Scepticism in the Book of Qohelet'

This Dialectical Evening was held by Reuven Kiperwasser and myself at the Centre on 16 February, 2016. In my contribution to the evening, I tried to point out that Qohelet was composed at the height of Hellenisation in Jerusalem around 175–170 BCE by a person steeped in Greek thought, whose philosophical biography reflects the pursuit of happiness life in philosophical ethics. In my view, the Near Eastern framework of royal self-reflection was added to the text at a later stage. Qohelet's thought thus became a transcultural reflection, referring jointly to traditions of Greek and biblical thought. I hope to submit these points as a short contribution to the proceedings of the Centre's workshop 'Expressions of Sceptical *topoi* in Judaism of (Late) Antiquity' (18 April 2016), which Reuven Kiperwasser plans to publish as another volume in the series 'Jewish Thought, Philosophy, and Religion.'

3. International workshop 'Isaac Orobio: The Jewish Argument with Dogma and Doubt'

I organised this workshop at the Centre on 26 February, 2016, with the participation of Yosef Kaplan, Harm den Boer, Adam Sutcliffe, and David Ruderman. My own lecture at the workshop was entitled 'Clandestine Classics: Isaac Orobio's Polemical Works and the Generic Traditions of Sephardi Anti-Christian Literature.' I have invited all participants to develop their papers for publication in a collective volume. The first manuscripts have already arrived, and there has been interest from other Orobio scholars in contributing studies to the same volume.

4. International workshop 'Jewish-Christian Polemics in the Middle Ages and in the Early Modern Period'

This workshop was organised by Racheli Haliva at the Centre on 15 June, 2016. I was involved with the co-organisation during the earlier stages of the planning, with the guiding idea to invite Professor David Lasker (Ben-Gurion University) to Hamburg to discuss his most recent research on Judah Halevi in a larger historical perspective. As part of this very inspiring workshop, I contributed a paper with the title 'The Spice in the Salad Bowl: Sephardi Apologetical Approaches to Post-Reformation Pluralism.'

5. Conference papers

During my Fellowship at the Centre I have presented four papers at conferences outside of Hamburg. The preparation of my lectures corresponded to earlier plans and were not directly related to the history of scepticism. Nevertheless, I would like to mention them here, because the completion of my papers greatly benefited from the favourable working conditions at the Centre as well as from the collections of the Hamburg State and University Library on Jewish and Iberian topics.

In sum, I will retain the memory of an intense and transformative scholarly experience from my research period at the Centre. The results of my work in Hamburg will be the object of publications in the near future and will hopefully inspire a dialogue with a wider audience. However, presenting and discussing them for the first time in the midst of the Centre's scholars and guests has been most significant for the development of my interests, research, and argument.

Prof. Dr. David Ruderman
Senior Fellow
University of Pennsylvania
Project: The London Missionary Alexander McCaul and his Assault on the Talmud
Period of Fellowship: February to March 2016

I had the honour of serving as a Senior Fellow at the Centre from February to March, 2016. I had come primarily to work on my new project on nineteenth-century missionaries, on those Jews who converted to Christianity under their persuasion, and the reactions of Jewish intellectuals to Christian assaults on the viability of rabbinic Judaism. I was particularly interested, while in Hamburg, at looking at converts by conviction, those who left the Jewish fold for spiritual and intellectual reasons, and articulated a sceptical posture towards their former faith and even towards their newly adopted faith too. In particular, my focus was on one of the primary figures in the 'London Society for the Promotion of Christianity among the Jews,' Alexander McCaul, and his powerful polemic 'The Old Paths,' a devastating critique of the rabbis and the allegedly inauthentic and immoral version of Judaism they were promoting. McCaul influenced several Eastern European Jews to approach the baptismal font, especially during his long service in Warsaw in the 1820s. Most notable of all was a man who called himself Stanislaus Hoga, a Polish Jew of hasidic ancestry, who eventually broke from Judaism, followed McCaul back to England, and became an advisor and translator for the London Society. He is best known for his translation of McCaul's famous work into Hebrew, which elicited strong responses, especially from Eastern European *maśkilim* forced to defend the rabbis—even as they were critical of the parochial culture the latter had created. In the end, Hoga became a critic of his Christian mentor and the London Society, arguing for a blending of Christianity with Judaism, a belief in Jesus Christ together with a commitment to Jewish law—a position the London Society strongly opposed.

