

Activities and Events

Grand Opening on 29 October, 2015

The solemn inauguration of the Centre took place in the Atrium of the Hamburg State and University Library Carl von Ossietzky. The keynote speech entitled 'What is Jewish Philosophy? A View from the Middle Ages' was delivered by **Josef J. Stern**, University of Chicago.

Regular Events

Dialectical Evening

The Dialectical Evening is an informal meeting every four weeks (in fortnightly rotation with the Reading Evening) for discussions and readings, which is designed to promote dialectical culture and sceptical thought within the research unit. Members of the Centre and occasional guests convene to challenge, doubt, and explore theses pertaining to various subject areas.

[DE01] 17 November, 2015

Charles Snyder: **The Metaphysical 'Truth' of Academic Scepticism**

Aristotle argued that it is impossible to live on the basis of denying the principle of non-contradiction. This argument is widely believed to be an early formulation of the famous anti-sceptical accusation made by Stoics against Academic sceptics, the *apraxia* ('inactivity') argument. Stoics contend that Academics make action or life impossible, since action is caused and regulated by assent to the clear and distinct impressions Academics apparently deny. For Stoics, such impressions deliver the criterion of knowledge and life, such that we know and live in agreement with nature. Snyder intended to defend two theses: first, that the articulation of the Stoic *apraxia* argument is an embarrassing debacle of self-defeat for Stoic philosophy. To support this claim, he had to defend his second thesis: that Aristotle's defence of the principle of non-contradiction contains the same intuition motivating the dialectical scepticism of the Academy. Once this intuition is clarified, we gain insight into the metaphysical 'truth' of Academic scepticism. This truth consists in the insight that the solution to the problem of demonstrating the Stoic criterion of action is the vanishing of the problem.

[DE02] 1 December, 2015

Roi Benbassat: **Yeshayahu Leibowitz and his Radical Scepticism (session I)**

The twentieth-century Jewish thinker Yeshayahu Leibowitz has sharply distinguished religious faith from belief. This distinction enabled him to incorporate radical scepticism towards traditional beliefs into the framework of the Jewish religion. Similar to Kierkegaard in the Christian context, Leibowitz defined religious faith as an ‘evaluative decision,’ that is, one’s determination of a superior, unconditional value to which his or her life is devoted. And, ‘like all evaluations’ (including moral determinations), Leibowitz claimed, ‘faith does not result from any information one has acquired, but is a commitment to which one binds oneself. In other words, faith is not a form of cognition; it is a conative element of consciousness.’ This religious standpoint, which may be regarded as an extreme version of fideism, shows great resilience against philosophical criticisms and the assertions of science, but it also implies problematic philosophical assumptions. Benbassat made an attempt to defend this religious position.

[DE03] 19 January, 2016

Roi Benbassat: **Yeshayahu Leibowitz and his Radical Scepticism (session II)**

[DE04] 16 February, 2016

Reuven Kiperwasser and Carsten Wilke: **Scepticism in the Book of Qohelet (Ecclesiastes)**

Of the many historical intersections between philosophical scepticism and the Jewish tradition, the earliest possible and only canonic text is the book of Qohelet. Although traditionally attributed to King Solomon, it can be dated to the Hellenistic period on linguistic grounds. The central aphorism of Qohelet is *ha-kol hevel*, translatable as ‘it’s all smoke’ (Peterson, *The Bible in Contemporary Language*), and diversely translated as ‘all is vanity’ (King James Version), ‘everything is meaningless’ (New International Version), or as ‘nothing matters’ (Complete Jewish Bible). The author of Qohelet insists on the utter futility of any quest for knowledge, labor, virtue, justice, and happiness, and dismisses the belief in human agency, divine providence, and the afterlife of the soul. Scholarly research on the book is divided between, on the one hand, a philosophical reading, affirming that the author shared its sources and critical stance with Greek scepticism, and, on the other hand, a reading that places the book inside autochthonous Levantine and biblical reflections on theodicy and divine transcendence.

