Yearbook of the Maimonides Centre for Advanced Studies 2016

Jewish Thought, Philosophy, and Religion

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Yearbook of the Maimonides Centre for Advanced Studies

Edited by
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Giuseppe Veltri

Editorial

We are pleased to present the first 'Yearbook of the Maimonides Centre for Advanced Studies', which documents the activities of 2015–16, our first academic year.

The central aim of the Maimonides Centre, which was founded at the University of Hamburg in October 2015, is the exploration of and research into scepticism, first and foremost in Judaism, in its dual manifestation: firstly as a purely philosophical tradition and secondly as a more general expression of sceptical strategies, concepts, and cultural attitudes.

Scepticism is understood by us as an enquiry by the 'perpetual student' who harbours doubts about different dimensions and systems of secular or revealed knowledge, thereby calling authority into question. Scepticism does not represent an intellectual or theoretical worldview, but rather an attitude that provides a basis for numerous and diverse phenomena. It addresses fundamental processes and categorisations in Jewish philosophy, religion, literature, and society. More specifically, the term scepticism is applied to expressions of social deviance from, and conformity with, political structures. It is also applied to systems of governance, in response to and in exchange with adjacent cultures.

Research into Jewish philosophical scepticism is still in its very beginning. This also holds true for research into cultural expressions of scepticism, i.e. modes of sceptical strategies present in Jewish literature, cultural practices, history, organisation of social groups, and especially education. The apparent lack of interest in the intricacies of Jewish scepticism in the field of Jewish Studies may be rooted in the modality of Jewish philosophy. This field notoriously finds itself between the disciplines, and this subsumes and affects traditional wisdom, philosophy, theology, and both Jewish and general *Weltanschauung*, as well as cultural history, representing a hazardous bridge between orthopraxy and orthodoxy. The 'invisibility' of the particular (i.e. Judaism) due to its immersion into general philosophy could be one reason for the lack of interest.

Here, the need for an 'imaginative grammar,' corresponding to the demands of a language of scepticism in the history of Jewish philosophy and cultural history as well as in that of adjacent cultures, becomes apparent. This issue can be addressed by researchers at the Centre, who aim to benefit from comparative perspectives, thus gaining new insights into Western philosophy and culture and their inherent connections to texts and manifestations of Eastern cultures and thought. We believe this approach to be essential for mapping the transcultural dimensions of this barely explored field of research.

At the Centre we aim to offer outstanding conditions for research and for a fertile exchange of ideas. The successful creation of an inspiring atmosphere, favouring original research based on continuous dialogue, depends on the establishment of an interconnected academic community of scholars. Experts from many different fields gather in Hamburg in order to develop innovative approaches and methods.

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Our fellowship programme gives internationally established scholars and aspiring junior researchers the opportunity to spend time in Hamburg, for both shorter and for more extended visits. Both fellowship programmes have been designed with the aim of creating a school of learning, a place where senior and junior scholars can closely collaborate, similar to the ancient 'academies'.

We trust that the content of this volume adequately conveys the activities of our first year, our discussions, debates, and exchanges of ideas, which took place in a variety of formats: regular Dialectical and Reading Evenings, Workshops and Lectures. A **Dialectical Evening** consists of a debate between two or more opponents, in order to learn and practice sceptical strategies of discourse on truth, (un)certainty, and philosophical or cultural dogmas and questions. A **Reading Evening**, where texts in different languages and from different intellectual traditions are read together, poses a different challenge altogether. Each participant translates not only texts, but also ideas, concepts, and systems of thought from his or her own project for the benefit of the other participants, in order to prepare for the communal reading and discussion of a primary text relevant to their project. The **Workshop**, in the format of day-long mini-conference, thematises topics and areas of common interest. This year, workshops were dedicated to subjects such as sceptical controversies, dogma and doubt, conversion, sceptical *topoi* in ancient Judaism, and polemics in the Middle Ages. Within the framework of the series of the **Maimonides Lectures on Scepticism,** which take place three or four times a year, eminent scholars focusing on various aspects of scepticism are invited to present and discuss their research topics in an evening lecture. The **Annual Lecture,** which is delivered by an internationally acclaimed expert in his or her field, is the solemn inauguration of every new academic year at the Centre. On the following pages, you will find a timeline and full description of our activities.

Publishing a yearbook serves a number of purposes: it showcases articles written by Fellows and Research Associates of the Centre, records the activities of its temporary and permanent members, and documents the development of the Centre's library and database resources. By producing a yearbook, we wish to encourage the Centre's Fellows and Research Associates to publish not only comprehensive articles providing the academic community with the results of finished research projects, but also works-in-progress and first drafts. However, all articles are subject to a peer review process identical to that established for academic journals. The deadline for the submission of articles and reports was the end of June 2016. In order to present the activities up to the end of the academic year, the editors decided that Fellows whose period of stay at the Centre would begin after June would be included with an excerpt from their original research proposal rather than a report. Articles are presented in chronological order of topics, and reports in chronological order of periods of fellowship.

This is the appropriate place to thank the German Research Foundation ('Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft') for the generous financial support that made the creation of the Centre possible. I also wish to thank the President of the University of Hamburg, Professor Dieter Lenzen, the University's Vice Presidents, Professor

Jetta Frost and Professor Susanne Rupp, the Chancellor of the University, Dr Martin Hecht, the Dean of the Faculty of Humanities, Professor Oliver Huck, and all members of the University of Hamburg, especially the fantastic team at the Centre itself, who facilitated the creation of our Centre, for their enthusiasm and professional support in building our 'sceptical enterprise'. In addition, I would like to thank the members of the Board of Trustees, especially the Second Mayor of Hamburg and Senator for Science, Research, and Equal Rights, Ms Katharina Fegebank, as well as the members of the Advisory Board of our Centre.

Last but not least I owe special thanks to my colleagues at the University of Hamburg, Professor Michael Friedrich from the Centre for the Study of Manuscript Cultures, Professor Benjamin Schnieder from the Department of Philosophy, and Professor Johann Anselm Steiger from the Graduate School for Research into Trans- and Interdenominational Permeability for their generous advice and guidance during the founding phase of our Centre. Many have helped to make a rare and difficult thing possible. It is for us to make it excellent. As Baruch Spinoza said: 'But all excellent [things] are as difficult as they are rare' (*Sed omnia praeclara tam difficilia quam rara sunt*, Ethics, Part V, Prop. XLII, Scholium).

Giuseppe Veltri
Hamburg, August 2016

Part I: **Articles**

Charles E. Snyder

Two Kinds of Belief for Classical Academic Scepticism

> No one knew about Arcesilaus any more than they knew about which side the son of Tydaeus was on, concerning whom Homer had said no one knew whether he sided with the Trojans or the Achaeans. For to keep to one argument and state one and the same position was not in him, nor indeed did he ever think this manner of speaking by any means worthy of a clever man.
>
> Numenius in Eusebius, *Praeparatio evangelica*

Philosophical scepticism takes two basic forms in the ancient Greek tradition. Classical sceptics have the view that nothing can be known for certain and the view that one should withhold assent, even about the view that nothing can be known for certain. Dogmatic sceptics, on the other hand, take a position and argue for the view that nothing can be known and for the view that one should withhold assent. In spite of important differences within classical scepticism, Arcesilaus, Carneades, and the neo-Pyrrhonian Sextus Empiricus are classical sceptics. Dogmatic scepticism is a position that develops within the late phase of Academic scepticism according to which sceptics now feel secure in arguing for the view or belief that nothing can be known for certain.[1] In this paper, I focus almost exclusively on the early formative phase of ancient scepticism introduced in Plato's Academy by the philosopher Arcesilaus of Pitane (316/5–241/0 BCE) less than a century after Plato's death. In the course of defending Michael Frede's thesis, namely, that the philosophy of Arcesilaus is an instance of classical scepticism, I revise Frede's original formulation of the distinction between the two kinds of belief giving shape to Arcesilaus' classical Academic scepticism.

Before entering into an ongoing dispute about the original Academic sceptic, I begin with a brief and preliminary account of the term 'scepticism'. It derives from the ordinary Greek term σκέψις meaning 'search' or 'enquiry'. Accordingly, near the middle of the first century BCE, the Epicurean Philodemus (*Rhet.* I 191.4 Sudhaus) refers to philosophers in general as 'most enquiring' (σκεπτικωτάτους), and less than a century later, Philo of Alexandria (*De ebr.* 202 W) refers to philosophers in general

1 Michael Frede, "The Sceptic's Two Kinds of Assent and the Question of the Possibility of Knowledge," in *The Original Sceptics: A Controversy,* eds. Myles Burnyeat and Michael Frede (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997): 127–151 is a main source for the two basic forms of ancient Greek scepticism. Cf. Michael Frede, "Des Sceptikers Meinungen," *Neue Hefte für Philosophie* 15/16 (1979): 102–129; reprinted in idem, *Essays in Ancient Philosophy* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1987): 179–200. Frede has had his critics, but Tad Brennan, *Ethics and Epistemology in Sextus Empiricus* (New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1999) responds to the critics with a lucid and compelling defence of Frede's account of Sextus Empiricus' classical scepticism.

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as σκεπτικοί or δογματικοί without conveying any apparent contrast between the two terms.[2] For one to be labelled σκεπτικός, it could mean simply that one is a philosopher who has not discovered what knowledge is but continues to search for it; on the other hand, the term later takes on a technical meaning in the revival of classical scepticism around the middle or end of the second century CE by Sextus Empiricus,[3] identifying a peculiar kind of philosopher with 'an ability to set out oppositions among things which appear and are thought of in any way at all, an ability by which because of equipollence in the opposed objects and accounts, we come first to suspension of judgment and with it tranquility' (*PH* 1.8). Classical Academic sceptics did not self-characterise as σκεπτικοί in the sense honed by Sextus (but cf. Aulus Gellius, *NA* 11.5.6), but this fact does not prohibit one from using σκεπτικός ('sceptical') in a non-technical sense, conforming more closely to the ordinary Greek sense of σκέψις, to describe the kind of 'search' or 'enquiry' broadly characteristic of philosophers who search for knowledge.

For philosophers today, the term 'scepticism' has narrowed to convey challenges for specialists working within the domain of epistemology: the possibility of validating the reliability of basic epistemic faculties or the evidence for the existence of an external world. In the tradition of ancient Greek philosophy, however, σκεπτικοί or 'sceptics' engaged in enquiry spanning a wider range of beliefs and claims defended by self-proclaimed experts or philosophers pertaining to theses, for example, concerning the nature of divinity, mortality, or the ethicality of pleasure. Ancient philosophers known as 'sceptics' or 'enquirers' were so-called because they found themselves unable to conclude philosophical investigation with beliefs underpinned by robust theories about the nature of knowledge and truth. In suspending judgment about everything, ancient sceptical philosophers kept on searching for the truth (*PH* I.1–3) or what approximates the truth (Cicero, *Ac*. 2.7).

For Sextus Empiricus' revival of classical scepticism, sceptical philosophy has direct associations with a way of life, one which follows from a particular way of engaging in the search for knowledge and wisdom. Sextus specifies a way of life guided by an ability to generate opposing arguments about any topic of concern to philosophers who suppose that they have discovered knowledge and truth. In the Academy of Arcesilaus, however, sceptical enquiry does not lead the sceptic to take a position or make reports, either orally or in writing, about how one lives the kind of life an Academic might have called sceptical. Happiness or tranquility of the soul is not an explicit aim for Arcesilaus' enquiries, as it had been for Pyrrho (Aristocles in Eusebius, *Praep. ev*. 14.18, 758d) or as it

2 Cf. Karl Janáček, "Das Wort σκεπτικός in Philons Schriften," *Listy Filologiké* 101.2 (1979): 65–68.
3 Although there is good reason to think Philo of Alexandria read the writings of the neo-Pyrrhonian Aenesidemus, there is still no source antedating the later neo-Pyrrhonian Sextus Empiricus in employing the technical sense of σκεπτικός that Sextus assigns it throughout *PH*. See Fernanda Decleva Caizzi, "Sesto e gli scettici," *Elenchos* 13 (1992): 277–327. Evidently, Timon Fr. 59 (Diels 1901, 200) uses the term σκεπτοσυνής, but similar to the term σκεπτικωτάτους in Philodemus and σκεπτικοί in Philo of Alexandria, Timon's term signifies 'enquiry' or 'search' without Sextus' later technical connotation.

would be again for Sextus Empiricus (*PH* 1.10); nor is there a value, either negative or positive, explicitly assigned to the correlation between philosophical enquiry and the alleviating or exacerbating effects of a soul inclined to search for truth. One might contend that for the Academic sceptic such a correlation is taken for granted, at least for Academic sceptics early in the Hellenistic period. Even if a correspondence between philosophical enquiry and happiness or tranquility is tacitly assumed, it is anachronistic nonetheless to think of Academic scepticism as heralding the modern confinement of 'scepticism' to a specialised field of research such as epistemology. An unrestricted range of questions is also a feature of Academic scepticism; enquiry for Arcesilaus, though, is distinctive for evincing a specific form of examining the beliefs or claims asserted by an interlocutor in a dialectical cross-examination. It is the application of an oral method of cross-examination (Cicero, *De fin*. 2.2–3; *De orat*. 3.67; *Tusc*. 5.11) that makes Arcesilaus' sceptical enquiries even more dissimilar from modern or contemporary notions of scepticism than the neo-Pyrrhonian variety epitomised in the monological reportage of Sextus Empiricus.

To put it mildly, it has been difficult to resolve the complexities of the ancient evidence about Arcesilaus' scepticism. In reviving a form of Socratic cross-examination as head of Plato's Academy, Arcesilaus made it nearly impossible for his contemporaries and subsequent thinkers to know whether he held or could have consistently held any beliefs of his own. According to the lurid remarks of the second century CE Platonist Numenius, preserved by Eusebius, Arcesilaus tended to present himself in argument like a many-headed Hydra decapitating his own beliefs and severing himself into contrary positions (*Praep. ev*. 14.6) within the very same disputation; Ariston of Chios famously parodied Arcesilaus, his contemporary, as a philosophical chimaera (*PH* 1.234; Augustine, *Contra Ac*. 3.17.38, Diogenes Laertius [hereafter D.L.], *Life of Arcesilaus* 4.32). Due to the complex method of his oral cross-examination, a dispute about Arcesilaus' beliefs continues to embroil interpreters of his brand of Academic scepticism, dating back to contemporary critics like Ariston through posthumous admirers or sympathisers like Cicero and Plutarch, and on again through modern historians of ancient Greek and Roman philosophy. The dispute cannot be settled by interpreting with greater sophistication either what Cicero, Sextus, or other ancient authors wrote about Arcesilaus or what Arcesilaus wrote himself, since his method was entirely oral, writing no philosophical works of his own. And yet, the intractability of the evidence or source material has not restrained three modern interpretations of Arcesilaus' scepticism from vying to set the record straight. Each interpretation offers solutions to the dispute on the basis of one or more pieces of source material from antiquity that describe second-hand Arcesilaus' dialectical arguments. But to resolve the dispute about Arcesilaus' beliefs, and to gain insight into the kind of classical scepticism his philosophy undertakes, one must first distinguish one relevant notion of belief, which the early formative phase of Academic scepticism abandoned in suspending belief about all things, from a second and equally relevant notion of belief to which Arcesilaus' cross-examining method conformed in believing that one should suspend belief about all things.

According to the original dogmatic interpretation, Arcesilaus held and championed a number of beliefs.[4] He is thought to have openly argued for the belief that nothing can be known for certain (*akatalēpsia*, *De orat*. 3.67; Sextus, *M* 7.145), a negative conclusion or conflicting claim that emerged from an attempt to refute the Stoic criterion of truth and wisdom. According to Zeno's Stoic philosophy, human beings are able to receive and give assent to perceptual impressions with propositional content specifying that *p*, that is, that something is so and so. Knowledge and wisdom require assenting to the right kind of impression, what Stoics called a 'cognitive impression' (*katalēptikē phantasia*, D.L. 7.47; *SVF* 2.130). A person advances to knowledge in the primary sense, a systematic body of knowledge of human and divine matters, by means of a stable disposition that in receiving cognitive impressions cannot be shaken by reason (Stobaeus, *Ecl*. 2.73.19–4.3; *SVF* 3.112). The cognitive grasp of such impressions is possible on the basis of the stability involved in the sage's disposition. Thus it is not possible to refute the sage, or what the sage has assented to, given that one who so regularly and securely assents to cognitive impressions in accordance with a stable disposition cannot be shaken by another's argument. In encountering the kind of impression or proposition that lacks the security of the cognitive impression, the Stoic sage withholds assent to that which appears false (D.L. 7.121).

According to the original dogmatic interpretation, Arcesilaus strove to refute the Stoic doctrine of knowledge and wisdom and champion a second belief, a corollary to *akatalēpsia:* that one should suspend assent or belief about everything (*epochē peri pantôn*, *PH* 1.232; *M* 7.158; Augustine, *Contra Ac*. 3.5.12; 3.10.22; D.L. 4.32).[5] Proponents of a dogmatic interpretation attribute a third belief, namely, that Arcesilaus argued for, or believed in, the criterion of the 'reasonable' for the guidance of action.[6] The criterion would explain how a sceptic, who presumably argues for *akatalēpsia* or *epochē peri pantôn*, is still able to choose certain courses of action over others despite the uncertainty and the suspension of assent. With one or more of these beliefs assigned to Arcesilaus, the dogmatic interpretation can explain Arcesilaus' revival of Socrates' dialectical method. The dialectical method was useful in refuting the confident claims or assertions of knowledge and wisdom, human or divine, and in putting forth conflicting claims.

On this picture, since the arguments of Arcesilaus against the early Stoa had a doctrinal agenda, it would seem that the arguments were devised in order to establish the conflicting claim that there is no criterion of truth or knowledge, and that

4 David Sedley, "Three Platonist Interpretations of *Theaetetus*," in *Form and Argument in Late Plato,* eds. Christopher Gill and Mary M. McCabe (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996): 79–103.

5 Idem, "The Motivation of Greek Scepticism," in *The Sceptical Tradition*, ed. Myles Burnyeat (Berkeley and Los Angeles: The University of California Press, 1983): 9–29.

6 Robert J. Hankinson, *The Sceptics: Arguments of the Philosophers* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995); Malcolm Schofield, "Academic Epistemology," in *The Cambridge History of Hellenistic Philosophy*, eds. Keimpe Algra, Jonathan Barnes, Jaap Mansfeld, and Malcolm Schofield (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999): 323–351.

one should suspend assent about everything. But the original dogmatic interpretation raises an obvious difficulty for a sceptic with beliefs: if the sceptic believes in and argues for the suspension of belief, how can the sceptic take a position with respect to any of his beliefs without being inconsistent? Scholars who think that the dogmatic interpretation is a plausible reconstruction often try to determine, on the basis of the ancient sources, whether Arcesilaus violated his own scepticism or believed in something he should not have believed in, given his belief in the universal scope of the suspension of belief. One might try to explain Arcesilaus' adherence to *akatalēpsia* and *epochē peri pantôn* not in terms of his believing in them, but in terms of hypothetical or 'reasonable' views (Sextus, *M* 7.158).[7] The revision rids Arcesilaus of beliefs and strands him with views to which he could appeal in explaining action or choice and defending the negative conclusions of his method against the charge of inactivity. A revised version of the dogmatic interpretation insists that Arcesilaus did not believe anything at all, for his appeal to the 'reasonable' is merely an attempt to explain how we naturally act without belief. Nature, therefore, leads us to act even without belief and those actions considered 'reasonable' are those in which rational creatures can explain how the deeds accord with our nature. Again, the revision grants that such explanations are not beliefs but merely what Arcesilaus was naturally led to say having already acted in accordance with nature. While suspending belief about all things, Arcesilaus is thus capable of acting because nature simply impels him to act one way rather than another.

Similarly, a dialectical interpretation asserts that Arcesilaus argued against his Stoic interlocutors without holding any beliefs of his own. Arcesilaus is sceptical because of his method of refutation not the possession of certain beliefs or the acceptance of tentative views. Again, Arcesilaus is cast as arguing negatively for the sake of generating conclusions contrary to the claims advanced by the interlocutor. But this interpretation restricts Academic dialectic to an adversarial exercise of refutation,

7 Anna M. Ioppolo, "Il concetto di *eulogon* nella filosofia di Arcesilao," in *Lo Scetticismo Antico*, ed. G. Giannantoni (Naples: Bibliopolis, 1981): 143–161; eadem, *Opinione e Scienza: il dibattito tra Stoici e Accademici nel III e nel II secolo a.C.* (Naples: Elenchos, 1986): 120–134, 157–158; eadem, "Appendix 1 'Cicerone *Luc.* 32'," in eadem, *La testimonianza di Sesto Empirico sull'Accademia scettica* (Naples: Bibliopolis, 2009): 193–208; Harald Thorsrud, *Ancient Scepticism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009): 53–58, tries to explain Arcesilaus' scepticism in terms of *a-rational* commitments. By this Thorsrud contends that Arcesilaus' commitments are 'neither in accordance with, nor violations of, *any* rational standard [my italics].' Thorsrud's contention unwittingly assumes that a dogmatic standard of rationality is in fact the overriding standard. Recall that Arcesilaus thinks that the dogmatic claims made and reasoning offered to establish the dogmatist's rational standard are not compelling. Evidently, Arcesilaus has reasons not to believe in the rational standard of the dogmatist, despite his tentative or weak commitment to those reasons; we should not assume that Arcesilaus lacked some kind of non-dogmatic belief in rationality. It might be more accurate to characterise Arcesilaus' commitments as *a-rational* if he had given his assent to the Stoic standard of rationality even though he thought the Stoic failed to establish the truth of that standard. Arcesilaus' commitments to *akatalēpsia* and *epochē peri pantôn* only seem *a-rational* according to a dogmatic standard of rationality, but this need not make them *a-rational*.

such that Arcesilaus had no any standing commitment to the premises or conclusions of the arguments against Stoic philosophy.[8] The dialectical interpretation acknowledges the influence of Plato's so-called early dialogues on the formation of the Academy's sceptical method. Arcesilaus revived Socrates' dialectical style of argument and used it to show how the contrary claims that result from the argumentation belongs to the interlocutor, just as the arguments which generate those conclusions also belong to the interlocutor. This interpretation concurs with the revised dogmatic interpretation on two points. First, it presents Arcesilaus' scepticism without philosophical beliefs (though the premises and conclusions are accepted by Arcesilaus as either hypothetical or 'reasonable' views in the revised version of the dogmatic interpretation). Second, the method of argument is construed once again in terms of aiming at the refutation of the Stoic theory of knowledge and wisdom.

A Socratic interpretation attempts to harmonise core features of the dialectical and original dogmatic interpretations, and it is the first interpretation to make use of a distinction between two kinds of belief for Academic scepticism. Accordingly, Arcesilaus argued *ad hominem* and he had beliefs. To bring these two features together, the Socratic interpretation contends that Arcesilaus argued against his opponents without the further intention of taking a position or establishing his beliefs and claims according to a logically demonstrable criterion of truth. While upholding a core tenet of the dialectical interpretation, namely, that Arcesilaus argued against the beliefs of interlocutors, a Socratic interpretation contends that Arcesilaus nevertheless believed in *akatalēpsia* and *epochē peri pantôn*, and yet such beliefs were not held in a manner that motivated Arcesilaus to take a position or make a claim for his beliefs in the way that a dogmatic philosopher typically feels stable and secure in taking a position or making a claim. Following Socrates, Arcesilaus engaged in a search for knowledge and truth, and he found that the arguments in favor of any position were always inadequate, including any arguments he might bring forth.

A Socratic interpretation relies on the notion of a non-theoretical or rationally unwarranted belief. Non-theoretical beliefs underpin Arcesilaus' dialectical activity; his belief that philosophical knowledge is important and worthy of attaining motivates a pursuit for wisdom.[9] As the negative conclusions of his Socratic investigations keep recurring, Arcesilaus' enquiries force upon him the suspicion that even his beliefs about philosophy are rationally unwarranted. Yet he continues the search for knowledge on the same assumption that discovering it would be a worthy goal to attain. But as he continually fails to discover what truth and knowledge is, a growing suspicion that truth and knowledge will forever elude the effort presses upon him and it begins to strike him that perhaps such goals are not that worthy after all—that perhaps non-theoretical beliefs are all mortals require. It doesn't follow, though,

8 Pierre Couissin, "Le Stoïcisme de la Nouvelle Académie," *Revue d'histoire de la philosophie* 3 (1929): 241–276.

9 John Cooper, "Arcesilaus: Socratic and Sceptic," in idem, *Knowledge, Nature, and the Good: Essays on Ancient Philosophy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004): 81–103.

that he should then have given up his non-theoretical belief that it is irrational to have beliefs without knowledge, since one should only give that up if one can demonstrate that it would be irrational to hold beliefs. This too is a thought that his arguments cannot demonstrate any more than his arguments can successfully demonstrate the opposite conclusion or conflicting claim.

Arcesilaus thus assumed the importance of knowledge, and the general inadequacy of his beliefs are non-theoretical in the sense that he remained unpersuaded that he could demonstrate his beliefs according to some canon of argument or theory. He continued to believe that he failed to discover knowledge, and that it would be irrational and shameful to assent to anything without knowledge, but again in light of his experience in oral argument, he considered it still possible for there to be reasons against the belief that it is irrational or shameful to assent without knowledge. Thus he was not in a position to give his rational assent to the proposition that it is irrational to hold beliefs—he just found that that is how things strike him, i.e. that's just what he believes. An Academic sceptic, on this view, is someone whose sustained but non-theoretical commitment to rational investigation weakens confidence in rationality, but only partially. The result is not a negative claim or belief, for example, a claim or belief that we can't acquire knowledge owing to the limitations of our rational faculties, but a pervasive lack of theory sustained by the ongoing continuation of dialectical enquiry. Arcesilaus' scepticism shows us, according to this interpretation, that it is possible to believe in or be committed to rationality in some attenuated way, and yet remain sufficiently detached from rational demonstration to recognise that, whatever it may be, it may just lead us nowhere.

Both the dialectical and dogmatic interpretations presume that Arcesilaus revived an adversarial form of refutation. The dialectical interpretation takes this element very seriously in the sense that it assumes that Arcesilaus' sceptical philosophy sought to refute Stoic wisdom. The revised and the original dogmatic interpretation also ascribes the intent of refutation to Arcesilaus. For Arcesilaus must have relied on refutation to establish in argument what appear to be his own contrary claims. A Socratic interpretation, however, parts ways with all three interpretations. Frede writes that 'the sceptic never tries to argue for a position, he never argues against a claim in the sense that he tries to establish a conflicting claim, and thereby try to show the falsehood of the original claim.'[10] On this view, we are to suppose that Arcesilaus in the image of Socrates sought to learn from the alleged expertise of those who claim to know by questioning the experts. The expert interlocutor supplied the premises and beliefs, while Arcesilaus or Socrates remained without any standing commitment about whether the premises, conclusions, or the mode of reasoning were true or false. The questioning inevitably went badly for the confident expert in appearing not to know what he claimed to know. In following this model of Socrates and meeting the same negative results, Arcesilaus was led to the belief that he

10 Frede, "Two Kinds of Assent," 129.

should withhold belief. But in acquiring this belief at the end of cross-examination it does not follow that Arcesilaus was ready to make the claim or defend the belief that one should withhold belief.

Frede's Socratic interpretation posits a 'substantial difference' between having a belief (i.e., weak assent) and taking a position or defending a belief by means of a form of reasoning that sets out to establish the truth of the belief and the reasoning according to a criterion (i.e., strong assent). Here is how Frede clarifies this 'difference'. Merely having a belief is just to find oneself with an impression after having enquired into a given subject (though enquiry is not necessary for this kind of impression or belief to set in). Weak belief may apply either to ordinary statements in everyday experience or statements that employ notions of wisdom, virtue, or knowledge. According to this formulation, it does not follow for the one who has the impression or belief that one must also have the 'further thought' that the impression is true. I will return to this key formulation below. By contrast, to take a position and defend a claim or belief is to subject oneself to specifiable criteria and canons of argumentation about what counts as truth or knowledge. This is strong belief or assent. In taking a position or defending a claim, one feels stable and secure in the truth of the impression or belief as satisfying certain criteria and canons of argumentation that purport to establish what it is for a belief to be true.[11]

Frede's 'difference' has been criticised on the basis of what has come to be known as the standard conception of belief.[12] The standard conception of belief stipulates that in A's belief that *p* A also takes *p* to be true. Now, on Frede's account of weak belief, one can have a belief that *p* or be left with an impression that *p* without having the 'further thought' that *p* is true. Scholars have taken this account of weak belief to imply a rejection of the standard conception of belief. Following Fine's claim that 'Frede rejects the standard view of belief,' Perin contends that Frede's

11 Weak and strong belief should also be distinguished according to two different kinds of dispositions or states in which one might be said to 'have' or 'hold' beliefs. One can believe that *p* and thus 'have' a given item of belief yet not 'have' the kind of disposition over it such as to exercise a claim or defence of the belief that *p*. Plato's *Theaetetus* illustrates this difference in disposition (197b9–12). Socrates differentiates two dispositions of 'having' with the example of a person who 'has' a cloak in the sense of owning it yet 'does not have' a cloak in the sense of 'having' it firmly and immediately at hand. If a person purchases a cloak and thus owns or possesses the cloak, but is it not wearing the cloak at a given moment, we ought to say that he does not 'have' it (though indeed he does in another sense 'possess' or 'have' it). Socrates explains the difference between 'possessing' an item (*ktesis*), or the mere 'having' it, and possessing an item such that one 'has' it at one's immediate disposal (*hexis*). Accordingly, the latter disposition refers to a kind of firm and immediate disposition of belief such that one is compelled to make a claim on that belief; the former refers to a kind of weak 'having' such that one detaches oneself from what one 'has'.

12 For a criticism of Frede according to the standard conception of belief, see Gail Fine, "Sceptical *Dogmata: Outlines of Pyrrhonism* I 13," *Methexis* 13 (2000): 81–105. Fine takes Bernard Williams, *Problems of the Self* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973): 136–151, to be an original formulation of the standard conception.

grounds for rejecting the standard conception are obscure.[13] But Fine and Perin are mistaken to think that Frede's clarification of weak belief rejects or implies any rejection of the standard conception. Frede elaborates a weak notion of belief in which 'the sceptic does not think that his impressions [beliefs] are such that they will come out true on the true theory of things.' He states that one can have the belief that *p* without having the 'further thought' that *p* is true, let alone the 'further thought' that *p* is true according to a true theory of things, but there is no reason to infer that weak belief rejects a conception of belief stipulating that believing that *p* consists in taking *p* to be true; taking *p* to be true is built into the belief that *p* such that there is no requirement for the one in possession of the belief that *p* to think, in addition to the belief that *p*, that *p* is true. In explaining and defending the standard conception, Fine assigns exactly this lack of any extraneous thought to the standard conception. That is, the standard conception does not mean that for A to believe *p* A must have an explicit or implicit 'further thought' that *p* is true. Rather, according to Fine, believing that *p* 'consists in, or essentially involves, taking *p* to be true' without any additional thought.[14] Again, taking *p* to be true is internally built into what it means to believe. Frede's account of weak belief rejects the idea that believing *p* consists in, or essentially involves, taking any canon or criterion for what counts as true on the true theory of things. This is what dogmatic philosophy lays claim to in raising the conditions beyond ordinary usage for what counts as knowledge and what counts as true. And in compliance with the classical Academic scepticism considered here, the standard conception of belief avoids any posit of a canon or criterion for what counts as true, nor does it require for the one who believes that *p* to be in possession of an additional thought about what is true or counts as true in general.

The lack of any developed theory for what the true might be in the standard conception of belief is an important part of what makes the conception 'standard', and almost trivial. That is, the notion of the true in formulations of the standard conception is just as non-dogmatic as the notion of weak belief—for they both accommodate an ordinary sense of what counts as true, namely, that something is or seems to be the case. Indeed, Frede states that the classical sceptic may follow ordinary usage, and in perfect consistency with his scepticism, the sceptic may be moved to say 'that he knows this or that.' Frede construes the sceptic as following 'common custom to mark the fact that he is saying what he is saying having given the matter appropriate consideration in the way one ordinarily goes about doing this, by using the verb "to know".' For ordinary usage does not require that someone who says that he knows that *p* should have in possession the kind of demonstrable criteria or canons from which to justify his belief that *p* so as to eliminate incompatible beliefs or es-

13 Casey Perin, "Making Sense of Arcesilaus," *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 45 (2013): 313–340.
14 Fine, "Sceptical *Dogmata*," 84.

tablish his belief that *p* as a state of knowing that *p* with the unshakeable certainty of a philosophical sage.

In ordinary language, the verb 'to know' is as common as the adjectival use of 'true' to describe what is or seems to be the case. Adherents of the standard conception of belief often invoke ordinary usage in precisely this way to elucidate how the standard conception stipulates that beliefs have a built-in component fixed to aim at what is true.[15] Fine appeals to an ordinary situation to shine light on the internal purport within the ordinary statement 'I believe it's raining.' Fine makes the point that it would be unusual or odd for that same person to clarify the statement in terms of the 'further thought'—'I believe that it's true that it's raining.' With a weak notion of belief, Frede leaves the internal purport of the true in the standard conception unchallenged, though he clearly rejects the requirement that one with a belief that *p* must also have the additional thought that *p* is true. Let's extend Fine's ordinary situation. Assume a bystander is within earshot of the statement 'I believe it's raining,' and agrees with the initial statement by saying, 'yes, that's true; it's raining.' Note that this agreement need not imply that the additional thought 'it's true that it's raining' occurred to the original reporter, even though the second statement may be equivalent to the original. The one in agreement may not have had any 'further thought' about what counts as true according to a theory which raises the requirements for what counts as true. Again, the standard conception of belief denies that one must have a separate thought that '*p* is true' in believing that *p*, nor does it require one to possess in addition a criterion of the true according to which a theory of things might be justified or demonstrated. The standard conception of belief and the notion of weak belief are perfectly compatible, and it is the lack of this 'further thought' that can help us identify the way in which Arcesilaus held beliefs.

In fact, the 'difference' between weak and strong belief is quite helpful in specifying two varying modalities of belief within the standard conception. In the case of weak belief, the sceptic has the kind of belief which has built into it an ordinary sense of what is or seems to be true. Just as there is no requirement, according to the standard conception, for having some extraneous or 'further thought' about what counts as true over and above the ordinary expression 'it's true that *p*.' That is, the sceptic with a weak belief that *p* does not see himself in a position to defend

15 Interpreters of Sextus, like Myles Burnyeat, "Can the Sceptic Live his Scepticism?," in *The Original Sceptics*, 25–57, are mistaken to think that the classical sceptic's use of non-epistemic appearance-statements ('it appears') rules out the attribution of ordinary epistemic beliefs ('it is raining'), citing in support *PH* I.135, 198, 200 and *M* 7.18–19. However, Brennan, *Ethics and Epistemology*, 36–46, argues decisively that the context surrounding these passages does not warrant the generalisation Burnyeat wants, namely, from Sextus' use of the language of appearance in his discussion of dogmatic beliefs to the beliefs that a sceptic ordinarily employs in his daily life. As Brennan notes, the non-epistemic appearance-statements are restricted to registering the sceptic's experience in investigating the claims made by dogmatic philosophers; appearance-statements have no special function in registering the sceptic's experience with things ordinarily.

the belief that *p*, for the sceptic is irresolute in so far as the sceptic does not have or acquiesce in any separate or 'further thought' about a canon of truth or knowledge according to which one might defend that *p* is true in a strong or robust mode. For one to engage in the practice of establishing the belief that *p* in the sense that might make that *p* a knowledge-claim or truth-claim according to a criterion of knowledge and truth, one would need to make the transition from a weak to a strong disposition of belief. This is just what Arcesilaus, in remaining a sceptical philosopher, takes himself to be unable to do.