During my stay in Hamburg, I wrote two papers related to this larger project. The first was part of a workshop organised by my colleague Carsten Wilke, dedicated to the seventeenth-century converso philosopher and polemicist Orobio de Castro. In the nineteenth century Alexander McCaul noticed a translation of part of Orobio's assault on Christianity prepared by the prominent novelist and essay writer Grace Aguilar. He retranslated a section of the French translation Aguilar had used more literally, and composed a sharp and bitter rejoinder to Orobio's arguments against Christianity, accusing the translator of a lack of respect for and toleration of the Christian Protestant majority in England. I analysed the work and attempted to contextualise how Orobio's words played out differently in an English-speaking environment and in a Protestant, as opposed to Catholic, culture. The essay will be published by the Centre in a volume based on this highly successful workshop on Orobio.

My second paper was on the aforementioned spiritual and intellectual journey of Stanislaus Hoga, part of a workshop I organised at the Centre on nineteenth-century

converts by conviction, encompassing examples of ideologically driven converts in Russia, Poland, Germany, and England. My reconstruction of Hoga, especially the final years of his life in England, was specifically prepared for this conference and fit well with the other three papers presented that day. I will edit the papers into a small volume for publication by the Centre, including my own contribution and an introduction.

I was an active participant in all the seminars held at the Centre during my visit, especially a Reading Evening on Judah Messer Leon and Solomon Ibn Verga that I lead, and one on Simone Luzzatto that I co-taught. As a Senior Fellow, I enjoyed the opportunity to speak and engage with the large number of young researchers the Centre has attracted. I hope that I left as positive an impression on my interlocutors as they have left on me. I also spent considerable time exploring the Jewish community of Hamburg past and present. One cannot help but sense the visible presence of a pre-Holocaust Jewish community—especially because of the numerous brass stumbling stones in front of many buildings in the former Jewish neighbourhood occupied by the University—the 'Grindelviertel'. As an institute of higher learning in Jewish Studies, the Maimonides Centre honours the memory of the former residents of its neighbourhood. I am deeply grateful for the opportunities afforded me during my stay at the Centre by Giuseppe Veltri, its director, and his wonderfully dedicated and efficient staff. I hope to be able to return in the not too distant future.

Dr. Libera Pisano
Junior Fellow
Free University Berlin
Project: From Isolation to Community—Sceptical Strategies in Landauer's Anarchy
Period of Fellowship: March to August 2016

I am a Junior Fellow at the Centre with a research project entitled 'From Isolation to Community—Sceptical Strategies in Landauer's Anarchy.' I am attempting to shed light on the linguistic scepticism of Mauthner as a theoretical premise for Landauer's mystical anarchy. My aim is to demonstrate the originality of their different scepticisms, because a study of the relationship between linguistic critique and anarchy is still lacking. My research project is divided into two main sections. During my six-month Fellowship I am writing two essays that could also eventually become two chapters of a monograph dealing with linguistic scepticism among early twentieth-century Jewish thinkers. According to my view, linguistic scepticism is one of the most extensively discussed questions in the Western philosophical tradition, and it represents a powerful hermeneutical category, which can be defined as philosophical doubts about the communicative, epistemological, and ontological value of language.