[DE05] 12 April, 2016

Michael Engel and Racheli Haliva: **Function and Purpose of Mosaic Law within the Anti-Sceptical Jewish Averroist School: The Case of Isaac ben Joseph Polqar**

Traditional Jews generally perceive the Mosaic commandments as a divine decree. In an unjust world where the pious suffer and the wicked prosper, there must be, according to the traditionalists, recompense in the world to come. Otherwise the entire notion of divine justice would be void. Many Jewish philosophers have attempted to give a rational explanation for the commandments. Maimonides, most prominently, argued that all 613 commandments can be explained by reason. In case one fails to do so, one must conclude that the deficiency of understanding all the commandments is found in the human intellect rather than in an irrational aspect of God.

The fourteenth-century Jewish philosopher Isaac ben Joseph Polqar presents two different discussions regarding the Mosaic commandments. On the first stage, he presents a general position according to which the Mosaic Law, with respect to other laws, is the best law in existence. On the second stage, he analyses the Mosaic Law as a set of rules within the Jewish community. Polqar divides the commandments into 'severe' commandments (*miṣwot hamurot*) and 'light' commandments (*miṣwot qalot*). With this division, Polqar emphasises a hierarchy of significance within the commandments: rational commandments are seen as 'severe,' while commandments related to the social, political, and traditional realm are seen as 'light'. The perfect philosopher can determine which commandments are more important than others and act accordingly.

[DE06] 24 May, 2016

Libera Pisano: **Linguistic Scepticism as Political Strategy: Mauthner's Critique of Language at the Root of Gustav Landauer's Anarchy**

Gustav Landauer (1870–1919) was a Jewish anarchist and radical philosopher who was brutally beaten and murdered by Freikorps in Munich. As a political activist and writer, journalist and translator, Landauer combined Jewish messianism with anarchy, politics with mysticism, and a romantic philosophy of history with a belief in the urgency of change. His oeuvre consists of articles, translations, fragments, reviews, and a number of discourses. Important milestones are *Die Revolution* and *Auf-
ruf zum Sozialismus*. His only complete philosophical study, on which he worked for two years after his release from prison early in 1900, is *Skepsis und Mystik*. Landauer's mystical anarchism has its premise in a philosophical scepticism, which has its point of departure in the linguistic critique of Mauthner. The two thinkers were linked by a deep intellectual friendship, sustained in a lifelong correspondence.

Landauer used the linguistic scepticism of Mauthner as a political strategy in order to counteract the power of the state and to lead to a new community based on a new idea of justice. Far from being only a theoretical abstraction, linguistic scepticism led Landauer to a practical one, seen as a communal deed.

[DE07] 21 June, 2016

Thomas Meyer: **'We Refugees'** by Hannah Arendt

In January 1943, Hannah Arendt published a short essay under the title 'We Refugees' in the New York-based Jewish journal *Menorah*. Nobody from her intellectual circle seems to have noticed this publication, and there is no mention of it in contemporary correspondence, as far as we are aware. In a review of Arendt's anthology 'The Jew as Pariah' (1978), where her essay was reprinted for the first time, the Straussian philosopher Werner J. Dannhauser offered a harsh critique of 'We Refugees'. So did the author of her eulogy in *Jewish Social Studies*, a journal which Arendt had co-edited since the beginning of the late fourties. Today, many intellectuals consider 'We Refugees' to be a key text for understanding the recent refugee crisis. Giorgio Agamben's critique can help to examine why so many people are fascinated by Arendt's analysis. In 'We Refugees' Arendt offers a specific scepticism that became the starting point for her later writings, including 'Origins of Totalitarianism' (1951) and 'The Human Condition' (1958).

[DE08] 26 July, 2016

Bill Rebiger: Isaac ben Joseph ibn Polqar on Kabbalists in his **'Ezer ha-Dat ('In Support of the Religion')**

The Jewish Averroist Isaac Polqar (second half of the thirteenth century—first half of the fourteenth century) devotes a short paragraph in his *'Ezer ha-Dat* to the rejection of several kabbalistic claims. His arguments are directed against any kind of denial of the importance of rationality and logic. Polqar bases his arguments mainly on the rational philosophy of the Aristotelian-Maimonidean-Averroist tradition. He supports his arguments with two examples: firstly, the transmission of ancient texts as such as the Holy Scriptures, secondly, a popular story about the illegitimate acquisition of knowledge of how to perform a specific magical act.