But Frede's formulation of the 'difference' is inadequate as it applies to Arcesilaus, for it does not account for the dialectical context in which claims or beliefs are examined and withheld by classical Academic scepticism. There is precedent in Socrates' dialectical method for integrating the disposition or possession of weak belief with a 'complex manner of searching or enquiring' (*multiplex ratio disputandi*, *Tusc*. 5.11) that allows the dialectician to abstain from taking a position even while arguing *pro* and *contra* the positions taken and defended by interlocutors. Dialectical cross-examination allows the Academic sceptic to continue investigating without ever taking a position, or trying to demonstrate strongly held beliefs, while holding an assortment of beliefs himself. Plato's *Theaetetus* presents Socrates as an empty or infertile maieutician: withholding strong beliefs in the dialectical investigation and eliciting from his interlocutors what he himself does not proclaim and defend (*Tht*. 157c7-d3). The three modern interpretations sketched above unwittingly replicate our best ancient sources on the philosophy of Arcesilaus—Sextus Empiricus (*M* 7.150–158, *PH* 1.232–34), Augustine (*Contra Ac*. 3.9.18–22), and Plutarch (*adv. Col*. 1121e-1122d)—in overlooking the full significance of maieutic method for Arcesilaus' Academic scepticism. Cicero adheres, and claims that the sceptical Academy also adheres, to the restraint of Socrates' dialectical midwifery. Cicero states 'that those who openly admit teaching obstruct those who desire to learn' (*ND* 1.10, cf. *Ac*. 2.60), but the restraint of scepticism is hardly ever traced back to its archetype in the method of Socrates in *Theaetetus*. While Frede's Socratic interpretation discerns two relevant notions of belief for Arcesilaus' scepticism, it mischaracterises the 'difference' and how the difference gives shape to what came to be known as classical Academic scepticism. The cut between two kinds of belief should be made, in my view, in strict conformity with the method of dialectical cross-examination in *Theaetetus*.

Some scholars contend that Socrates in *Theaetetus*, according to the procedure of midwifery, professes his total abstention from giving birth or reporting his beliefs in the course of cross-examining interlocutors. But there is no such profession in the dialogue. Thus we read of Socrates openly announcing a number of his beliefs, which he holds without any separate or 'further thought' about the exact nature of truth or knowledge. For example, Socrates believes that his interlocutor is experiencing the 'labor pains' (148e6) of intellectual pregnancy; or, that he believes a popular reproach against him is 'true' (*alēthes*, 150c6–7); Socrates believes that the reproach is 'true' despite the fact that those who disseminate it have no grasp of the cause,

or reason for, his dialectical method. The reproach alleges that 'he questions others but makes no claim or assertion of his own about anything on account of not having wisdom' (150c5–6). Those who disseminate the reproach are unaware that they are identifying a feature of Socrates' maieutic method. In openly announcing his beliefs regarding Theaetetus' pregnancy and the veracity of the reproach, it is important to note the ways in which the reproach and his expressed beliefs generally remain 'true' to the maieutic method.

First, Socrates stipulates that his method proscribes him from taking a position in direct response to the main philosophical question that elicits the interlocutor's beliefs. The reproach is 'true' in the qualified sense that maieutic Socrates does not make a claim or take a position in response to the main question, the 'what is F?' question, that serves to deliver or elicit through midwifery the beliefs of interlocutors. Thus Socrates does not say that he refrains from invoking any of his beliefs, both strong and weak beliefs. Nor does he refrain from issuing statements of the kind purporting that he believes that *p*. As a midwife, he merely refrains from generating and defending strong beliefs to the 'what is F?' question in the context of a dialectical examination. The abstention follows from his maieutic technique: not taking a position with respect to the question of knowledge helps in delivering the reasoning of his interlocutors. For Socrates there is nothing inconsistent in expressing weak beliefs either about Theaetetus or the popular reproach, since expressions of this kind do not consist in making a claim for which one strives to establish as true according to a criterion of truth or knowledge one takes oneself to securely possess. His manner of invoking these beliefs complies with the ordinary usage of taking to be true, or believing that *p*, while eschewing the activity of advancing claims and taking positions in the cross-examination.

Moreover, maieutic Socrates openly announces his agreement with the premises articulated by an interlocutor as a means of further eliciting a reasoned defence of the beliefs the interlocutor sees himself in a position to affirm and defend. In addition to the beliefs noted above, we read of Socrates openly announcing his belief that a god assists him with his maieutic method (150d5), and that no god can do evil to humans (151d1), in a sincere attempt to prevail on Theaetetus the benefit of submitting one's strong beliefs to cross-examination. Here again Socrates presumes and asserts, without justification or argument, that philosophical cross-examination with an old man such as himself, who confesses that he does not know what knowledge is, may have beneficial effects for the interlocutor. In examining Theaetetus' second definition of knowledge—that knowledge is true belief—Socrates even invokes his belief on the very nature of 'belief' (*doxa*), appending the crucial proviso that he cannot defend this view since he is 'not making a claim on a matter that he knows' (189e7). Socrates says that it seems to him that 'belief' consists in the activity of accepting or rejecting a *logos* ('assertion') that can be asserted 'silently to oneself' rather than asserted aloud. According to this tentative view, belief consists in at least a weak or deficient epistemic disposition in which one settles on an inner assertion and comes to a decision in the mode of an inner or silent that *p*. By invoking his be-

liefs in the dialogue, including his weak belief about what a 'belief' seems to him to be, Socrates is not making a claim for which he feels compelled to defend according to a criterion of knowledge. Nor can it be said, in the terminology of midwifery, that Socrates gave birth to beliefs in direct response to the main question under dialectical investigation. Instead, his method elicits the interlocutor's claims and examines the interlocutor's reasoning for those claims. It follows that weak beliefs, according to Socrates, can either be expressed aloud without taking a position or remain silent assertions. Either way, weak beliefs do not amount to making a claim or taking a position about anything in the dialectical examination.

At *Ac*. 2.66, Cicero suggests that Arcesilaus appealed to beliefs he considered 'true' at the outset of his cross-examinations. In reconstructing his interrogation of the Stoic doctrine of wisdom, Cicero invokes Arcesilaus' agreement with Zeno: 'For the sage, however, Arcesilaus agrees with Zeno that the greatest strength is to make sure that he isn't tricked and to see to it that he isn't deceived.' Again, at *Ac*. 2.77, Cicero returns to Arcesilaus' examination of Zeno's doctrine, saying: 'None of Zeno's predecessors had ever explicitly formulated, or even suggested, the view that a person could hold no beliefs—and not just that they could, but that doing so was necessary for the sage. Arcesilaus thought that this belief was both true and honorable, as well as right for the sage' (*visa est Arcesilae cum vera sententia tum honesta et digna sapienti*). Finally, at *Ac*. 1.45, Cicero says in his own voice that Arcesilaus believed that 'nothing is more shameful (*neque hoc quicquam esse turpius*) than for one's assent or approval to overtake knowledge and apprehension.' Arcesilaus' agreement with Stoicism at the beginning of the discussion complies with the procedure of maieutic method, for such agreement with an interlocutor is not a claim with respect to the main philosophical question posed that elicits the interlocutor's theory of knowledge. Arcesilaus held beliefs, but he did not articulate those views in the mode of defence according to a criterion of truth or knowledge.

Moreover, the contrary claims or conclusions that result from Arcesilaus' examination of the Stoic cataleptic impression are Arcesilaus' beliefs (for instance, the belief in *akatalēpsia* and *epochē peri pantôn*). One might insist that such conclusions result from a *reductio ad absurdum*, exposing the incoherence of Stoic arguments. But to see these claims as more than the mere absurd claims of Stoicism gone wrong, recall Socrates' dialectical method in *Theaetetus*. There Socrates brings Theaetetus' claim that knowledge is perception just shy of a contrary claim; but later we find Theaetetus responding to Socrates with the assertion that a number of common properties (being and not-being, sameness and difference, etc.) are properly grasped by the soul, not the organs of perception. Theaetetus asserts the contrary claim or negative conclusion himself—that knowledge is not perception—to which Socrates the midwife adds (185e8): 'For this was my belief, but I wanted this to be your belief too.' Indeed, maieutic Socrates held beliefs but he remained reluctant

to proclaim and defend them.[16] The reluctance is consistent with the observation that Socrates' beliefs emerge in *Theaetetus* in an oblique way, as the midwife 'never clearly formulates these beliefs (or their relationships in any authoritative way).'[17] The very same status ought to be given not only to Arcesilaus' agreement with the Stoic premises noted above, but also to *akatalēpsia*, *epochē*, and the 'reasonable' criterion of action. Arcesilaus' beliefs arise indirectly in the cross-examination but not as part of an articulated defence according to an indisputable criterion of truth.

As a sceptic, Arcesilaus thus observed the dialectical method of *Theaetetus* in arguing *ad hominem* by not taking a position or defending his beliefs even when he found himself in agreement with the premises of Stoic doctrine.[18] Arcesilaus held beliefs about the main philosophical question under investigation, but he remained reluctant to voice or overtly claim and defend his beliefs in the interest of acquiring or discovering what knowledge or wisdom may really be. It should be said that Arcesilaus held his beliefs with respect to the main philosophical question in the manner that Socrates specifies in *Theaetetus*—a disposition of belief that involves a deficient epistemic state in which one settles on a *logos* or assertion 'silently to oneself.' Since Arcesilaus was also aware that he did not know, he withheld making any claim about knowledge in the dialectical cross-examination and refrained from taking an outspoken position. In so far as Arcesilaus displayed a lack of conviction by not defending or seeking to establish any of his beliefs in an authoritative way, namely, as beliefs to be taught and learned as true doctrines in conformity with a theory of truth, one can truly say that he consistently suspended all dogmatic claims or beliefs that purport to respond to the main question under investigation in the cross-examination. That is, Arcesilaus, the first Academic sceptic, suspended making claims about anything whatever in the dialectical cross-examination.

In one sense, the Socratic interpretation is correct in saying that Arcesilaus did not make a claim or take an outspoken position about knowledge (or the lack of knowledge) in the way that his interlocutors did, or in the way that other philosophers who are non-maieutic or non-sceptical typically make claims, that is, by taking an outspoken position, either in writing or in a dialectical examination, and seeking to defend and establish particular claims as true. On the other hand, Socrates the midwife, or Arcesilaus the sceptic, brought their respective dialectical investigations of an interlocutor's claims to negative conclusions; both philosophers should be construed as having held beliefs throughout the examination, perhaps even beliefs about the main question of the discussion, though each suppressed any defence of those beliefs in the dialectical examination.

According to the maieutic interpretation developed here, Socratic and dialectical interpretations are mistaken in saying that Arcesilaus came to the oral examination with-

16 Zina Giannopoulou, "Socratic Midwifery; A Second Apology?," *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 33 (2007): 55–87.

17 Annas, "Plato the Sceptic," *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* Suppl. Vol. (1992): 43–72.

18 *Ibidem*, 54–57.

out any beliefs of his own. Rather, in announcing his agreement with Stoic premises, and keeping other weak beliefs that seem in conflict with the premises almost entirely to himself, Arcesilaus came to the search absent the stability and security of a disposition fit for defending the beliefs that strike him as true in the weak sense. The mere fact that he came to the cross-examination with beliefs does not mean, as both the original and revised dogmatic interpretations espouse, that Arcesilaus strove to establish and defend what he believed. Nor is it correct to say, as all three interpretations unanimously contend, that he set out determined to refute his dogmatic interlocutors. One may reasonably insist that Arcesilaus had some inclination to refute his Stoic interlocutors because of his long tenure as leader of a school notorious for challenging empirical claims to knowledge. Attributing such an inclination to Arcesilaus may be accurate, but it fails to account for the kind of beliefs he held and the reluctance built into the dialectical method he revived in Socrates' midwifery. Let's remember that *Theaetetus* is Plato's most sustained examination of knowledge and perception in the Platonic corpus, and yet it's not Socrates who refutes Theaetetus' empirical claim with a conflicting claim. Socrates the midwife takes himself to be empty of claims to make and defend, and yet it still may be accurate to say that Socrates had been inclined to believe that nothing can be known for certain through perception alone. On the maieutic interpretation, Arcesilaus set out in genuine search for truth, knowledge and wisdom like Socrates the midwife, finding himself reluctant to take a position in the fashion of dogmatic philosophers in the Hellenistic period. The discovery of truth would have furnished a radical transformation from the deficient epistemic state of weak belief to one in which he would be ready and disposed to argue for his beliefs. But the transformation into a dogmatic philosopher is not one that ever took place for the classical scepticism of Arcesilaus, who for the first time in the history of Plato's Academy revived the method of Socrates' midwifery.

Giuseppe Veltri

Linguistic Scepticism

> εἴπερ γὰρ φύσει τὰ ὀνόματα ἦν καὶ μὴ τῇ καθ' ἕκαστον θέσει σημαίνει, ἐχρῆν πάντας πάντων ἀκούειν, Ἕλληνας βαρβάρων καὶ βαρβάρους Ἑλλήνων καὶ βαρβάρους βαρβάρων.[1]

Although the expression 'linguistic scepticism' today refers primarily to the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, specific problems concerning the philosophy of language were already being discussed in Antiquity. Linguistic scepticism therefore is a common terrain of the epistemological strategy of sophism and scepticism, and the dependence of the latter on the former is no longer *terra incognita*.[2] The goal of the following article is less to search for common strategies of both groups than to present a peculiar aspect of significance for sceptical strategies: the discussion of the translatability of words in other languages as an example of the debate on nature-convention (*fysei ē thesei*) in ancient philosophy. My specific interest here will focus on this discussion as reflected in (Jewish) Hellenistic and rabbinic literature and on the intriguing, but nevertheless dogmatic, view of the untranslatability of the divine language (*lešon ha-qodeš*) *per se*.

We will begin with the analysis of an important source, the Greek prologue to the *Wisdom of Sirach,* also known as *Ben Sira*.[3] The Greek translator of the original Hebrew of the book of Shim'on, son of Yeshua', son of El'azar ben Sira, called *Sofia Seirach* in the Greek and Ecclesiasticus in the Latin tradition, begins his work by introducing his grandfather's (or ancestor's) wisdom text and explaining the difficulty of translating it. I dealt with this topic in another publication from 2006.[4] In the following, I will take into consideration the criticism of my contribution and respond to it. My special focus here, which has not been considered until now, is also to take into account the argument of Sextus Empiricus, who definitively addresses the same problem of the translation of words, but from another perspective, namely as an example of the alleged natural connexion between words and things.

1 Sextus Empiricus, *Against the Grammarians*, VII, § 145.

2 See the chapter by Nicholas Rescher, "Greek Scepticism's Debt to the Sophists," in idem, *Essays in the History of Philosophy* (Aldershot: Avebury, 1995): 51–70, here 67, reprinted in idem, *Cosmos and Logos: Studies in Greek Philosophy. Topics in Ancient Philosophy,* vol. 1 (Frankfurt a.M.: Ontos Verlag, 2005): 63–87; cf. *ibidem*, 82, for the use of the expression.

3 I still do not understand the mixed form used by authors who speak of Ben Sira*ch*.

4 Giuseppe Veltri, *Libraries, Translations, and "Canonic" Texts: The Septuagint, Aquila and Ben Sira in the Jewish and Christian Traditions* (Leiden: Brill, 2006).

DOI 10.1515/9783110501728-003,

The Translator of *Ben Sira* and the *isodynamata*

Modern scholarship often quotes the Greek prologue to *Ben Sira* as the earliest testimony of the difficulty of translating a book. The common opinion of the prologue among specialists is that the author is speaking of the impossibility of word-for-word translation,[5] or 'that the Greek text he had written was often semantically not very close to his Hebrew original.'[6]

The grandson[7] stresses a fundamental problem of translation as follows:

> For the same things uttered in Hebrew, and translated into another tongue, have not the same force in them: and not only these things, but the law itself, and the prophets, and the rest of the books, have no small difference, when they are spoken in their own language.[8]

The author claims that in reading or hearing his translation the audience may find something 'not of equal force' (*isodynamein*) when spoken in Hebrew or translated into another tongue. How could his readers ascertain the difference between the original Hebrew and a translation?[9] If they could read Hebrew, they did not need the translation; if not, they would not have noticed any difference.

Yet, this difference should be noted, Stefan Schorch would add, because it is a fundamental one between the Hebrew original and its translation, since the 'Greek text has a small substantial and aesthetic agency onto his audience,' and he concludes: 'on the basis of the divinity of the Hebrew, the Hebrew text has more meaning than the Greek one.'[10] Using the terminology of sceptical philosophy, I would call this a dogmatic position because of the *a priori* ('von vornherein') statement by Schorch.[11]

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5 J.H.A. Hart, ed., *Ecclesiasticus* (Cambridge: University Press, 1909): 267.

6 James Barr, *The Typology of Literalism in Ancient Biblical Translations* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1979): 43; see also Dries De Crom, "Translation and Directionality in the Hebrew-Greek Tradition," in *Complicating the History of Western Translation: The Ancient Mediterranean in Perspective*, eds. Siobhán McElduff and Enrica Sciarrino (Manchester and Kinderhook, NY: St. Jerome Publishing, 2011): 77–87.

7 There is no necessity to translate this as 'nephew', as I suggested in my *Libraries, Translations, and "Canonic" Texts* (Leiden: Brill, 2006): 201; see also Marko Marttila, *Foreign Nations in the Wisdom of Ben Sira: A Jewish Sage between Opposition and Assimilation* (Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter, 2012): 6–7.

8 I am following here the translation by Lancelot C.L. Brenton. The RSV has 'sense' instead of 'force'.

9 See also the article by Benjamin Wright III, "Access to the Source: Cicero, Ben Sira, the Septuagint and their Audience," *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 34 (2003): 1–27.

10 Stefan Schorch, "Sakralität und Öffentlichkeit. Zum Problem jüdischer Bibelübersetzung," in *Dialog der Disziplinen. Jüdische Studien und Literaturwissenschaft*, eds. Eva Lezzi and Dorothea M. Salzer (Berlin: Metropol Verlag, 2009): 60.

11 *Ibidem:* 'dass die Äußerung vielmehr die fundamentale Differenz zwischen einem hebräischen Text und seiner Übersetzung behandelt. Nach dem Enkel Ben Siras herrscht zwischen beiden von vornherein keine *isodynamie* (wörtlich "Kraftgleichheit"), weil der griechische Text eine geringe inhaltliche und ästhetische Wirkkraft auf seine Leser ausübe. Aufgrund der Heiligkeit des Hebräischen hat ein hebräischer Text von vornherein mehr Bedeutung als ein griechischer.'

We will see that there are other factors and linguistic elements which let us depart from the commonly accepted antagonism between the holy language and its translation into Greek.

The first consideration is that the author is not speaking of a well-established original text written in the holy language, but only of his experience as a translator, for if we presuppose that the author is speaking of an (established) written text, then we proceed from false assumptions. In fact, the grandson uses only the word for 'hearing' and not for 'writing': the differences between the grandfather's original book as well as the Torah, the books of prophets, and the other books do not concern the written, but the oral forms. Some reflections on this are called for. The author is not dealing with the general problem of translation, but with precise expressions or idioms (*tisin tōn lexeōn*) which are different if s p o k e n in a language other than Hebrew (*en autois hebraisti legomena*).

Following a first look at the participle *legomena* with regard to linguistic usage in the common Greek (the *koinē dialektos*), it is apparent that the *media vox* refers to the pronunciation, or something spoken, not to a written translation.[12] But there is a more cogent argument that weakens the idea of an alleged semantic discussion of the value of translation: the use of *hebraisti* in the common Greek of the Second Temple period. The term *hebraisti* occurs before the first century only once, precisely in this prologue to *Ben Sira*. As used in the first century CE, in almost all the sources I have examined it refers to the common and spoken language of the Jews.[13] I infer this lexical assumption from the fact that both Josephus and the author of the Fourth Gospel use *hebraisti* for Aramaic terms.[14] The confusion is understandable if we regard *hebraisti* as the corresponding denomination for *hellenisti* in referring to the Greek language, in other words, as an expression for the *koinē dialektos* of the Jews. This is also the lexical use of *ivrit*, which does not occur in biblical Hebrew[15] but only in post-biblical texts and denotes either the language of the Jews in general (as opposed to *la'az*, 'foreign language'),[16] the common everyday language among the Jews,[17] or the particular Old Hebrew script which was replaced by the Square script (*aššurit*) still in use today.

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12 See the Gospel of John 4:25; 11:16; 20:24; 21:2 and the Acts of the Apostles 9:36.

13 On this aspect, see Giuseppe Veltri, *Eine Tora für den König Talmai: Untersuchungen zum Übersetzungsverständnis in der jüdisch-hellenistischen und rabbinischen Literatur* (Tübingen, Mohr Siebeck, 1994): 118–119; idem, *Gegenwart der Tradition: Studien zur jüdischen Literatur und Kulturgeschichte* (Leiden: Brill, 2002): 57–59.

14 See *Liber Antiquitatum* 3:252 and Gospel of John 5:2. With the exception of Josephus, *hebraisti* occurs only in the so-called *corpus Iohanneum:* Gospel of John 5:2; 9:13: 9:17; 9:20; 20:16; Apocalypses 9:11 and 16:16.

15 See Edward Ullendorf, "The Knowledge of Languages in the Bible" [in Hebrew], in *Studies in the Bible Presented to Professor M.H. Segal by His Colleagues and Students*, eds. Yehoshua M. Grintz and Yaakov Liver (Jerusalem: Kiryat Sepher, 1964): 145.

16 Only in the Tosefta; see *Tosefta Megillah* 2:6; 3:13.

17 *Mishnah Giṭṭin* 9:17; *Tosefta Bava Baṭra* 11:8; *Mishnah Yadayim* 4:3 and 4:5.

If the author is speaking of spoken rather than literary language, we should raise the question of the meaning of *legomena en hebraisti:* does he intend to point out that the 'force' of Hebrew emanating from the Hebrew letters and words cannot really correspond to their rendition in the Hellenistic idiom? I think rather that he is polemically countering a diffuse conviction among Egyptian Jewry of the existence of an autonomous development in Jewish literature and wisdom on the basis of the Septuagint translation, as seen by Aristeas and Philo of Alexandria. According to the latter writers, the Septuagint was the perfect copy of the Hebrew original; Philo even speaks of two sisters:

> (38) Yet, who does not know that every language, and Greek especially, abounds in terms, and that the same thought can be put in many shapes by changing single words and whole phrases and suiting the expression to the occasion? This was not the case, we are told, with this law of ours, but the Greek words used corresponded literally with the Chaldean, exactly suited to the things they indicated. (39) For just as in geometry and logic, so it seems to me, the sense indicated does not admit of variety in the expression which remains unchanged in its original form, so these writers, as it clearly appears, arrived at wording which corresponded with the matter, and alone, or better than any other, would bring out clearly what was meant.[18]

A perfect translation, according to Philo, requires perfect synonymy. The Jewish philosopher of Alexandria explains this fact, speaking of homonymy and synonymy in general: 'everyone will allow that homonymy and synonymy are opposites, homonymy meaning one name applied to one object, synonymy many names applied to one object.'[19] He continues:

> There are other names which are different though one thing is meant by them (*allai d'eisi prosrēseis diaphoroi kata sēmainomenoy henos*), as 'arrow', 'shaft', 'dart'; for the thing discharged at the mark from the string of the bow is called by all these names. Again, the instrument which does as well as sails for propelling a vessel is called an 'oar', 'scull', 'rowing-sweep'.[20]

In contrast to Philo's vision of translation theory, the author of the prologue to *Ben Sira* claims that the translators (and he himself) were not able to produce an 'isodynamic' copy of the original words. We have to stress here that the grandson is quite aware of the topic he is tackling, because the term in this context, *isodynamein*, is a technical word of ancient grammar to denote synonymy whereas *diaphoros* is the antithetical term for designating semantic differences. Let me quote some examples taken from Polybius's *Histories:*

> Since, among those authors who were contemporaries of Aratus, Phylarchus, who on many points is at variance and in contradiction with him, is by some received as trustworthy, it will be useful or rather necessary for me, as I have chosen to rely on Aratus' narrative for the history

18 *De Vita Mosis* II: 38–39.
19 *De Plantatione* 150.
20 *De Plantatione* 152.

> of the Cleomenic war, not to leave the question of their relative credibility undiscussed, so that truth and falsehood in their writings may no longer be of equal authority (*hina mē to pseudos en tois syngrammasin isodynamoun apoleipōmen pros tēn alētheian*).[21]

Polybius charges Phylarcus (third century BCE) with partiality to Cleomenes and at the same time unfairness toward his contemporary Aratus. He speaks of falsehood and truth in their writings, which cannot be, for that very reason, of *equal* authority. The stridence of the contrast between opposing components, between historical 'truth' and 'partiality' (even falsehood), leads to the conclusion that *isodynamein* is semantically more than a minor matter in translating; rather, it can absolutely corrupt the original meaning. Another passage in the same work reads as follows: 'for an introductory summary is not only of equal value to a prologue but even of somewhat greater [value], while at the same time it occupies a surer position, as it forms an integral part of the work' (*tēs gar proektheseōs ou monon isodynamousēs (pros) tēn prographēn, alla kai pleiōn ti dynamenēs*).[22]

Polybius's text is of importance here because he is comparing two literary forms or genres: the introductory summary and the prologue. The prologue has the function of advertisement, or in Polybius's words, 'fixes the attention of those who wish to read the work and stimulates and encourages readers in their task,'[23] while the introductory summary gives the main events (in each Olympiad)[24] at the outset. The genres are not comparable. Another cogent example:

> The Aetolians, after some further observations about the actual situation, decided to refer the whole matter to Glabrio, committing themselves 'to the faith of the Romans, not knowing the exact meaning of the phrase, but deceived by the word 'faith' as if they would thus obtain more complete pardon. But with the Romans to commit oneself to the faith of a victor is equivalent to surrendering at discretion (*para* [*de*] *Rhōmaiois isodynamei to t'eis tēn pistin auton encheirisai kai to tēn epitropēn dounai peri autou tōi kratounti*).[25]

The Aetolians did not understand that to commit themselves to the 'faith' of the Romans did not mean to 'obtain a more complete pardon,' but was equivalent to 'surrendering at discretion.' This is linguistically a complete misunderstanding, to their disadvantage.

In all these examples, the expression 'to have equal force' means, linguistically speaking, the perfect semantic and meta-semantic consonance between two different things. 'To not have the same force' means, on the contrary, to be simply antonyms, and hence for translation praxis to be fully unsuitable, because it suggests the wrong

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21 Polybius, *Historiae* II, 56.2. All English translations are from *The Histories of Polybius* (London: Heinemann; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1922–1927).

22 *Historiae* XI, 1a.4 (fragment).

23 *Ibidem*.

24 As we know, the ancient Greeks followed the event of the Olympiad in indicating the date.

25 *Historiae* XX, 9.9–12.

meaning. 'To have equal force' means to be perfectly synonymous with something, whereas a 'different' word ('difference' = *diafora*) denotes a basic similarity, but by no means an equal force, as Philo's vision of the Septuagint claims.

To explain the meaning of *Ben Sira*, and partially contrasting with my approach to it, Dries De Crom[26] has analysed the use of *isodynamein* in Greek prose from the fourth to the first century BCE. He began with the meaning 'to sound equally loud'[27] for musical instruments, or in general of 'to have equal measure' in Timaeus,[28] or 'to have a same (logical) value' in Eudemus.[29] His interest is attracted by the use of *isodynamein* in Berossus's *Babyloniaca:*[30] 'The roots that grow in the marshes are edible. They are called *gongai*; and these roots are equivalent to barley.'[31] He states that there is no translation here, but rather a statement of equivalence between the roots and barley. I do not understand his further statement: 'he specifically states that *tas rhizas tautas* are equivalent to Greek *krithai* not the word *goggē*' (p. 105). Too much precision can generate confusion, for Berossus defines *goggai* as roots and 'these' are equalised to *krithai*. This of course is not a translation, but an equalisation between two different plants so that the reader can understand what is meant.

De Crom refuses the grammatical characterisation included in the first two instances I quoted from Polybius above because 'the concepts themselves are under scrutiny, not the words or their meaning' (p. 106). However, he accepts the last example, in which Polybius speaks of the 'fatal misunderstanding' (p. 107) between *pistis* and *deditio*, as appropriate. De Crom's position is similar to mine in that he avoids any reference to translation between languages and opts merely for a non-equivalence between words. The semantic use of *isodynamein* is also attested in Aristonicus[32] and of course by Philo of Alexandria, as I dealt with above.

To conclude on this aspect: De Crom is not against the semantic theory of synonymy between words as a premise for the perfect translation; he merely objects to my use of what he sees as inappropriate examples. He does not question the theory, but rather the instances that I quoted. The key aspect of this discussion is neither the concepts nor the words, and the circumstance that we are speaking of here is only of words and concepts and not of a language as a whole. That is an essential aspect if we consider Schorch's claim quoted above. Philo states that as a rule translations are imperfect because of the inappropriate synonymy of the words; only by a linguistic 'miracle' could the seventy-two translators be successful: 'so these writers, as it

26 Dries De Crom, "Translation equivalence in the Prologue to Greek ben Sirach," in *XIII Congress of the International Organization for Septuagint and Cognate Studies, Ljubljana 2007,* ed. Melvin K.M. Peters (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2008): 99–112.

27 Theophrastus fr. 89,7, ed. Wimmer. All the references are taken from the article by De Crom.

28 Fr. 207; ed. Marg (reference of De Crom).

29 Fr. 15; ed. Wehrli (reference of De Crom).

30 Fr. 1,2; ed. Jacoby, Frag. Gr. Hist. 680 (reference of De Crom).

31 All the translations are taken from the cited article by De Crom.

32 Sign. Od. In Od. 3,317; ed. Carnuth (reference of De Crom).

clearly appears, arrived at wording which corresponded with the matter, and alone, or better than any other, would bring out clearly what was meant.'[33]

If we read the Greek prologue to *Ben Sira* as a reaction to the widely held thesis of similarity, we can understand the author's polemical allusions. The reference to the translation of the Septuagint is therefore deliberately reverent, but not positive: the seventy-two translators did their best, but in Palestine and Egypt there is no such thing as the twice-revealed truth, for wisdom is a product of Palestine, so the Egyptian Jews must be content with imperfect copies of it. If we assume that the Greek translation of *Ben Sira* dates from the first century, then the translator is criticising and opposing those who are receptive towards the Greek Bible. Also, Philo is sceptical towards the concept of possibility *a priori* of a perfect translation. The exception of the Greek Bible confirms the rule.

But why is it impossible to translate words into other languages? There are two explanations: the first is the sceptical proof as an answer to the Stoic belief of meaning by nature and not convention, which we find in Sextus, and the second is the magical force which invests only (some) divine words and originates from them.

Sextus and the Non-Equipollence (*isologias*) of Nouns

Let us continue the discussion on translatability with Sextus Empiricus. In his 'Against the Professors', chapter VII, 'Against the Grammarians' (§§ 142–158), Sextus faces the question of nouns (*onomata*) and whether they are 'naturally' masculine, feminine, or neuter, or singular, dual, or plural:

> How could the Grammarians' stupidity decide whether names are due to nature or to convention (*fysei ē thesei*), or some to the one and some to the other, when even for those who have attained the summit of natural science it is no easy matter to settle because of the equipollence of the arguments on either side (*dia tas ekaterōthen isologias*)? Moreover, this view is confronted by a strong argument to which the Grammarians—even if they could [as men say] stand up against a bolt from a cross-bow—will be unable to discover any fitting reply.
>
> If nouns exist 'by nature' and are not significant in each instance by reason of convention, then all men ought to understand the speech of all, Greeks that of barbarians and barbarians that of Greeks and barbarians that of [other] barbarians (... *echrēn pantas pantōn akouein, Hellēnas Barbarōn kai Barbarous Hellēnōn kai Barbarous Barbarōn*). But this is not the case; therefore, nouns are not 'naturally' significant (*ouk ara fysei sēmainei ta onomata*). This, then, they will not assert.[34]

33 Philo, *De Vita Mosis* II: 39.

34 Sextus Empiricus, *Against the Professor*s, I:VII, §§ 144–145 (Loeb 1949, 86–87).

The debate on whether words and things are connected by nature or by convention is pre-Socratic and lasted at least into Late Antiquity.[35] The origin of the dispute did not primarily affect the linguistic aspect, but the concept of justice, as is proven by the fragment of Antiphon's 'On the Truth' in which he claims that Greeks and barbarians share an equal universal nature.[36] The interesting aspect of this discussion emphasised by Sextus is the argument about translation between languages or, better, the interchange between Greek and non-Greek (here *barbaroi*). According to him, nouns are not significant by nature and the proof is the diversity of speeches between Greek and non-Greek.

A similar concept is to be found in his 'Outlines of Pyrrhonism', II:214:

> Now they at once assert that the sciences of natural objects exist whereas those of conventional objects have no existence and that with reason. For science claims to be a thing that is firm and invariable, but the conventional objects are easily liable to change and variation, because their character is altered by the shifting of the conventions which depend upon ourselves. Since, then, the significance of names is based on convention and not on nature (for otherwise all men, barbarians as well as Greeks, would understand all the things signified by the terms, besides the fact that it is in our power at any time to point out and signify the objects by any other names we may choose), how would it be possible for a science capable of dividing a name into its significations to exist? Or how could Dialectic really be, as some imagine, a 'science of things which signify and are signified'?

Sextus is indirectly addressing the function of the dialectics as the science (*episteme*) of the signifier and signified, calling to mind 253d I-e2 of Plato's 'Sophist'.[37] The reference to the Platonic dialogue between the Stranger and Theaetetus is not understandable at first sight, but is clearly implicitly involved. Sextus introduces the Dialectic as 'the science of things which signify and are signified'[38] in the discussion of Being and Not-Being of natural and conventional objects.[39] The significance of names should be considered in the sphere of Being according to the dogmatists, and that is questionable because barbarians call the same object by other names and we can also call other objects with different names (an implicit allusion to syno-

35 Eugenio Coseriu and Bimal K. Matilal, "Der φύσει-θέσει-Streit: Are Words and Things Connected by Nature or by Convention?," in *Sprachphilosophie. Ein internationales Handbuch zeitgenössischer Forschung, 2. Halbband,* 2 vols., ed. Marcelo Dascal et al. (Berlin and New York: De Gruyter, 1996): 880–900.

36 See on this Rachel Barney, "The sophistic movement," in *A Companion to Ancient Philosophy,* eds. Marie Louise Gill and Pierre Pellegrin (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2006): 77–97, here 82–83.

37 See Alfonso Gómez-Lobo, "Plato's Description of Dialectic in the 'Sophist' 253 d I-e2," *Phronesis* 22 (1977): 29–47; C.D.C. Reeve, "Motion, Rest, and Dialectic in the Sophist," *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 67 (1985): 47–64.