During the first period of my Fellowship, I selected primary and secondary sources in the libraries of Hamburg and Berlin, focusing almost exclusively on the works

of Mauthner. I have written an essay on Mauthner's linguistic critique, entitled 'Misunderstanding Metaphors: Linguistic Scepticism in Mauthner's Philosophy,' which is published in this volume. The essay is an in-depth analysis of Mauthner's thoroughgoing scepticism that anticipates the linguistic turn of the twentieth century. In order to shed light on the main features of his thought, I draw attention to Mauthner's permanent dialogue with sceptical tradition and the philosophy of language. I examined his '*logos* scepticism' by analysing his epistemology as a radicalisation of empiricism, the coincidence between thinking and speaking, the relevance of use and linguistic habits, the utopia of communication, the role of metaphors, and the liberating task of philosophy and its controversial relationship with Judaism and silent mysticism.

I am currently working on the second section of my research project, dealing with Landauer's use of scepticism as a political strategy in order to contest the power of the state and to lead to the creation of a new community. For a development of the theoretical argument of my research project, I had the pleasure of discussing my thesis with the Fellows and members of the Centre during a Dialectical Evening entitled 'Linguistic Scepticism as Political Strategy: Mauthner's Critique of Language at the Root of Gustav Landauer's Anarchy,' held on 24 May, 2016. I am very grateful to all of my interlocutors, because it was a very stimulating event with a thought-provoking and thorough debate. I shed light on the connection between Mauthner's linguistic critique and Landauer's political thought, showing the political implications of a radical scepticism. Arguing that, in my view, linguistic scepticism is the most radical and paradoxical form of scepticism, I presented two theses that were intensively discussed.

The first argument concerned Mauthner's treatment of language as a deceptive tool for human knowledge, by erasing the uniqueness of sense experience and by referring to reality only metaphorically. I discussed the peculiarity of his critique in relation to the history of scepticism in order to show the affinities and the differences. In my view, the practical aim of Mauthner's philosophy, i. e. liberation from the superstitions of words, is in accordance with the therapeutic value of ancient scepticism and, moreover, his mystical silence as consequence of his critique is a modern achievement of ancient *ataraxia*.

The second argument paid attention to Landauer's use of linguistic scepticism, interpreted not only as a tool for unmasking the cult of the state, but also as a premise for a political renewal of mankind. Mauthner's critique of language was used by Landauer as a political strategy in order to develop an antiauthoritarian critique and a complex mystic conception of community, conceiving the individual as indissolubly bound to the entire past and present of humanity. Far from being only a theoretical abstraction, linguistic scepticism is the path toward liberation from the superstition of language (for Mauthner) and from the idol of the state (for Landauer).

During my Fellowship I am attending events at the Centre, such as Reading and Dialectical Evenings, Jours Fixes, workshops, conferences, and lectures. These occasions are extremely important for promoting debate with different approaches and

exploring various subject areas. The interdisciplinary examination and the inspiring atmosphere, supported by the Centre, are key for a fruitful exchange of views.

Prof. Dr. Marietta Horster
Senior Fellow
Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz
Project: Public Discourse About 'What One Deserves' in the Roman Imperial Period
Period of Fellowship: April to August 2016

My current research interests lie in understanding the basics of peaceful societal and communal living as a result of a common understanding of fairness in social interaction. Social practices and intellectual discourse are at the core of my investigation. These practices include negotiation processes in various strata of society regarding adequate participation in decision-making, adequate access to resources and markets, adequate insights into the workings of government, and adequate opportunity to participate and stimulate, or even instigate, changes in societal ideology and cultural practices. What is judged as equitable distribution is mirrored in intellectual philosophical and non-philosophical dialogues. Such dialogues can question, more often implicitly than explicitly, established traditions and authorities, including social hierarchies, Roman governmental actions and decisions, and the 'black box' of procedural practices. During my stay at the Centre, I am focusing on a sceptical intellectual questioning of authorities and traditions—traditions that were still based on an affirmative general support of existing structures and beliefs.