One can view Polqar's attempts to doubt the textual accuracy of kabbalistic sources and to undermine the legitimacy and credibility of the kabbalists as sceptical strategies. However, the philological method of textual criticism and the polemical reproach of stolen wisdom denounce claims of truth and authority made by the kabbalists.

Reading Evening

The Reading Evening is an informal meeting every four weeks (in fortnightly rotation with the Dialectical Evening). Fellows and Research Associates read and discuss primary texts that are specifically relevant to their respective projects. Each meeting, one Fellow or Research Associate selects and presents a text of particular importance for her research. In reading together, the group benefits from the expertise of the individual scholars.

[RE01] 24 November, 2015

Carsten Wilke: **Abraham Gómez Silveyra's *Silveyradas*—Translations from the Prologues (session I)**

The *Silveyradas* are a series of clandestine Spanish treatises written by Gómez Silveyra between 1700 and 1738 in seven volumes and an appendix, totalling 4,472 manuscript pages. The autograph is today divided between Ets Haim Library Amsterdam and the John Rylands Library Manchester. The author reviews hundreds of Protestant, Catholic, Jewish and anti-religious publications of the early Enlightenment from a standpoint of Jewish critique of Christianity.

[RE02] 12 January, 2016

Carsten Wilke: **Abraham Gómez Silveyra's *Silveyradas*—Translations from the Prologues (session II)**

[RE03] 2 February, 2016

Paolo Bernardini: ***Porta Veritatis***

Manuscripts of the Latin text *Porta Veritatis*, ascribed to Jacob ben Amram and probably composed after 1636, are preserved in four locations (London, Oxford, Los Angeles, and Amsterdam). An additional copy of the text may be found in Hamburg. Jacob ben Amram, of Portuguese Jewish origin, was active in Florence and Venice in the first half of the seventeenth century. The complex text belongs to the long tradition of anti-Christian polemics and Jewish apologetics. It is an example of extensive deconstruction of theological, moral, and political tenets belonging to Christianity. Menasseh ben Israel is known to have brought the text to England, possibly before 1655. It circulated and was amply commented on and confuted by Anglicans such as Bishop Kidder, Neo-Platonists such as Ralph Cudworth, and Aristotelians. After 1700, the text fell into oblivion. The text was never published and never read in its entirety. The multitude of historical, exegetical, and philosophical arguments

employed to debunk and attack the validity of Christian theology, such as the doctrine of the Trinity, the doctrine of Christ, and visual representations of God, could be viewed as an expression of Jewish scepticism. The author legitimises a type of relativism that would allow the coexistence of different religions and theologies within a non-sectarian state. The author is well-versed in contemporary theology and philosophy and presents daring interpretations of the Gospels.

[RE04] 1 March, 2016

David Ruderman: **Judah Messer Leon's *Nofet Šufim* and Solomon Ibn Verga's *Ševet Yehudah***

David Ruderman proposed to read two critical Hebrew texts from the early modern period which he has taught regularly in his forty years of teaching undergraduates and graduates.

The first is the well-known passage on memory from Judah Messer Leon's *Nofet Šufim* ('The Honeycomb's Flow'). Messer Leon lived in northern Italy at the end of the fifteenth century, was a student of Aristotle and Averroes but broke with this tradition in composing a truly humanistic handbook on rhetoric, a subject considered inferior by the ancient philosophers.

The second is from the famous fictional dialogue between a Spanish king and his political advisor about the reason for Jewish suffering embedded in Solomon Ibn Verga's *Ševet Yehudah* ('The Rod of Judah') written in mid-sixteenth century by a Spanish emigré who travelled across Europe and probably ended up in the Ottoman Empire.

Neither of the two texts are strictly sceptical texts. One deals with rhetoric, the other with history or philosophy of history. But both texts radically challenge the status quo, are paradigm breakers arguing against the conventional ways Jews read their sacred writings or how they conceived of their interactions with the non-Jewish world. They take a critical stance towards regnant views of Judaism and Jewish–Christian relations. And in this sense, they are indeed sceptical.