38 ἢ πῶς ἐπιστήμη σημαινόντων τε καὶ σημαινομένων, ὡς οἵονταί τινες, ἡ διαλεκτικὴ δύναιτ' ἂν ὑπάρχειν.

39 Εὐθέως οὖν τὰς ἐπιστήμας τῶν φύσει φασὶν εἶναι, τῶν θέσει δὲ οὐδαμῶς.

nymy or to the arbitrariness of naming objects).[40] Ergo: the science of 'the division of names into significations' does not exist, because the nexus between signifier and signified is totally arbitrary, being not based on nature.[41]

We need to accentuate here that Sextus—in my opinion—is not emphasising the impossibility of equipollence for any language at all, but only of nouns, concepts, etc. Theories of ancient language deal with terms and their semantic value and not with language as a whole. This is more important the more we consider that the Greek estimation of Barbarian culture and education was very low.[42] However, I do not think that the low education of the non-Greeks is the decisive argument against the Stoic doctrine. The Stoics distinguished between[43] 1) vocal sound, the thing signifying (*semainon*), 2) a body (external object), thing designated by the vocal sound, and 3) the thing signified (*semainomenon*). In 'Against the Logicians' II 12, Sextus states that the last of these is incorporeal and that 'which we apprehend as existing in dependence on our intellect, whereas the barbarians although hearing the sound do not understand it; and the thing existing is the external real object.'[44] This is an interesting aspect which introduces the following paragraph: the belief in the magical conception of the sound of (magical or sacred) words which do work onto the audience. The agency of the word is independent from the meaning. That is also a reason why these words cannot be translated, and that is the topic of the next paragraph.

40 πάντες γὰρ ἂν συνίεσαν πάντα τὰ ὑπὸ τῶν φωνῶν σημαινόμενα, ὁμοίως Ἕλληνές τε καὶ βάρβαροι, πρὸς τῷ καὶ ἐφ' ἡμῖν εἶναι τὰ σημαινόμενα οἷς ἂν βουλώμεθα ὀνόμασιν ἑτέροις ἀεὶ δηλοῦν τε καὶ σημαίνειν.

41 For a very similar argument, see Sextus, *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, III, 267–68: 'Nor, in fact, is anything taught by speech. For speech either signifies something or signifies nothing. But if it signifies nothing, neither will it be capable of teaching anything. And if it signifies something, it does so either by nature or by convention. But it is not significant by nature because all men do not understand all when they hear them, as is the case with Greeks hearing barbarians talk or barbarians hearing Greeks.'

42 See Robert J. Hankinson, *The Sceptics. The Arguments of the Philosophers* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 34; but see also Ingomar Weiler, "Greek and Non-Greek World in the Archaic Period," *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies* 9.1 (1968): 24 (for the ancient period). In Sextus's period, the situation did not change and the Jewish Bible was completely unknown. On this aspect, see my forthcoming book *Alienated Wisdom. Jewish Philosophy between History, Myth and Scepticism* (forthcoming 2017; probably De Gruyter) and the literature quoted there in the first chapter (*sapientia capta*).

43 Here I am following Jacques Brunschwig, "Stoic Metaphysics," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Stoics*, ed. Brad Inwood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003): 217.

44 Loeb's translation; Brunschwig's translation in "Stoic Metaphysics," 217, is: 'we grasp it in exchange [for the sound?] as subsisting along with our thought, whereas the barbarians [i.e., non-Greek speakers] do not understand it, although hearing the sound.'

The Untranslatability of (Some) Magical Words

According to the *Corpus Hermeticum* XVI:1–2,[45] Asclepius called upon King Ammon to store the hermetic writings and did not permit any translations into Greek. He instructed that the contents of the revelation should be explained in the form in which they were revealed. The structure and external shape of the book (*ē syntaxis*) should be simple and understandable, while the meaning should be confused and concealed (*asafēs … kai kekrymmenon ton noun tōn logōn*). If the Greeks were to try to translate 'our language' into theirs, the words would be more confused. 'Only in one's own language does the expression retain the meaning of the words. For the characteristic sound and the force of the Egyptian name possess the energy of their meaning.'[46] In contrast to the Greek language, the Egyptian words are not simply vocabulary items, but 'sounds filled with energetic effect' (*ēmeis de hou logois chrōmetha alla phōnais mestais tōn ergōn*).

The Neoplatonic philosopher Iamblichus supported the idea of the existence of sacred languages whose 'names' cannot be translated:

> If one translates the names, they do not keep the same meaning. For among every people, there are certain concepts which are impossible to be rendered into the language of another people. On the contrary, if one translates these names, they do not keep the same force in the translated texts (*epeita kan hei oion te auta methermēneuein alla tēn ge dynamin ouketi phylattei tēn autēn*).[47]

Clemens of Alexandria followed Iamblichus's onomastic theology when he postulated the existence of 'barbarian' peoples and thus languages (*hai prōtai kai genikai dialektoi barbaroi men*) whose words were more original and more primal (*physei de ta onomata echousin*), which was why their prayers were more effective than those of others. This was also the opinion of Origen in his discussion with Celsus when speaking of the 'nature of the effective names' (*physin onomatōn energōn*). In this context, he wrote:

> If then, we shall be able to establish, in reference to the preceding statement, the nature of powerful names, some of which are used by the learned amongst the Egyptians, or by the Magi among the Persians, and by the Indian philosophers called Brahmans, or by the Samanaeans, and others in different countries; and shall be able to make out that the so-called magic is not, as the followers of Epicurus and Aristotle suppose, an altogether uncertain thing, but is, as those skilled in it prove, a

45 *Corpus Hermeticum*, 2 vols., ed. Arthur D. Nock, transl. André-Jean Festugière (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1945).

46 *Corpus Hermeticum* XVI:2.

47 *Iamblichi de Mysteriis Liber 5*, ed. Gustav Parthey (Berlin: Nicolai, 1857, reprint Amsterdam: Hakkert, 1965); Eric R. Dodds, *The Greek and the Irrational*, 3rd edition (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1959): 293. See Peter Crome, *Symbol und Unzulänglichkeit der Sprache. Jamblichos. Plotin. Porphyrios. Proklos* (Munich: Fink, 1966): 56ff.; Maurus Hirschle, *Sprachphilosophie und Namenmagie im Neuplatonismus: mit einem Exkurs zu "Demokrit" B 142* (Meisenheim am Glan: Hain, 1979): 45–48.

> consistent system, having words which are known to exceedingly few; then we say that the name Sabaoth, and Adonai, and the other names treated with so much reverence among the Hebrews, are not applicable to any ordinary created things, but belong to a secret theology which refers to the Framer of all things. These names, accordingly, when pronounced with that attendant train of circumstances which is appropriate to their nature, are possessed of great power; and other names, again, current in the Egyptian tongue, are efficacious against certain demons who can only do certain things; and other names in the Persian language have corresponding power over other spirits; and so on in every individual nation, for different purposes.[48]

Origen's comments on holy names are clearly influenced by ancient theories of the magic of the word as a vessel containing a force that cannot be translated and transmitted to other languages. That is the reason the words Sabaoth, Adonai, Amen, and Hallelujah are preserved in Christian liturgy. Jerome takes a very similar position in his letter to Pammachius entitled 'On the Best Method of Translating' (*De optimo genere interpretandi*). He notes:

> For I myself not only admit but freely proclaim that in translating from the Greek (except in the case of the holy scriptures where even the order of the words is a mystery), I render sense for sense and not word for word.[49]

The words in brackets are treacherous: 'absque scripturis sanctis ubi et verborum ordo mysterium est.' Here the ascetic monk of Bethlehem contradicts himself in the same letter in which he attacks Aquila's translation because of his literalism in slavishly following the biblical text.[50] If the order of the words is a mystery, how can they be translated if not by an exacting literalism? Most probably, a new tendency was slowly gaining authority and influence at this time in the Christian world, a theory which would become the moving force for the acceptance of the Kabbalah in the late Middle Ages and Renaissance: the sacred character of the Hebrew language, based in Judaism on the theological conviction that God spoke to Adam in the *lešon ha-qodeš*.

A glance at the semantic development of the expression *lešon ha-qodeš* suggests that the special emphasis on the Hebrew language as a sacred tongue was not possible until a certain point in Jewish history: when this language was no longer a spoken ver-

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48 *Contra Celsum* 1:24; *Origène contre Celse*, vol. 1: 136–138; English translation by *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, transl. of the writings of the Fathers down to A. D. 325, eds. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe (Edinburgh: T&T Clark; Grand Rapids, Michigan: W.M.B. Eerdmans, 1956). See Hans-Dieter Betz, "The Formation of Authoritative Tradition in the Greek Magical Papyri," *Jewish and Christian Self-Definition*, vol. 3: *Self-Definition in the Greek-Roman Papyri*, eds. Ben F. Meyer and E. P. Sander (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982): 162; Naomi Janowitz, "Theories of Divine Names in Origen and Pseudo-Dionysus," *History of Religion* 30 (1991): 359–372.

49 *Epistula LVII ad Pammachium*, 5: 'Ego enim non solum fateor, sed libera voce profiteor, me in interpretatione Graecorum, absque Scripturis sanctis, ubi et verborum ordo mysterium est, non verbum e verbo, sed sensum exprimere de sensu.'

50 *Epistula LVII ad Pammachium*, 11: 'Aquila autem proselytus et contentiosus interpretes, qui non solum verba, sed etymologia verborum transferre conatus est, iure proicitur a nobis.'

nacular, and was acknowledged only for its liturgical role. The expression *lešon haqodeš*, or *hiera glotta* with reference to Hebrew, is unknown in either Jewish-Hellenistic literature or the New Testament. However, it does appear in Mishnah, *Soṭah* 7:2–4.[51] In this passage, a distinction is made between the biblical *Parašat Soṭah*, which should be recited in all languages, and other *parašot* listed there, which must be recited only in the holy language.[52] In this case, the understanding of the text does not have priority, but rather the precise rendition of its letters. It is difficult to ascertain whether the theurgy of the spoken word played a role in this ruling or whether it was only due to exegetical reasons, according to the discursive principle *ko tomar* 'so you have to say.' Mekhilta, *Baḥodeš* 2 illustrates this principle: 'You have to recite in this way, in the holy language, in the same order, in the same situation, in the same way, without adding and without subtracting something.'

The problem of the Midrash is in adapting these *parašot* to other legal and exegetical cases or situations. The obvious intention is to consider these texts as legally unique, i. e., applicable only to these cases. There is no doubt that at a certain time in connection with the rabbinic story, theurgic elements were introduced to explain the nature of the Hebrew language, which is also interconnected with the very creation of the world.

How can one reconcile the theurgic value of the Hebrew with the rather free method which the rabbis used in dealing with the biblical text? One answer is to consider the crucial difference between the liturgical and non-liturgical uses of Hebrew. Only the liturgical use, which can be fulfilled solely under special conditions, has certain theurgic consequences; one need only recall the sacerdotal benediction of Yom Kippur. More than anything else, this pertains to the divine name. The discussion about a 'permitted use' of the Jewish name of God, the *tetragrammaton*, dates back to the rabbinic period. At that time, the halakhic importance of God's name was emphasised in connection with written material to be concealed in the Genizah or to be saved from fire. We read in Midrash *Sifre Numeri* 16:

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51 The question of when this expression appears is this subject of lively discussion among modern scholars. Often, the two scattered records in Qumran and Jubilees are—in my eyes—overemphasised so that the term is considered to be of a very early date. As one protagonist of this position, I wish to refer to my friend and colleague Stefan Schorch, who dates the prologue to *Ben Sira* to the second century BCE. In my view, there are neologisms and particular expressions from the first century CE which contradict this theory. Moreover, the dating of the emergence of the term says nearly nothing about its conceptual use. The early rabbinic records of it indicate that first it was a more technical term which denoted the language of the Temple. See Stefan Schorch, "The Pre-eminence of the Hebrew Language and the Emerging Concept of the 'Ideal Text' in Late Temple Judaism," in *Studies in the Book of Ben Sira: Papers of the Third International Conference on the Deuterocanonical Books, Pápa, Ungarn, 2006*, eds. Gèza G. Xeravits and Józef Zsengellér (Leiden: Brill, 2008): 43–54; Avigdor Shinan, "*Lishan bet qudsha*" [Hebrew], *Bet Miqra* 66 (1976): 472–474.

52 Deuteronomy 26:3–10; 25:7–9; 27:15–26; Numbers 24–26; Deuteronomy 17:14–20; 21:7 et seq.; 20:2–7.

> Do we not find here the use (of the hermeneutic rule) of the *qal va-ḥomer?*, regarding the reconciliation of a man and his wife, if God says: The book which was written in holiness is to be erased by water, *a maiori* the books of the Minim should be removed from the world because they cause hostility, hatred, jealousy and war.
>
> R. Yishma'el (says): the books of the *minim:* What about them? The name of God has to be cut out and the rest must be burnt. R. 'Aqiva says: They are to be completely burnt because they have not been written in holiness.[53]

The status of the name was entirely altered because it was not written according to the biblical and rabbinic laws of purity. There is no doubt that the redactor of *Sifre* modernised the Halakhah from Numbers 5 by mentioning the similarity between the action of a priest writing curses on the parchment or book and the rabbinic laws about writing a Torah scroll which 'renders the hands impure.' This comparison would be incomprehensible if we did not bear in mind that writing on parchment was also considered the precondition for the theurgic value of a written text. Only *tefillin* or *mezuzot*, written according to the Halakhah, have the power to protect (Mishnah, *Megillah* 1:8). It is not the characters of the *tetragrammaton* and other divine names which have theurgic energy, but only those written according to the Halakhah of purity.

We could also note at this point a certain anti-theurgic tendency in rabbinic Judaism: the mere characters of the *tetragrammaton* have no intrinsic power *per se*. Only if produced in terms of rules for what is permitted can the text be considered theurgic in its effect. If compared to the theurgic conception of the hermeneutic tradition of Iamblichus, Clemens, and Origen, we can conclude that the rabbis did not like to let the text act beyond its original authority. Moreover, the power of the divine name cannot act without a rabbinic premise (or authority). A sacramental *ex opere operato* cannot exist if the circumstances in which this happens are not permitted by the Halakhah, as of course decided by rabbinic academies.

The conception of the sacral dimension of the entire Hebrew language emerged in the Amoraic era, above all in Babylonia, as in Babylonian Talmud, *Sanhedrin* 21b:

> Mar Zutra, or, as some say, Mar 'Ukba said: Originally the Torah was given to Israel in Hebrew characters and in the sacred language (בתחילה ניתנה תורה לישראל בכתב עברי ולשון הקודש); later, in the times of Ezra, the Torah was given in *aššurit* script and Aramaic language (וחזר וניתנה להם בימי עזרא בכתב אשורית ולשון ארמית). [Finally], they selected for Israel the *aššurit* script and Hebrew language (ביררו להן לישראל כתב אשורית ולשון הקודש), leaving the Hebrew characters and Aramaic language for the *hedyoṭot* (והניחו להדיוטות כתב עברית ולשון ארמי). Who are meant by the *hedyoṭot*?—R. Ḥisda answers: The Cutheans. And what is meant by 'Hebrew characters'?—R. Ḥisda said: The *libuna'ah* script.

This text is very important because it indicates a period of time during which the text of the Torah was transmitted only in square Hebrew characters (*aššurit*). The Aramaic

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53 [Chaim] Saul Horovitz, *Siphre d'be Rab* (Leipzig: Fock, 1917), 21. On this Halakhah and its parallels, see Johann Maier, *Jüdische Auseinandersetzung mit dem Christentum in der Antike* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1982), 26–33 and *passim*.

language and Hebrew script are attributed to the tradition of the Samaritans. The text supports the opinion that the language of the rabbinic tradition is Hebrew and not Aramaic. Another important conclusion is that *lešon ha-qodeš* is the characterisation of the whole Torah as sacred work as is stated in Babylonian Talmud, *Eruvin* 13a:

> Did not Rab Judah in fact state in the name of Samuel who had it from R. Meir: When I was studying under R. Akiba I used to put vitriol into my ink and he told me nothing [against it], but when I subsequently came to R. Ishmael the latter said to me, 'My son, what is your occupation?' I told him, 'I am a scribe', and he said to me, 'Be meticulous in your work, for your occupation is a sacred one; should you perchance omit or add one single letter, you would thereby destroy all the universe.'

Comparing this text with other rabbinic discussions, we can observe that the process of sacralisation of Hebrew probably came to its apex in Babylonia, as we read in, for example, Tosefta, *Megillah* 4:41:

> Rabbi Yehudah says: Whoever translates a biblical verse as it reads, is a liar. Whoever adds something, is a blasphemer. It is not allowed to the translator (*meturgeman*) who is before his Sage to subtract or add or change something except if he is his father or Rav.

Changes in the (oral) transmission/translation of the Torah are allowed only in the case that the Rabbis permitted them. There is no problem of translation, but only of understanding which is dependent on the rabbinic school. The Babylonian text does not leave any space for doubt that the Torah *per se* is holy and therefore unchangeable, while the meaning of the text does not primarily depend on the wording but on the rabbi who is explaining it.

The Untranslatability of Words: *isologia* and *isodynamis*

The concept of the untranslatability of languages would lead to a dogmatic view among Jewish-Hellenistic and earlier rabbinic thinkers that does not do justice to their discussion on linguistics. All of them deal only and primarily with words, not with languages as a whole. In other words, the sentence 'the holy language cannot be translated as such, or as a whole' would be a dogmatic view because it would be claiming something *a priori* or axiomatically. The grandson of Ben Sira argues that some words do not have the same force in the original and translated terms. He does not tell us which words are affected by this reduction of meaning or force and by no means what is the reason for this.

Also, for Philo of Alexandria, a translation into Greek poses some difficulty because of the lack of perceived synonymy between words. Only the seventy-two translators of the Torah could make a perfect copy of the original; it was only something extraordinary which went beyond human perception and practises of linguistic comparison. Rabbinic Judaism does not explain why it refuses a written translation of the

Torah, and I suspect the liturgical (and magical) use of the written Torah as a plausible reason. Yet, for rabbinic Judaism, translation is not impossible *per se*, but only in the case where it is written, which can arrogate the substitution of the original, as I have tried to explain elsewhere.[54] In this case, the written word demands a place of uniqueness which cannot be substituted.

However, the question of why the words of a language cannot be perfectly translated remains. I have tried to exemplify this with two points of view: the linguistic scepticism of Sextus and the magical theory of the untranslatability of precise words.

Sextus Empiricus negates the translatability of 'Barbarian' into 'Greek' and vice versa, because words are not significant by nature but by convention. A perfect translation implies the perfect *isologia* between words, which, he argues, is negated by the experience:

> If nouns exist 'by nature' and are not significant in each instance by reason of convention, then all men ought to understand the speech of all, Greeks that of barbarians and barbarians that of Greeks and barbarians that of (other) barbarians. But this is not the case; therefore, nouns are not 'naturally' significant.[55]

The 'convention', which is mostly acerbic criticism against dogmatism, does not necessarily mean that people cannot understand each other, only that this understanding is not ruled by nature and therefore cannot be a perfect synonymy—I would argue—because it may change according to time, space, and the people involved.

A second explanation held by Neoplatonist writers negates the translatability of language, but only of certain 'magical' names, as Origen claims in the above-quoted text: 'These names, accordingly, when pronounced with that attendant train of circumstances which is appropriate to their nature, are possessed of great power.'[56]

The most curious thing about both explanations of ancient theories of untranslatability is the usage of 'by nature'. Sextus negates the equal meaning or force of names because it is produced by convention, not by nature. In contrast, the Neoplatonists negate the equal force because the names are created by nature. Both of them contradict the possibility of perfect communication between individuals. This is indeed a real sceptical point of view.

54 See Veltri, *Alienated Wisdom*, chapter 1.

55 Sextus Empiricus, *Against Professors*, I:VII, §§ 144–145 (Loeb 1949, 86–87).

56 *Contra Celsum* 1:24; *Origène contre Celse*, vol. 1: 136–138.

Bill Rebiger

The Early Opponents of the Kabbalah and the Role of Sceptical Argumentations: An Outline[1]

Introduction

Initiated by Gershom Scholem, academic research on Kabbalah has resulted in numerous studies, editions, and articles. Today, there is not only investigation into the major trends in Jewish mysticism, but also into minor branches and figures. The subtle irony of the title 'Major trends in Jewish Mysticism'[2] deals with the historiographical fact that Jewish mysticism was formerly considered a minor trend in Judaism. Meanwhile, the formerly minor trend of Jewish mysticism has been acknowledged as a major trend in Judaism. Nowadays, the welcome state of research in Jewish mysticism is so rich and differentiated that there is even focus on minor trends within this major trend.[3]

The emergence of the Kabbalah as a historical phenomenon in the High Middle Ages, that is, establishing many authors, producing numerous texts and creating a vibrant discourse,[4] evoked much less discussion, polemic, and criticism, let alone a counter-discourse, as it probably would be expected, at least from a modern, enlightened perspective.[5] The scholarly view of the Kabbalah tends to emphasise the

1 This first presentation of my research carried out at the Maimonides Centre for Advanced Studies at the University of Hamburg is deeply indebted to many talks and discussions with my colleagues there and our visiting fellows. I would especially like to thank Giuseppe Veltri, Racheli Haliva, and Patrick Koch.

2 Gershom Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (New York: Schocken Books, 1946; reprinted, New York: Schocken Books, 1995).

3 Cf. the overviews of scholarship on Jewish Mysticism and Kabbalah in the twentieth century presented in Peter Schäfer and Joseph Dan, eds., *Gershom Scholem's Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism, 50 Years After: Proceedings of the Sixth International Conference on the History of Jewish Mysticism* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1993); Moshe Idel, "Academic Studies of Kabbalah in Israel: 1923–1998: A Short Survey," *Studia Judaica* 8 (1999): 91–114; Peter Schäfer, "Jewish Mysticism in the Twentieth Century," in *Jewish Studies at the Turn of the Twentieth Century: Proceedings of the 6th EAJS Congress, Toledo, July 1998*, eds. J. Targarona Borrás and A. Sáenz-Badillos, vol. 1 (Leiden: Brill, 1999): 3–18; Moshe Idel, "Kabbalah Studies," *Encyclopaedia Judaica, second edition*, eds. Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik, vol. 11 (Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2007): 681–692; Daniel Abrams, *Kabbalistic Manuscripts and Textual Theory: Methodologies of Textual Scholarship and Editorial Practice in the Study of Jewish Mysticism* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press and Los Angeles: Cherub Press, 2010).

4 Cf. Kocku von Stuckrad, "Discursive Study of Religion: From States of the Mind to Communication and Action," *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 15 (2003): 255–271.

5 Cf. Gershom Scholem, *Kabbalah* (Jerusalem: Keter, 1988), 190: between 1500 to 1800 'an open polemical attack on the Kabbalah was practically unheard of'; Moshe Idel, *Kabbalah. New Perspectives* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press 1988): 250–251: 'It is a striking fact, which has curiously

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innovative aspect of kabbalistic ideas and motifs as well as the strange and fantastic character of their images and symbols. However, in their historical context, this innovation and strangeness were apparently not received as such by most of their contemporaries and recipients.[6] In contrast, there is much more evidence of a polemical and disclaiming literature against Christians[7] or Maimonideans[8] in this period.[9] According to Moshe Idel, two factors were responsible for the surprisingly small number of textual polemics and attacks on Kabbalah in the period of its emergence. Firstly, the study of Kabbalah was mostly limited to small circles such as families or teacher-student relationships. While the philosophy of Maimonides was always inextricably connected with his personality, the Kabbalah was differentiated in various groups led by broadly accepted and well-established scholars and powerful communal leaders. Secondly, and Idel stresses the greater importance of this point, in contrast to the teachings of Maimonides, many kabbalistic interpretations and also particularly its innovations were accepted as being more in continuity than in a sharp-cut rupture with older rabbinic traditions.[10] Accordingly, many kabbalists were also rabbinic and halakhic authorities. The self-image of the kabbalists—namely, that they presented merely Kabbalah, that is, a tradition of older secrets transmitted over a long period from generation to generation—was mostly undisputed. Both sides, the kabbalistic and the traditional rabbinic scholars, were agreed and shared the same discourse when they attacked the rational philosophers as their mutual

remained largely unnoticed by Kabbalah scholarship that the emergence of major Kabbalistic schools did not stir significant controversies in the Jewish milieus in which they arose.'

6 Cf. Hartley Lachter, "The Politics of Secrets: Thirteenth-Century Kabbalah in Context," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 101.4 (2011): 505: 'For example, how are we to account for the strikingly odd fact that the radical and bold imagery found in zoharic literature was quickly regarded by some Jewish readers not only as an authentic and legitimate Jewish tradition but the secret core of Judaism itself?'

7 Cf. Hanne Trautner-Kromann, *Shield and Sword. Jewish Polemics against Christianity and the Christians in France and Spain from 1100–1500* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1993); Daniel J. Lasker, *Jewish Philosophical Polemics Against Christianity in the Middle Ages* (Oxford and Portland, Oregon: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2007).

8 Cf. Jacob I. Dienstag, "The *Moreh Nevukhim* Controversy—An Annotated Bibliography," in *Abraham Maimonides' "Wars of the Lord" and the Maimonidean Controversy*, ed. F. Rosner (Haifa: The Maimonides Research Institute, 2000): 154–200; Daniel Jeremy Silver, *Maimonidean Criticism and the Maimonidean Controversy 1180–1240* (Leiden: Brill, 1965); Wolfram Drews, "Medieval Controversies about Maimonidean Teachings," in *Moses Maimonides (1138–1204): His Religious, Scientific, and Philosophical Wirkungsgeschichte in Different Cultural Contexts*, eds. Görge K. Hasselhoff and Otfried Fraisse (Würzburg: Ergon 2004): 113–135.

9 Cf. Idel, *Kabbalah*, 251: 'The paucity of criticism [of Kabbalah] is surprising when compared to a parallel phenomenon, close both in time and location to the rise of Kabbalah: the attitude toward Maimonides' philosophy'; Alon Goshen-Gottstein, "The Triune and the Decaune God: Christianity and Kabbalah as Objects of Jewish Polemics with Special Reference to Meir ben Simeon of Narbonne's Milhemet Mitzva," in *Religious Polemics in Context*, eds. Theo L. Hettema and Arie van der Kooij (Assen: Royal Van Gorcum, 2004): 172: 'Given how extensive the Jewish-Christian debate was, it is striking to note how little anti-Kabbalistic polemics we possess.'

10 See Idel, *Kabbalah*, 251–2; cf. Lachter, "Politics of Secrets," 505.

enemy. The most obvious example of this discursive coalition can be seen in the controversies about the philosophy of Maimonides, as may be seen below.

The main claims of the kabbalists concern various fields including epistemology, theology, cosmology, angelology, ethics, the duties of religious practitioners, the meaning of human actions, and so on. Thus, kabbalistic statements focus on, for instance, the knowledge of the inner life of the godhead, the emanation of God's essence to the earthly realm, the concept of the transmigration of the soul, the meaning of kabbalistic principles for halakhic decision-making,[11] the theurgic power of the fulfillment of the *miṣwot*, that is, the commandments, and the alleged 'real' meaning of the traditional texts, especially the Bible and the rabbinic *aggadot*. Hence, any opposition to Kabbalah comes from the different perspectives of different experts in the fields of rational philosophy, halakhic decision-making, biblical exegesis and rabbinic literature. Furthermore, criticism of specific kabbalistic claims was also formulated inside the kabbalistic camp. In other words, the historical development of the Kabbalah meant that there were already competing figures, schools and traditions by the second generation of known kabbalists.

However, since from the very beginning the Kabbalah was neither totally undisputed nor flourishing without any opposition,[12] it is rather surprising that no monograph devoted exclusively to the opponents of the Kabbalah and the history of this opposition has been published so far.[13] Of course, several articles or book chapters have already been written on specific figures and texts, and I am gratefully relying on these contributions,[14] but nevertheless, a comprehensive overview and discussion of these phenomena in the period from the emergence of the Kabbalah until the seventeenth century when Leon Modena (1571–1648) composed his *Ari Nohem* ('Roaring Lion') is still to be written. Concerning this desideratum, I would like to initiate this research focus in the scholarly world by presenting a couple of case studies concerning the early opponents of the Kabbalah. The purpose of my research project is less to write a comprehensive history of the early opponents of the Kabbalah and

11 Cf. Scholem, *Kabbalah*, 191–193; Meir Benayahu, "Kabbalah and Halakhah—A Confrontation" [in Hebrew], in *Daat. A Journal of Jewish Philosophy and Kabbalah* 5 (1980): 61–115; Jacob Katz, *Halakhah and Kabbalah: Studies in the History of Jewish Religion, Its Various Faces and Social Relevance* [in Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1986); Elliot R. Wolfson, "Mystical Rationalisation of the Commandments in the Prophetic Kabbalah of Abraham Abulafia," in *Perspectives on Jewish Thought and Mysticism*, eds. Alfred Ivry, Allan Arkush and Elliot R. Wolfson (Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1998): 311–360; Saverio Campanini, "Talmudisten versus Kabbalisten? Der Streit um die Hermeneutik der Gebote im mittelalterlichen Judentum," in *Das Gesetz—the Law—la loi*, eds. Andreas Speer and Guy Guldentops (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014): 263–277.

12 Cf. Scholem, *Kabbalah*, 68: 'unceasing opposition of some individuals.'

13 Cf. Idel, *Kabbalah*, 2: 'No elaborate and detailed survey of the nature and history of this religious movement is known, however, until the period of the Renaissance'; Abrams, *Kabbalistic Manuscripts*, 618: 'A related and extremely interesting project would be a volume that collects anti-kabbalistic polemics [...].'

14 See the references given in the footnotes throughout this article.

more to focus on the sceptical, anti-sceptical, and non-sceptical modes or strategies of argumentation of selected authors and texts in specific discourses. In the case studies, the relevant texts will be translated into English and the claims and arguments will be studied carefully. However, another purpose of my research is the reconstruction of the historical context and the specific discourse in which these authors were engaged. Thus, the focus will not only be the critical discussion of the various figures, circles and schools of the Kabbalah as well as their corresponding claims and arguments, but also the kabbalistic reaction to this criticism. A fairly long-term agenda of this research proposal also includes more minor and less-known figures and texts, as well as more evidence from the manuscript tradition.

In the following outline of my research proposal, various sources providing evidence of the early opposition to the Kabbalah will be briefly surveyed. Subsequently, the systematic importance of several philosophical arguments formulated by Maimonides for any criticism of Kabbalah and, more generally, the relationship between philosophy and Kabbalah will be discussed. Finally, some first thoughts concerning the role of sceptical arguments in the opposition to the Kabbalah will be presented.

Evidence of Opposition to the Kabbalah: The Sources

There is some evidence of opposition to the Kabbalah found in a relatively small number of texts written mostly by known authors from the thirteenth to the seventeenth century. Here follows a very brief survey of the sources I am familiar with so far, although this list is certainly incomplete.[15] When the Kabbalah started to emerge in Provence, its first known opponent appeared almost immediately: the talmudist Meir ben Simon ha-Meʿili of Narbonne, who was a contemporary of the first known kabbalistic author, Isaac the Blind, in the first half of the thirteenth century. In an epistle included in the end of his anti-Christian polemical work *Milḥemet Miṣwah* ('War by Commandment') written around 1230–35, he criticised the Kabbalah and, in addition, made what was probably the very first reference to the supposed first known kabbalistic book, the *Sefer ha-Bahir* ('Book of the Brightness'), attributed pseudepigraphically to Rabbi Nehunya ben HaKanah.[16] In fact, Meir ben Simon to-

15 For additional evidence see Jordan S. Penkower, *The Dates of Composition of The Zohar and The Book Bahir. The History of Biblical Vocalization and Accentuation as a Tool for Dating Kabbalistic Works* [in Hebrew] (Los Angeles: Cherub Press, 2010): 64–66.

16 This passage was translated by Gershom Scholem, *Origins of the Kabbalah*, trans. Allan Arkush (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society and Princeton University Press, 1990), 398–400. The Hebrew text is found in MS Parma de Rossi 155 (2749), fol. 230b, and was published in a slightly abridged form by Gershom Scholem, "Teʻudah ḥadašah le-rešit ha-qabbalah" [Hebrew], in *Sefer Bialik*, ed. Yaʿakov Fikhman (Tel Aviv: Hoṣa'at va'ad ha-yovel uve-hištatfut hoṣa'at omanut, 1934): 146–150, here 146–149, reprinted in Gershom Scholem, *Studies in Kabbalah*, ed. Yosef ben Shelomo, vol. 1 (Tel Aviv: 'Am 'Oved, 1998): 7–38; cf. furthermore Heinrich Gross, "Meïr b. Simon und seine Schrift Milchemeth Mizwa," *Monatsschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums* 30

gether with his father-in-law, the talmudist Meshullam ben Moses of Bèziers, not only condemned but also expelled the kabbalists from Languedoc, where Kabbalah emerged first.[17]

Not surprisingly, the main opposition to the Kabbalah was formed by philosophers who belonged to the Aristotelian–Maimonidean tradition. In particular, several Jewish Averroists contributed polemics against the Kabbalah in their works. Chronologically, the first was the physician, philosopher, and translator Jacob ben Abba Mari ben Simson Anatoli (ca. 1194–1256), who, in a small passage in the introduction of his *Malmad ha-Talmidim* ('Teacher of the Disciples' or 'Goad to the Students'), mentioned the 'Account of the Chariot' and those scholars who combined this topic with the names of God. This verdict is probably also directed against kabbalists whom he mentioned some lines earlier.[18] In the second half of the thirteenth century, Isaac Albalag wrote a few lines against kabbalists as esotericists in his commentary on the Hebrew version of Al-Ghazali's 'Intentions of the Philosophers' (*Kawwanot ha-Filosofim*), entitled *Sefer Tiqqun ha-De'ot* ('Book of the Rectifying of the Doctrines').[19] Next came Isaac ben Joseph ibn Polqar (second half of thirteenth century—ca. 1330) who devoted a passage in the fourth chapter to the criticism of Kabbalah in his polemical work *'Ezer ha-Dat* ('In Support of the Religion').[20] The physician, philosopher, and exegete Moses Narboni (before 1300–after 1362) criticised Kabbalah in his commentary on Maimonides' 'Guide'.[21] In the first half of the fifteenth century, this commentary was studied in a circle of Jewish scholars in Prague, among them Rabbi Menahem bar Jacob Shalem, who harshly attacked the kabbalists for not using their intellect.[22] The philosopher Samuel ibn Seneh Zarza (second half of the fourteenth

(1881): 295–305, 444–452, 554–569; Adolf Neubauer, "The Bahir and the Zohar," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 4 (1892): 357–360; Goshen-Gottstein, "The Triune and the Decaune God," 165–200.

17 Cf. Gregg Stern, *Philosophy and Rabbinic Culture. Jewish Interpretation and Controversy in Medieval Languedoc* (London: Routledge, 2009): 2–3.

18 See Jacob ben Abba Mari ben Simson Anatoli, *Malmad ha-Talmidim* [Hebrew], ed. L. Silbermann (Lyck, Prussia: Ḥevrat Meqitze Nirdamim, 1866): introduction, 6a.

19 See Isaac Albalag, *Sefer Tiqqun Ha-De'ot* [Hebrew], ed. Georges Vajda, (Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1973), 38; cf. Colette Sirat, *A History of Jewish Philosophy in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985): 238–243.