I am investigating some important intellectual tendencies found in the Roman Imperial period. These tendencies opened up external, non-philosophical sources of knowledge and authority, in a 'sceptical' sense as outlined in the mission statement of the Centre. The sceptics of the Greek and Roman philosophical tradition were characterised by Sextus Empiricus (late second century CE) in a rather polemical manner as those who think that truth hasn't yet been discovered, and that dogmatic and academic philosophical traditions set the search for 'knowledge' on the wrong track. Judgment might thus be suspended and other avenues should be explored.

Some of the sophists of the Roman imperial period broke fresh ground in their search for the truth about the good ordering of society and just treatment of individuals and groups. They claim in their writings to have sought and found this truth through a mixture of philosophical reasoning, religious experiences such as divine epiphanies, travel to far-flung geographical and intellectual worlds, and through discussions with 'wise' men in India and Ethiopia.

Scholars like Kendra Eshleman in Michigan, Tim Whitmarch in Cambridge, and Peter Van Nuffelen in Gent have approached the subjects of wisdom and cosmic order in a similar way, concentrating on contemporary literature and the polemic between Jews, Christians, and pagans in the Roman Empire. Although innovative and

of the highest interest for everyone working on religious pluralism and cultural interaction, their publications devote only a few pages to the question of whether such intellectual (religious) discourse might pose a challenge to Roman culture and the Roman set of values. Recent studies on Philo, and to a lesser extent on Greek pagan and Christian literature, have addressed the subject of intercultural exchange and mutual intellectual enrichment. But this kind of intercultural approach towards the organisation of a great variety of social groups within the Roman empire, its influence on social practices aimed at maintaining contentment and internal peace, and the existence of different voices in the interconnected discourse on distributional justice have not yet been addressed.

During my research stay in Hamburg, I am concentrating on the sophist writings of Philostratus and Lucianus, investigating their ideas of fairness, especially of distributional justice, on the one hand, and their description and evaluation of social practices on the other. These two authors express themselves in multifaceted texts of different literary genres with an often ironic, and sometimes profound, sceptical attitude.

When I explain to others what I am doing at the Centre, I underline two important aspects of my stay. First, the Fellowship gives me time to read and contemplate—a very precious gift for a German professor. Second, the discussions and intellectual exchange with colleagues and Fellows, at the Centre and at cooperating research groups at the University of Hamburg, offer insights into subjects and texts that force me, willingly, to reflect upon my cultivated attitudes and presumptions about Jewish and non-Jewish intellectual cultures of different periods in history.

Prof. Dr. Christiane Thompson
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Project: Education and Scepticism as a Way of Life
Period of Fellowship: May 2016

From an educational perspective, the role of scepticism in education has been contended. Scholars from the field of educational philosophy have argued that scepticism is incompatible with education as a 'productive' and 'constitutive' affair. Considered as a de(con)structive practice, scepticism has been criticised for avoiding the question of meaning and commitment. Arguing in a parasitic manner, not speaking in one's own voice, the sceptic attitude has also been regarded as 'weak' in reason-giving. Finally, the educational sceptic is also confronted with the 'performative self-contradiction': posing knowledge when criticising the uncertainty of knowledge.

Notwithstanding these arguments against the 'educational sceptic,' it is evident that there is a vivid dispute surrounding scepticism within the educational–philosophical discourse. This dispute stretches from antiquity—Socrates, Stoic philosophy—until today. See for example Stanley Cavell's thoughts on scepticism and education

following Wittgenstein, or Wolfgang Fischer's transcendental scepticism. The scope and meaning of scepticism in education—this is evident—is far from being adequately determined. In this context, Socrates is a key figure for clarifying the scope and meaning of educational scepticism in several respects.

(1) The educational dimension: The figure of Socrates provides a rich framework for reflecting on central educational issues—such as superiority and authority within educational relationships or the performative dimensions of dialogue as a common practice of reflection.