[RE05] 22 March, 2016

Anna Lissa, David Ruderman, Michela Torbidoni: **Jews on Trial and their Sceptic Attorney—Simone Luzzatto (1583?–1663) and his main Italian Works *Discorso sopra il stato degli Hebrei* ('Discourse on the State of the Jews', 1638) and *Socrate ovvero dell'humano sapere* ('Socrates or on Human Knowledge', 1651)**

The aims of this evening was to provide a comprehensive framework for examining Luzzatto's political and philosophical thought and his debt to the sceptical tradition.

Anna Lissa gave a general introduction to Simone Luzzatto and discussed the thematic connection between his *Discorso* and the *Socrate*: the prosecution of the Jews in the *Discorso* and of Socrates in the *Socrate*. Then, she showed the sceptical

structure of the *Discorso* and how Luzzatto, the ‘sceptic attorney,’ uses sceptical strategies to defend Venetian Jewry. To this end, some relevant passages of the work were read and commented on.

David Ruderman offered some comments on Consideration XVI of the *Discorso* (‘Regarding the Jews’ application to their Studies and the Various Classes of Sages’), in which Luzzatto offers his view of the nature of historical and contemporary Judaism.

Michela Torbidoni pointed out those elements of Consideration XVI which anticipate and introduce Luzzatto’s later work *Socrate*. She discussed the role that sceptical arguments played in the maturing of Luzzatto’s philosophical writing.

[RE06] 10 May, 2016

Bill Rebiger: Isaac ben Joseph ibn Polqar on Kabbalists in his ‘*Ezer ha-Dat* (‘In Support of the Religion’)

The Jewish Averroist Isaac Polqar (second half of the thirteenth century—first half of the fourteenth century) devotes a short paragraph in his ‘*Ezer ha-Dat* (‘In Support of the Religion’) to the rejection of several kabbalist claims. His arguments are directed against any kind of denial of the importance of rationality and logic. Polqar bases his arguments mainly on the rational philosophy of the Aristotelian-Maimonidean-Averroist tradition. He supports his arguments with two examples: firstly, the transmission of old texts like the Holy Scriptures, secondly, a popular story about the illegitimate acquisition of knowledge of how to perform a specific magical act.

The purpose of the session was a close reading, word by word, of this short paragraph in Hebrew, in order to improve the first draft of Rebiger’s own preliminary translation into English. A discussion and interpretation of the text, from a philosophical and sceptical perspective, took place during a Dialectical Evening in July 2016.

[RE07] 7 June, 2016

Lawrence Kaplan: R. Judah Moscato’s *Qol Yehudah*

Qol Yehudah, by the seventeenth-century Mantuan scholar, R. Judah Moscato, is perhaps the most important, certainly the most massive, commentary on R. Judah Halevi’s twelfth-century philosophical masterpiece, the *Kuzari*. This Reading Evening was devoted to read the Hebrew original and Kaplan’s own English translation of Moscato’s Introduction. Moscato’s view regarding what he perceives as the *Kuzari*’s basic thesis and its four basic themes was examined. The question of how Moscato uses these themes to structure his work was posed during the session.

[RE08] 19 July, 2016

Felix Papenhausen: **Hillel Zeitlin and Lev Shestov**

Hillel Zeitlin (1871–1942) was a pessimistic wanderer between Hasidism and secularism who was self-taught. He was engaged in publishing, wrote in Yiddish and Hebrew, and was one of the first Russians who read Nietzsche in German. He translated the *Zohar* into Hebrew, wrote the first monograph on Spinoza and was one of the first and biggest admirers of Lev (Leon) Shestov (1866–1938).

Shestov was a Jew and a Christian, for whom philosophy was not a science. He thought that it should only deal with ‘the last things,’ with problems that can never be answered, especially not with words or language. Shestov was well trained in logic. He believed in the paradox, in secrets, in coincidence, in wonders and in mystery. He stays for the ‘as well as’ between speculation and revelation, for radical subjectivity and against all general validity. He wrote in comprehensive, colloquial language, in an aphoristic style, adapting the form of his texts to reflect the ‘essence’ of his thoughts. Western philosophy and theology were for Shestov—as for many Russians—‘strange’, ‘schematic’, too ‘far from life’, ‘dead’. Among his merits is the establishment of a philosophy of literature.