20 See Isaac Polqar, *Ezer HaDat. A Defense of Judaism*, ed. Jacob S. Levinger (Tel Aviv: The Chaim Rosenberg School of Jewish Studies, 1984); cf. Carlos del Valle, "La critique de la Qabbale chez Isaac ibn Polgar," in *Expérience et écriture mystique dans les religions du livre*, eds. Paul B. Fenton and Roland Goetschel (Leiden: Brill, 2000): 131–141; Racheli Halevi, *Isaac Polqar—A Jewish Philosopher or a Philosopher and a Jew? A Study of the Relationship between Philosophy and Religion in Isaac Polqar's ʿEzer ha-Dat [In Support of the Religion] and Teshuvat Apikoros [A Response to the Heretic]* (typescript, PhD McGill, Montreal, 2015).

21 Cf. Moshe Idel, *Studies in Ecstatic Kabbalah* (Albany: State University of New York Press): 68, n. 2.

22 Cf. Ephraim Kupfer, "Concerning the Cultural Image of German Jewry and its Rabbis in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries" [in Hebrew], *Tarbiz* 42 (1972–73): 123–124; Tamás Visi, *On the Peripheries of Ashkenaz: Medieval Jewish Philosophers in Normandy and in the Czech Lands from the Twelfth to the Fifteenth Century* (Olomouc, 2011), 223–228.

century) wrote a passage against the authenticity of the kabbalistic classic *Sefer ha-Zohar* ('Book of the Splendour') in his commentary on the Pentateuch entitled *Sefer Meqor Ḥayyim* ('Book of the Source of Life').[23] The physician and Aristotelian philosopher Judah Messer Leon (ca. 1420/25–ca. 1498) also criticised several kabbalistic claims.[24] In 1466, a controversy about the veracity of the transmigration of the soul took place in the Cretan community of Candia, involving the Aristotelian philosopher and Rabbi Moses ben Samuel ha-Cohen Ashkenazi (second half of the fifteenth century) and the philosophically trained kabbalist and Rabbi Michael ben Shabbetai ha-Cohen Balbo (1411–after 1484).[25] A few passages written by Elijah Delmedigo (ca. 1458–ca. 1493), particularly in his *Sefer Beḥinat ha-Dat* ('The Examination of the Religion'), also attacked the kabbalists as a specific sect.[26]

Not only philosophers but also halakhic authorities, such as Menahem ben Solomon ha-Meiri of Perpignan (1249–ca. 1310),[27] Isaac ben Sheshet (1326–1408),[28] Elijah Mizrahi (ca. 1455–1525/6)[29] and Solomon Luria (1510–1573),[30] to mention just a few,[31] criticised the claims of the kabbalists regarding the reasoning of Halakhah in their responsa.

Aside from known authors who were engaged as opponents of the Kabbalah, unknown authors also transmitted treatises under pseudonyms. For instance, probably in the fourteenth century, a Spanish Jew living in Italy (where he came into contact with Ashkenazi Jewry) wrote a satirical polemic against the alleged inability of Ashkenazi rabbis to be skilled in philosophy, logic, and rhetoric entitled *Sefer ʿAlilot De-*

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23 See Samuel ibn Seneh Zarza, *Sefer Meqor Ḥayyim* (Mantua 1559), fol. 118b (*Parašat Ki Teṣe*).

24 Cf. Idel, *Kabbalah*, 2: He 'accused the Kabbalists of attributing corporeality, change, and plurality to God.'

25 Cf. Kupfer, "Concerning the Cultural Image," 125–130; Ephraim Gottlieb, "The Transmigration Debate in 15th Century Candia" [in Hebrew], in idem, *Studies in the Kabbala Literature*, ed. Joseph Hacker (Tel Aviv: The Chaim Rosenberg School of Jewish Studies, 1976): 370–396; Aviezer Ravitzky, "The God of the Philosophers Versus the God of the Kabbalists. A Controversy in 15th Century Crete (Heb MSS Vatican 105 and 254)," in *Studies in Jewish Manuscripts*, eds. Joseph Dan and Klaus Herrmann (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1999): 139–170; Brian Ogren, *Renaissance and Rebirth. Reincarnation in Early Modern Italian Kabbalah* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2009), 41–70.

26 See Elijah Delmedigo, *Sefer Behinat HaDat of Elijah Del-Medigo. A Critical Edition with Introduction, Notes and Commentary* [in Hebrew], ed. Jacob Joshua Ross (Tel Aviv: The Chaim Rosenberg School of Jewish Studies, 1984); Giovanni Licata, *La via della ragione. Elia del Medigo e l'averroismo di Spinoza* (Macerata: Edizioni Università di Macerata, 2013); cf. Kalman P. Bland, "Elijah del Medigo's Averroist Response to the Kabbalah of Fifteenth-Century Jewry and Pico della Mirandola," *Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy* 1.1 (1991): 23–53.

27 Cf. Scholem, *Kabbalah*, 66.

28 See Isaac ben Sheshet, *Še'elot u-Tešuvot* (Constantinople, 1546/7), no. 157.

29 See Elijah Mizrahi, *Še'elot u-Tešuvot* (Jerusalem: Darom, 1938): 11; cf. Rachel Elior, "The Dispute over the Status of Kabbalah in the Sixteenth Century" [in Hebrew], *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 1 (1981): 178–181.

30 See Solomon Luria, *Še'elot u-Tešuvot* (Lublin, 1599), no. 98, fol. 68a.

31 For additional evidence see Benayahu, "Kabbalah and Halakha."

varim ('False charges', literally 'Pretext of Words') under the pseudonym Palmon ben Pelet.[32] The treatise favors rational philosophy over the alleged Ashkenazi obsession with halakhic casuistic and methods like *pilpul*, but also with Kabbalah, magic and superstition. The author's conclusion is that this failure of the Ashkenazi rabbis is the reason for the ongoing exile of the people of Israel.[33]

In 1639 the first full-fledged critique of Kabbalah was written by the Venetian Rabbi Leon Modena in his *Ari Nohem*, which is devoted exclusively to this topic.[34] Marking the final point of the present survey, his book compiles and quotes many but not all of the anti-kabbalistic sources and arguments mentioned so far.

In a discourse of kabbalistic and anti-kabbalistic criticism and polemic the respective other side is often quoted or paraphrased. A closer look behind the polemical and often distorting description of the claims of the enemy might reveal some evidence of historical value. Thus, kabbalistic detractions of or attacks on rational philosophy can provide the historian of ideas with matters of dispute.[35] An intriguing example among others of kabbalistic criticism of the philosophical interpretation of the Hebrew Bible, in this case refuting Samuel ibn Tibbon's rationalisation of creation, can be found in *Mešiv Devarim Nekhoḥim* ('Response of Correct Answers') written by Jacob ben Sheshet in Catalonia around 1240.[36]

Furthermore, one may add, it may be presumed that much of the textual evidence of the opponents of the Kabbalah was suppressed by kabbalists and therefore either survived in manuscripts alone or even is now completely lost.[37] This evidence is not only attested in manuscripts of works produced by the opponents of the Kab-

32 See Michael Ben Reuven, ed., "Sefer ʿAlilot Devarim" [Hebrew], in *Ozar Nechmad. Briefe und Abhandlungen jüdische Literatur betreffend*, vol. 4, ed. Ignaz Blumenfeld (Vienna: Verlag von Jacob Schloßberg's Buchhandlung, 1863): 177–178 (introduction); 179–195 (text); 196–214 (commentary).

33 Cf. Scholem, *Kabbalah*, 66: Josef ben Meshullam (?), written in 1468. This name is mentioned in the first sentence of the commentary; see "Sefer ʿAlilot Devarim," 196; Israel M. Ta-Shma, "Hekhan nitḥabber Sefer ʿAlilot Devarim" [Hebrew], in *ʿAlei Sefer* 3 (1977): 44–53: German origin; Jacob J. Schacter: "'Al Sefer 'Alilot Devarim" [Hebrew], in *ʿAlei Sefer* 8 (1980): 148–150; Robert Bonfil, "Sefer ʿAlilot Devarim: Pereq be-toledot he-hagut ha-yehudit ba-meah ha-14" [Hebrew], in *Eshel Be'er Sheva. Studies in Jewish Thought* 2 (1980): 229–264: Spanish author in Italy named Rabbi Josef Tov-Elem; cf. also Israel Jacob Yuval: "Magie und Kabbala unter den Juden im Deutschland des ausgehenden Mittelalters," in *Judentum im deutschen Sprachraum*, ed. Karl-Erich Grözinger (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1991): 173–176.

34 See Leon Modena, *Ari Nohem*, ed. Nehemiah S. Libowitz (Jerusalem: Darom, 1929); cf. Yaacob Dweck, *The Scandal of Kabbalah. Leon Modena, Jewish Mysticism, Early Modern Venice* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011).

35 Cf. Hartley Lachter, "Kabbalah, Philosophy, and the Jewish-Christian Debate: Reconsidering the Early Works of Joseph Gikatilla," *Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy* 16 (2008): 1–58.

36 Jacob ben Sheshet, *Mešiv Devarim Nekhoḥim*, ed. Georges Vajda (Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1968); cf. Georges Vajda, *Recherches sur la philosophie et la kabbale dans la pensée juive du Moyen Age* (Paris: Mouton, 1962).

37 Cf. Idel, *Kabbalah*, 1–2: '[...] it does seem that once there was more anti-Kabbalistic material than is extant in the surviving documents.'

balah but also by the kabbalists themselves. One example of this phenomenon is the kabbalist Avigdor Kara (1389–1439) who collected the attacks and polemics of his enemies.[38] Another example may be found in MS Cambridge Add. 673,1, fol. 13a-55a (Reif 846), attesting a text entitled *Ohel Mo'ed* ('Tent of Meeting') that was attributed to the kabbalist Rabbi Abraham ben Eliezer ha-Levi. According to Scholem, this manuscript was '[...] written by an unknown kabbalist before 1500—in Italy or even still in Spain—in order to defend the Kabbalah against its detractors.'[39] So, besides the few above-mentioned printed editions of genuine works written by the opponents of the Kabbalah, there are more texts to be found in other editions, but first and foremost in manuscripts.

Maimonides and the Relationship of Philosophy and Kabbalah

One major kind of opposition to the Kabbalah is certainly presented by Jewish philosophers, especially those who were indebted more or less to the philosophy of Aristotle. The basics and main arguments of any philosophical criticism of the Kabbalah are already provided by Maimonides, despite the fact that he lived some years before its first emergence. It is well known that the philosophy of Maimonides is deeply engaged with Aristotle as he was transmitted and revised in the Arab tradition. The commentaries of Averroes on various works of Aristotle are especially important for the later Jewish reception inside the Maimonidean camp. Menachem Kellner's monograph 'Maimonides' Confrontation with Mysticism' is a very useful starting point for my research and in the following I would like to present his main arguments.[40] In general, Kellner tries to understand the philosophy of Maimonides as a blueprint for any philosophical criticism of the mystical and kabbalistic stance.[41] Kellner's 'proto-kabbalistic' examples to which Maimonides was sensitive and critical include the Heikhalot literature, the *Sefer Yeṣirah* ('Book of Creation') and the Jewish magical tradition.[42] Kabbalistic interpretations of the Heikhalot literature and commentaries on the *Sefer Yeṣirah* were decisive for the development of the Kabbalah. It is likely that Jewish magic became prominent as 'Practical Kabbalah' later on.

38 Cf. Idel, *Kabbalah*, 280, n. 3: 'R. Avigdor Kara, a fifteenth-century Kabbalist in Prague, who possessed longer critical works on Kabbalah that are apparently lost.' In the same footnote, an edition of this text prepared by Idel and Frank Talmage was announced. It has not yet appeared in print due to the premature passing of Talmage.

39 Scholem, *Kabbalah*, 67. Note the mistake concerning the manuscript, *ibidem*, 78: 'Ms Jerusalem'!

40 Menachem Kellner, *Maimonides' Confrontation with Mysticism* (Oxford and Portland, Oregon: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2006).

41 Cf. Moshe Idel, "Maimonides and Kabbalah," in *Studies in Maimonides*, ed. Isadore Twersky (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 1990): 34.

42 Kellner, *Maimonides*, 18–25.

In his 'Guide of the Perplexed', Maimonides tries to define anew the so-called 'Mysteries of the Torah' (*Sitrei Torah*) already discussed in rabbinic literature. His definition and interpretation of these mysteries differ completely from the dominant trends of the former and contemporary Jewish tradition so far. As always, he presents a philosophical, that is, Aristotelian, explanation for these matters. When it comes to the ancient Jewish secret topics, the so called 'Account of the Beginning' or 'Account of the Creation' (*Maʿaśeh Berešit*), and the 'Account of the Chariot' (*Maʿaśeh Merkavah*), Maimonides states unmistakably concerning the latter in the introduction to his 'Guide' 3:[43]

> [...] the knowledge of this matter has ceased to exist in the entire religious community, so that nothing great or small remains of it. And it had to happen like this, for this knowledge was only transmitted orally[44] and has never been set down in writing.

Emphasising the esoteric character of the 'Account of the Chariot', Maimonides disclaims or at least neglects the entire Heikhalot literature focusing mainly on this subject, which he definitely knew.

Maimonides' sharp attack on magical practices, which were well attested in his own Jewish community, is a clear indicator of his general attitude towards any so-called 'secrets' concerning the names of God.[45] Thus, we read in his 'Guide' 1:61:

> All the names of God, may He be exalted, that are to be found in any of the books derive from actions. There is nothing secret in this matter. [...][46]

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43 Moses Maimonides, *The Guide of the Perplexed*, trans. Shlomo Pines (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1963), 415; the following Hebrew translations of the *Guide* were consulted as well: Moshe ben Maimon, *Sefer Moreh ha-Nevukhim* [Hebrew], trans. Samuel ibn Tibbon, ed. Yehuda ibn Shmuel (Jerusalem: Mossad Harav Kook, 1987); Maimonides, *The Guide of the Perplexed. Hebrew Translation from the Arabic, Annotations, Appendices, and Indices* [in Hebrew], trans. Michael Schwarz (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University Press, 2002).

44 Translated by Pines as 'from one chief to another'; Schwarz, 427, reads 'from mouth to ear.'

45 Cf. Harvey Spencer Lewis, "Maimonides on Superstition," *Jewish Quarterly Review* [OS] 17 (1905): 475–488; Bezalel Safran, "Maimonides' Attitude to Magic and to Related Types of Thinking," in *Porat Yosef—Studies Presented to Rabbi Dr. Yosef Safran*, eds. Bezalel Safran and Eliyahu Safran (Hoboken, NJ: Ktav Publishing House, 1992): 92–110; Dov Schwartz, *Studies on Astral Magic in Medieval Jewish Thought*, trans. David Louvish and Batya Stein (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2005): 27–54; idem, *Amulets, Properties and Rationalism in Medieval Jewish Thought* [Hebrew] (Ramat-Gan: Bar Ilan University Press, 2004), 21–34; Marc B. Shapiro, "Maimonidean Halakha and Superstition," *Maimonidean Studies* 4 (2000): 61–108; Aviezer Ravitzky, "Maimonides and His Disciples on Linguistic Magic and 'the Madness of the Writers of Amulets'" [in Hebrew], in *Jewish Culture in the Eye of the Storm: A Jubilee Book in Honour of Yosef Ahituv*, eds. Abraham Sagi and Nahem Ilan (Ein Zurim: Ha-Qibbuṣ ha-Me'uḥad, 2002): 431–458; Yuval Harari, "Leadership, Authority, and the 'Other' in the Debate over Magic from the Karaites to Maimonides," *The Journal for the Study of Sephardic and Mizrahi Jewry* 2 (2007): 90–101; Yossef Schwartz, "Magic, Philosophy and Kabbalah: The Mystical and Magical Interpretation of Maimonides in the Later Middle Ages," *Daat. A Journal of Jewish Philosophy and Kabbalah* 64–65 (2009): 5–39.

46 Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, trans. Pines, 147; Schwarz, 155, reads the last sentence as 'This is a known matter.'

> Do not think anything other than this and do not let occur to your mind the vain imaginings of the writers of charms[47] or what names you may hear from them or may find in their stupid books, names that they have invented, which are not indicative of any notion whatsoever, but which they call the *names* and of which they think that they necessitate *holiness and purity* and work miracles. All these are stories that it is not seemly for a perfect man to listen to, much less to believe.[48]

The four-letter-name of God, the tetragrammaton, is the only exception from this insofar as it 'gives,' in his own words, 'a clear unequivocal indication of His essence.'[49] The uniqueness and transcendence of the essence of God expressed by the tetragrammaton is 'in such a way that none of the created things is associated with Him in this indication.'[50] In the same chapter it is written:[51]

> As for the other names, all of them, because of their being derived, indicate attributes; that is, not an essence alone, but an essence possessing attributes. For this reason they produce in one's fantasy the conception of multiplicity; I mean to say that they produce in one's fantasy the thought that the attributes exist, and that there is an essence and a notion superadded to this essence.

This passage seems to be perfectly fitting as a possible argument against the essentiality of the sefirotic system of the theosophical Kabbalah. Accordingly, the sefirot would then be nothing but a product of 'one's fantasy' without any essence by themselves. In accordance with this possible argument is probably the following verdict from Maimonides towards the end of the 'Guide' where he interprets the famous parable about the ruler and his subjects who try to enter the ruler's habitation. In his interpretation, Maimonides distinguishes various classes with regard to their ability to obtain knowledge and to speculate about matters of natural science and metaphysics. There he says:[52]

> As for someone who thinks and frequently mentions God, without knowledge, following a mere imagining or following a belief adopted because of his reliance on the authority of somebody else, he is to my mind outside the habitation and far away from it and does not in true reality mention or think about God.

Thus, his main argument concerning knowledge of God is not to rely on somebody only because he is, at least in his circle, an accepted authority in these matters. In contrast, it must be emphasised that, for the Jewish philosophers standing in the Aristotelian tradition, God is first and foremost intellect, that is, in this specific

47 Another translation would be 'amulets'.
48 Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, trans. Pines, 149; cf. also *Guide* 3:37 (*ibidem*, 540–550); idem, *Mishneh Torah, Hilkhot 'Avodah Zarah* 11:10–16 and *Hilkhot Tefillin* 5:4.
49 Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, trans. Pines, 147.
50 *Ibidem*, 148.
51 *Ibidem*.
52 *Ibidem*, 620.

case, the active intellect. If human beings are created in the image of God, then human knowledge of God is possible by means of reason. This kind of Aristotelian rationality is completely opposite to the claim of knowledge concerning God's nature as it is executed by most kabbalists.

However, the relationship between philosophy and Kabbalah is not that simplistic, like one of two clearly distinct and opposite entities as they seem to be in modern eyes.[53] In other words, Kabbalah is itself heavily influenced by certain philosophical ideas such as, for instance, the Neo-Platonic concept of emanation or the idea of celestial hierarchies. Besides this, a socio-intellectual factor is also relevant here. In a recent study, Jonathan Dauber emphasised his thesis that 'a major factor that led to the development of Kabbalah was the adoption by the first Kabbalists of a philosophical ethos [...] in which a sort of meta-reflection on classical Jewish texts and, in particular, the investigation of God as the height of that reflection, was accorded great religious significance.'[54] But more essential is the fact that the medieval concept of *devequt*, that is, adherence or cleaving to God, mainly focusing on the deeper meaning and essence of biblical prophecy, is phenomenologically very similar both in Maimonides' ideal of intellectual worship and in the kabbalistic description of mystical ecstasy.[55] Furthermore, even the philosophy of Maimonides himself was adopted in various manners by kabbalists.[56] The most impressive and probably irritating example

53 Cf. Idel, "Maimonides and Kabbalah," 31–79; Hava Tirosh-Samuelson, "Philosophy and Kabbalah: 1200–1600," in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Jewish Philosophy*, eds. Daniel H. Frank and Oliver Leaman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003): 218–257; Elliot R. Wolfson, "Beneath the Wings of the Great Eagle: Maimonides and Thirteenth-Century Kabbalah," in *Moses Maimonides (1138–1204): His Religious, Scientific, and Philosophical Wirkungsgeschichte in Different Cultural Contexts*, eds. Görge K. Hasselhoff and Otfried Fraisse (Würzburg: Ergon, 2004): 209–212; Sandra Valabregue, "Philosophy, Heresy, and Kabbalah's Counter Theology," *Harvard Theological Review* 109.2 (2016): 233–256.

54 Jonathan Dauber, *Knowledge of God and the Development of Early Kabbalah* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2012): 3.

55 Cf. Scholem, *Major Trends*, 138–142; idem, *Origins*, 413; idem, *The Messianic Idea in Judaism and Other Essays on Jewish Spirituality* (New York: Schocken, 1971): 205; Idel, "Maimonides and Kabbalah," 76–78; Wolfson, "Beneath the Wings," 211 and 221–237; David R. Blumenthal, "Maimonides' Intellectual Mysticism and the Superiority of the Philosophy of Moses," *Studies in Medieval Culture* 10 (1977): 51–68; idem, "Maimonides: Prayer, Worship, and Mysticism," in *Approaches to Judaism in Medieval Times*, vol. 3, ed. David R. Blumenthal (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988): 1–16; see more recently Adam Afterman, *Devequt: Mystical Intimacy in Medieval Jewish Thought* [in Hebrew] (Los Angeles: Cherub Press, 2011).

56 Cf. Jacob I. Dienstag, "Ha-Rambam ve-ḥokhmei ha-qabbalah" [Hebrew], in *Maimonides, His Teachings and Personality: Essays on the Occasion of the 750th Anniversary of His Death*, ed. Simon Federbush (New York: The Cultural Department of the World Jewish Congress and the Torah Culture Department of the Jewish Agency, 1956): 100–135; idem, "Maimonides and the Kabbalists: Bibliography" [in Hebrew], *Daat. A Journal of Jewish Philosophy and Kabbalah* 25 (1990): 54–94, 26 (1991): 61–96; Wolfson, "Beneath the Wings," 209–237; idem, "*Via Negativa* in Maimonides and Its Impact on Thirteenth-Century Kabbalah," *Maimonidean Studies* 5 (2008): 393–442; Jonathan Dauber, "Competing Approaches to Maimonides in Early Kabbalah," in *The Cultures of Maimonidean-*

of this, at least from the perspective of a 'pure' philosopher, is certainly Abraham Abulafia's system of ecstatic Kabbalah based on Maimonides' 'Guide'.[57] Other examples of kabbalists heavily attracted to the rational philosophy of the kind of Aristotle, Averroes and Maimonides include Joseph ben Abraham ibn Waqar (fourteenth century),[58] Abraham ben Meir de Balmes (ca. 1460/70–1523),[59] and, much later, Elijah Benamozegh (1823–1900).[60] While he also acknowledged this specific philosophical tradition, the Italian Renaissance kabbalist Yohanan Alemanno (ca. 1435–after 1504) was first and foremost affected by Platonic and Neo-Platonic sources.[61] On the other hand, there are many philosophers who were, at least from a modern perspective, deeply influenced by certain magical, mystical or kabbalistic ideas and who were trying to reconcile or at least to combine both approaches, such as the son of Maimonides Abraham ben Moshe ben Maimon (1186–1237),[62] Isaac ibn Latif (ca. 1210–1280)[63] or Hillel of Verona (ca. 1220–ca. 1295).[64]

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ism: New Approaches to the History of Jewish Thought, ed. James T. Robinson (Leiden: Brill, 2009): 57–88; Moshe Idel, "On Maimonides in Nahmanides and his School and Some Reflections," in *Between Rashi and Maimonides. Themes in Medieval Jewish Thought, Literature and Exegesis*, eds. Ephraim Kanarfogel and Moshe Sokolow (New York: Michael Scharf Publication Trust of the Yeshiva University Press, 2010): 131–164.

57 Scholem, *Major Trends*, 126; Moshe Idel, *The Mystical Experience in Abraham Abulafia*, trans. Jonathan Chipman (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987); idem, "Maimonides and Kabbalah," 54–70; idem, "Maimonides' *Guide of the Perplexed* and the Kabbalah," *Jewish History* 18 (2004): 197–226; Elliot R. Wolfson, *Abraham Abulafia—Kabbalist and Prophet: Hermeneutics, Theosophy and Theurgy* (Los Angeles: Cherub Press, 2000).

58 Cf. Steven Harvey, "A 14th Century Kabbalists' Excerpt from the Lost Arabic Original of Averroes, Middle Commentary on the Physics," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 6 (1985): 219–227.

59 Cf. Brian Ogren, "Sefirotic Depiction, Divine Noesis, and Aristotelian Kabbalah: Abraham ben Meir de Balmes and Italian Renaissance Thought," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 104.4 (2014): 573–599.

60 Cf. Alessandro Guetta, *Philosophy and Kabbalah. Elijah Benamozegh and the Reconciliation of Western Thought and Jewish Esotericism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2009).

61 Moshe Idel, "The Study Program of R. Yohanan Alemanno" [Hebrew], *Tarbiz* 48 (1979): 318–322; idem, "The Magical and Neoplatonic Interpretations of the Kabbalah in the Renaissance," in *Jewish Thought in the Sixteenth Century*, ed. Bernard D. Cooperman (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983): 186–242.

62 Cf. Paul B. Fenton, "Abraham Maimonides (1186–1237): Founding a Mystical Dynasty," in *Jewish Mystical Leaders and Leadership in the 13th Century*, eds. Moshe Idel and Mortimer Ostow (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, 1998): 127–154.

63 Cf. Sara O. Heller Wilensky, "The 'Guide' and the 'Gate': The Dialectical Influence of Maimonides on Isaac Ibn Latif and Early Spanish Kabbalah," in *A Straight Path: Studies in Medieval Philosophy and Culture. Essays in Honor of Arthur Hyman*, ed. Ruth Link-Salinger (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1988): 266–278; eadem, "Isaac Ibn Latif: Philosopher or Kabbalist?," in *Jewish Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, ed. Alexander Altmann (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1967): 185–223.

64 Cf. Hillel von Verona, *Über die Vollendung der Seele*, ed. Yossef Schwartz and trans. together with Alexander Fidora (Freiburg: Herder, 2009); cf. especially Hillel's concept of the magical power of one's active intellect, see the introduction by Schwartz, *ibidem*, 24–29.

Also, from a historiographical perspective there is an interesting point of relationship between philosophy and Kabbalah. Several scholars even see the emergence of the Kabbalah as a reaction to Maimonides and his philosophical claims, especially concerning ancient Jewish esoteric matters such as the so-called 'mysteries of the Torah'.[65] Both sides, the rational philosophers as well as the kabbalists, share the general assumption that beneath the literal surface there is a deeper meaning in the biblical and rabbinic literature, and both agree that this hidden dimension is destined only for the 'happy few'. Therefore, the results of their investigations have to be concealed in an esoteric manner.[66] Hence, for example, the Castilian kabbalist, Todros ben Joseph Abulafia (1225–ca. 1285), wrote in his *Šaʿar ha-Razim* ('The Gate of Secrets') concerning the esoteric approach in the highest esteem of Maimonides while paraphrasing the relevant passage in the introduction of his 'Guide'.[67] The hermeneutics of esotericism in both camps are established by literary strategies as well as social restrictions of transmission and instruction.

However, the negative theology of Maimonides is the direct opposite to the detailed sefirotic theosophy as described, for instance, in the *Sefer ha-Zohar*. In both approaches, the philosophical and the kabbalistic, the central question is 'what can a human being know about God?' Whereas Maimonides restricts himself, or more general, human knowledge of God, to statements about what God is not, alleged knowledge of God is abundant in kabbalistic literature—even when the absolute inconceivability of the highest and most transcendent stage of God's inner world, that is, the *Ein Sof*, is considered by many kabbalists. Facing God makes Maimonides be silent, but, in contrast, so to say, many of the kabbalists loquacious.[68]

While the ecstatic and theurgic aspects of ritual praxis are intertwined in Kabbalah, Maimonides' concept of intellectual union with God would only agree with the former but not the latter aspect.[69]

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65 Heinrich Graetz, *Geschichte der Juden von den ältesten Zeiten bis auf die Gegenwart*, vol. 7 (Leipzig: Leiner, 1897): 59–82, and the appendix *ibidem*, 385–402; idem, *History of the Jews* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1894), vol. 3, 547–558; cf. Scholem, *Origins*, 7; Idel, "Maimonides and Kabbalah," 33; idem, *Kabbalah*, 253.

66 Concerning the difference between both approaches, see Alexander Altmann, "Maimonides' Attitude towards Jewish Mysticism," in *Studies in Jewish Thought. An Anthology of German Jewish Scholarship*, ed. Alfred Jospe (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1981): 203; Wolfson, *Abraham Abulafia*, 38–93; idem, "Beneath the Wings," 217–221.

67 Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, trans. Pines, 11–12; see Todros ben Joseph Abulafia, *Sha'ar ha-Razim*, ed. Michal Kushnir-Oron (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1989): 46; cf. the introduction by Kushnir-Oron *ibidem*, 30–31; Wolfson, "Beneath the Wings," 217. On more examples of other early kabbalists attesting the (alleged) affinity between their teachings and those of Maimonides, see *ibidem*, 221–237.

68 See *Guide* 3:51 (Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, trans. Pines, 620–624); cf. *Guide* 1:50 (*ibidem*, 111–112); 1:59 (*ibidem*, 140); cf. Josef Stern, *The Matter and Form of Maimonides' Guide* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2013): 132–249. In contrast see Wolfson, "Beneath the Wings," 233–237!

69 Cf. Wolfson, "Beneath the Wings," 231.

This differentiation focuses mainly on the issue of anthropomorphic descriptions of God as found in the biblical and rabbinic literature. In his explanation of God's essence, Maimonides purges the Jewish God from the anthropomorphism that was introduced in the Holy Scriptures only in order to speak to the common people in their language. In contrast, the kabbalists interpret the anthropomorphic image of God as essential and as an adequate expression of the living God. It is likely that Maimonides' reasoning of the commandments, his rationalistic explanations of the narrative passages in the Hebrew Bible and the later rabbinic literature as well as his emphasis on the human intellect are contrary not only to most statements in the older Jewish traditions but also to the different kabbalistic presuppositions and claims. So, it is not surprising that many philosophical opponents of the Kabbalah relied on Maimonides and his followers. In particular, several major philosophers belonging to the camp of the Jewish Averroists were explicitly critical of the Kabbalah. Furthermore, the role of kabbalists in the Maimonides controversies has also to be studied in this regard.[70]

It must be emphasised that the philosophically grounded opposition to and criticism of the Kabbalah is not the only possible method. Thus, many non-philosophical and traditional talmudic and halakhic authorities were also doubtful, polemical and critical towards the kabbalistic approach and its claims especially when it came to halakhic matters. Thus, the kabbalistic books of *Ṭaʿame ha-Miṣwot* ('Reasons for the Commandments'), that is, the reasoning of the commandments and their observance by kabbalistic explanations, were highly disputed by rabbinic authorities who were not in favor of the Kabbalah.

From a systematic perspective, several topics of dispute can be added to those already mentioned. Firstly, for instance, the pseudo-epigraphical attributions of kabbalistic texts to rabbinic authorities and the asserted old age of these texts have been questioned since the beginning. Since the truth of kabbalistic claims[71] is usually not reasoned by rational argumentation and logic, the assertions of venerability and continuous tradition are crucial for the kabbalists. Hence, the proof of missing evidence of authorship or an interrupted chain of tradition is a common strategy to discredit kabbalistic self-legitimation. Another concept to be disputed is the prophetical or mystical approach of the adept to knowledge. Thus, the possibility of prophecy in post-biblical times and the mystical union with God were also questioned by the anti-kabbalists. One of the main targets of the opponents of the Kabbalah was Prac-

70 Cf. Scholem, *Origins*, 393–414; I am not convinced by the conclusions of José Faur, "Anti-Maimonidean Demons," *Review of Rabbinic Judaism* 6.1 (2003): 3–52. The sources of the controversies are collected by Solomon J. Halberstam, ed., "*Milḥemet ha-Dat. Qevuṣat mikhtavin be-ʿinyane ha-maḥloqet ʿal devar sefer ha-moreh veha-mada*" [Hebrew], *Jeschurun. Zeitschrift für die Wissenschaft des Judentums* 8 (1875), ed. Joseph Isaac Kobak (Bamberg: Druck der Max G. Schmidt'schen Officin, 1875): 17–56 and 89–170.

71 Kabbalists introduce their statements rather often as given, i.e., 'by the way of truth' (*ʿal derekh ha-emet*).

tical Kabbalah, that is, Jewish magic, superstition, and manipulations of divine names. In this case, linguistic scepticism concerning the alleged power of the Hebrew language would be effective. Furthermore, the alleged causality between macro- and microcosmic structures, which is so prominent in neo-Platonic, astrological, magical and kabbalistic concepts, was refuted by many Aristotelian opponents of the Kabbalah. However, the main difference between the (theosophical) kabbalists and their philosophical critics lies in the ideas and statements concerning the knowledge of God. Particularly, the concept of ten sefirot as a description of the inner life of the Godhead was sometimes disputed by authors of various camps as being against the central monotheistic idea of one impartible God. In this regard, the polemics against Christianity, especially the Christian theologoumenon of the Trinity, and the Kabbalah of the sefirot, were paralleled by some authors.[72]

Besides systematic reasons, that is, inner intellectual argumentation, encouraging opposition to the Kabbalah, external reasons emanating from the realm of political and social agenda are also important. At least two historical phenomena by the turn of the sixteenth century are decisive for the growing criticism of the Kabbalah:

1. The printing of kabbalistic books and the related increasing publicity of kabbalistic ideas.
2. The emergence of a Christian Kabbalah stating that the Jewish Kabbalah is evidence for Christian theological essentials and concepts such as the Trinity.

Of course, both of these mentioned phenomena are related to one another. In particular, the printing of the *Zohar* was heavily disputed by Jewish scholars.[73] Another example of controversy was the Latin translation of Jewish kabbalistic texts prepared by or for Christian kabbalists. In addition, the expulsion from Spain and Portugal played a major role in the dissemination of sefardic Kabbalah in Italy, Ashkenaz and the Ottoman Empire. In this turbulent period, apocalyptic and messianic expectations led to religious-political movements and turmoil; the Reformation and the

72 Cf. Goshen-Gottstein, "Triune and Decaune God," 165–172.

73 Cf. Scholem, *Kabbalah*, 70–71: 'At first no opposition was roused—neither when Recanati's book was produced in Venice (1523) nor when several other books came out in Salonika and Constantinople—although these works did not receive the *haskamah* ('approval') of the rabbinic authorities. However, when the printing of the *Zohar* itself and the *Ma'arekhet ha-Elohut* (1558) was contemplated, the plan gave rise to bitter arguments among the Italian rabbis [...]'; Isaiah Tishby, "The Controversy About the *Zohar* in Sixteenth-Century Italy" [in Hebrew], *Perakim* 1 (1967/8), 131–182 (reprinted in idem, *Studies in Kabbalah and its Branches: Researches and Sources*, vol. 1 [Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1982], 79–130); Joseph Hacker, "A New Epistle on the Publication of the *Zohar* in Italy" [in Hebrew], in *Massu'ot: Studies in Kabbalistic Literature and Jewish Philosophy in Memory of Prof. Ephraim Gottlieb*, eds. Michal Oron and Amos Goldreich (Jerusalem: The Bialik Institute, 1994): 120–130; Boaz Huss, *Like the Radiance of the Sky: Chapters in the Reception History of the Zohar and the Construction of its Symbolic Value* [in Hebrew] (Jerusalem: The Ben-Zvi Institute and The Bialik Institute, 2008): 227–232; Abrams, *Kabbalistic Manuscripts*, 574–575.