(2) The practical dimension: Socratic scepticism offers a different view of scepticism than that of an exclusively epistemological endeavour. The Platonic figure of Socrates is representative of the enigma of 'leading a good life' and for the question how to 'know' about this life.

(3) The discursive dimension: The figure of Socrates has been a 'central hub' for the manifold traditions of scepticism and knowledge traditions, traversing schools and doctrinal positions. Thereby, it has brought about an open and thought-provoking framework for philosophising about the (un)certainty of human knowledge, including variations of Jewish scepticism.

The aim of my research during my stay was to examine Socrates' role as educational sceptic in the abovementioned context. First, I undertook a study of the early Platonic dialogues in order to reconstruct important dimensions of the 'performance' of scepticism by the Socratic *elenchos* and *eironia*. How is scepticism exerted? How is it realised as a communicative endeavour? Secondly, I examined and reconstructed references to the figure of Socrates in educationally relevant writings. I began with this reconstructive work during the early part of my stay in May 2016. However, in exchange with other researchers at the Centre, it became very obvious that further enquiries into how Socrates has been implemented, presented, and outlined in Renaissance and Enlightenment writings could form the base for a promising joint research project.

The educational dimension

Research into the Platonic dialogues and the related secondary sources has made visible an entire landscape of educational themes, gestures, and motifs of scepticism. To be sure, the idea of *paideia* as originating in the loss of evident knowledge, which Jäger, among others, has developed, formed an important starting point for my analysis. Recent contributions on education in antiquity have painted the sceptical Socrates as a figure of care and commitment instead of as a disinterested and scandalous authority, as in Aristophanes' play 'The Clouds'. Furthermore, the *elenchos* has been presented as a practice that 'affects' the self in its relationship to itself. These and other contributions led me to focus more closely on the communicative and performative dimensions of the sceptical Socrates within the earlier Platonic dialogues.

In this report, I will limit myself to a short outline of two issues that have not yet been adequately worked out in the context of educational studies, i. e. the interplay and counterplay within the dialogue positions enabled by irony and the presence of the 'political feeling/attunement' of *aidos* ('awe'). In short, for the sceptical Socrates it is crucial to 'liquefy' what is usually considered a coherent and stable position or point of view. With Socratic irony, a productive strategy and motor of (de-)identification takes shape. It is my goal to further delineate how irony implies a particular ethos of intellectual mobility and openness and how this ethos is enacted in the dialogue practice.

The second theme that is of crucial interest to me is that of *aidos*, which has a strong communicative function within the Platonic dialogues. It is surprising that this theme has not yet been considered on its own, given the fact that the dialogue *Protagoras* entails the myth of Hermes bringing *dike* and *aidos* to humankind in order to enable political life.

The practical dimension

The practical dimension of scepticism, following the figure of Socrates, can take the 'care of the self' as a point of departure. Contributions by Pierre Hadot show that a merely epistemological view of ancient thought is problematic. Foucault has taken up Hadot's work in order to elaborate on the *epimeleia heautou* as 'practices of the self.' Recent educational reflections on this point criticise a historically detached reception of antiquity. The study of older contributions on the theme of 'self-examination' in ancient thought shows that there has been a strong Christian projection of self-examination as the 'study of the soul.' These (improper) projections indicate the relevance of scepticism from the standpoint of a life-practice that involves limited knowledge. In this regard, the interrupting *daimonion* of Socrates has been presented as a sceptical moral practice. However, it is important to grasp this practical dimension in a wider framework—including the setting-up—of a 'research community.' To be sure, the Platonic dialogues can be read precisely in this regard: scepticism is a figurative force for the practice of research, of teaching and learning a particular form of life, and of being with others.