During this Reading Evening some passages from Papenhausen’s English translation of Zeitlin’s Hebrew text on Shestov were read and discussed.

Occasional Events

Workshops

Workshops are formal meetings (four times a year) between fellows, the research team of the Maimonides Centre and invited researchers from Germany and abroad. The topics of the workshops reflect the broad variety of research projects at the Centre.

[WS01] 4 November, 2015

Convenor: Paolo Bernardini

Henry Dodwell: A Controversy Involving Deism, Scepticism, and Fideism

Speaker: Diego Lucci, American University, Blagoevgrad/Bulgaria

The workshop will be centered upon the works and figure of Henry Dodwell the Younger (ca 1705–1784), an author almost forgotten now, but very important and quoted, as well as attacked, in his time. His book ‘Christianity Not Founded on Argument’, published in 1741, reached four editions within a few years and was at a centre of a major controversy involving deism, scepticism, and fideism. Diego Lucci presented and discussed the book in the context of British and continental phi-

losophy of that time, offering a fresh appraisal of a long-forgotten, albeit quite complex and interesting text. Clearly, in the 1740s the most intense season of deism was almost entirely over, and British philosophy had new concerns, beginning with the rise of post-Locke empiricism. The long shadow of Collins, Toland, Tindal, and the other deists was still haunting the theoretical scene. Dodwell's work can be considered as a bridge between these two concurrent, but evidently interrelated, schools of thought.

[WS02] 15 February, 2016

Convenor: Carsten Wilke

Isaac Orobio: The Jewish Argument with Dogma and Doubt

The Amsterdam physician Isaac Orobio de Castro (c. 1617–1687) is renowned as the sharpest pen among the early modern defenders of Judaism against Christian proselytising. His Spanish clandestine polemics, copied and collected among the Sephardim, did not fail to leak out into the non-Jewish world and arm the most radical Enlightenment philosophers for their attacks on Christianity. Voltaire found this Jewish author 'profound, yet never obscure, a man of refined literary taste, of a pleasant wit and impeccable manners.' Orobio's polemical writings owe much of their quality to his transcultural experience. Born as Baltasar Álvaresin Bragaña (Portugal) to Christian parents of Jewish ancestry, he achieved a brilliant career as a court physician and university professor in Spain and France, but broke with his double life when he publicly became a Jew. With solid academic erudition and skilled baroque rhetoric, Orobio translated Jewish religious positions into the philosophical language of the day. This Jewish apologist constantly fought in two directions—against Christian dogma and Spinozist doubt. The Workshop assessed the impact of Jewish criticism on the early modern quest for philosophical certainty and religious pluralism.

Lectures

Yosef Kaplan, The Hebrew University, Jerusalem/Israel

'From Christianity to Judaism Revisited: Some Critical Remarks after Forty Years of its First Publication'

Harm den Boer, University of Basel/Switzerland

'The Literary Profile of Isaac Orobio de Castro'

Carsten Wilke, Central European University, Budapest/Hungary

'Clandestine Classics: Isaac Orobio's Polemical Works and the Generic Traditions of Sephardi Anti-Christian Literature'

Adam Sutcliffe, King's College, London/Great Britain

'From Apologetics to Polemics: Isaac Orobio's Defences of Judaism and their Use in the French Enlightenment'

David Ruderman, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia/USA

'Reading Orobio in Nineteenth-Century England: The Missionary Alexander McCaul's "Israel Avenged"'

[WS03] 29 March, 2016

Convenor: David Ruderman

Converts of Conviction: Faith and Scepticism in Nineteenth Century European Jewish Society

The study of Jewish converts to Christianity in the modern era has not always been a favourite subject of Jewish historiography. Labeled disparagingly in the Jewish tradition as *meshumadim* ('apostates'), many earlier Jewish scholars treated them in a negative light or generally ignored them as not properly belonging any longer to the community and its historical legacy. This situation has radically changed in recent years with an outpouring of new studies on converts in variegated times and places, culminating perhaps in the most recent synthesis of Todd Endelman, one of the pioneers in the study of converts in the modern era.