German Peasants' War could be mentioned as examples on the Christian side, and the messianic upheavals of Asher Lemlein or David Reubeni and Solomon Molkho on the Jewish side. The contribution of kabbalistic ideas to these events was obvious even in the eyes of the contemporaries. There was therefore a need for some kind of reaction to these dangers. In the wake of Renaissance humanism, philology was acknowledged as an important tool for the detection of Hebrew studies. Christian Hebraists established their new discipline at universities and contributed to the modern scholarship of Jewish studies including research on kabbalistic texts from their perspective.[74] These are some of the main historical events leading to an increasing criticism of Kabbalah.

Opposition to Kabbalah and Scepticism

The question of whether there is a specific kind or even a tradition of Jewish scepticism is a rather recent one in the academic discourse, and only a few contributions have been presented up until now.[75] Regarding this fact and, in addition, due to the rather early stage of my research, the following considerations focusing on the relationship between the opposition to Kabbalah and scepticism can only be preliminary.

The literary genres of the various texts written by the early opponents of the Kabbalah and mentioned here so far include epistles, sermons, commentaries, responsa, and philosophical as well as satirical polemics. Nevertheless, despite this generic di-

74 Cf. Gershom Scholem, "Die Erforschung der Kabbala von Johannes Reuchlin bis zur Gegenwart," in idem, *Judaica 3. Studien zur jüdischen Mystik* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1973): 247–263; on this see Saverio Campanini, "Some Notes on Gershom Scholem and Christian Kabbalah," in *Gershom Scholem (1897–1982). In memoriam*, ed. Joseph Dan, vol. 2 (Jerusalem: The Hebrew University of Jerusalem = Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought 21, 2007): 13*-33* (English Section); Stephen Burnett, *From Christian Hebraism to Jewish Studies: Johannes Buxtorf (1564–1629) and Hebrew Learning in the Seventeenth Century* (Leiden: Brill, 1996); idem, *Christian Hebraism in the Reformation Era (1500–1660). Authors, Books, and the Transmission of Jewish Learning* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2012), 103–106; Moshe Idel, *Kabbalah in Italy 1280–1510. A Survey* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2011), 227–235.

75 Cf. Giuseppe Veltri, "Principles of Jewish Sceptical Thought, The Case of Judah Moscato and Simone Luzzatto," in *Rabbi Judah Moscato and the Jewish Intellectual World of Mantua in the 16th-17th Centuries*, eds. Giuseppe Veltri and Gianfranco Miletto (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2012): 15–35; idem, "Do/Did the Jews Believe in God? The Sceptical Ambivalence of Jewish Philosophy of Religion," in *Envisioning Judaism. Studies in Honor of Peter Schäfer on the Occasion of his Seventieth Birthday*, vol. 2, eds. Ra'anan S. Boustan, Klaus Herrmann, Reimund Leicht et alii (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013): 717–732; Elliot R. Wolfson, "Scepticism and the Philosopher's Keeping Faith," in *Jewish Philosophy for the Twenty-First Century. Personal Reflections*, eds. Hava Tirosh-Samuelson and Aaron W. Hughes (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2014): 481–515; Giuseppe Veltri and Michela Torbidoni, "Alcune considerazioni sulla sospensione del giudizio e il silenzio nella tradizione ebraica scettica," in *Seconda navigazione, Omaggio a Giovanni Reale*, eds. Roberto Radice and Glauco Tiengo (Milan: Bompiani, 2015): 745–757.

versity, all the texts share one common goal, that is, opposition to Kabbalah, or at least certain kabbalistic claims, texts or figures. Hence, the main feature of the selected texts is polemicising against contrary positions. In this sense, the opponents of the Kabbalah were anti-kabbalists without assuming automatically from the starting point that they all belonged to a kind of anti-kabbalistic school or tradition. The *a priori* of any polemic is that the knowledge of the adversary is necessarily wrong and his claims have to be refuted and disproved. Thus, the front line evoked by a polemic seems to be very clear-cut. In this regard, any statement intended for a polemical purpose seems to be not a sceptical one at all. In contrast to a sceptical enquiry, discussion or open-ended dispute, or to be more specific, in the tradition of Sextus Empiricus even without any intention or purpose, the intention of polemics is from the very beginning to affirm only the truth of one side, that is, that of the polemicist. Furthermore, it must be emphasised that rather often the adversary is only a cardboard character without any immediate historical validity.

It is not simply that every doubt of kabbalistic claims leads automatically to an elaborate scepticism in the sense of the corresponding philosophical schools going back to the Ancient Greeks (Academic and Pyrrhonic scepticism). In this sense, even philosophical criticism of the Kabbalah is very often, especially in the camp of Jewish Averroists, anti-sceptical and dogmatic insofar as the final truth of their philosophical claims of knowledge is obviously hardly in question. In general, any assertion without substance is subject to sceptical philosophy. It is not the content of a claim, but rather the reasoning of it that is in question in sceptical enquiry. Thus, the criticism of methodology characteristic of any modern science was developed by the sceptical approach. However, this kind of sceptical enquiry alone does not make a sceptical philosopher into a philosophical sceptic. The former corresponds as an ideal to any modern scholar; the latter would generally doubt the possibility of any certainty concerning truth and reasoning at all.

What is indeed criticised by the rational philosophers is the often-missing argumentation by reasoning in the Kabbalah. In addition, the scepticism that is to be found in these anti-kabbalistic texts is expressed as a doubt of authority as a source of knowledge leading eventually to a kind of social or political scepticism. However, all the anti-kabbalistic protagonists mentioned here so far sowed the seeds of doubt against kabbalistic claims and, first and foremost, against the authority of kabbalists and their texts. Implanting scepticism in the camp of the adversary towards any of his claims, especially those which are not provided with reasoned argumentation, is a subversive literary strategy. Sometimes, these seeds need rather a long time to become fruitful plants. Thus, the main arguments against kabbalistic claims were transmitted or reinvented, collected and systematised, and led eventually in the period of the Haskalah, that is, the Jewish Enlightenment, to a rigorous scepticism concerning irrational claims and an almost complete condemnation and denial of the

Kabbalah.[76] So, for instance, the greatest Jewish historian of the nineteenth century, Heinrich Graetz (1817–1891), was not only an expert in the field of Kabbalah in his time, but also one of the most fiery zealots against the Kabbalah.[77] Along with this development, or better despite this general attitude of damnation and neglect towards Kabbalah, the modern scholarship on Kabbalah began with a few scholars of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums*. One major characteristic of any modern scholarship is obviously the sceptical attitude towards claims of eternal or absolute truth leading finally to scepticism of methodology. Thus, in the modern scholarship on Kabbalah the critical tools of textual philology and historical hermeneutics were introduced, provided mainly by the arguments of anti-kabbalists especially against the authenticity of the *Sefer ha-Zohar*.

The main sceptical philosophical arguments against kabbalistic claims of knowledge about the inner life of God can already be found in Maimonides' writings as presented above, especially in his Negative Theology. The sceptical reading of the *Guide* acknowledges that the limits of human language and cognition lead eventually to silence concerning the possibility of metaphysical knowledge of God.[78] All that can be said concerning God is about his actions in this approach. Thus, the question of where exactly the border lies between the human ability to describe or even to define God on the one side and the necessity to be silent concerning him on the other side differentiates Maimonidean philosophy from Kabbalah.

The evidence for a sceptical epistemology of Maimonides was discussed in an article written by Hannah Kasher.[79] Concerning the certainty of conclusions, two sources of knowledge, namely generally accepted opinions and traditions, are not self-evident because they rely only on the social environment and testimony. In this regard, the assertion that Kabbalah is indeed an old tradition, as the literal meaning of the term suggests, was particularly doubted by the opponents.

The Christian adaptation, discussion and enhancement of kabbalistic texts, their symbols and exegetical methods in order to show evidence of the truth of Christian

76 Cf. Christoph Schulte, "Haskala und Kabbala: Haltungen und Strategien der jüdischen Aufklärer beim Umgang mit der Kabbala," in *Aufklärung und Esoterik*, ed. Monika Neugebauer-Wölk (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1999): 335–354.

77 Cf. Peter Schäfer, "'Adversus cabbalam' oder: Heinrich Graetz und die jüdische Mystik," in *Reuchlin und seine Erben. Forscher, Denker, Ideologen und Spinner*, eds. Peter Schäfer and Irina Wandrey (Ostfildern: Jan Thorbecke, 2005): 189–210.

78 Cf. Shlomo Pines, "The Limitations of Human Knowledge According to Al-Farabi, ibn Bajja, and Maimonides," in *Studies in Medieval Jewish History and Literature*, ed. Isadore Twersky (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 1979): 89–100; Moshe Halbertal, *Maimonides: Life and Thought* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2013): 301–311; Josef Stern, *Matter and Form*, 132–249.

79 Cf. Hannah Kasher, "Maimonides: Halakhic Philosopher or Philosophical Halakhist? On Sceptical Epistemology and Its Implications," in *Moses Maimonides (1138–1204): His Religious, Scientific, and Philosophical Wirkungsgeschichte in Different Cultural Contexts*, eds. Görge K. Hasselhoff and Otfried Fraisse (Würzburg: Ergon 2004): 51–63.

theology in Jewish sources shows very clearly the limits and the danger of the Kabbalah in the eyes of some Jewish scholars in this time.[80] The crucial argument of Jewish criticism of the Kabbalah might be something like the following: when, by means of kabbalistic exegesis and hermeneutics, Christian theologoumena such as Jesus' sonship of God and the Trinity will be approved even in the Hebrew Bible, then there must be something essentially wrong with this kind of exegesis, that is, Kabbalah itself! Or, more generally, if two opposing truths were reached by one method, then the state of sceptical *isosthenia*, that is, the indistinguishableness of which is true, is attained. The only solution to this epistemological dilemma would be methodological criticism. This kind of methodological criticism eventually evoked the beginning of modern scholarship of Kabbalah.

80 Cf. Moshe Idel: "Jewish thinkers versus Christian Kabbalah," in *Christliche Kabbala*, ed. Wilhelm Schmidt-Biggemann (Ostfildern: Jan Thorbecke, 2003): 49–65.

Martina Mampieri

'The Jews and Their Doubts': Anti-Jewish Polemics in the *Fascicolo delle vanità giudaiche* (1583) by Antonino Stabili

Introduction

The goal of this contribution is to present the first results of an ongoing research project on the *Fascicolo delle vanità giudaiche* ('Dossier of the Jewish Vanity'), an anti-Jewish polemical work written by the Dominican friar Antonino Stabili (c. 1533–1583) and published during the second half of the sixteenth century.[1] After an introduction detailing the author's biography, I will focus on the content and structure of his work, pausing on some crucial points and quoting the text in English translation where necessary, with the original in Italian in the footnotes.

Finally, some brief considerations on the use of dialogue in the medieval and early modern periods in anti-Jewish polemical and apologetic Christian works, useful for future perspectives of study, will be offered.

Anti-Jewish literature in the Middle Ages and early modern era was particularly prolific and venomous, and contributed to the creation and strengthening of stereotypes and anti-Jewish feelings. Despite the frequent conflicts and expulsions from one side, and the tireless activity of preaching from the other, the Jewish presence in Christian society was considered necessary in order to testify to the Jews' errors and the triumph of the Christian Church.[2]

The *Fascicolo delle vanità giudaiche*—which has not been studied at all until now[3]—clearly belongs to this polemical genre because of its content and structure, for reasons we will consider later. The work, written in the form of a dialogue between two Jews, Moses (called Moyse in the work) and Solomon (Salamone), is divided into sixteen chapters, corresponding to the sixteen days on which the conversations between the two characters take place.

1 Antonino Stabili, *Fascicolo delle vanità giudaiche, composto per il R.P.F. Antonino Stabili da S. Angelo a Fasanella, dell'ordine de' predicatori. Giornate sedici, nelle quali si discorre sopra la Scrittura vecchia, & noua, et si proua la venuta del vero Messia Christo, Giesù, Signore, & Redentor nostro. Con due tauole, l'una de gl'autori citati nell'opera, l'altra de gl'argomenti in ciascuna giornata* (Ancona: Francesco Salvioni, 1583). I wish to thank the Biblioteca Vallicelliana in Rome for having given me the opportunity to handle and reproduce a digital copy of the work (S.BOR C.I.104).

2 Kenneth Stow, *Popes, Church and the Jews in the Middle Ages: Confrontation and Response* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007): 1.

3 The only person to mention and quote some excerpts from the work is François Secret, "Notes sur les hebraïsants chrétiens," *Revue des études juives* 124 (1965): 176.

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The author, the friar Stabili, speaks through the words of Moses, who is favourable to Christian arguments and doubtful about the coming of the Messiah of the Jews. As the weeks pass, he expresses more and more conviction about the errors and doubts of the Jews, explaining that, because of the many sins of Israel, God has revoked his selection of the Jews as the chosen people and that the only way to dissipate Jewish vanity and stubbornness is the recognition of Jesus Christ as the Messiah and conversion to Christianity.

There is very little biographical information on Antonino Stabili. He was born in Sant'Angelo a Fasanella in the Kingdom of Naples (today in the province of Salerno), probably during the first half of the sixteenth century, and he joined the Dominican order in his youth. He received a good education and he was well versed in the study of philosophy, theology, and Hebrew. It seems that he wrote a monumental work, now lost, called *Delle vanità giudaiche* ('On Jewish Vanity'), consisting of 48 manuscript volumes.[4] His major work is the *Fascicolo delle vanità giudaiche,* which was published in Ancona in 1583 by Francesco Salvioni[5]—son of the Venetian printer and bookseller Marco—who also printed another work by Stabili called the *Rosario della gloriosa vergine Maria* (1581). The edition of the *Fascicolo*, in *octavo*, is quite rare and consists of 319 folios (*recto* and *verso*, i.e. 638 pages), although it was probably conceived by the author as a part of a greater work. Another work by Stabili, the *Introductorium duplici ternario comprehensum ad singula Quadrigesimae Evangelia*, was published posthumously.[6] It is an exegetical commentary on the Gospels and other texts from the New Testament and the Hebrew Bible traditionally read during Lent[7], such as the Pauline epistles and the Psalms, based on sermons that Stabili himself delivered during his lifetime. In the work's preface, the general inquisitor of Venice, Giovanni Domenico Vignucci da Ravenna, describes the author as 'knowledgeable and well-versed in preaching' (*viris peritis et in concionandi arte versatis*).[8] Additional proof of Stabili's prolific activity as preacher and theologian, apart from

4 See Tommaso Bartoletti, *Biografia cronologica-storico-critica degli uomini illustri Atessani nella dignità ecclesiastica, letteraria, armi, pietà, titoli, e di altri cittadini benemeriti e contraddittori. Offerta all'amor patrio de' signori amministratori e degli amministrati cittadini di Atessa dal sacerdote Tommaso Bartoletti Lettore e predicator generale dei PP. Predicatori* (Naples: Pasquale Tizzano, 1836): 100.

5 On Salvioni's family and printing in Ancona, see Ernesto Spadolini, "L'arte della stampa in Ancona dal 1574 al 1660," *La Bibliofilia: rivista di storia del libro e delle arti grafiche di bibliografia ed erudizione* 7 (1906): 78–90; Filippo M. Giochi and Alessandro Mordenti, eds., *Annali della tipografia in Ancona: 1512–1799* (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1980); Renato Paci, Marina Pasquali and Ercole Sori, eds., *Ancona e le Marche nel Cinquecento: economia, società, istituzioni, cultura* (Ancona: Pinacoteca "Francesco Podesti", 1982). Among other works printed by Francesco Salvioni are the *Diporti notturni* (1580) by Captain Francesco Ferretti, the *Regula et testamentum beati patris nostri Francisci,* and the general statutes of the Franciscan Order (1582).

6 Antonino Stabili, *Introductorium duplici ternario comprehensum ad singula Quadrigesimae Evangelia* (Venice: Nicola Misserino, 1610).

7 The liturgical period corresponding to the forty days preceding Easter.

8 Stabili, *Introductorium*, 22v.

the length of the *Introductorium* itself,[9] is found in Dominican literature.[10] The same Dominican authors referred to the existence of other works by Stabili, which have remained in manuscript.[11] Three titles are known: *Manuale Predicatorum* (another collection of sermons for Lent), *Il nuovo Rosario,* and the *Historia di Lucania oggi detta Basilicata*.[12]

At the turn of the nineteenth century, the Dominican friar and historian Tommaso Bartoletti wrote that during the last years of his lifetime, Stabili lost his mental faculties and died in 1583.[13] However, if it is true that Stabili finished the work on 23 May, 1583, at the age of 50 (meaning that he was born in 1533)–as he himself wrote at the end of the *Fascicolo*[14]—the information about his mental illness appears rather problematic. The internal coherence of the work and the complexity of its contents, supported by a large number of sources and quotations, encourage us to believe that the author was in full possession of his intellectual capabilities. According to some other Dominican sources, it is quite certain that Stabili drew up the *Fascicolo* and his other writings in the Dominican convent of Santa Maria in Atessa (in the province of Chieti, Abruzzo), where he lived for twenty or twenty-five years and where he died in 1583.[15]

The *Fascicolo delle vanità giudaiche* (1583): Contents and Structure

Written in Italian, the work was probably intended to be a functional tool for Christians engaged in the frequent controversies against the Jews living in the Papal States and all over Italy. The writing is dedicated to Rinaldo Carafa,[16] a local patrician and, this must be emphasised, a relative of the Pope Paul IV (1476–1559), the former Grand Inquisitor Cardinal Gian Pietro Carafa, who, among other things, established Jewish

9 The *Introductorium* has 588 pages.

10 Bartoletti, *Biografia cronologica-storico-critica*, 99–100; Jacques Quétif and Jacques Echard, *Scriptores ordinis Predicatorum recensiti,* vol. II. (Paris: Ballard et Simart, 1721), 266–267.

11 Quétif and Echard, *Scriptores ordinis Predicatorum recensiti*, 266–267.

12 Bartoletti, *Biografia cronologica-storico-critica*, 100.

13 *Ibidem*.

14 See *Fascicolo*, f. 314v.

15 See Niccolò Toppi, *Bibliotheca napoletana, et apparato a gli huomini illustri in lettere di Napoli e del Regno, delle famiglie, terre, città, e religioni che sono nello stesso Regno. Dalle loro origini, per tutto l'anno 1678* (Naples: Antonio Bulifon, 1678), 23; Quétif and Echard, *Scriptores ordinis Predicatorum recensiti*, 266–267.

16 Marquis of Montenero and Monfalcone in the Kingdom of Naples and relative of pope Paul IV Carafa. On the Carafa family, see Biagio Aldimari, *Historia genealogica della famiglia Carafa*, 3 vols. (Naples: Giacomo Raillard, 1691).

ghettos in the Papal States and enacted other several anti-Jewish restrictions contained in the bull *Cum nimis absurdum* (issued July 14, 1555).[17]

The dedication and other sonnets addressed to other notable men precede Stabili's preface, in which he informs the reader about his goals and sources:

> You do not have to pay attention to the crazy things that it is possible to read at the end of this book. From the thorns we must seize the roses and let the obstinate Jews sting themselves, every time we read about their ineptitude and the silly things that they say so shamelessly [...]. As you can see, in the whole dialogue, there are only two people speaking: Moses, who supports the Christians' arguments, and Solomon, who thinks the opposite, but do not pay attention to his arguments.[18]

The setting of the dialogue is not well defined, but the description of the sea suggests that it is an Italian seaside town, perhaps Ancona, the place of the publishing house and centre of an important Jewish community. The sixteen meetings, corresponding to the sixteen chapters of the writing, always take place on Shabbat, starting in May and continuing until September. To summarise the synopsis preceding each chapter of the work:

1. Beginning of the dialogue between Moses and Solomon in May. Moses declares his doubts concerning the Jewish faith and stresses that Israel is not God's chosen people.
2. Some considerations on compliance with Mosaic Law and the actions of the Jews. Moses recognises the divinity of the Gospels and tells some stories that are critical of the Jews who, according to him, do not deserve to be called 'Jewish people' or 'people of Israel'.
3. Debate on free will, angels, Mosaic Law, and exile. The Jews are deprived of God's grace and mercy because of their stubbornness.
4. Solomon's arguments against the Gospels. Reasoning of Solomon on the exile and on the vanity of waiting for the coming of the Messiah on the basis of rabbinical sources.
5. Other reflections on the Messiah.
6. Some declarations on lies, sins, death and dietary prohibitions, and also on priestly ornaments.
7. The Gospels are true and Jesus Christ is the Messiah whom the Jews are still awaiting.
8. Reasoning on Adam's sin and the King Messiah.

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17 For an English translation of the bull from Latin, see Kenneth Stow, *Catholic Thought and Papal Jewry Policy 1555–1593* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1977): 294–298.

18 'Non si dee por mente che elli habian detto tante pazzie come nel fin di questo libro si legge. Impercioche dalle spine non ne dovemo cogliere le rose. Et lasciare le spine acciò con quelle si pungano gli ostinati hebrei, ogni volta che da altri, o da loro si leggeno, le tante dapocagini, e melensagini, che così sfaciatamente essi hanno dette [...]. In tutto questo Dialogo, partito per giornate come si può vedere, solo due sono che ragionano, Moise il quale favorisce le ragioni de Christiani, e Salamone che ragiona in contrario, e però non si deve far caso delle sue ragioni' (*Fascicolo*, f. 11v).

9. Examples from some references on the impossibility of a woman giving birth without being impregnated by a man; the Ten Commandments and the *Miṣwot*.
10. Some considerations in favour of Christianity.
11. Reasoning on the cult of icons, adoration, and the keeping of the Shabbat.
12. On the ancient feasts and rites with sacrifices and their rejection. The Mosaic Law is imperfect and must be substituted with the Law of Christ, the Messiah. Other considerations on the keeping of the Shabbat.
13. Account of a dispute that happened in the synagogue on the Book of Jeremiah and Jewish blindness. Legends of extraordinary births.
14. Reflections on spiritual peace and Jewish stubbornness and cruelty. The Jews' sin is greater than that of Sodom because they killed Christ; for this reason, the Temple and Jerusalem will not be built again. Vanity of waiting for the coming of the Messiah.
15. Accounts of the prophets and identification of Christ with God's prophet; reasoning on the King Messiah's names. Declarations on Mary's perpetual virginity.
16. Solomon reveals to his wife his desire to convert to Christianity and they decide to be baptised with the whole family. On the presence of Christ in the Eucharist, the Transubstantiation (the change of substance of bread and wine into Body and Blood of Christ), and other miracles operated by God. Reasoning on Jewish vanities and madness. Baptism of Moses and Solomon.

By finding proofs in long quotations from the Hebrew Bible and rabbinical works, the author aims to demonstrate Jewish errors and stubbornness. Where Jewish sources do not help him, he turns to Christian sources, such as the New Testament and the Church Fathers (John Crysostom, Jerome, Augustin, Gregory the Great, and Bernard of Clairvaux), but also to classical Greek and Latin authors such as Hippocrates, Aristotle, Menander, Cato, Cicero, Sallustius, Valerius Maximus, and Seneca, Plinius, and also the more recent authors Francesco Petrarca and Giovanni Pontano.[19]

From the very beginning, Moses expresses his doubts about his compliance with Mosaic Law which, according to him, is ambiguous and, for this reason, disputable. He adduces arguments and quotations from the Bible and some rabbinical works to support some examples of doubt. He begins his speech by saying:

> With true spirit and true speech, I say that in these hard times we, the Jews, know the compassionate and merciful God, who because of his Glory, and for our salvation and satisfaction, gave us many gifts, particularly the spirit of true interpretation and right wisdom on many obscure aspects of the Mosaic Law, which are very disputable and unclear. Other Jews, because of the many rabbinical expositions and notes, remained perplexed. For this reason, when we are in the synagogue with the same will, we are very satisfied when you declare and show to us

19 A table showing the sources is provided in *Fascicolo*, ff. 8r-v.

> some things about the Torah for our salvation [...] this salvation must be desired above all. Especially in the present condition.[20]

According to him, although the Jews received wisdom from God so that they were able to understand the Torah properly, they are perplexed about many settings of the Holy Scriptures and, above all, about many rabbinical expositions and notes. The Jews need to strive for the correct interpretation of Mosaic Law, especially during these hard times, in 'this captivity in which we, the miserable Jews, are, and for which reason God in the past deemed to show to our enemies many signs and deeds.'[21]

During the second half of the sixteenth century—especially after Paul IV's papacy (1555–1559)—the situation of the Italian Jews living in the Papal States became increasingly dire because of the application of several bulls. The above-mentioned *Cum nimis absurdum*, in particular, marked a turning point in papal policy toward the Jews, establishing Jewish ghettos in the Papal States and imposing a great number of other severe regulations which, among other things, restricted Jewish economic activity and property ownership.[22] The project of segregating and annihilating the Jewish communities finally resulted in the definitive expulsion from the Papal States (with the exception of Rome and Ancona) set forth by another bull, the *Hebraeorum gens sola* (1569) issued by Pius V, formerly known as the Grand Inquisitor Michele Ghislieri.

Stabili, who finished the work fourteen years later at the latest, clearly hints at this situation. Continuing with the dialogue, Moses does not hesitate to state that the miserable condition in which the Jews live is the proof that they have not been chosen to be in covenant with God because of their many sins and lies. For this reason, they have to suffer not only in the present time, but also eternally.[23] Hearing such things, his friend Solomon is simply dumbfounded and tries to counter his arguments by showing examples from the Bible. But Moses responds by confessing his concerns about the Jewish faith: after having heard Psalm 102 in the synagogue two weeks before, 'with which words the holy and pious prophet demonstrates the falsehood of our doctrine, through which he persuades us that the mercy of God is only

20 'Con animo sinciero, e con parlare non finto, dico che per quello, che da noi altri hebrei in questi tempi calamitosi si può conoscere il pietoso, e misericordioso Iddio, che per la sua gloria, e per la nostra salute, e satisfattione ve ha manifestamente dotato e arrichito di certi doni particolari, e particolarmente vi ha dotato lo spirito della vera interpretazione e della retta intelligenza di molti luoghi della scrittura Mosaica, e profetate, delle quali altri in se stessi dubiosi sono, e oscuri. Altri, per le tante espositioni e glose fatte da nostri Rabbini, restano perplessi, et oscuri assai. Di modo che tutti con uno istesso volere restiamo da voi molto satisfatti, quando nella Sinagoga vi degnate con carità dechiararci e manifestarci per nostra [17v] salute alcune cose della Legge, imperciocché tal salute si deve da tutti desiderare sopra ogn'altra cosa che sia. Et particolarmente in questo stato, e in questa cattività nella quale noi disgratiati hebrei ne ritroviamo, per la cui cagione Iddio ne passati tempi si degnò di operare et manifestare a nostri avversarii tanti segni e tante maraviglie' (*ibidem*, f. 17r-v).

21 *Ibidem*.

22 For the English text of the bull, see Stow, *Catholic Thought*, 291–298.

23 *Fascicolo*, f. 22r.

upon us, the blind Jews,'[24] he convinced himself that the Jews were not the chosen people.[25] God—Moses continues—complains again and again to his people in the Hebrew Bible because of their many sins, as we read in the Book of Ezekiel: 'at the same time they also did this to Me: they defiled My Sanctuary and profaned My sabbaths. On the very day that they slaughtered their children to their fetishes, they entered My Sanctuary to desecrate it. This is what they did in My House.'[26]

For this reason, according to Moses, God has revoked his grace and mercy, denying Israel the status of his chosen people. Moreover, he states that it is possible to worship God only in Jerusalem. What about the Jews who live in peace beyond the Caspian Sea? Solomon asks, referring to the myth of the lost Ten Tribes of Israel, which was the subject of many medieval and early modern speculations. Moses replies saying that there are no Jews there: in fact, if a similar condition of peace for Jews were real, he affirms that, in that case, all of the Jews would have moved there. The reality is that the Jews are forced to live in the same Christian lands from whence they were expelled in the Middle Ages and in modern times: France, Germany, Spain, the Kingdom of Naples, and now the Papal States. This happens, according to Moses's words, because 'we practice the cursed usuries and we like gaining without difficulty.'[27] Usury is a recurring theme in Franciscan preaching against the Jews[28] and it represents a critical point also in Luther's work 'On the Jews and Their Lies.'[29] Citing numerous examples from the Bible, and above all the story of Job, Solomon replies that God inflicted numerous punishments and periods of exile on his people because of the sins of Israel, but at the same time, he also showed his immense mercy, for which the Jews must strive. At this point Stabili is speaking through Moses, saying that it is true that the Jews must pray and have high hopes in God (as Psalms 31 and 71 state 'In Thee, O Lord, I have taken refuge; let me never be ashamed'), but that this also is the case for all the nations and people of the world. Moses refers to Christians in particular, and, to prove their perse-

24 'Nelle quali parole il santo, et devoto profeta ne dimostra più che chiaro la falsità della nostra dottrina, per la quale noi ci persuademo, che la misericordia di Dio (per salvare) sia solo sopra noi accecatissimi hebrei, come già voi di sopra diceste' (*ibidem*, f. 27r).

25 *Ibidem*, ff. 26v-28v.

26 *Ezek*. 23:38–39 (Jewish Publication Society edition, 2000).

27 'Ci esercitiamo nelle maledette usure, et ci piace il guadagno senza fatiche' (*Fascicolo*, f. 38v).

28 Especially in fifteenth-century Italy, the observant friars attacked Jewish moneylending and encouraged Christian society to turn to the *Monti di pietà*, charitable institutions providing loans for a relatively low rate of interest. Franciscan friars promoted the new institutions through sermons, sometimes very aggressively, which often resulted in episodes of violence against the Jewish groups living in the city. Cf. Giacomo Todeschini, "Testualità francescana e linguaggi economici nelle città italiane del Quattrocento," *Quaderni medievali* 40 (1995): 21–50; idem, "La riflessione etica sulle attività economiche," in *Economie urbane ed etica economica nell'Italia medievale*, eds. Roberto Greci, Giuliano Pinto and Giacomo Todeschini (Rome: Laterza, 2005): 151–228.

29 Martin Luther, *Von den Juden und Ihren Lügen* (Wittenberg: Hans Lufft, 1543); there are several references to usury in the pamphlet. For the English text, see Martin Luther, *On the Jews and Their Lies*, vol. 47, trans. Martin H. Bertram, in *Luther's Works*, ed. Franklin Sherman and Hartmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971); for usury, see parts 11 and 12.

verant attitude towards God, he quotes directly from the Gospels. Jesus himself taught perseverance: 'Ask, and it will be given. Seek, and you will find. Knock, and it will be opened to you' (Matthew 7:7; Luke 11:9). Moses does not finish here, but goes on to quote the Pauline epistles, recalling how Paul exhorted those Jews who converted to the Christian faith to persevere: perseverance is the only way to reach the reward, that is to say, salvation. The same idea is expressed by another quotation from the *Epistula* 65 by Seneca.[30] Aware of the possibility of being charged by apologetics for having used Christian sources to support his arguments from an internal (and Jewish) perspective, Stabili describes a scene of a controversy between the same Moses and Solomon. Indeed, the latter affirms that his friend appears to be a real Christian and asks him whether he has wasted his time by studying the Christian scriptures. Moses replies that all his knowledge comes only from conversations with the Christians who live in the city, and that anyway, 'their authorities are so engraved in *his* mind that they are impossible to forget.'[31] The reason for this is explained by the compliance between the Christian and Jewish faiths. After a long argumentation on the analogies and differences between the two laws, Moses is charged again by Solomon with being a Christian because of his defence of Christian arguments.[32] The debate becomes heated, and at this point Moses invites Solomon to speak more carefully and not to be angry with him because 'we are not having this discussion in order to upset one another, but only to seek and know the truth that we really need.'[33]

Stabili's intention behind these words is clear, and this is only one of countless examples presented by the (somewhat) sceptical Moses to his coreligionist Solomon. Continuing his dialogue—although it would be more appropriate to describe it as a monologue—Moses reviews the story of the Jewish diaspora from Babylon to the most recent generations, saying that in the past, captivities used to last only one hundred years. Since the destruction of the Temple by Titus (70 AD), who took the Jews to Rome in chains, the diaspora has continued up until the present time, and God is not sending signs or prophets to save his people. With this argument, Moses aims to prove that the Jews are not the *Verus Israël* because of their sins, and so 'all our things are in a great confusion [...] our wise men are confused and scared'[34] because God has disregarded his people, as is written in Psalm 52. Solomon, becoming more and more puzzled, replies that it is necessary to hope, because God is merciful. So Moses replies that both God and Jesus Christ are merciful, as the New Testament shows.

From now on, the conversation between the two Jews is entirely focused on Christian faith and on the possibility of Jews converting to Christianity. Day by day, Shabbat after Shabbat, Solomon asks Moses to discuss a disputable aspect of Jewish and Christian faith. Returning to their speech on the diaspora, Moses starts

30 *Fascicolo*, f. 10r.
31 *Ibidem*, f. 41r, italics mine.
32 *Ibidem*, f. 44r.
33 *Ibidem*.
34 *Ibidem*, f. 31v.

to convince himself and his friend that the Jews, living in these difficult conditions and awaiting the Messiah, are mistaken, and that the Messiah will not come to the diaspora because he had already arrived, but the Jews—especially the rabbis—did not recognise him. This is a possibility, not a certainty. Moses goes on to talk about the disputes between Jews and Christians on the coming of the Messiah:

> M: How many times, when we discuss the coming of the King Messiah that we are desiring and awaiting with the Christians, are we defeated, remaining confused by them? And so, because we do not know what else to say, we begin to say: 'we were born in Judaism, by God's will, so we want to die as Jews.' If this expression is appropriate and right, we should also say the same for the other unfaithful nations. What do you think about this?
>
> S: You certainly know that in our synagogues, this expression is being taught to children and the ignorant so that they do not remain confused when they meet Christians and start to discuss with them. This happens so that they are not forced to abandon Judaism and convert to Christianity by some arguments from Christians.[35]

According to Solomon, this sentence is often taught to children and ignorant people in order that they may avoid baptism and remain in Judaism. However, Moses demonstrates that the same behaviour is also adopted by educated and wise people, citing the case of Moise Giazia and Abramo Giairo,[36] common acquaintances of Moses and Solomon who, discussing the coming of the Messiah with a Christian, 'remained so confused that they did not know what to reply, so they said that they were born in Judaism and they wanted to die as Jews.'[37]

The theme of Jewish stubbornness as a reaction to forced preaching by the clergy—in most cases neophytes—has already been highlighted. From the rejection of conversion follows the will to remain and die as Jews. This sentence seems to have become a *topos* in Italy throughout the centuries, and it is possible to find this statement in many works. We could find it, for instance, in a chronicle written in Rome during the eighteenth century, where the Jews Abramo Caivano and Angeluccio della Riccia condemned to death in 1736 refuse baptism and affirm their will to die as Jews:

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35 'M: Quante volte ragionando noi con li Christiani parlando del Re Messia che tanto desideriamo e aspettiamo noi da quegli con le nostre ragioni istesse restiamo vinti, et confusi? E come da noi non si può più alle cose vere rispondere ne voltiamo a dire. Noi siamo nati giudei, e a Dio così ha piaciuto, onde volemo nel giudaismo anco morire. Se questo modo di dire fusse convenevole et buono, converia ancora che si dicesse dell'altre nationi che al certo infedeli sono. Parvi che in questo modo si consenti alla verità?