The discursive dimension

Socrates has been a strong figure in philosophy since ancient times precisely because of his enigmatic character. The contradicting and underdetermined ways of interpreting Socrates' sayings and doings is an important aspect of research—not in order to reconstruct the historical figure, but rather, to engage in the multiplicity and hybridity of placing and posing 'Socrates'—thus giving shape to a polyphony of scepticism. If scepticism includes very diverse forms of intellectual engagement and openness, it

is—from an educational point of view—of interest to work on a 'cartography of the sceptical landscape.' This cartography or polyphony of scepticism would clarify its social and communicative role. The sceptical idea that human knowledge is fallible has to be reflected in the ways it alters or affects the social conditions of discourse (see e. g. the 'principle of charity'). Altogether, it is the theme of 'transgressing' traditions that makes the figure of Socrates an important common reference point.

I plan to publish the results of my research in international and German educational journals and to take them as a point of departure for future joint research projects at the Centre, especially since other projects are already dealing with the figure of Socrates—a translation of Simone Luzzato's *Socrates* is under way. A workshop in the coming year would offer a good starting point.

Prof. Dr. Lawrence Kaplan
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Project: R. Judah Moscato's *Qol Yehudah*
Period of Fellowship: May to June 2016

Qol Yehudah, by the noted seventeenth-century Mantuan scholar R. Judah Moscato, is generally acknowledged to be the most important, and certainly the most massive, commentary on R. Judah Halevi's twelfth-century philosophical masterpiece, the *Kuzari*. Indeed, it is perhaps the most important commentary on any work of medieval Jewish philosophy. But how are we to characterise it?

In his recent important study, 'The Kuzari and the Shaping of Jewish Identity, 1167–1900,' Adam Shear points to 'two different modes of reading and reflection on a multi-faceted work like the *Kuzari* [...]: a thesis approach and a contents approach.' The thesis approach, or what I would term the macroscopic approach, searches 'for an overarching theme, an all-encompassing thesis, or a central message [...] of the work,' while the contents approach, or what I would term the microscopic approach, 'takes up the text as a repository of individual pieces of information, small-scale arguments, views on particular subjects, and so forth' (Shear, p. 10). Shear shows, for example, that in the pre-modern period medieval Provençal rationalist philosophers, as well as both moderate pro-Maimonideans and radical anti-Maimonidean critics in pre-expulsion Spain, primarily adopted a thesis approach to the *Kuzari*. He also shows that Italian rabbis and scholars in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, such as Azariah de Rossi, Judah Messer Leon, and, in particular, Judah Moscato, opted for a contents approach, with Halevi serving as an 'expert witness' on a wide range of issues, particularly more humanistic, literary, and historical issues.

One example of the contents approach taken by these Italian rabbis and scholars is that Moscato viewed the dialogue form of the *Kuzari* as a model of good rhetorical style. Furthermore, Azariah and Moscato 'took the *Kuzari* to be a more or less reliable

historical source' (Shear, p. 104). In accordance with their own (possibly Renaissance-influenced) interest in history, they paid great attention to and made extensive use of the work's historical sections, especially its discussions of the history of Jewish sects, and Karaism in particular (3:64–67; 4:13–14). Above all, for the three abovementioned rabbis (and others as well), Halevi's famous long discourse on the Hebrew language and poetics at the end of Book 2 of the *Kuzari* served as perhaps the major and certainly the most authoritative source for their own discussions of the Hebrew language and their assertions of its primacy and greatness.

This tendency among the Italian rabbis of this era to use the *Kuzari* as an authoritative source in discussions of literary, historical, and scientific matters reached its apogee in Moscato's *Qol Yehudah*, to which Shear devotes an entire chapter. Here, Shear shows how Moscato, while identifying the *Kuzari*'s central thesis as 'there is no approaching God except by God's commandments,' primarily utilises the *Kuzari* 'as a kind of encyclopedia of Jewish knowledge' (Shear, p. 147). While Shear is certainly correct in this observation, I would characterise his commentary differently, and would maintain that he developed the thesis approach much more fully and elaborately than would appear from Shear's presentation.