While Endelman argues that most modern converts left the Jewish fold for economic, social, or political reasons, he does acknowledge the presence of those who chose to convert for ideological and spiritual reasons. The purpose of the Workshop was to consider the latter group, perhaps the most interesting from the perspective of Jewish intellectual history, those who moved from Judaism to Christianity out of a conviction that they were choosing a superior faith, and out of doubt or lack of confidence in the religious principles and practices of their former one. Their spiritual journeys often led them to doubt their newly adopted faiths as well, and some even returned to Judaism or adopted a hybrid faith consisting of elements of both religions. Their intellectual itineraries between Judaism and Christianity offer a unique perspective on the formation of modern Jewish identities, Jewish–Christian relations, and the history of Jewish sceptical postures.

Lectures

Christian Wiese, Goethe University, Frankfurt/Germany

'A Tale of Two Brothers: David and Paulus Cassel's Roles as Scholars of Judaism and Jewish Christianity'

Ellie Schainker, Emory University, Atlanta/USA

‘Jerusalem Letters: Vasily Levison’s Ruminations on Faith, Doubt, and Conversion from Judaism to Russian Orthodoxy’

David Ruderman, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia/USA

‘The Intellectual and Spiritual Journey of Stanislaus Hoga: From Judaism to Christianity to Hebrew Christianity’

Agnieszka Jagodzinska, University of Wrocław/Poland

‘Students of the Rabbinical School as Converts: Interactions Between Missionaries and Jews in Warsaw’

[WS04] 18–19 April, 2016

Convenor: Reuven Kiperwasser

Expressions of Sceptical *topoi* in (Late) Ancient Judaism

Scepticism has been a driving force in the development of cultures of the past and the impetus for far-reaching scientific achievements and philosophical investigations. Sceptical ideas were shaped in the works of Greek and Roman thinkers of the past, leaving us numerous literary monuments. Early Jewish culture, in contrast to Graeco-Roman culture, has avoided creating consistent representations of this doctrine.

However, Judaism of the first centuries was characterised by persistent intellectual activity, whose literary fruits are works devoted to Oral Law, religious norms and regulations, Bible exegesis and other traditional areas of Jewish knowledge. To detect sceptical ideas in Ancient Judaism requires a closer analysis of its literary heritage and cultural context.

The aim of this Workshop was to discuss elements of sceptical thought in Ancient and Late Ancient Judaism through a new analysis of relevant texts. The participants discussed a wide spectrum of texts: Jewish writings of the Second Temple period, rabbinic literature, magical texts, as well as reflections of Jewish thought in early Christian and patristic writings.

Lectures

Cana Werman, Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, Beer-Sheva/Israel

‘Philosophical Scepticism and Apocalyptic Certitude’

Serge Ruzer, The Hebrew University, Jerusalem/Israel

‘Reasonable Doubts of the “Other”: Jewish Scepticism in Early Christian Sources?’

Geoffrey Herman, The Hebrew University, Jerusalem/Israel

‘Scepticism and Belief in the Attitude Towards Gods and Demons in the Jewish Religious World of Sasanian Babylonia’

Tali Artman Partock, University of Cambridge/Great Britain

“If a Man Tells You He is God ...”

Reuven Kiperwasser, University of Hamburg/Germany

‘Facing the Omnipotence and Shaping the Sceptical *topos*’