S: Voi sapete con certezza come nelle vostre sinagoghe questo modo di rispondere si insegna, et persoadersi a gli putti et a gl'huomini ignoranti acciò non restino essi confusi quando peraventura co' Christiani (nel mezzo de quali habitano) essi ragionano. Et questo si fa acciò che non siano costretti da alcuni argomenti fattili da Christiani, di abandonare il giudaismo et farsi Christiani' (*ibidem*, f. 51r).

36 There is no evidence that they actually existed.

37 'Restarono essi talmente confusi che non sapendo più che rispondere, dissero le parole che di sopra dette habiamo, cioè che essendo essi vati Giudei così volevano anco morire' (*ibidem*, f. 51v).

> Abramo [...] after he had met the comforters, started to cry, saying that he had not killed anyone and did not deserve death, but, since he was condemned to it, he wanted to die in his religion, in the grace of the God of Israel, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. [...] He wanted to die as a Jew without any baptism [...]. [Angeluccio to the preacher]: 'Leave me, I want to die, I want to die in the grace of Jacob and Isaac and I do not want to listen to your sermons. I was born a Jew and I want to die as a Jew.'[38]

Almost the same are the words of Anna del Monte, a young Jewish woman enclosed in the *Casa dei Catecumeni* ('House of Catechumens') in Rome in 1749 in order to be converted, as appears in the diary of her imprisonment. To the two priests who attempted to convert her, she replied: 'This is nothing for me, whereas I was born a Jew and I want to die as a Jew.'[39]

On the other hand, after the sermons of the preachers, many Jews became more and more perplexed, and in many cases ended up converting to Christianity. The theme of conversion is particularly dear to Stabili, who inserts some neophytes into the dialogue. One of them, Giovanni Battista, was identified by François Secret in 1965 with Giovanni Battista Buonamici (born Aharon ben Menaḥem), a neophyte in Civitanova Marche, who appears in the chronicle on Paul IV's papacy written by the moneylender Benjamin Neḥemiah ben Elnathan.[40]

However, Secret's hypothesis is not strengthened by any strong evidence, since he limited himself to saying only that the name Giovanni Battista was frequently adopted by converts to Christianity and that the Giovanni Battista mentioned in the chronicle by Benjamin must be the same person who appears in the *Fascicolo*.[41] There is no strong proof either that the city in which Moses and Solomon live is Civitanova or that the Giovanni Battista mentioned by Moses is the same neophyte who contributed to the instigation of the Christian population against the Jews in Civitanova, as the author of the chronicle recounts. The city could possibly be identified as Ancona for the reasons expressed before and also because when Stabili was writing (after 1569), the Jews were allowed to live only in Rome and Ancona because of the bull by Pius V mentioned above. Moreover, as proven by the local archival documentation, the Jewish community of Civitanova Marche had disappeared by this time, since the synagogue and the Jewish cem-

38 Simona Foà, ed., *Le "croniche" della famiglia Citone* (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1988): 295–298. The translation from Italian into English is mine.

39 Marina Caffiero, ed., *Rubare le anime. Diario di Anna del Monte ebrea romana* (Rome: Viella, 2008), 97 and 45–55. The translation from Italian into English is mine.

40 François Secret, "Notes sur les hebraïsants chrétiens," 176. The chronicle by Benjamin Neḥemiah ben Elnathan from Civitanova Marche was first published by Isaiah Sonne in *Tarbiz* 2 (1930–1): 331–376 and 477–502, then republished in idem, *Mi-Pavolo ha-revi'i 'ad Pius ha-ḥamiši. Kronikah 'ivrit min ha-me'ah ha-shesh 'eśreh* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Mossad Bialik, 1954): 3–93. The chronicle in question is the topic of the PhD project I am expecting to complete in 2017, supervised by Professor Paolo Broggio, Università degli Studi Roma Tre, and Professor Giuseppe Veltri, Universität Hamburg.

41 Secret, "Notes sur les hebraïsants chrétiens," 176.

etery had finally been sold by the Jews in 1569.[42] What is certain is that most of the time, the zealous preaching of the neophytes represented a problem for the rest of the Jewish population living in Christian society.[43]

Then, Moses analyses other arguments about the Christian faith: the Trinity, priesthood, dietary prohibitions, some prophecies on Jesus Christ, and finally, the authority of the Gospels. With more and more conviction, Moses restates that the Messiah has come: the truth is within the Gospels that Jesus is the Messiah that the Jews are awaiting, the New Testament agrees with the Hebrew Bible, and Jesus has not come to abolish Mosaic Law. Using the metaphor of a moth bumping into a light, Moses says that the rabbis were unable to see the truth, or better, that they saw the truth but did not recognise it.[44] At this point, Stabili launches a heavy attack on rabbinical literature, which he has already criticised in the preface. Indeed, at the beginning of the work, Stabili informs the reader about the use of those sources, accepted by the same Jews. Referring to the rabbinical literature, he writes that 'they have [quoted] those modern rabbis whose authority is not so great among the Jews themselves.' In contrast, the Christian authors and writings presented date back to an ancient time, so their authority 'cannot be denied by any Jew.' The references to the Talmud in the *Fascicolo* are very few and, in general, it is simply described as 'the profane and wicked law'[45] of the Jews. Moses/Stabili gives an interesting argument about the prohibition and burning of Christian books charged with heresy. He insists on the importance and veracity of the antique writings, as opposed to the modern authors who have deviated from the doctrine; moreover, he praises the restrictions in matters of faith that the Christians adopt through their councils such as the prohibition and burning of unorthodox writings.[46] According to Moses, this is also what the Jews themselves should do in order to prevent the spreading of various erroneous doctrines. Even though there is no explicit mention of this, it is clear that Stabili is referring to the burning of the Talmud and other forbidden Jewish books. The first burning of the Talmud was decreed in September 1553 by Julius III and renewed a year later; with some exceptions, the order was applied all over the Papal States, and 'thousands of books were destroyed in several Italian cities, and in France and Spain

42 These acts are preserved in the State Archive of Macerata. Due to the lack of funds in Civitanova, in 1613 the City Council appointed a Jewish banker to come to live in the city in order to lend money at the rate of 12% (Archivio storico comunale di Civitanova Marche, *Riformanze*, reg. 197, f. 189v, March 18, 1613).

43 On some episodes of violence operated by Jew-turned-Christian neophytes see, for example, Robert Bonfil, *Jewish Life in Renaissance Italy* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1994), 117–118; Marina Caffiero, *Forced Baptisms: Histories of Jews, Christians, and Converts in Papal Rome* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 2012); original title: *Battesimi forzati. Storie di ebrei, cristiani e convertiti nella Roma dei papi* (Rome: Viella, 2004).

44 *Fascicolo,* f. 124r.

45 *Ibidem*, f. 305v.

46 *Ibidem*, f. 142r.

as well.'[47] With this argument, Stabili indirectly justifies not only the burning of the heretical Christian writings, formerly forbidden by the indexes issued by the popes,[48] but also the burning of Jewish texts, including the Talmud.

Moses gives many examples to illustrate his argument that the rabbis' writings are ridiculous and their beliefs are foolish and sometimes heretical. One of these is the belief expressed by Shimon ben Pazzi, student of Jehoshua ben Levi, according to which God made a mistake when he created the moon. In the beginning, as described in Genesis 1, God created the sun and the moon, but after a while the moon became arrogant, so God punished it by reducing its light. However, according to the story, God understood his mistake and finally asked the Jews to make sacrifices to the moon to remedy his error.[49] This example was also very popular in other polemical works, such as the *Riti e costumi degli ebrei* (1736) by the convert Paolo Sebastiano Medici, where it was used to support his arguments against the blasphemies of the Jews.[50]

The last chapters of the *Fascicolo* are entirely devoted to demolishing Solomon's last doubts. Moses explains that Isaiah's prophecies are fulfilled in Jesus Christ, who came to dissolve the doubts of the Jews of his time, for instance, as to whether it was correct to pay tribute to Caesar or not. Now all the doubts are almost gone: Moses clearly says that the Jews must convert and recognise Jesus as the Messiah that the Jews are expecting. What was once a doubt is now a certainty.

Solomon agrees, even if he has other doubts which prevent him from converting: for instance, the Christian belief of the virginal conception of Jesus. To dissipate this last doubt, Moses recounts a long dissertation on some famous cases of extraordinary births, quoting Valerius Maximus, Flavius Josephus, Giovanni Pontano, Amatus Lusitanus, and many others. Turning from some medieval legends on hermaphroditism via the myth of the Arabian phoenix to the description of the reproductive modalities of some animals (such as bees and mice) referencing the works of Virgil, Ovidius, and Plinius, Moses demonstrates that a woman does not necessarily need a man to give birth, especially if her son is God's son, because nothing is impossible for him.[51]

> M: You see clearly, Solomon, the degree of clearness with which we know the vanity, or, on the contrary, I say the falsehood, of our hopes waiting for the King Messiah, the restoration of the Temple,

47 Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin, *The Censor, the Editor, and the Text. The Catholic Church and the Shaping of the Jewish Canon in the Sixteenth Century*, translated by Jackie Feldman (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007): 32.

48 The first of these, issued by Pope Paul IV, dates back to 1559.

49 *Fascicolo*, f. 304v. This story is reported in the Babylonian Talmud, *Ḥullin* 60b.

50 Paolo Sebastiano Medici, *Riti e costumi degli ebrei descritti, e confutati dal dottore Paolo Medici sacerdote e lettor pubblico fiorentino* (Florence: Pietro Gaetano Viviani, 1736), 235–237. The aim of the work was to discredit the *Historia de' gli riti hebraici* (Paris: Gaffarel, 1637) written by the Venetian Rabbi Leon Modena. This ethnographical genre was thoroughly widespread in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries: see Giuseppe Veltri, *Renaissance Philosophy in Jewish Garb. Foundations and Challenges in Judaism on the Eve of Modernity* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2009): 171 ff.

51 *Fascicolo*, f. 292r.

> and the rebuilding of Jerusalem? For God's sake, Solomon, we should not remain in this blindness, perfidy and, stubbornness; let us find out with every effort how to enter this Temple in this spiritual city, that is to say the faith of the Christians. We have to, so that we can praise God both in this world and in the next. If we do the contrary, I doubt the possibility of our salvation.[52]

After Moses's last speech, the dialogue finally ends with Solomon and Moses declaring their intention to convert along with their whole families. The representation of doubt as a fiction, a theatrical performance, apparently recalls the sceptical tradition, but in this case it would be better to talk about a mystification of scepticism, here used by the author with a catechetical goal. The dialogue between the two Jews represents a stratagem, a fictional device through which Stabili constructs a debate for his own dogmatic purposes. It can be argued that, for the author, doubts have a positive value, in opposition to 'Jewish stubbornness', because they represent the pretext for a rational debate based on both Christian and Jewish sources, aimed at resolving doubts. Only by freeing themselves from doubts can the Jews understand their errors and be born again to a new life through the sweet waters of baptism. Also, the choice of the dialogue form seems to aim towards this same goal, for reasons we will discuss in the next section.

The Use of Dialogue in Christian Anti-Jewish Polemics: Notes for Future Perspectives of Study

Anti-Jewish polemics from Late Antiquity through the Middle Ages gave life to a massive literary production expressed in different genres: the *testimonia*, the *epistola*, the *tractatus*, the *homilia*, the *sermo* and, above all, the *dialogus*, which was the most widespread literary tool in controversies between Christians and Jews.[53]

Concerning the term 'dialogue', the Oxford English Dictionary gives us two different definitions: first of all, dialogue is 'a conversation between two or more people as a feature of a book, play or film,' but it can also be intended as 'a discussion between two or more people or groups, especially one directed towards exploration of a particular subject or resolution of a problem.'[54] The dialogue is also a literary technique

52 'Vedete di gratia o Salamone con quanta chiarezza si conosce la vanità, anzi dirò la falsità delle nostre speranze in aspettar più il Re Messia con la reintegrazione del Tempio e della Città per habitare corporalmente. Deh per Dio Salamone, non stiamo più in questa accecatione, perfidia et ostinatione, ma cerchiamo con tutte le forze entrare in questo Tempio, et in questa città spirituale, che altro non è (per quel conoscer si può) se non la fede dei Cristiani, et dovemolo fare ad ogni modo, acciò ne sia lecito lodare Iddio in questo mondo, et nell'altro, et facendo il contrario io ho dubio della nostra salvatione' (*Ibidem*, f. 278r-v).

53 Immacolata Aulisa and Claudio Schiano, "Dialogo di Papisco e Filone giudei con un monaco," *Quaderni di Vetera Christianorum* 30 (2005): 20–21.

54 Oxford English Dictionary, online version: http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/dialogue, accessed June 20, 2015.

and its use can be seen as far back as classical literature, especially in the works of Socrates and Plato, with rhetorical and argumentative goals.[55]

Among the Christian dialogues, we can encounter, for instance, the lost 'Dialogue between Jason and Papiscus', the 'Dialogue with Trypho' by Justin Martyr, and also the writings of Tertullian. It was undoubtable that that a virulent anti-Judaism spread in Europe during the Middle Ages, through the diffusion of the works of Petrus Alfonsi[56] and the preaching of Pablo Christiani,[57] tireless supporters of the *Adversus Judaeos* literature. Similarly, we could name Samuel Maroccanus or Marochitanus, a Jew who converted to Christianity and wrote a polemical work against the Jews in Arabic during the second half of the eleventh century, which was translated into Latin under the title of *Tractatus Rabbi Samuelis* by Alfonsus Bonihominis around 1339, and then into Italian by the friar Gregorio Lombardelli during the sixteenth century, republished by the Venetian philosopher and physician Girolamo Moratino in 1655.[58]

These and other writings were certainly influenced by the late antique Christian polemical works, replying at the same time to the polemical and apologetic Jewish literary production that was very prolific during the Middle Ages and the Early Modern period.[59] Antonino Stabili, who was well versed in Hebrew and Jewish literature, as we know, might have read or known works such as the *Sefer ha-Kuzari* by Yehuda ha-Levi, the *Milḥamot ha-Šem*, the *Toledot Yešu*, or the writings of Nahmanides, who, in fact, is mentioned several times in the *Fascicolo delle vanità giudaiche*. Indeed, the work touches on some important aspects of Jewish polemics and apologetics such as, for instance, the coming of the Messiah, the virginal conception of Jesus, Mary's virginity, and the *Birkat ha-Minim*. Alongside these themes in the *Fascicolo* we encoun-

55 On the relationship between dialogue and rhetoric, see: Edda Weigand, *Dialogue and rhetoric* (Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Beniamins Publishing & Co., 2008). For more on the dialogue form, see Kenneth Seeskin, *Dialogue and Discovery: A Study in Socratic Method* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987).

56 Moshe Sefardi (eleventh century, Spain) converted to Christianity in 1106; he was the author of a *Dialogus contra Iudaeos*. See John Tolan, *Petrus Alfonsi and his Medieval Readers* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1993).

57 Shaul ? (thirteenth century, Spain) converted to Christianity and joined the Dominican Order as a friar, participating to the disputation of Barcelona on the Talmud (1263) against Nachmanides. See "Christiani, Pablo," in *Jewish Encyclopedia* (online version): http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/4365-christiani-pablo, accessed July 1, 2015. See also Moshe Idel and Mauro Perani, *Naḥmanide esegeta e cabalista. Studi e testi* (Florence: Giuntina, 1998).

58 On the editions of this work, see Norman Roth, ed., *Medieval Jewish Civilization: An Encyclopedia* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 222; Centre des études supérieures de la Renaissance, ed., *Antonio Brucioli: humanisme et évangelisme entre Réforme et Contre-Réforme. Actes du colloque de Tours, 20–21 Mai 2005* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2008).

59 Among the extensive literature on the topic, see Daniel J. Lasker, *Jewish Philosophical Polemics Against Christianity in the Middle Ages* (New York: Ktav, 1977); idem, "Jewish Anti-Christian Polemics in the Early Modern Period: Change or Continuity?," in *Tradition, Heterodoxy, and Religious Culture: Judaism and Christianity in the Early Modern Period*, eds. Chanita Goodblatt and Howard Kreisel (Beer-Sheva: Ben Gurion University of the Negev, 2006): 469–488.

ter other arguments that recur in anti-Jewish polemical works such as, for instance, the myth of the lost Ten Tribes of Israel and the critics of the Kabbalah. Referring to this last point, Stabili/Moses argues that the modern rabbis, because of their confusion, started to multiply the letters and syllables of words and combine them with each other and other similar kabbalistic matters 'believing that [in the Kabbalah] are hidden the secrets and the true soul of our [the Mosaic] Law.'[60]

The *Pugio fidei* (completed by 1280) by Ramón Martí, another model used by Stabili, attempts to demonstrate the absurdity of the Jewish faith and the righteousness of Christianity through the use of rabbinical authorities and the Talmud as primary sources.[61] This use of Hebrew texts became more and more fashionable during the Early Modern period, leading to an increase in the number of Christians learning Hebrew, whose teaching was established in the fourteenth century in order to argue against the Jews.[62] Some Christian polemicists who engaged in anti-Jewish controversies in early modern Italy such as Giulio Bartolocci[63] (1613–1687) and Melchiorre Palontrotti (seventeenth century),[64] despite not having a Jewish family background, show a deep knowledge of Judaism and a complete mastery of the Hebrew language. On the other hand, more frequently protagonists of anti-Jewish controversies were neophytes turned from Judaism to Christianity, who offered their service to the Church in many ways, such as, for example, teaching Hebrew, revising Hebrew books considered improper and blasphemous by the Church, and writing polemical

60 'Li Rabbini moderni fatti senza altra autorità vegendosi confusi in molte cose per lo mezzo di tali spositioni diederonsi alla moltiplicatione delle nostre lettere et di ponti, alla continovatione delle sillabe, a congiungere un verso con l'altro, et a simili altre cose secondo l'arte che essi chiamano cabalistica, credendosi che quivi li secreti et li veri sentimenti della nostra Legge ascosi fussero' (*Fascicolo*, f. 184r).

61 The *edition princeps* of the *Pugio fidei adversus Mauros et Judaeos* appeared in 1651 (apud Mathurinum et Ioannem Henault, Paris). On the work, see Jeremy Cohen, *Living Letters of the Law: Ideas of the Jew in Medieval Christianity* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999), 343 ff.

62 Cf. Michael C. Legaspi, *The Death of Scripture and the Rise of Biblical Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 96; Samuel David Luzzatto, *Prolegomeni ad una grammatica ragionata della lingua ebraica, di Samuel David Luzzatto da Trieste* (Padua: Tipografia e Fonderia Cartallier, 1836): 40–42.

63 A Cistercian monk and *scriptor hebraicus* of the Vatican Library, he learned Hebrew from Rabbi Jehudah Jonah from Safed (converted to Christianity with the name of Giovambattista Jonah). Bartolocci was author of the *Bibliotheca Magna Rabbinica de Scriptoribus, et scriptis hebraicis, ordine alphabetico Hebraice et Latine digestis...*, 4 vols. (Rome: ex typographia Sacrae Congregationis de Propaganda Fide, 1683). Cf. Giovanni Garbini, "Bartolocci, Giulio," *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani* 6 (1964).

64 It might be that this Melchiorre Palontrotti was a descendent of a homonymous cantor who lived in the sixteenth century, see Richard Wistreich, "Palontrotti, Melchiorre," *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani* 80 (2014). On the polemicist and his works, see Fausto Parente, "Il confronto ideologico tra l'ebraismo e la Chiesa in Italia," *Italia Judaica* 1 (1983): 303–381, esp. 335 ff.; Benjamin Ravid, "Contra Judaeos in Seventeenth-Century Italy: Two Responses to the Discorso of Simone Luzzatto by Melchiore Palontrotti and Giulio Morosini," *AJS Review* 7–8 (1982–3): 301–351; Giulio Busi, "La *Breve Raccolta* (Venezia, 1649) del polemista antigiudaico Melchiorre Palontrotti," *Annali di Ca' Foscari* 24/3 (1985): 1–19.

works to encourage the conversion of the Jews. This is the case, for instance, of Fabiano Fioghi (first half of the sixteenth century–1611 or 1628), Giulio Morosini (1612–1683), Paolo Sebastiano Medici (1671–1738), and Lorenzo Filippo Virgulti (?–1735). The first of these was, among other things, the author of a dialogue between a neophyte and a preacher who indoctrinates him, printed in Rome in 1582, one year before the publication of Stabili's work.[65] Medici also preferred the dialogue form, although for his exegetical and homiletic works on the books of the Old and New Testament, which were not directly linked to anti-Jewish controversies.[66]

The production of anti-Jewish literature, circulating in Italy in the Middle Ages and the Early Modern period, was obviously widespread and strongly influenced by the historical circumstances.[67] It is possible that Antonino Stabili, who wrote, as we said above, in the second half of the sixteenth century, could have read and studied most of the medieval Jewish writings, which were certainly available in many religious and private libraries (and maybe in the same convent of Santa Maria in Atessa where Stabili was). On the other hand, it is also possible that he became aware of their contents through the reading of other Italian (and non-Italian) works, based on the Jewish works named above and on Christian anti-Jewish literature.

Furthermore, we cannot overlook the fact that Stabili was a child of his time: during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, the preaching of the observant friars took root in in the Kingdom of Naples (and throughout Italy) thanks to the activity, among others, of Bernardino of Siena (1380–1444), Giacomo della Marca (1393–1476), and Giovanni of Capestrano (1386–1456). As a Dominican friar who lived only a century after them, Stabili could have been influenced by their preaching and teachings. Moreover, it should not be forgotten that Stabili himself lived in the Kingdom of Naples when the Jews were expelled in 1541, or that he lived during the papacies of Paul IV (1555–1559) and Pius V (1566–1572), who were particularly strict towards the Jews.

The fictional device of a dialogue between two Jews expressing their doubts regarding their faith (and the possibility of eventually converting to Christianity) helps Stabili to construct a new narrative, not reflecting the echoes of venomous preaching but based on the same Jewish evidence from an internal perspective. The only Christians who appear in the *Fascicolo* are those who dispute with the main characters' acquaintances but do not manage to convert them to Christianity. The analysis of long-neglected polemical works like Stabili's, their contextualisation within the historical framework of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Europe, the comparison between Christian and Jewish sources, and their integration with the archival documen-

65 Fabiano Fioghi, *Dialogo fra il cathecumino et il padre catechizante, composto per Fabiano Fioghi dal Monte San Savino, Lettore della Lingua hebrea nel Collegio de Neophiti…* (Rome: Antonio Blado, 1582) another extended version was published in 1611, then reprinted in 1628.

66 His *Dialoghi sacri* were first printed in Florence in 1719, then gathered together and published again in Venice by Angelo Geremia between 1731 and 1737.

67 Gianfranco Fioravanti, "Polemiche antigiudaiche nell'Italia del Quattrocento: un tentativo di interpretazione globale," *Quaderni storici* 64 (1987): 19–37.

tation can help historians not only to have a more complete overview of early modern polemics but also, more generally, to develop common paths of research at the crossroads between literature, history, and the history of ideas.

Concerning the *Fascicolo delle vanità giudaiche*, a more in-depth reading of anti-Christian and anti-Jewish works circulating in the sixteenth century and also further archival and bibliographical research into the convent where the author lived may shed light on some issues. Moreover, further study of Dominican literature in the Early Modern period (and also of Stabili's other writings) would be very useful to reveal the role and the diffusion of the *Fascicolo delle vanità giudaiche* after Antonino Stabili's death and afterwards for a wider comprehension of the work in general.[68]

68 Copies of the *Fascicolo delle vanità giudaiche* (Ancona, 1583) are preserved in the Biblioteca Vaticana, in the Biblioteca Alessandrina (Rome) and in other libraries in several Italian cities, (Ancona, Ascoli Piceno, Asti, Bergamo, Bologna, Ferrara, Florence, Macerata, Padua, Palermo, Pavia, Pesaro, Ravenna, Reggio Emilia, Torino, and Venice). Another two copies are preserved in London (British Library) and in Lugano. A specimen was held in the library of the artist Pietro Veri (1568–1611) from Florence according to a document published in Lothar Sickel, "Pietro Veri. Ein Florentiner Künstler in Diensten des Herzogs von Bracciano, Virginio Orsini," *Marburger Jahrbuch für Kunstwissenschaft* 30 (2003): 205. We also found a small excerpt of the work among the papers of Giovanni Pastrizio (1636–1708), a prominent lecturer in theology in the Collegio di Propaganda Fide in Rome (Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, *Borg. lat*. 493).

Paolo L. Bernardini

Hebraica veritas? Philosophy, Scepticism, and Politics in the *Porta Veritatis* (1634–1640)

The Text and its Arguments

This essay[1] aims to offer some theoretical and historical–philosophical insights and some reflections on the *Porta Veritatis*. As I have demonstrated elsewhere,[2] the *Porta Veritatis* was written by Benedetto Pinelli—also known (by his original Portuguese name) as Bento Pinhel, or by his Hebrew name as Jacob ben Amram, his *nom de plume*—between 1634 and 1640, when he was probably at a later stage of his life.[3]

Jacob ben Amram was a New Christian and a jurist, trained at the University of Coimbra, who taught in the first two decades of the seventeenth century in Pisa. Pisa was one of the oldest and most reputed universities in Italy, founded in 1343. Not only did Galileo Galilei first study, then teach there, from 1589–1592, but Pisa was

1 This essay was conceived and written during my first months as inaugural fellow of the Maimonides Centre. I am very grateful to Giuseppe Veltri and his wonderful staff for the invitation and for providing an excellent environment for research as well as for scholarly discussions. First of all, I would like to thank Dr. Bill Rebiger, for, *inter alia*, his careful reading and his comments on this article, as well as for all his generous suggestions related to my work in Hamburg. I wish to thank the other fellows from the first semester of 2015–2016, Prof. Dr. Carsten Wilke, Dr. Roi Benbassat, and Dr. Charles Snyder, with whom I discussed more than once the contents and aims of my research, and from whom I have certainly learned very much in terms of methodology, and not only for this essay. My special thanks go to Maria Wazinski, Scientific Coordinator of the Centre, and to my research assistant, Marlene Heider, for their constant and caring assistance. I also wish to thank some other scholars who provided me with important information and insights, including Prof. Dr. Diego Lucci (American University in Bulgaria), Prof. Dr. Elisa Bianco (University of Insubria), Dr. David Leech (University of Bristol), and Marilyn Lewis (University of London). Anna Lissa and her husband Gaetano were among those who made my stay in Hamburg not only scientifically productive, but also humanly enjoyable. In this essay I will focus in particular on the contents of the text, and for this reason I have reduced footnotes and references to literature to the bare minimum. I want to thank, last but not least, the anonymous reviewers and the editors of the text as for its English.
2 For the aspects of the research relevant to the authorship, original language, date, and codices, see my "Mysteries at the Gate of Truth: A Reappraisal of the *Porta Veritatis* (1634–1640)," *Nuova Rivista Storica* 3 (2016), forthcoming. This article, along with the present essay, anticipates some of the results of my research. I am currently working on an annotated edition of the *Porta Veritatis*, based on the Clark Library (UCLA) codex, which will be published, *si deus vult*, in 2017. Some of the themes dealt with in my introduction to this volume are anticipated in the present essay. All references in this article are to the copy of the manuscript held at Balliol College, MS 251. It is probably the oldest among the surviving codices. However, it was written by six hands, so it cannot be considered the first copy, but rather a copy of the first. All the textual problems will be addressed in the introduction to the annotated edition of the manuscript that I am preparing.
3 In this essay I will use all three names, as to be faithful to his triple identity, an identity he never denied.

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also home to a vast community, a real colony of Portuguese New Christians, at least five of whom taught medicine and law.

The *Porta Veritatis* was written in Latin and, so far, four codices of it, all different from one another, are known. There are no traces of an early circulation and reception of this manuscript in continental Europe. Its first circulation and the attacks the manuscript drew upon itself took place in England, and later on, to a lesser extent, in Holland. In Italy, where the work was conceived and written, the impact was equal to zero.

However, the impact of the *Porta Veritatis* in England was initially very strong. The manuscript, brought to England by Menasseh ben Israel in his 'mission' to plead for the readmission of the Jews to England, haunted the nights and days of a number of Anglican, Calvinist, and neo-Platonic writers, as far as we know. It is however possible that its readership was larger and that some of its readers did not express any opinion of this 'burning' text.

The last owner of this copy, Bishop Richard Kidder (1633–1703), before bequeathing the manuscript to Balliol College library, left a note on the front cover that hinted at the dangers present in the text for any Christian approaching it without due instruction. It is worth quoting the note in full, for it is very telling about a number of issues, biases, and attitudes related to the Jews at that time, and not only in England:

> This Manuscript was found in the Library of the very learned Ralph Cudworth D.D. Thence it came into the hands of my learned friend P. Allix D.D. of whom I bought it. I have heard Dr. Cudworth say that he bought of M. Ben Israel a manuscript for 10 pounds, and I believe this to be the same. It hath been thought that M. Ben Israel was the author of it. I cannot affirm that to be so. But I can affirm that I take it to be the greatest effort against Christianity that I ever saw in any language whatsoever. And for that reason I do declare that it is my will that it be not sold to any private person for any price how great so ever. Lest by that means it should be printed, without an answer to the prejudice of Christianity. I rather will that it should be burnt, or given to some public library upon sufficient caution that it be never lent out of the said library, nor transcribed, but locked up by itself and consulted upon occasion in the Library by such only as shall be allowed by the owners of the said library. May 9. 1700. Richard Bath and Wells.[4]

Such a warning was written in or around 1700. However, only a few years later, Jacques Basnage, in his *Historie des Juifs*, published in French in 1706 and in English in 1708, presented a completely different image of the *Porta Veritatis*, removing any sort of 'danger' from the manuscript and disarming rather than confuting some (among many) of its anti-Christian arguments in just a few lines.[5] Basnage referred explicitly to Richard Kidder:

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4 This note is found at the beginning of the Balliol codex (MS 251). From now on, all references to the *Porta Veritatis* in this essay will be to the Balliol codex.

5 See Jacques Basnage, *The History of the Jews, from Jesus Christ to the Present Time: Containing their Antiquities, their Religion, their Rites, the Dispersion of the Ten Tribes in the East, and the Persecutions this Nation has Suffer'd in the West. Being a Supplement and Continuation of the History of Josephus. Written in French by Mr. Basnage. Translated into English by Tho. Taylor, A.M* (London: printed for J. Beaver and B. Lintot in Fleet street, R. Knaplock in St. Paul's Church-Yard, J. Sprint in Little Brittain,

> The Rabbis, who govern the synagogue, will not permit any correspondence with the Christians about religion. Dr Kidder (author of the Demonstration of the Messiah) offered a Conference to the Cacam of London,[6] to convince a young Maid, who had already some knowledge of the Truth: the Cacam not only refused, but the Maid was shut up by her Parents, and obliged to stifle the seeds of Truth she had received [...].
>
> XXII. The Bishop, who was taken away by a sad and dreadful accident (he was crushed under the ruins of the Episcopal Palace, in a storm which happened in 1703), has confuted the Gate of Truth, written by Jacob the son of Amram. This author, who was unknown to Bartolocci, lived in the last century (An. 1634) and his work continues in manuscript. Bp. Kidder was afraid it would stagger those who read it, and therefore he answered it. In the mean time [*sic*] Jacob's objections are not considerable. He accused Jesus Christ of being deceived, by saying that David and his companions ate the Shew-Bread, which is false, since he was alone. He maintains, that the Purification of the Virgin contradicts the Immaculate Conception of the Mother and the Son; that the licence given the Devils to precipitate the Swine into the sea[7] is in contrary to Charity since Private Persons lost their herds by it: that Christ did not eat the Paschal Lamb as the Law ordained; that to Saint Mathew, Saint Peter must have renounced his Master before the cock crew, and according to Saint Mark, he did not do it till the second crowing of the Cock; Jesus promised to go before his disciple into Galilee, and yet he did not do it, and, on the contrary, he promised his Disciples not to send them his Spirit till after his Ascension, tho' they had received it before. If these objections breed any doubt of the Truth of the Christian Religion, which the Jewish Doctor designed to shake, a Man may recur to Dr Kidder's preface, who confutes them before he demonstrates Jesus Christ to be the Messiah as long expected.[8]

On the eve of the Enlightenment, the dangers related to a typically Baroque anti-Christian polemic were no longer evident or present, or at least they were not perceived as such. Dismissed as inoffensive by Basnage, but terribly feared by Kidder, the *Porta*, torn between these two extremes, is well worth a comprehensive reappraisal. When Basnage wrote his work, the tensions that shattered England and continental Europe in the Baroque era had only recently faded, and the early Enlightenment was powerfully entering the scene, with the biblical criticism of Richard Simon, Spinoza, and Georges-Louis Leclerc, among others. This was the time of the birth of the 'radical Enlightenment'. The scholars who worked extensively on the 'radical Enlightenment', from Martin Mulsow to Jonathan Israel, amply demonstrated that works such as the *Porta Veritatis* might still be considered 'dangerous', but that they were much more acceptable than in the Baroque era.[9]

A. Bell, R. Smith, and J. Round in Cornhill, 1708). For an enlightening study of Basnage see Jonathan M. Elukin, "Jacques Basnage and the History of the Jews: Anti-Catholic Polemic and Historical Allegory in the Republic of Letters," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 53.4 (1992): 603–630.

6 The episode is rather obscure: it is not clear whether it actually happened.

7 On the importance of this interpretation, related to the miracle of the swine, see the "Conclusions' of the present essay, *infra*.

8 Basnage, *The History of the Jews*, 681.

9 See in particular Martin Mulsow, *Enlightenment Underground: Radical Germany, 1680–1720* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2015).

To Basnage, arguments like those summarised in the above text seemed to belong to polemics and controversies that had been quenched for some time. The Jews had been 'informally' and later formally readmitted to England, and John Toland had even written a plea for their naturalisation, a legal step (taken only much later) well beyond simple toleration and acceptance.[10] Works like the *Porta* belong to a spiritual atmosphere typical of the Baroque and alien to the early Enlightenment. The argument of the infringement of private property is probably the only 'actual' argument among those recalled by Basnage, and seems to be quite original. This might have been, however, the only one to draw attention in the history of the reception of the work. Basnage's short and dismissive mention of the text sealed the fate of the *Porta* for good. When it was written, however, it was clearly a dangerous and potentially disruptive text. It had its last moment of glory when it (in the Clark codex) was exhibited at the Whitechapel Art Gallery, among the many items on display in the exhibition of 'Jewish Arts and Antiquities,' which lasted from November 7 to December 16, 1906, visited by the staggering figure of 150,000 people.[11] The fact that as late as 1906 a work like the *Porta* could be displayed, among many others, in an exhibition meant for the general public is very revealing, at least of the fact that the impact of the *Porta* lasted well beyond the second half of the seventeenth century.[12]

In this essay, I will attempt to identify the philosophical, sceptical, and finally the political elements that the manuscript presents, without addressing the core of its contents, which are mainly theological and based on the Old Testament, the Talmud, and occasionally the Kabbalah. If there is a clandestine text where the principle of *philosophica ancilla theologiae* ('philosophy is/must be the servant of theology') is truly applicable, this is certainly the *Porta*, for philosophical references are few, but not absent.[13]

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10 I personally first became interested into the *Porta Veritatis* (while working on the British Library Codex, quite similar to that in Balliol and to the fourth (and so far, the last) in the Royal Library in Amsterdam) when preparing the Italian edition of the work of John Toland, the *Reasons for Naturalizing the Jews in Great Britain and Ireland*, published in 1714. See John Toland, *Ragioni per naturalizzare gli ebrei in Gran Bretagna e Irlanda (1714)*, ed. Paolo Bernardini, translated into Italian by L. Orsi (Florence: La Giuntina, 1998): 246.