Shear's discussion of the introduction to Moscato's *Qol Yehudah* truncates Moscato's presentation of the *Kuzari*'s thesis. Shear, as noted above, correctly states that Moscato identifies the *Kuzari*'s central thesis as 'there is no approaching God except by God's commandments.' However, he then states 'following this thesis statement Moscato describes each of the five sections of the *Kuzari* in detail' (Shear, p. 144). This is incorrect. Rather, after this initial identification of the *Kuzari*'s thesis, Moscato, before proceeding to the description of the individual sections, greatly expands and elaborates upon this thesis statement. He first notes that the *Kuzari* 'does not cease from lovingly teaching about the uniquely strong bond between Israel and their Father in Heaven, connecting them with chains of love by means of the Divine Torah in the Holy Land.' It is revealing that Yehudah Even Shemuel, in the first part of the introduction to his 1972 Hebrew translation of the *Kuzari*, entitled 'The Place of the Book of the *Kuzari* in the Hearts of the People,' chose this statement to sum up Moscato's high praise of the book. Moscato then lists what he views as the four key themes of the *Kuzari:* the people of Israel, the land of Israel, the Temple, and the Torah. They are God's four *qinyanim*, and 'when they are joined together the world is filled with light, joy, gladness, and honour.' More significantly, Moscato, both in his subsequent description of the *Kuzari*'s five sections and in strategic places in the commentary proper, seeks to show—at times in a somewhat strained fashion—how these four key themes are present in and serve as structuring elements of all the sections.

In the light of this, we must modify Shear's account of *Qol Yehudah* in two ways. Firstly, to repeat, Shear is undoubtedly correct that Moscato primarily utilises the *Kuzari* 'as a kind of encyclopedia of Jewish knowledge,' and thus the commentary exemplifies the contents approach to the *Kuzari*. However, the commentary also exemplifies the thesis approach, to a much greater degree than is evident from Shear's

treatment. Secondly, synthesising the views of a number of modern scholarly studies of Moscato, Shear argues that *Qol Yehudah* 'displays [the four] trends [of] medievalism, humanism, Jewish particularism, and Renaissance universalism' (Shear, p. 144). This is undoubtedly so. But in the light of *Qol Yehudah*'s emphasis on the four particularist themes mentioned above, we must give more weight to the trend of Jewish particularism than Shear does.

My research project consists of two parts. The first part will be an essay in which I will defend and elaborate on the above claims. Given the great importance of Moscato's introduction to *Qol Yehudah*, the second and major part of my project will be a complete and fully annotated translation of that introduction and of the already mentioned key passages in the commentary proper.

During my two-month stay at the Centre, I translated most of the introduction, much of which I reviewed with the Fellows and members of the Centre in a very fruitful and helpful Reading Evening. I hope to complete the translation of the introduction and key passages over the next few months, to be followed by an essay.

Dr. Reuven Kiperwasser
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Project: Sceptical Meditations of Qohelet (Ecclesiastes) in Rabbinic Midrash and the Embodiment of Scepticism in Rabbinic Narratives
Period of Fellowship: June to September 2016

Sceptical meditations of Qohelet in rabbinic Midrash

In rabbinic tradition, the book of Qohelet is thought to be a type of prophetic book, composed by King Solomon. The trend for seeing the components of a prophetic script in this book appears to have started in ancient Midrash. Qohelet includes verses expressing doubts in Divine Justice or even the involvement of God in earthly events, as well as the author's pessimistic view of the nature of humankind. The rabbis inverted problematic verses and often interpreted them apologetically. However, some sceptical *topoi* in Qohelet are dealt with consistently and are even elaborated on in rabbinic literature. This brings up the question of the characteristics of rabbinic culture: what kind of sceptical reasoning was appropriate for the rabbis and which needs of rabbinic culture does it serve? I aim to explore these questions and probe the nature of this exegetical phenomenon and its theological background. My project will address rabbinic scepticism not only in a narrow sense; it will also aim to approach the cultural expressions of scepticism manifest in rabbinic exegetical narratives based on verses from Qohelet and other 'problematic' verses from Wisdom literature.