[WS05] 15 June, 2016

Convenor: Racheli Haliva

Jewish-Christian Polemics in the Middle Ages and in the Early Modern Period

This workshop focussed on sceptical aspects in Jewish-Christian polemics. Three different points of view were presented: philosophical controversies found in Halevi's *Kuzari*, conversion as it appears in Abner of Burgos' *Tešuvot la-Meharef*, and confessionalisation in the Early Modern period. Judah Halevi lived most of his life under Islamic rule, and yet he engaged in anti-Christian polemics in his *Kuzari*. Although the Jewish critique of Christianity is usually considered a reaction to a Christian mission, much evidence indicates that such polemics are not solely a defensive measure. Jewish rationalists engaged in polemics against Christianity as part of their self-definition of Judaism, while Jews who eschewed rationalism, especially those in Christian Northern and Eastern Europe, usually did not engage in such criticisms of Christianity even when there were Christian provocations. The issue, addressed by Daniel Lasker, followed by Lawrence Kaplan's response, is to what extent do Halevi's anti-Christian polemics fit this Jewish rationalist paradigm. Abner of Burgos, the famous Jewish convert to Christianity from the fourteenth century, wrote extensively after his conversion, praising his new faith and claiming it to be the true religion, while rejecting his birth faith. In many of his works, Abner harshly criticises 'Jewish' ideas. At the same time he puts in a great effort to show that the Jewish rabbis, in fact, accepted the fundamental principles of Christianity, explaining that they had to conceal this acceptance for political reasons. This topic was presented by Racheli Haliva, followed by Michael Engel's response. Hayyim Hillel Ben-Sasson, a scholar of the previous generation, has documented the considerable impact that the Protestant Reformation had on Jewish history. Further important research on this topic was undertaken by Jonathan Israel, the author of 'European Jewry in the Age of Mercantilism.' The subject continues to be investigated by historians. After the collapse of medieval monolithic Christianity, Jews intelligently negotiated new social and political positions on the diversified map of religious groups and sub-groups. At the same time, Jewish authors developed strategies of doctrinal self-definition and polemical self-defence that reacted to the unprecedented religious pluralism. The topic was pre-

sented by Carsten Wilke. The topic of confessionalisation in the Early Modern period was explored by Paolo Bernardini, who raised the question ‘What is meant by “public” and “private” theological controversies between Jews and Christians and how do these two types of controversies differ?’ The subject was approached through an examination of the seventeenth-century anti-Christian Latin polemical work *Porta Veritatis* (1634–1640). The polemics contained in this work were ‘staged’ for a very limited public or for no public at all. What, then, was this work’s real purpose? Certainly, it sought not only to establish the ‘truth’ of one religion, or rather some of this religion’s tenets, with respect to the other. But also, it sought to demonstrate that a Jew could ‘actively’ defend his or her religion, and to be present as an intellectual on the philosophical scene, a scene that was quite lively and even frantic in the century of Spinoza and Descartes.

Lectures

Daniel J. Lasker, Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, Beer-Sheva/Israel
 ‘Judaeano-Christian Polemics, Religion and Scepticism in Judah Halevi’s *Sefer ha-Kuzan*’

Lawrence J. Kaplan, McGill University, Montreal/Canada
 ‘Response to Daniel Lasker’s Lecture’

Racheli Haliva, University of Hamburg/Germany
 ‘Abner of Burgos—A Jewish Christian or a Christian Jew? Abner’s Double Standard Approach Towards the Jewish Rabbis’

Michael Engel, University of Hamburg/Germany
 ‘Response to Racheli Haliva’s Lecture’

Carsten Wilke, Central European University, Budapest/Hungary
 ‘The Spice in the Salad Bowl: Sephardi Apologetical Approaches to Post-Reformation Pluralism’

Paolo Luca Bernardini, Università degli Studi dell’Insubria, Como/Italy
 ‘Fighting for the Truth? Some Remarks on the Real Meaning of Early Modern Jewish-Christian Controversies’ [cancelled]

Summer Schools

The Centre's Summer Schools are interdisciplinary by design and are open to advanced students and graduates. The duration of the Summer School is six days, during which approximately ten lecturers and ten to twenty student participants come together to present and discuss diverse approaches to the topic of Jewish scepticism and to jointly study a variety of primary sources.