11 On this exhibition, see Peter Gross, *Representations of Jews and Jewishness in English painting, 1887–1914* (Ph.D. thesis, University of Leeds, 2004), *passim*. On the general theme of Jewish images and depictions, and the relevant iconology, see Richard Cohen, *Jewish Icons* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

12 For evidence of quoting the text in the eighteenth century, see my "Mysteries at the Gate of Truth: A Reappraisal of the *Porta Veritatis* (1634–1640)," *Nuova Rivista Storica* 3 (2016), forthcoming. Basically, the text became an exegetical work among many others, and was completely deprived, by those who quoted it, of any 'polemical', 'anti-Christian' meaning.

13 It is worth noting that the same title *Porta Veritatis* indicates more a methodology, or an 'access to the truth', than a real presentation of the 'truth'. From this point of view, the emphasis is on the 'method' rather than on its results. On the one hand, this fits into the late Renaissance and Baroque attitudes to philosophical and theological enquiries. On the other hand, it also terminologically close

The first and principal question regards the use of philosophy within a theological treatise. Secondly, I will discuss the use of sceptical tools and expressions, along with arguments and conceptual strategies more or less relevant to scepticism. Thirdly and finally, I will examine the political context, and the relevant political positions taken by the author, in a manuscript of largely polemical-theological and religious contents.

In principle, within a theological and polemical treatise, philosophical arguments might be entirely excluded. If we take the *Porta Veritatis*, written by a man who was trained as a legal scholar and who taught canon law at the University of Pisa, its main arguments fall within an apparently merely theological framework. They are exposed at the end of the long *Prologus*, firstly in eight points, then immediately afterwards condensed into three main arguments:

1. Si ostendimus, Deum opt. Max. ita esse bonum, ut non recipiat multiplicationem, et distinctionem personarum.[14]
2. Praecepto morali negativo prohibuisse sui ipsius imaginem, aut sculptam similitudinem.[15]
3. Dei legem in Sinai datam Judaeis, per manus Moysis, prefortissimam, iustificatam in se, et iustificatam esse, immutatam, et immutabilem, et consequenter continuo observandam, dum mundus, et Israel persisterint.[16]
4. Sabbati sacrosantum Diem in sui rigurosa custodia nunc esse debere; sicut et retro sempre, et in posterum.[17]
5. Sacrificiorum sacras leges extare, et extituras.[18]
6. Populum Dei (Judaeos) non fuisse mutatum, nec mutandum: et consequenter eius loco alium non suffectum.[19]
7. Messiam Judaeis a Deo promissum non adhuc venisse.[20]
8. Debere esse purum homine ex semino virili Davidis Regis.[21]

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to other works coming from Jewish environments, such as the *Puerta del ciel* by Abraham Cohen de Herrera (1570–1635), recently published with an Italian translation: *La Porta del Cielo: Prima edizione italiana con testo spagnolo in appendice*, ed. G. Saccaro (Vicenza: Neri Pozza, 2015). It is probable that the two more-or-less contemporaries met in Portugal or in Italy. The analogies between the two works are several; however, de Herrera's work is mainly devoted to Kabbalah, which occupies only a minor space in the *Porta Veritatis*.

14 'If we demonstrate that God, Supreme and Excellent, does not accept duplications, and division into more than one person, then [etc.].' (all translations, unless stated otherwise, are my own)

15 'By force of a negative moral obligation, He prohibited any image of Himself, or any duplication in sculptures.'

16 'The Law given by God on Mount Sinai to the Jews through Moses is extremely perfect, justified in itself, and, in general, unchanged, immutable, and therefore to be observed and respected forever, until the end of the world, and of the people of Israel.'

17 'The day of Shabbat is sacred to God, and has been preserved and has to be preserved by Him, as for the past, as well as for the future.'

18 'The laws prescribing sacrifices are sacred, and are present and will be always present in the future.'

19 'The Chosen People, the Jews, have never changed, nor will change; as a consequence of that, it is not possible that a new people could replace it.'

20 'The Messiah, promised by God to the Jews, has still to come.'

After Jacob ben Amram displays his *themata probanda* in this way, he immediately goes on to describe the three sections of the book, sections that also summarise the eight arguments quoted above:

1. *Primus.* De simplicissima, et omnino immultiblicabili unitate Dei; reiecta scilicet distinctione personarum.[22]
2. *Secundus.* De perpetua duratione legis Mosayce; et aeterna electione populi Israel, nempe Iudaeorum.[23]
3. *Tertius.* De unico, futuro adventu Messiae; puri hominis de virile semine Dadivis.[24]

As is immediately clear, Jacob ben Amram is writing within a solid, long-lasting tradition of Jewish apologetics. The human nature of the Messiah, as well as his future coming, are among the tenets of Judaism, along with the denegation of the Trinity and the perpetuity of the validity of Mosaic Law, conferred upon the Chosen People. There are the three main theses which, in a very long treatise, and with a solid and vast array of sources and arguments, ben Amram aims to prove. He does so by referring to interpretations of the Holy Scriptures belonging to the Rabbinic and Talmudic traditions, with a certain space left for Kabbalah as well. His training as a jurist, as we will see, is evident from the very structure of the work: 1100 paragraphs, one following the other, with the 'Christian thesis' followed by the 'Jewish antithesis', and a synthesis favorable to the Jewish interpretation. He is writing, however, in a period—the date of composition is from 1634 to 1640—in which the secular learning, philosophy, including its sceptical elements, reinforced by the publication of Sextus in 1621,[25] could not be avoided in the construction of a sophisticated anti-Christian intellectual weapon. Traditional exegesis was no longer considered the only tool for imposing the truth, even though it is still the tool most used by Jacob ben Amram, and the *sensus literalis sacrorum eloquiorum* (f. 4r) is often corrected by referring to 'tropological' (moral), allegorical, and metaphorical as well as symbolic meanings and

21 'He has to be of pure semen of Man, the same semen of King David. My translation tries to render more explicit the author's Latin. As a jurist, he wrote in a very concise style that has to be rendered in longer sentences in order to better understand the full meaning of the words.'

22 'First: the unity of God is extremely simple, and for no reason can He be multiplied: as a consequence, we refuse the distinction of God in three persons, or the Trinity.'

23 'Second: the Laws of Moses have a perpetual duration; accordingly, the Jews are to be considered as perpetually chosen, or elected.'

24 'Third: there will be one single, forthcoming advent of the Messiah. He will be of the masculine semen of David.'

25 Sextus Empiricus, *Sextou Empeirikou Ta sozomena. Sexti Empirici opera quae extant. Magno ingenii acumine scripti, Pyrrhoniarum Hypotyposeon libri 3. Quibus in tres philosophiae partes acerrimè inquiritur, Henrico Stephano interprete: Aduersus mathematicos, hoc est, eos qui disciplinas profitentur, libri 10. Gentiano Herveto Aurelio interprete, graecè nunc primùm editi. Adiungere visum est Pyrrhonis Eliensis philosophi vitam: nec non Claudii Galeni Pergameni de Optimo docendi genere librum, quo aduersus academicos pyrrhoniosque disputant*, Coloniae Allobrogum: sumptibus Petri & Jacobi Chouet, 1621. There is no evidence that Jacob ben Amram read this edition of Sextus.

interpretations. Once more, however, we are in the field of theological tradition, a long tradition which never excluded the extensive use of philosophical and logical arguments, from the *Sefer ha-Berit* to the *Milḥamot ha-Šem*.

The Use of Philosophy

Philosophy is a constant, albeit discrete, presence in the *Porta Veritatis*. When the Christian and the Jewish interpretations of certain biblical passages or themes are in conflict, philosophy offers help to Jacob ben Amram; it is a use *aus Not* ('out of necessity') in an argumentative sequence that follows the rules of logic and consequence above all. Philosophy appears thus in several forms. In dealing with the idea of Trinity, of course, logic is not only called upon as in the case of the Aristotelian principle of contradiction, A equals A and cannot be at the same time B (a typical logical anti-Trinitarian argument); but even when theologians and common Christians speak of the Trinity with reference to animal or plant constitution, 'color, caro, semen' for animals or 'stamina, caro, spina' for plants, this way of reasoning is not valid, since the elements that make an up animal, or a plant, are much more than three, at least four, so the analogy with the natural world should rather hint at a *quaternitas*, a concept dear to Jacob ben Amram and also to some Christian heretics.

The attitude of conferring the possibility of solving problems that cannot be solved by *supremus intellectus* (f. 46v) on the senses is a case of *infelicitas humana* for Jacob ben Amram. In a more sophisticated way, he debunks another of the 'analogies' that should confer validity upon the doctrine of Trinity. For instance, if the soul is one, but its powers are three, *memoria, intellectus, et voluntas*, this does not justify, as a philosophical argument, the metaphysical mystery of the Trinity: first of all, they do not have equal value, and are three different and hierarchically different *potentiae*; secondly, they are *in anima* in the way they are *in subjecto*, where they act in different way. Here, as usual, Jacob ben Amram uses a Christian author, in this case the philosopher Giovanni Battista Rossi,[26] against other Christian authors: his *bête noir*, Tomás de Jesús,[27] and the Jesuit Martin Be-

26 Giovanni Battista Rossi, *Commentaria et quæstiones in vniuersam Aristotelis metaphysicam. Authore r.d. Io. Baptista Rubeo Ianuense, sacræ familiæ Somaschensium professo & alumno. Nun primum in lucem edita. Cum indice rerum notabilium, & singulorum librorum argumentii*, Venetiis : apud Ioannem Guerilium, 1618. Little else is known by this Genoese scholar, who was active in the first two decades of the seventeenth century.

27 Tomás de Jesús (1569–1627), *Thesaurus sapientiae diuinae, in gentium omnium salute procuranda. Schismaticorum, haereticorum, Iudaeorum, Sarracenorum, caeterorumque infidelium errores demonstrans. Impiissimarum sectarum, maxime Orientalium, ritus ad historiae fidem 12. libris enarrans, errores ad veritatis lucem confutans. Auctore r.p. Thoma à Iesu Bratiensi Hispano, Ordinis carmelitarum discalceatorum in Belgio superiore*, Antuerpiae: sumptibus viduae & haeredum Petri Belleri, sub scuto Burgundiae, 1613.

canus, probably the most important author among ben Amram's contemporary sources.[28]

The section on the Trinity in terms of contents and themes is the most relevant to philosophical (and not dogmatic and theological) discussions, some of them quite interesting: can, for instance, Christ and the Holy Spirit be of 'irrational nature' (*naturae irrationali*)? Can God create a son 'Bucephalus' (a hidden reference to John Wycliffe's well-known and fiercely heretical doctrine)? Well, in principle, yes, but what is potentially possible is *impium, blasphemum et spurium*. Jacob ben Amram concludes his reasoning with an *abyssum abyssum invocat* that closes the paragraph rather abruptly. The same method of reasoning is applied to the creation of man: if he was made *ad imaginem et similitudinem* of God, should he not be himself 'Trinitarian', or rather, tripartite? Well, that is not possible, given the imbalance between the three *animae* of man: 'vegetative', 'sensitive', *rationalis*, a classic Aristotelian argument; for, among other things, the similitude of God and Man is only *in anima*: *in qua sola viditur Dei imago et similitudo* (f. 30v). The *anima sensitiva* and the *anima vegetativa* have their existence *ex vi materia*, *et omnino materiales sunt*, so that *cum ipsa finiuntur, quibus personis tribuarentur*? At this point, Jacob ben Amram begins a long confutation ('Art. Primi secunda pars') of the visual representation(s) of God.

By addressing the problem of the *anima*, Jacob ben Amram touches upon one of the most burning issues of Renaissance and Baroque philosophy. Is he in favour of the mortality of souls, like Uriel Acosta? Not quite. But ben Amram is at least largely aware of all the debates related to the soul of the late Renaissance, from Pierre d'Ailly (Anellus) to Pedro Martinez de Brea.[29]

When dealing with the unicity of God, Jacob ben Amram uses all possible arguments, both philosophical and theological, to affirm the *reductio ad unum* and to deny any validity of the 'mystery' of the Trinity (later, he debunks other Christian 'mysteries', including those related to the Virgin Mary). Judaism, as would be made clear in the second half of the century, and later in the age of the Enlightenment, is a good instrument for free thinking, and for his uses of solid, 'rational' arguments against Christianity, ben Amram is a perfect representative of this tendency. Belief in the Trinity is idolatry, is paganism, is a potentially infinite multiplication of the Gods: referring to Giovanni Botero[30]—once again a Jesuit, for Jesuits were the

28 Martinus Becanus (1563–1624), *R.P. Martini Becani Societatis Iesu...Opuscula theologica siue Controuersiae fidei inter Catholicos et Haereticos huius temporis. In quibus eorundem haereticon praua dogmata & opiniones explicantur, & egregiè refelluntur*, Duaci: typis Martini Bogardi, typographi iurati, sub signo Parisiorum, 1634. His Dutch name was Martin van der Breck.

29 On this theme, see M. Sgarbi, *Profumo di immortalità. Controversie sull'anima nella filosofia volgare del Rinascimento* (Roma: Carocci, 2016).

30 Giovanni Botero (1540–1617), *Le Relationi universali di Giovanni Botero senese in tre parti, cinque volumi diuise, con tauole di geografia, & indici copiosi & particolari a ciascuno di loro: et in questa noua editione dal proprio autore accresciute, megliorate d'assai*, Bergamo: Per Comin Ventura, 1595

keenest philosophers among the Catholic religious writers, at least when they dealt with theological controversies—he mentions the plurality of the Peruvian gods, 'three hundred thousand,' and *apud Synas, sunt innumeri*. In doing this, ben Amram constantly shows the contradiction in the same Christian doctrine by setting one author against the other: how can God create a Son who is eternal, but who was born, so before his birth or conception did not exist? If for the Christians Christ has been always present, *filius semper fuit*, *ergo frusta gignitur*, why was He conceived and generated? What is *impossibile* is what is *incogitabile*. Here ben Amram uses the arguments of Francisco Vallés against Roberto Bellarmino (f. 17r).[31]

God is *solitaries*, and *incomitatus*, as is clear from the Hebrew text of the Bible, the *hebraica veritas* often opposed to the bad translations of the *Vulgata*.[32] Furthermore, many paragraphs are devoted to debunking the ideas of those Christians who claim to find evidence of the Trinity in the Kabbalah, *qui putant se altius volare (!)* (f. 42r and ff.) In this case, once again there is a danger of 'infinite' projections of God, *quae repugnant simplicissima essentia, et unitati Dei*, proved both by *vera philosophiae ratio* and by the word of God: *concludamus itaque, perfectius, beatius, convenientius, et plusquam necessarium fuisse, ut unus et solitarius in se esset Deus* (f. 46v).[33]

This text is a long refusal of every possible visual representation of God, and in general of religious elements. Once again, from Thomas Aquinas to Bellarmino, a number of Christian authorities are quoted, and pitted against one another. While Menasseh ben Israel was reconciling the Jewish textual contradictions in his work, Jacob ben Amram did the opposite with the Christian truths: he shows all the contradictions by juxtaposing several authors, in a most systematic way. It comes as no surprise that Menasseh admired this work, where his own *Conciliador* stands out as one of the most quoted and endorsed exegetical sources.[34]

At the end of the second article, on the validity of laws, Jacob ben Amram discusses the co-existence of 'philosophy' and 'theology', and the fact that both concur

31 Francisco Vallés (1524–1592) is one of the most-quoted Christian authors in the *Porta*. A key author in the medicine of the late Renaissance, he offers a number of daring interpretations from the point of view of his rational science—medicine—of the Old and the New Testament. His *De sacra philosophia* (1587) circulated widely in Spain and Portugal, as well as in Italy, and was a watershed in Biblical exegesis. The target of Vallés' polemics is Bellarmino's *Disputationes de Controversiis Christianae Fidei adversus hujus temporis hereticos*, which had a great number of editions: Ingolstadt (1586–89), Venice (1596), Paris (1608), and after his death, Prague (1721), and Rome (1832).

32 Certainly, the use of the term *hebraica veritas* can be misleading, since it is normally used to refer to the *Vulgata*; (the *Vulgata* as *hebraica veritas*). In this essay, we refer, as ben Amram did and intended when using the term *hebraica veritas*, to the absolute validity, in conceptual, theological terms, of *hebraica veritas*, a 'Jewish Truth' as 'absolute Truth', not to be identified with the *Vulgata*.

33 'We therefore conclude that the most perfect, most felicitous, most convenient and most necessary thing is that God be one for himself and solitary.'

34 This extremely important work by Menasseh, dated 1632, is now available online in English translation, in its entirety: https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/009731624.

with the truth: *philosophicus theologicus*, and *theologus scripturarum*, i. e., a proper interpreter of the Holy Scriptures (f. 106r). This is made clear in the epistolary exchange at the end of the manuscript. This short and revealing correspondence makes a number of references to the role of philosophy in a theological, apologetic, or religious-controversial context. Once again, the polemical target is Thomas à Jesus. Like the Socinians—to whom a text like this should have been extremely dear—Jacob ben Amram denies the divine nature of Christ, even in a comical way: he made all the possible *naturales operations: ultra alia comedebat, bibebat, et caetera, quae ingestum cibum, et potuum sequuntur.* Christ too 'ate, drank, and did all the things a man does after having eaten and drank: He used to go to the toilet!' Thomas argues, in this case, in the most dogmatic possible way: *Responded Biatens* [Thomas à Jesus] *non esse attendendam humanae philosophiae rationem; sed recurrendum [est] ad auctoritates Sacrae Scripturae, quae dictam unionem suadent* (f. 242r).[35] Ben Amram's reply is sharp:

> Ratio quoque verae philosophiae humana attendenda est cum implicationes continet: nam quae implicant, potentiam Dei effugiunt, quin aliqualiter ostendatur. Etenim contradictoria uniri sub eadem subsistentia implicat: nihilque magis contradictorium est, quam Deitas humanitati, et contra; ita ut posito uno alterum tollatur, necesse sit (f. 242v; vd. also f. 176v: 'non homo Deus').[36]

Jacob ben Amram makes reference to one of the clearest passages in the Holy Scripture, where every possible human nature of God is denied, Num. 23:19: 'God is not human, that he should lie, not a human being, that he should change his mind. Does he speak and then not act? Does he promise and not fulfill?' (New International Version)

God is therefore fully rational, created 'reason' himself, and cannot go against His own creatures. It is clear that, from a Jewish, theistic point of view, many of the arguments of Deism and free thinking are well anticipated here. Thomas à Jesus worked with *diligentia* against the *splendorem veritatis*, turning the *tenebrae* into *lux*, and vice versa. Rationality goes along with 'literal', 'corporeal' interpretation of the Scripture, which should only rarely be integrated with other forms of interpretation, allegorical, 'tropological' (moral), and especially mystical. This is made clear several times in the 1100 paragraphs of the work. The literal, 'corporeal' interpretation of the Old Testament is made necessary by the same *simplicitas* of God:

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35 'Thomas à Jesus, of Beze, replied that we did not have to follow the reason of human philosophy, but rather, we had to refer to the authority of the Holy Script.'

36 'The human reason of the truth of philosophy has to be followed, for it also has implications: those implications refer to things that go beyond the power of God, a power that is shown in other forms. As a matter of fact, to unite in the same essence elements that are contradictory includes the utmost contradiction: the fact that God is united with humanity, and the contrary. So it is necessary for human reason that when one thing is added, another is subtracted.'

> Via Domini unica, simplex, splendens, immaculata, directa [...] quia fundatur in illa sacratissima Lege, quae clare, sine ambagibus, laboryntis, implicationibus, contradictionibus, et impossibilibus, in Sinai lata et filiis Israel, et iis qui libere et spontanee ei aggregantur (f. 233r).[37]

This is an important passage, in which Jacob ben Amram makes clear that Judaism does not force conversions, but is open to all men and women who, in freedom and with spontaneity, decide to join the faith. The Catholic religion, and in particular its 'modern' interpreters, are full of *novationes, sophismata, argutias, et inania argumenta*, and they all want *omnibus silentium imponere* (f. 230v). Judaism seems to be a 'religion of reason': a long tradition of thought that would culminate in Spinoza and the radical Enlightenment, amongst whose involuntary forerunners ben Amram is well placed.

The Presence of Scepticism

In the spirit of his times, Jacob ben Amram often refers to methodological strategies that relate to scepticism. He is not a radical sceptic, does not question the truth of God, or of the tenets of his own religion: his is a variety of fideistic Scepticism, in the meaning conferred upon the term by the late Richard Popkin. Furthermore, ben Amram is clearly against atheism and idolatry, while he sees a sort of hierarchy in the revealed religion, with Judaism in the first place, followed by Christianity and Islam.

The function of 'doubt' is stressed more than once, from the very beginning of the work:

> Lege itaque, vel communi consensu pateat cuilibet libertas disputandi, ac praelo committendi de lege Moysis, immo Dei; non tum Iudaeis modo, sed inter ipsomet Christianos etiam; *non supponendo, sed dubitando* [my italics], fingendo se quispiam ex animo nudum lege, et sola indutum veritatis inveniendi affectione, ut veritati locus patescat (f. 7v).[38]

The *dubitare de fide Christiana* is a philosophical-theological activity, which does not lead to a disruption of the Christian political system and relevant states: *non parumque politica Christianorum quies turbaretur* (f. 8r). Doubts are raised, interestingly, against the *fides Christiana odierna*, or *moderna* (f. 11r), *quia antica non frangebat*

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37 'The way of God is unique, simple, bright, immaculate, direct [...] for it is grounded in that most sacred Law, a law that in a clear way, without delay, labyrinths, implications, contradictions, and impossible things, was given on Mount Sinai to the children of Israel, and to those who join them freely and in a spontaneous way.'

38 'Thanks to the law, therefore, and to the common consent, therefore, the freedom to dispute, and to publish on the Law of Moses, that is, of God, may be open to whomever. Not only to the Jews, but also to the Christians. Not by suppositions, but by doubts, having in mind the letter of the law, and moved only by the passion of finding the truth, so that the place for the truth could become open and clear.'

legem Moysis (*ibidem*). So, the doubts follow an argument of impossibility (*argumentum ab impossibilitate*), the *physica repugnantia*, i.e. what goes against the laws of nature, and the *imperfectio in dicta fide*.

The fact that, according to the Church Fathers, the Apostles did not 'dispute' in matters of faith only consolidated a dogmatic faith, which is against the very nature, interest, and spirit of Christianity itself. The conclusion is that *posse omnes et debere gentem Christianam [...] disceptare, et indagare, diligentissime, liberrime*, in particular of the perpetuity and perfection of the Law of Moses, which is also binding for them (f. 8v). The great advantage of Judaism over Christianity is therefore its *conformitas*, while a strong doubt, *suspicion*, is cast upon the *difformitas* of the Gospels and their later interpretations: *difformitas scripturarum in divinis suspecta* (f. 248r).

Scepticism, therefore, in a 'loose' form far away from Sextus' technicalities, is turned here into a tool for debunking a faith which expresses its hatred against Judaism through doctrines which are not animated and inspired by the *zelo veritatis*, but rather by *odio in Judaeos, belluino* (so not human) and *immani*; those who practice that hatred do so *tenebras quarere, ac subterfugia*. Why then, *Porta Veritatis?* Why such a title?:

> Quia solidam veritatem quis accepit non potest, nisi praevia completa cognitione veritatis simplicissima Dei, et legis sacrae, electisque Populi. Vel *Compendiaria via ad beatitudinem*, quia brevi studio [...] ad veram felicitatem pervenitur.[39]

The beatitude is not only a celestial beatitude, but also a *felicitas* ('happiness') in this world. The link between exact knowledge, perfect morality, and finally individual happiness is the centre of the *Porta Veritatis*.

Obviously, it is not simple reasoning, or scepticism, to bring the truth to light: it is rather a systematic reference to the 'fonts', *in fontibus quaerere et invenire veritatem, et si quid in his dubium, aut obscurum recipiatur, ad fontes reducere, indeque hauxire verum sensum*, the 'true meaning, i.e. the true interpretation.' To go directly to the sources, and dig out of them the 'real meaning': this is the task ben Amram set for himself, and for the true lover of the Truth.

For some questions, such as those related to the infinity of world, and the relations of this infinite with a correlative infinite action of God—for God could not have been *otiosus*–Jacob ben Amram arrives, unable to find a solid conclusion, at a sort of 'suspension of judgement,' referring to authors such Leo Hebraeus (f. 44r), who discuss *philosophice* the topic:

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39 'For it is not possible for someone to obtain the solid truth, unless this person obtained beforehand the complete and very simple truth of God, and of the sacred Law, and of the Chosen People as well. A compendium for beatitude, for with a short study [...] one reaches the true happiness.'

> Nobis autem (quibus non licet disputare de iis, quae praecedunt mundi creationem) sufficit dicere, Deum nostrum non produxisse alterum eundem Deum; non tamen fuisse otiosum: et ipse solus fecit suas ab aeterno operationes, nec alio cogit ulla efficax ratiocinatio, seu implicatio.[40]

Here there is a reference, once again, to Francisco Vallés, whose *De sacra philosophia* (I, 17) clearly says that God was not idle, but that at the same time all He did was to consider that it was done by an Entity *sibi sufficientissimus erat, et est*. The *efficax ratiocination*, a reference to Thomas Aquinas, is a key concept in this work. It relates to a method of argumentation that should answer precise technical problems in an 'efficient' and not merely speculative way.

Other sceptical elements are present in the work, such as the use of *paradoxa*, when referring, for instance, to the famous novel of Giovanni Boccaccio (f. 99r), where Abraam Giudeo converts to Christianity after having seen the corruption of the Catholic Church in Rome, and having realised that Christianity, in spite of this, is a growing and universal religion (an argument, obviously, very dear to the Protestants, who obviously read this work by Boccaccio through their own lenses).[41]

Similarly, Jacob ben Amram more than once uses arguments from relativism (if Christianity is so big, why are there civilisations, such as the Chinese and the Islamic, which are even bigger and not affected by Christianity at all?), and refers more than once to the *consensus omnium* to judge an argument. He is able to use, within a strictly theological, apologetic, and anti-Christian work, a number of extra-theological sources, including Giovanni Boccaccio—certainly not a surprise for a Jew living for decades in Tuscany—Botero, and other authors who mainly dealt with extra-theological themes.

Finally, the *Porta Veritatis* contain long sections devoted to chronology and Jewish history. The systematic debunking of Christian chronology is an aspect of this work that should be addressed in a separate essay, given its importance and the amount of fascinating arguments used by ben Amram.

The Political Dimension of the Text

The *Porta Veritatis* was written at a very crucial moment in the history of the Jewish diaspora. While in England there were discussions about whether to officially readmit the Jews into the country, discussions which led to the inconclusive Whitehall Conference of 1655, in Italy the situation was critical. Simone Luzzatto published

40 'To us therefore—to whom it is not licit to dispute of what preceded the creation of the world—it is enough to say that our God did not produce another God; at the same time, He was not idle; and He did what He does during eternity, and there is no other efficient reasoning, or implication from that.'
41 There are many works dealing on the tradition of Boccaccio in Protestant countries. Among the most recent, see Herbert G. Wright, *Boccaccio in England from Chaucer to Tennyson* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014).

his *Discorso* in 1638, for the Jews of Venice, for a number of reasons, might have expelled from the Ghetto, erected in 1516. The Inquisition burnt a Portuguese Marrano at the stake in Rome in 1640. All these signs and events indicated dire times for the Jews. The situation got worse all over Europe when the Ottoman Empire began its attacks to Europe, and Vienna was put under siege in 1683.

Even in tolerant and open societies, like the Grand Duchy of Florence, the growing importance acquired by the Jews of Leghorn in trade and society after the 'open-gates' decrees of Ferdinand I in 1591 and 1593 (an importance matched, at the academic level, by the number of New Christians who were offered top positions in Pisa) started to provoke envy and threats in the local society. Europe was struck by the Thirty Years War and by the plague, and the position of the Jews, accused of voluntarily spreading the plague and of having commercial interests in the war economy, was not an easy one. For this reason, the *Porta Veritatis*, from its very beginning up until its end, in a dense theological, doctrinal, exegetical narrative, intersperses several political references:

> Quapropter vos Caesares, Reges, Duces, principes, magnates ac illustres viri, quibus subditorum cura incumbit (ad Vos namque praesertim dirigitur praefatio ista) rogatos velim, ut sicut sub vestra pia umbra protegitis Judaeos (non-nulli [sic] vestrum veluti mitissimi parentes, potius quam Domini), ita et Iudaeorum causam, ac legem libere disquiri, ac palam, permittatis. Non enim imperium, aut dominium vestrum (quod omne a Deo est) propterea corruet; quin immo securius fulcietur (f. 7r).[42]

Interestingly, Jacob ben Amram explicitly states that this 'preface' is generally directed to the political authorities. The presence of Jews, and the freedom granted to them to openly discuss their faith, does not constitute a risk for the political powers. The new religious scenario for Christianity in Europe, where there are plenty of denominations, mostly freely discussing matters of faith, *Papista, Lutheranus, Calvinista, Protestans, Reformatus*, is the breach that should also allow the Jews to enter the building and express their own thoughts. This is a new situation, ben Amram clearly admits. We are in a *nova fides* dimension. Interestingly, to prove the variety of faiths, ben Amram does not refer to contemporary sources, but rather to Isidore of Seville. His *Etimologiae* contains not only a long list of Christian heresies, but also a short list of Jewish heresies (8:5). Already by the ninth century, when Isidore wrote the book, Christianity was divided into a number of sects.[43]

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42 'For this reason, you, Caesars, and Kings and Dukes, princes and wealthy men and illustrious persons, upon whom the care of the subjects is conferred (the present preface is meant for you): I ask you to protect under your pious shadow the Jews—and be at least some of you like fathers more than Lords—and to let all the discussions and debates on the law and the cause of the Jews be set free. This does not corrupt your power and domination (which by the way comes from God), but, on the contrary, it will shine more securely than before.'

43 Sunt et aliae haereses sine auctore et sine nominibus: ex quibus aliae triformem putant esse Deum: aliae Christi divinitatem passibilem dicunt: aliae Christi de Patre nativitati initium temporis

Jacob ben Amram quotes a number of historical instance of kings and queens who were either in favor of or against the Jews, culminating in the fatal year 5252, i. e. 1492, which saw the expulsion of the Jews from Spain (and later from Portugal in 1497). It is quite different from the situation with a king, Alphons (1416–1454), whom ben Amram praises for what he did for the Jews, including from a legal point of view, and calls *pius, sapiens, vere Catholicus*, *non tamen catolicus vocitatus est* (f. 7v). He was indeed a true Catholic, in the sense of a true universalist, friend, and tolerant of all the denominations.

Furthermore, Jacob ben Amram quotes the *Summus quoque Pontifex*, *simul ut purpurea Societas*, bishops and cardinal, *Judaeis favent, adiuvant, et protegunt sub sua ditione*, they help and protect the Jews. Finally, ben Amram cites Venice and the other Italian republics: *Iudaeis etiam favent, ac protegunt sub se Serenissimae Reipublicae, ac serenissimi Principes Itali; nec non alii complures exteri* (f. 7v). Not only the Italian principalities, first and foremost Venice, protect and help the Jews, but also a number of Princes outside of Italy do the same. The reference to Tacitus, which is presented later, is of extreme importance. With the *ratio status* theories of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century, political Tacitism took root in Europe, and Tacitus was far from being a friend of the Jews, as is well known. For this reason, ben Amram debunks Tacitus' views of the Jews. Anti-Semitic arguments seem to be *non subsistentes in naturali, morali, aut philosophica ratione* (f. 9v). The same Roman nation, furthermore, was, like that of the 'Chinese', full of idolatry, *idolis dedita*, and only later accepted Christianity, thanks to its antiquity, miracles, martyrs, and, once again, thanks to the *consensus populorum* (f. 10r).

The coincidence of the moral and natural laws in Moses's legislation, the indifference in terms of which kind of government is the best, and the praise of free *disputatio*, of free thinking (not to be confused with atheism or idolatry), together with the Jewish origins of Christianity, are more than once evoked as the basis for religious tolerance. This makes the *Porta Veritatis* a solid product of its times, where the skills of the jurist and lawyer surface more than once. In the text, there are many references to the relationships that should be created among the citizens, and between citizens and their king, which mainly refer to the present enjoyment of this life in a pact of mutual respect rather than to the 'promise' of the redemption

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dant: aliae liberationem hominum apud inferos factam Christi descensione non credunt: aliae animam imaginem Dei negant: aliae animas converti in daemones et in quacumque animalia existimant: aliae de mundi statu dissentiunt: aliae innumerabiles mundos opinantur: aliae aquam Deo coaeternam faciunt: aliae nudis pedibus ambulant ...(f. 70r). 'There are also some heresies without authors and names; some of them think God has three forms. Others admit the divinity of Christ as transitory; others think that Christ is as eternal as God; others think that the liberation of men did not occur when Christ went to Hell; others deny that the soul is the image of God; others think that souls turn into demons, and exist in every sort of animal; others have different opinions on the state of the world; others think that the number of worlds is infinite; others think that water is co-eternal with God; others walk with bare feet [etc.].'

of sins and enjoyment of Paradise in the next life. The (relatively) mundane character of Judaism in terms of its political allegiance with the present power is reinstated:

> Si Deus noster promittere remissionem peccatorum, et fruitionem spiritualium in caelo [...] Quis libere non irrideret? Sicut irrident Romanorum Pontificum indulgentias, ac remissiones peccatorum, etiam illi, qui Christiani cum sint, Papistae non sunt (f. 72r).[44]

Here Jacob ben Amram refers to two rather interesting figures in the political thought of that time, Joannes Marquez, a relatively minor figure who wrote *De gubernatore christiano*, and died in 1621, and, once again, to the Jesuit Martin Becanus. The God of Israel promises temporal goods: *Deus noster [...] optime noscere corda hominum, quae ipse efformavit, bona temporalia latius promisit, qua videri et tangi possunt* (f. 72r). The Jewish God, knowing the souls and hearts of His people, the people He himself created, promised very concrete goods, on earth and not in heaven. The *bona temporalia* are here the basis for a *fiducia circa spiritualia*, which is otherwise difficult to obtain. The attention towards earthly goods, private property, and life in this world is not only typical of a rich New Christian, like ben Amram was, but also of someone who, as a jurist, had constantly to work in defence of individual property and in mundane affairs.