I presented a paper on this subject at a Dialectical Evening at the Centre on 16 February, 2016, entitled: 'Scepticism in Qohelet.' The Dialectical Evening was organised in cooperation with Carsten Wilke, another Fellow at the Centre.

The embodiment of scepticism in rabbinic narratives

One arm of my project examines the role of the figure of the sceptic in rabbinic culture. Religious sceptics questioning religious authority are not necessarily anti-religious, but they are sceptical regarding specific religious beliefs or practices. The first rabbinic scholar known as a sceptic and rebel was Elisha ben Abuya, whose life is the topic of a famous narrative that appears as a homiletical story based on a verse of Qohelet. Elisha's claims and ideas were reconstructed by the later rabbinic narrators in different ways, and various explanations for his sinful behaviour were proposed. I wish to analyse the tradition following this figure, with the purpose of uncovering the shifting conceptions of heresy, nonconformity, and irreligion that it embodies.

Qohelet is not the only biblical book that inspired exegetical texts dealing with sceptical reasoning, and I will therefore widen the scope of the project to consider a larger textual frame. Of special interest are rabbinic stories in which God's involvement in the world and even his ability to change the order of the created world is questioned.

My project may well be the first systematic attempt to address sceptical modes of thought in rabbinic culture, and the first to explore their role in rabbinic thought in general. As part of my attempt to locate sceptical thought in rabbinic culture, I wanted to discuss the same question regarding Ancient Judaism as a whole. I was able to host an international workshop at the Centre dedicated to this theme, which will be described in the following section.

Workshop 'Expressions of sceptical *topoi* in (Late) Ancient Judaism'

Scepticism has been a driving force in the development of cultures of the past, as well as the impetus for far-reaching scientific achievements and philosophical investigations. Sceptical ideas were shaped in the work of Greek and Roman thinkers of the past and have left us numerous literary monuments. As is well-known, early Jewish culture, in contrast to Graeco-Roman culture, has avoided creating consistent representations of this doctrine. However, Judaism of the first centuries BCE was characterised by persistent intellectual activity, whose literary fruits are works devoted to the laws, norms, regulations, exegesis, and other traditional areas of Jewish knowledge. To detect sceptical ideas in ancient Judaism requires a closer analysis of its literary heritage and its cultural context. In accordance with this, the aim of this workshop was to discuss elements of sceptical thought in Ancient and Late-Ancient

Judaism through a new analysis of the relevant texts. Participants discussed a wide spectrum of Jewish texts: Jewish writings of the Second Temple period, rabbinic literature, magical texts, and reflections of Jewish thought in early Christian and Patristic writings.

The following papers were presented and discussed at the workshop in Hamburg: Prof. Dr. Cana Werman, The Deichmann Program for Jewish and Christian Literature of the Hellenistic-Roman Era, Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, 'Philosophical Scepticism and Apocalyptic Certitude;' Prof. Dr. Serge Ruzer, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Dept. of Comparative Religion, 'Reasonable Doubts of the "Other": Jewish Scepticism in Early Christian Sources?;' Dr. Tali Artman Partock, Israel Institute Fellow, Faculty of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies, University of Cambridge, '"If a Man Tells you He is God ...;"' Dr. Reuven Kiperwasser, 'Facing the Omnipotence and Shaping the Sceptical *topos*;' Dr. Geoffrey Herman, Mandel Scholion Interdisciplinary Research Center in the Humanities and Jewish Studies, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 'Scepticism and Belief in the Attitude towards Gods and Demons in the Jewish Religious World of Sasanian Babylonia.' The participants of the workshop are planning to publish their papers, in a more elaborate format, in a volume to be edited by Geoffrey Herman and myself. We hope to publish this volume in the Centre's series 'Jewish Thought, Philosophy, and Religion'.