31 July to 5 August, 2016

Sceptical Thought in Antiquity: The Greek, Hebrew and Latin Traditions

The Summer School addressed major concepts, strategies and key terms of ancient sceptical traditions in Greek, Hebrew, and Latin literature. Participants were introduced to the sceptical enquiry of concepts of truth and knowledge and to sceptical methods of doubting and arguing. Participants were made familiar with the original Greek, Hebrew, and Latin texts. The aim was to provide participants with tools and means by which they can examine scepticism in relation to the attainment of knowledge and truth—within each of the three traditions. Course leader was Giuseppe Veltri. He was supported by an international team of experts in scepticism from the fields of ancient philosophy and religious studies.

The first Summer School of the Centre was attended by 16 participants from Brazil, Canada, Hungary, Iran, Israel, Italy, Russia, the United Kingdom and the United States.

Maimonides Lectures on Scepticism

Maimonides Lectures on Scepticism are scheduled three to four times per year. Eminent scholars focusing on various aspects of scepticism are invited to present and discuss their research in an evening lecture.

23 February, 2016

Harold Tarrant, University of Newcastle/Australia

The Use and Abuse of Argument on Both Sides of the Question: Where Platonism and Scepticism Could Find Common Ground

Certain Platonic dialogues, including *Lysis*, *Euthydemus*, *Theaetetus*, *Phaedrus*, and *Parmenides* were noted in antiquity for their occasional employment of contrary arguments. In some instances this was attacked by opponents of either Platonism or Scepticism, or both. Known early critics were the Peripatetic Dicaearchus and the Epicurean Colotes, whose pamphlet-like works 'Against Plato's *Lysis*' and 'Against

Plato's *Euthydemus* partially survive after being found in Philodemus' library. Since the polemic ran from before the time of Arcesilaus until that of his contemporary Cato, it is possible that the very attention that the relevant passages were being afforded outside the Academy had encouraged the Academy's counter-attack. Some of the arguments that had been used quite early on to defend such tactics may well have been preserved by the late Neoplatonists (Hermias, Proclus, anon. *Prolegomena*), who were keen to continue the justification of contrary arguments (especially in *Phaedrus*, *Theaetetus*, and *Parmenides*) without being associated with the Sceptics, who were closely associated with this approach. Of particular interest are the separate educational purposes that Proclus would afford *ad hominem elenchus* and the arguments on both sides.

9 March, 2016

Dirk Westerkamp, University of Kiel/Germany

Salomon Maimon's Alethic Scepticism in Context

Praised by Fichte as 'one of the greatest thinkers of our time,' Salomon Maimon argued for a scepticism that challenged the Kantian foundation of transcendental logic. Maimon's arguments not only had a major impact on Post-Kantian and German Idealist thought; they also illuminate the logotectonic of sceptical thinking in general. There are at least four contexts within which Maimon's philosophical arguments can be situated: (i) in the context of Pyrrhonian scepticism, (ii) in the context of eighteenth century sceptical metaphysics (Hume), (iii) in the context of pre-idealistic scepticism (1790–1794) which led to the foundation of idealist subjectivism, and (iv) in the context of Jewish Scepticism. Westerkamp's paper aimed to shed some light on the first three contexts—leaving the matter of Jewish scepticism for the discussion. He tried to elucidate why Maimon's alethic scepticism is still indebted to the 'logic of truth' (Kant). He concluded with remarks on Maimon's implicit (sceptical) philosophy of language.

1 June, 2016

Therese Fuhrer, University of Munich/Germany

Augustinus Scepticus: Sceptical Strategies in Augustine's Argumentation

In his early work *Contra Academicos*, Augustine attempted to refute the well-known arguments of the ancient sceptics. Here and also in later works, strategies of argument are already present that were later central for Descartes (the famous *si fallor sum*, etc.). However, in the case of Augustine's refutation, the goal is a secure foundation for the possibility of belief in divine (biblical) truth. Augustine views the human ability to recognise this truth as a problem, in the same way as the sceptics saw the ability to recognise the objects and contents of the real world as a problem.

A sphere in which this sceptical position becomes apparent is Augustine's Bible exegesis, which often works with several possible interpretations of the text. Augustine here maintains a linguistic scepticism that is apparent already in *De Magistro*: the human ability to advance, by means of the text, to recognition of the divine *sententia*, is seen as limited; however, the position is dogmatic in the sense that it assumes the existence of truth.