Conclusions

With its rationalistic approach to religion, the *Porta Veritatis* belongs to those texts which paved the way, among 'sceptics, millenarians, and Jews' (and those who shared all these belongings, and maybe more) to the later period of Spinozism, rationalism, and critical exegesis.[45] Certainly, it is a text where the truth of Revelation is not challenged, and therefore it belongs to a long-lasting, Maimonidean tradition of Jewish rationalism, within the context of traditional Jewish faith. Its criticism of the New Testament in particular offers interesting approaches that include attitudes typical of a jurist, such as the defence of private property when dealing with Mark 5:12 (f. 216r). It gives, as already noted, a fascinating interpretation of the miracle of the pigs, told in all the synoptic Gospels, with minor variations. The argument by Jacob ben Amram is very innovative, even within the tradition of anti-Christian works. The pigs were *sub domino et pastore*, in the actual possession and full property of an individual, who, therefore, must have suffered major economic damage. While Jesus had probably the power to perform such a miracle, the fact that it im-

44 'If our God promised the remittance of the sins and the enjoyment of spiritual goods only in Heaven, who would not be free to laugh at us? For this reason, even those who are Christians, but are not Papists, laugh at the remittances of sins given by the indulgences issued by the Roman Popes.'
45 Here I am referring to the groundbreaking work by David S. Katz and Jonathan I. Israel, *Sceptics, Millenarians, and Jews* (Leiden and New York: Brill, 1990).

plied a lack of respect for private property makes the possibility of it actually having happened very dubious. Certainly, as Bishop Kidder made clear in his reply, were the pigs not 'filthy animals', meaning that whoever was their owner was himself outside the law? But was this true among the Gadarenes? Did they really consider pigs 'filthy animals?' Why then they were breeding and take care of them?

Jacob ben Amram offers elegant, textually accurate interpretations of the Bible. He is an enemy of 'obscurity', and more than once says that *verba enim obscura facile contorquentur* (f. 35v). At the same time, the 'natural' and 'rational' meaning of the Old Testament, and the coincidence of reason, nature, and the divine precepts of Moses, is not always self-evident. Like in the case of Shabbat, it is a norm that is not rational, or subject to natural explanations: it is good, for it is a precept; and the contrary is not true (f. 59v): *Sabbatum non est praeceptum, quod simpliciter, et naturaliter, bonum est, sed bonum, quia praeceptum est, cum alius dies possit cultui divino dicari*. At the same time, the cult of Shabbat, even if this is a prerogative given to the Jews by God, does not go against any universal law of morality: *ratio moralis*, *qua universalis et communis omnibus est* (f. 60v). Jacob ben Amram is certainly using a large number of rational arguments, but reason is always, or almost always, combined with authority. Like in the case of the immutability and perfection of the Laws—including that of observing Shabbat—given to Moses by God, *evidenti ratione, et autoritati probatur* (f. 63r). The perfection of the Law is such that any possible contingency and variation is included in the text, and whatever is not in the text can analogically or by means of other arguments be brought under the interpretative umbrella of the Law itself, including *mutatio momentanea*, and *quae per aliqua particulari causa sit* (f. 88r).

The combination of 'reason' and 'authority' is evident all over the text. After all, this is the work of a man skilled in law, and in particular in canon law, which is evident in the structure and in the arguments of the treatise, concluding with a most impressive alphabetical index of the themes (ff. 246r–256r).

Jacob ben Amram, aka Benedetto Pinelli, aka Bento Pinhel, wanted to leave a monumental anti-Christian, pro-Jewish work, using a concise style, typical of a legal scholar, and an incredible amount of sources that included Spanish, Portuguese, and Italian scholars. He chose Latin as he probably had a limited command of Hebrew, and did not want to write in Spanish or Portuguese so as to reach a broader audience. At the same time, he probably did not have a strong command of Italian, for his classes in Pisa were, as was common at that time, all in Latin.

Did the extreme rationalism of such works pave the way for materialism and atheism? This has been a key question for scholars for a long time. Certainly, he was not an atheist, nor a materialist. Simply put, he denied the obscurity and the fascination for 'mysteries' of Christian exegesis. But are the same existence of God, and the ways He created the world, not the 'supreme mysteries', even though narrated in the plain Hebrew of the Bible? From this kind of scepticism to atheism, there is indeed a long way. Can we however trace, by approaching *ex novo* texts of this kind, the unhappy turn in Judaism, which eventually brought to nineteenth-cen-

tury 'religious atheism'? If Catholicism is the religion of 'mysteries', it is the same meaning of the word 'mystery' that should be reassessed, as to understand the reason(s) why Judaism could not be considered a religion of 'mysteries', but rather of self-evident truths. How can we extend the notion of *credo quia absurdum* to Judaism, and Jewish faith, as well? This a crucial question to understand, *inter alia*, the relation between emerging philosophy and theological arguments in the age of the late Renaissance, until the early Enlightenment.

This is a question however that we are also allowed to ask here. Certainly, this is not the place to find a proper answer to it.

Libera Pisano

Misunderstanding Metaphors: Linguistic Scepticism in Mauthner's Philosophy

Nous sommes tous dans un désert.
Personne ne comprend personne.
Gustave Flaubert[1]

This essay is an overview of Fritz Mauthner's linguistic scepticism, which, in my view, represents a powerful hermeneutic category of philosophical doubts about the communicative, epistemological, and ontological value of language. In order to shed light on the main features of Mauthner's thought, I draw attention to his long-standing dialogue with both the sceptical tradition and philosophy of language. This contribution has nine short sections: the first has an introductory function and illustrates several aspects of linguistic scepticism in the history of philosophy; the second offers a contextualisation of Mauthner's philosophy of language; the remainder present a broad examination of the main features of Mauthner's thought as follows: the impossibility of knowledge that stems from a radicalisation of empiricism; the coincidence between word and thought, thinking and speaking; the notion of use, the relevance of linguistic habits, and the utopia of communication; the deceptive metaphors at the root of an *epoché* of meaning; the new task of philosophy as an exercise of liberation against the limits of language; the controversial relationship between Judaism and scepticism; and the mystical silence as an extreme consequence of his thought.[2] Mauthner turns scepticism into a form of life and philosophy into a critique of language, and he inaugurates a new approach that is traceable in many German—Jewish thinkers of the early twentieth century as such as Landauer

1 This verse of Flaubert is quoted by Mauthner; cf. Fritz Mauthner, *Beiträge zu einer Kritik der Sprache*, 2nd edition, 3 vols. (Stuttgart and Berlin: J.G. Cotta'sche Buchhandlung, 1913): I, 49.

2 It is worth saying a few words about the peculiar conception of mysticism—so called "neue Mystik"—that was developed in Germany at the turn of the twentieth century by poets and writers as Julius and Heinrich Hart, Wilhelm Bölsche, Willy Pastor, Rainer Maria Rilke, Alfred Mombert, Bruno Wille and others. This new kind of mysticism does not deal with the traditional idea of a mystical union between God and soul, but rather with an aware feeling of connection between the individual and the community, the present and the past. This kind of secularised mysticism combines aesthetical-linguistic aspects—it is not by chance that most of these authors were writers and poets—with a political and social idea of regeneration of humankind. Cf. Walther Hoffmann, "Neue Mystik," in *Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, eds. Friedrich Michael Schiele and Leopold Scharnack, vol. 4 (Tübingen: Mohr, 1913): 608–611; Uwe Spörl, *Gottlose Mystik in der deutschen Literatur um die Jahrhundertwende* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1997); Martina Wagner-Egelhaaf, *Mystik der Moderne. Die visionäre Ästhetik der deutschen Literatur im 20. Jahrhundert* (Stuttgart: Metzler 1989); Anna Wolkowicz, *Mystiker der Revolution. Der utopische Diskurs um die Jahrhundertwende* (Warsaw: WUW, 2007).

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and Wittgenstein. My goal is to show how the practical aim of Mauthner's *logos-scepticism*, i.e., liberation from the illusions of words, is in line with the therapeutic value of ancient scepticism and, moreover, his mystic silence—as the extreme consequence of a radical mistrust of language—is a modern (and tragic) achievement of ancient *ataraxia*.

Philosophy of Language or Linguistic Scepticism?

Linguistic scepticism could be broadly defined as a discussion about language and its limit, which constitutes one of the most extensively discussed problems in Western philosophy. Even if this binomial is not as common in the history of scepticism, it's worth analysing because on the one hand, it is the expression of a radical and paradoxical form of scepticism, which concerns language, seen as a deceptive tool at the root of human knowledge and as the only medium by which we can develop a sceptical enquiry; on the other hand, this sceptical enquiry of language spans the entire history of philosophy, which—starting from ancient Greece—has always mistrusted vocal expressions and the articulated thought.[3]

However, if—according to Aristotle—philosophy begins with wonder, one can say that philosophy of language arises from doubts about language and its communicative, epistemological, and ontological value.[4] To sum up, the main problems are as the following: the main target of communicative doubt consists of the assumption that there is an isomorphism between reality and language, which constitutes the basis for the communication; in fact, linguistic reference to the world is possible only if reality and language have an analogical structure; if not, the latter is only an obstacle to knowledge. Epistemological doubt refers to the verifiability of statements through the connection between subject and predicate, which should be proved in order to have knowledge;[5] ontological doubt deals with the power of the word and its conformity to the essence of the object it signifies, faced with the so-called 'archaic fusion'[6] of word and thing and the question of the correctness of names, which is connected to the long-standing juxtaposition of *fusei–thesei*, i.e.

3 This linguistic-sceptical–attitude is related to the etymology of the word 'theory', which comes from the Greek *theorein*—'to consider, to speculate, to look at'—, which is connected to sight—*horáō*—and not to the hearing that is the sense of language *par excellence*. Cf. Adriana Cavarero, *A più voci. Filosofia dell'espressione vocale* (Milano: Feltrinelli, 2003): 14–73.

4 Questionable is the position of Weiler, who saw the critique of language only as a peculiar argument of scepticism, from Sextus Empiricus to Hume. See Gershon Weiler, *Mauthner's Critique of Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970): 269.

5 This is the *logos apophantikos* (apophantic speech) of Aristotle that is not the task of language in general, but a peculiar form of *logos semantikos*, which could also be *logos praktikos* and *logos poietikos*. Cf. Aristotle, *On Interpretation*, trans. Ella M. Edghill, in *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, ed. Richard McKeon (New York: Random House, 1941): ch. 4 ff.

6 Cf. Guido Calogero, *Storia della logica antica. Logica arcaica* (Bari: Laterza, 1967): 63–95.

the debate about the relationship between sound and meaning as occurring by nature or by arbitrary negotiation.[7] Traces of this discussion can be found throughout the history of philosophy, combined with other issues such as the origin of language, the heterogeneity of languages, the possibility of translation, the correspondence between voices and meaning, and so on.[8]

However, in the history of Western metaphysics, language was always treated as a secondary subject or as an insurmountable obstacle to epistemology. With the exception of Giambattista Vico (1668–1744), it was only in the nineteenth century that the question of language—thanks to the works of Hamann, Herder, and Humboldt—did become a central philosophical subject by itself, to be investigated in all its nuances. Among the philosophers of language, Fritz Mauthner (1849–1923) was certainly the precursor of the linguistic turn of the twentieth century, even if he was for many years a largely forgotten figure.

Mauthner's thought is visible in the debate on the role of language supported by Neogrammatical School of Hermann Paul (1846–1921), who offered a radical empiricist approach to language by asserting that there are only individual speech-acts.[9] Moreover, the context in which we should locate Mauthner's scepticism is the so called *Sprachkrise*, a complex phenomenon of linguistic critique diffused in the philosophical and literary debate among German-speaking thinkers, poets, and intellectuals before World War I,[10] whose works consist in a 'proving ground for world

7 As is common knowledge, this was one of the most discussed issues in the theory of language: from Plato's *Cratylus*, Aristotle, Stoicisms, and Sextus Empiricus, passing through the Middle Ages, the Baroque, and Romanticism, up until the twentieth century, when Saussure stated that language is an arbitrary sign and there is no natural link between signifier and signified.

8 Cf. Jürgen Schiewe, *Die Macht der Sprache: Eine Geschichte der Sprachkritik von der Antike bis zur Gegenwart* (Munich: Beck, 1998); Eugenio Coseriu, *Geschichte der Sprachphilosophie von der Antike bis zur Gegenwart* (Stuttgart: UTB, 2003); Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (New York: Crossroad, 1989).

9 In his *Prinzipien der Sprachgeschichte*, Paul highlights the role of metaphors in phonetic and semantic shifts, seen as individual products based on the dialectic process between a usual meaning of a word and an occasional one. Cf. Hermann Paul, *Prinzipien der Sprachgeschichte* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1880). Mauthner quotes Paul in his *Beiträge*. Cf. Mauthner, *Beiträge*, I, 25: 'Sprache ist Abstraktion. Es gibt nur individuelle, atomisierte, momentane Sprechtätigkeit.'

10 Viennese culture was a nodal point at the turn of the last century, characterised by crisis, based on a distrust of reason, a failure of bourgeois values, and a general demystification of tradition. During this period there was a fin-de-siècle reassessment in many cultural fields: in painting with Klimt und Schiele, in music with Schönberg and Mahler, in psychology with Freud and in physics with Ernst Mach, whose theory of knowledge as ordered sense-experience was decisive for Mauthner. Cf. Christian Mittermüller, *Sprachskepsis und Poetologie: Goethes Romane 'Die Wahlverwandschaften' und 'Wilhelm Meister Wanderjahre'* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2008); Magdolna Orosz and Peter Plesner, "Sprache, Skepsis und Ich um 1900. Formen der belletristischen Ich-Dekonstruktion in der österreichischen und ungarischen Kultur der Jahrhundertwende," in '*...und die Worte rollen von Ihren Fäden fort...': Sprache, Sprachlichkeit, Sprachproblem in der österreichischen und ungarischen Kultur und Literatur der Jahrhundertwende*, eds. Magdolna Orosz, Amália Kerekes and Katalin Teller (Budapest: ELTE, 2002): 355–368; Günter Saße, *Sprache und Kritik: Untersuchung zur Sprachkritik der Moderne*

destruction.'[11] At the core of *Sprachkrise* there is a mistrust of language, seen as a defective means and an aesthetical device. Influenced by Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900), Hugo von Hofmannsthal (1874–1929), Arthur Schnitzler (1862–1931), Rainer Maria Rilke (1875–1926), Karl Kraus (1874–1936), and all the Jung-Wien[12] members put the epistemological efficacy of language in doubt.

Fritz Mauthner as Sceptic of Language

Mauthner was considered a dilettante and autodidactic philosopher, who, nevertheless, produced a huge corpus: three volumes of 'Contributions toward a Critique of Language', a 'Dictionary of Philosophy', 'History of Atheism in the Western Society',[13] as well as many essays and novels. Mauthner's interest in language was due to autobiographical factors: he was a German-speaking Jew—his grandfather was a follower of Sabbatai Zevi (1626–1676)—who grew up in a Czech-speaking society.[14] Speaking three languages led him to a critical awareness of language itself, which is at the root of his linguistic-sceptical attitude. Furthermore, he was a journalist, and had to utilise rhetorical techniques to draw the attention of the readers on a daily basis. He was also a writer and a translator, and it's not by chance that his critique later became the theoretical basis for the work of many writers as James Joyce (1882–1941), Samuel Beckett (1906–1989), and Jorge Luis Borges (1899–1986). However, Mauthner was certainly a controversial figure who received very little attention from the philosophical circles of his time, which regarded him as quite suspicious.

He was almost forgotten for many years and one can say that a critical remark by Wittgenstein sealed his fate. In fact, the Austrian philosopher wrote in his *Tractatus:* 'All

(Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1977); Martin Kurzreiter, *Sprachkritik als Ideologiekritik bei Fritz Mauthner* (Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 1993): 25–80; Gerald Hartung, *Sprach-Kritik: Sprach- und Kulturtheoretische Reflexionen im deutsch-jüdischen Kontext* (Weilerswist: Velbrück Wissenschaft, 2012).

11 Karl Kraus, *Untergang der Welt durch schwarze Magie* (Munich: Koesel, 1960): 418; quoted by Linda Ben-Zvi, "Samuel Beckett, Fritz Mauthner, and the Limits of Language," *PMLA* 95.2 (1980): 184.

12 'Young Vienna' (*Jung Wien*) was a literary circle and a cultural movement at the turn of the twentieth century. Among the group's members were: Schnitzel, Bahr, von Hofmannsthal, Salten, Dörmann, von Adrian, and many others. Cf. Istvan Varkonyi, "Jung Wien," in *Encyclopedia of German Literature*, ed. Matthias Konzett (Chicago and London: Fitzroy Dearborn Publisher, 2000): 550–551.

13 Mauthner, *Beiträge*; idem, *Wörterbuch der Philosophie. Neue Beiträge zu einer Kritik der Sprache*, 2nd edition, vol. 3, (Leipzig: Meiner, 1923); idem, *Der Atheismus und seine Geschichte im Abendlande*, vol. 4, (Stuttgart and Berlin: DVA, 1924).

14 Cf. Fritz Mauthner, *Erinnerungen von Fritz Mauthner* (Frankfurt am Main: Fisher, 1969): 32–33. From this point of view, it's worth comparing Mauthner and Kafka, who called his own education 'sawdust'. Cf. Ben-Zvi, "Samuel Beckett, Fritz Mauthner, and the Limits of Language," 184; Luisa Bertolini, *La maledizione della parola di Fritz Mauthner* (Palermo: Supplementa, Aestetica, 2008): 7.

philosophy is a critique of language (though not in Mauthner's sense).'[15] Nevertheless, nowadays, the affinity between both philosophers is undeniable; Wittgenstein took several ideas from Mauthner and utilised his metaphors—for instance the ideas that language is a game, a city, and a ladder are all to be found in Mauthner.

We have to wait until 1958 for the first critical and serious study of Mauthner's philosophy, written by Gershon Weiler (1926–1994), who also stresses the proximity with Wittgenstein and paved the way for other critical studies.[16] After Weiler, Toulmin and Jani—Wittgenstein's followers—provided a rehabilitation of Mauthner's thought, stressing the affinity between the two thinkers; in the wake of their work, Schiewe defined the linguistic sceptic as the most important precursor of Wittgenstein's philosophy.[17] However, in recent decades, we have seen a revival of interest in Mauthner's thought. Brilliant and comprehensive studies have been offered by Kühn, Bredeck, and Kurzreiter.[18]

Mauthner's critique of language is one of the most extreme linguistic scepticisms in the history of philosophy. The complexity of his position is deeply original and he anticipates the linguistic turn by arguing that philosophy of language sheds critical light on all philosophical questions and by admitting that the critical understanding of ordinary discourse is an important philosophical task. He connects epistemology with the critique of language; in fact, the correspondence between the perceived object and the perceptual representation relates—according to Mauthner—to inappropriate linguistic representations of the world. Because of its syntactic and semantic structure, language gives an improper experience of reality and it's not by chance that the work of Mauthner culminates with a mystical apology of silence in accordance with his godless mysticism ('gottlose Mystik') that transcends the limits of language and which he links to Spinoza, Meister Eckhart, and the Upanishad tradition.[19]

However, silence as the extreme step of linguistic scepticism constitutes a *topos* in the history of philosophy since Cratylus,[20] due to the paradoxical challenge of a

15 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, trans. David F. Pears and Brian F. MacGuinnes (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1961): 4.0031.

16 Gershon Weiler, "On Fritz Mauthner's Critique of Language," *Mind* 67 (1958): 80–87; idem, *Mauthner's Critique of Language*, 298–306. The first study on Mauthner's philosophy was written by Max Krieg in 1924, consisting only of a sum of quotations with no critical approach. Cf. Max Krieg, *Fritz Mauthners Kritik der Sprache: Eine Revolution der Philosophie* (Munich: Georg Müller, 1914).

17 Allan Janik and Stephen E. Toulmin, *Wittgenstein's Vienna* (New York: Simon, 1973); Schiewe, *Die Macht der Sprache*, 176–196.

18 Joachim Kühn, *Gescheiterte Sprachkritik: Fritz Mauthners Leben und Werk* (Berlin and New York: De Gruyter, 1975); Elizabeth Bredeck, *Metaphors of Knowledge. Language and Thought in Mauthner's Critique* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1992); eadem, "Crumbling Foundations: Fritz Mauthner and Philosophy after Philosophy," *MAL* 23 (1990): 41–53; Kurzreiter, *Sprachkritik als Ideologiekritik*. See also Gerald Hartung, ed., *An den Grenzen der Sprachkritik: Fritz Mauthners Beiträge zur Sprache- und Kulturtheorie* (Würzburg: Königshausen und Neumann, 2003).

19 Cf. Mauthner, *Beiträge*, I, 83.

20 Cf. William Marias Malisoff, "Cratylus or an Essay on Silence (Not Illustrated)," *Philosophy of Science* 11.1 (1944): 3–8.

critique of language by means of language. Consequently, instead of coping with the grammatical limits of our knowledge, Mauthner decided to spend the last years of his life isolated in a glass-house ('Gläserhäusle') on Lake Constance. Thence, at the end of his critique, there is an autobiographical and theoretical mysticism, which stems from a deep awareness and brings a single human being in connection with the word, far away from any form of linguistic articulation.[21]

The genesis of his 'Contribution' was tormented and lasted twenty-seven years; in fact, in 1873 he started to work on the first draft, then he began to write again, during the night, in 1891. But the incentive to finish his writing came from his friendship with Gustav Landauer (1870–1919), who actively participated in the composition.[22] The first volume is an analysis of the essence of language and the issue of psychology; the second is a confrontation with the contemporary linguistic sciences, in particular with the Neogrammatic School, and their main topics—for instance meaning, metaphors, the origin of language, writing and oral delivery, animal and human language. The third volume provides an in-depth examination of grammar and logic.

Mauthner starts his work by quoting the first sentence of the Gospel of John: 'In the beginning was the word.'[23] But he rejects this assertion by showing that the word is an enemy and that language is a prison, from which men should liberate themselves. His work begins by stating the impossibility of a general definition of language beyond singular speech-acts.[24] Through a combination of linguistic and epistemological doubts, the three volumes of 'Contributions toward a Critique of Language' are an example of an impeccable linguistic scepticism which is, at the same time, a radical attack on Western metaphysics. Mauthner systematically denies the possibility of knowledge because it is mediated by language, which can refer to

21 Cf. Fritz Mauthner, *Wörterbuch*, I, 384: 'Seit zehn Jahren lehre ich: das Ichgefühl ist eine Täuschung, die Einheit des Individuums ist eine Täuschung. Wenn ich nicht Ich bin, trotzdem aber bin, dann darf ich wohl auch von allen andern Wesen glauben; sie sind nur scheinbar Individuen, sie unterscheiden sich nicht von mir, ich bin Eins mit ihnen, sie und ich binnen Eins. Sind das bloß philosophische Wortfolgen? Spiele der Sprache? Nein. Was ich erleben kann, ist nicht mehr bloß Sprache. Was ich erleben kann, das ist wirklich. Und ich kann es erleben für kurze Stunden, daß ich nichts mehr weiß vom *principium individuationis*, daß der Unterscheid aufhört zwischen der Welt und mir.'

22 Cf. Kühn, *Gescheiterte Sprachkritik*, 201: 'Die Mitarbeit Landauers an der *Kritik der Sprache* ist für das Jahr 1898 bezeugt, aber es ist anzunehmen, daß Mauthner in Gesprächen mit dem leicht begeisterten und begeisternden Anarchisten die eigenen Gedanken einer geistigen Revolution schärfer faßte und mutiger vorantrieb.'

23 Mauthner, *Beiträge*, I, 1.

24 Cf. *ibidem*, I, 4: 'Die Sprache in diesem Sinne etwas ganz anders bedeutet als eine Sprache oder die Sprachen [...]. Die einzelnen Sprachen sind also die außerordentlich komplizierten Lautgruppen, durch welche sich Menschengruppe miteinander verständigen. Was aber ist die Sprache, mit der ich es zu tun habe? Was ist das Wesen der Sprache? In welcher Beziehung steht die Sprache zu den Sprachen. Die einfachste Antwort wäre: die Sprache gibt es nicht; das Wort ist ein so blasses Abstraktum, daß ihm kaum mehr etwas Wirkliches entspricht.'

reality only metaphorically, in his view. Accordingly, since language is a collection of abstractions, the entire history of philosophy is nothing but a sum of meaningless problems and linguistic illusions.

Mauthner's 'Contributions' have a helpful task, because they were written in an attempt to disclose the tricks and lies of language in order to demonstrate that it is useless as a means for the perception of reality. He turns philosophy into a permanent critique of language, which is seen in terms of its deceptions but also in terms of its inevitability. Hence, one can say that the most radical form of scepticism, which concerns language, is at the same time the most paradoxical. Surely, Mauthner is aware of the problems involved in writing a critique of language in a rigid language[25] and his battle against it is also undeniable in his style; he puts linguistic scepticism into practice by breaking the rules of grammar in order to invoke doubts in his narrative thread. Starting from these premises, Mauthner rethinks the task of philosophy as a disclosure of the deceptive use of language, by showing its artificiality and its arbitrary commonality of meanings. Therefore, linguistic scepticism should have the power to liberate us from superstitions and from the tyranny of words; in fact, the abstractive mechanism of language has a tendency to reify words, to remove them from their common usage. This reification constitutes words as both fetishes and superstitions, namely the naïve belief that nouns always correspond to concrete objects, or better that they are a mirror of the reality. By breaking with this paradigm, which stems from Ancient Greek philosophy and is based on the isomorphism between logic, language and reality, Mauthner attacks the possibility of knowledge and offers an extreme form of linguistic scepticism that leads to the achievement of a mystical silence.

Impossible Knowledge: Mauthner's Epistemology

The impossibility of knowledge is due to an epistemological process that combines the selectivity of the accidental senses, the uninterrupted change that constitutes the process of reality, and the metaphorical nature of language. Mauthner's epistemology has two main aspects: on the one hand, it is a radicalisation of empiricist positions, which leads to the abolishment of the difference between thoughts and sensation, to the coincidence of speaking and thinking, and to the disappearance of intellect;[26] on the other hand, the ontological basis is the idea of reality as an on-going flux that conveys Mach's conception.

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25 Cf. *ibidem*, I, 2: 'In dieser Einsicht liegt der Verzicht auf die Selbsttäuschung, ein Buch zu schreiben gegen die Sprache in einer starren Sprache.'

26 Cf. Weiler, *Mauthner's Critique*, 61: 'The significance of this doctrine can best be appreciated in the context of the history of empiricism. All major empirical philosophers have distinguished between sensations, impression etc. and a mental capacity such a reflection, understanding, etc. It was assumed that the ordering capacities of the mind are not themselves results or effects of the sensations or im-

At the core of Mauthner's epistemology is the assumption that there is an irreconcilable gap between sense-experience as achieved by accidental senses ('Zufallssinne'), which are five only by chance, because they are a fortuitous result of humankind's evolution[27]—and language as a collection of memory-indices, which offer only an approximation of experience. However, even if language deletes the uniqueness of human experience by transforming it into a series of tautologies, and even if it can refer to reality only metaphorically, it is the only possible articulation of knowledge.

In Mauthner's view, there are two different processes: the first is extra-linguistic and is made up of sensations, perceptions, and intuitions; the second concerns representations of sense-experience mediated by language. Mauthner distinguishes between accidental sense's experience, a pre-linguistic phenomenon that allows the inner process to occur, and thought that is always articulated in words.[28] But sense-knowledge has no value at all, because every time that we refer to it, we use words that precede us and fail in their communicative task. Hence, there is no difference between thinking and speaking, because the articulation of our on-going inner processes always happens in an historical language.

The main task of our five senses is to allow human orientation in the world,[29] rather than the pretension of giving us exhaustive knowledge, they are closer to a

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pressions. Now what Mauthner is doing is to abolish the distinction between sensations and thought, between what comes to us through our senses and the mental operations we perform on the material thus given. In other words, just as sense-organs are part of the natural history of man, so are his thinking capacities too.' However, according to Weiler, the empiricist theory is the weak point of Mauthner's scepticism, cf. *ibidem*, 4: 'His radical empiricism was no logical empiricism. Thus, his account of logic, which follows in broad outlines the doctrine of Hume, is of special interest and also of special difficulty. It is here that the central tension of Mauthner's thought is most apparent. Critique of language, which suggests that even empirical statements are but tautologies (since they only repeat what is already known), is not easily compatible with an empiricism which holds, in any of its versions, that facts are describable independently of each other. This tension is essentially one between two conflicting tendencies built into language, between the demand that statements should be connectable coherently and the demand that facts should be statable independently of each other.'

27 For instance, according to Mauthner, we don't have any sense of radioactivity. Cf. Mauthner, *Beiträge*, I, 252.

28 Cf. *ibidem*, I, 221: 'Fast alle Empfindungen und sehr viele Wahrnehmungen haben wir ohne Hilfe der Sprache; und da Empfindungen und Wahrnehmungen uns leicht zu verständigem Handeln veranlassen, was ungenau auch auf Denken zurückgeführt werden kann, so gibt es da so etwas wie Denken ohne Sprechen. Verstehen wir jedoch unter Denken nur diejenigen Prozesse in unserm Gehirn, bei denen sich Empfindungen oder Wahrnehmungen mit Vorstellungen assoziieren oder Vorstellungen untereinander, so kann von einem Denken ohne Sprechen nicht die Rede sein.'

29 Mauthner connects his epistemology with Plato's myth of the cave; cf. Weiler, *Mauthner's Critique*, 59–60: 'Mauthner's own inspiration came from Plato's Cave in the *Republic*. Those who sit in the cave with their backs to the entrance can see only the shadows of those who accidentally pass the entrance of the cave. Moreover, the light available, the shape and the size of the opening are also accidental. The human mind is likened by Mauthner to Plato's chained observers and just as the latter can perceive only a small fraction of what goes on outside the cave, so the human mind can register only a fraction of what there is.'

survival instinct and constitute a step in human evolution.[30] Instead of a Kantian purity, human reason is impure because it is already contaminated by language and—like our senses—is a random product. In fact, Mauthner defines the human senses as accidental ('Zufallssinne'), drawing attention to the word 'accidental',[31] used to connect contingency with selectivity, which in his perspective is nothing but a synonym of a limited view. If the senses are accidental, human knowledge is free from any form of teleology that, according to Mauthner, is just an incorrect assumption suggested by the reifying power of language.

Mauthner connected the assumptions of empiricism with linguistic theory and—by amending the empiricist slogan—he says that nothing is in our language that wasn't previously in our senses;[32] but if the senses are able to grasp reality, language, which stems from their internalisation, is the result of an abstraction.[33] However, even if language deletes the uniqueness of human experience in a series of tautologies, it is a collection of memory-indices, which preserve our misunderstandings by using an inherited catalogue of words that offer only an approximation of the momentary and individual sense-experience. This is why ordinary language is mistaken and misleading and *the* truth is nothing but an abstract substantive.[34] The unreliability of language is also due to the polysemy of every single word that is used by each person in a peculiar way without

30 Evolution and development play a central role for memory and sense, thence for our image of the world. But according to Mauthner, Darwin had not properly considered the function of tradition and of heritage; despite its revolutionary value in terms of liberation from a theological idea of evolution, Darwin's theory is only a genial hypothesis, used in an improper way by his followers, who turned his theory into a mythological pseudo-religion. Cf. Mauthner, *Beiträge*, III, 579: 'Die Lehre Darwins, daß die Zweckmäßigkeit der Organismen ohne jede göttliche Allweisheit durch Anpassung und Vererbung zu erklären sei, diese Lehre ist uns nichts mehr als eine genial Hypothese. Die unvorsichtigen Darwinianer [...] mussten wieder Begriffsromantik treiben. Es ist aber ein undankbares Geschäft, ihre immerhin kühnen Luftschlösser zu bekämpfen, wenn man es erleben muß, daß die von Darwin hinausgeworfene Teleologie in langsamer Arbeit wieder hineingeschmuggelt wird, wie wir es bei den letzen Kongressen der Naturforscher erleben konnten. Dogmatismus hüben und drüben, bei den Neovitalisten wie bei den Monisten.'

31 The word 'Zufall' is the German translation of *accident*, which plays an important role in the history of philosophy, especially in the Aristotelian tradition. Cf. Krieg, *Fritz Mauthners Kritik der Sprache*, 66: 'Der Zufallsbegriff ist also etymologisch—aus dem Akzidenzbegriff hervorgegangen, aus dem Gegensatze zum Wesentlichen. Zufällig ist das Unwesentliche, [...] aber im Laufe der Zeit [...] gewann der Zufallsbegriff die Bedeutung eines Gegensatzes zum Notwendigkeit.'

32 In the history of Western philosophy there is a well known opposition between empiricism and rationalism. If the former affirms that *nihil est in intellect quod prius non fuerit in sensu*, the latter corrects this sentence by adding *nisi intellectus ipse*.

33 The critique of abstraction, with regard to an individualisation of language, is sustained in a quotation from Spinoza's *Tractatus*. Cf. Mauthner, *Beiträge*, I, 5: 'Natura sana nationes, non creat sed individua.'

34 Cf. Mauthner, *Wörterbuch*, III, 384: 'Was ist Wahrheit? *Un mot abstrait* jedenfalls, und zwar ein abstraktes Substantivum. Nun haben wir gelernt, daß schon in der Wirklichkeitswelt nur Eigenschaften existieren, nicht die Dinge außer und über ihren Eigenschaften, daß die Dinge, die Substantive, einzig und allein in ihren Eigenschaften existieren und nicht zum zweitenmal neben ihren Eigenschaften.'

any guarantee of semantic commonality. The individualisation of language in Mauthner's thought makes communication impossible by leading to a perspectival and relative conception of all linguistic activities.

The second notion on which Mauthner's epistemology is based is the conception of reality elaborated by Ernst Mach, whose lecture held in Prague in 1872 was very important for Mauthner because of the sceptical principles that were articulated as the theoretical foundations of Mach's physics.[35] Mach's most relevant writings are *Beiträge zur Analyse der Empfindungen* (1886), *Erkenntnis und Irrtum* (1905), and *Principien der Wärmelehre* (1896), where many pages are dedicated to the problem of language. Mach's critique of mechanism was based on the assertion that science should acknowledge phenomena without searching for abstractions beyond them, thus avoiding the risk of turning science into metaphysics. His theory of knowledge is a phenomenology based on complexes of elements that coincide with different images of the world. From a logical perspective, concepts are determined products but, from an intuitive point of view, they are only confused images. Instead of a defined notion, concepts are a useful mark for human orientation in the world. Mach disintegrates the object and the subject too: the former is the sum of different sensations and, at the same time, the 'I' is nothing more than a hypostatisation of one entity that must not be separated from sensations. His critique of abstractions also implicates language and the fetishisation of the word by denouncing the provisory fiction of the frame of reference.[36] But these premises don't lead him to a sceptical conclusion. On the contrary, he retains his trust in scientific research, even if it only concerns temporary knowledge.

Mauthner wanted to perform the same task for philosophy as Mach had done for physics, but in a different way: dealing with a sceptical and radical perspective that involved language. The main feature of Mauthner's critique of language is the unbridgeable gap between word and object. Moreover, in a revolutionary gesture, Mauthner turns not only the truth but the entire verbal world into a linguistic product. There are three different perspectives that allow us to have many different frames of reference; in this respect one can say that there is in Mauthner a linguistic,

35 Cf. Fritz Mauthner, *Erinnerungen* (Munich: Georg Müller, 1918): 210: 'In dem gleichen Jahr 1872 ließ mich Mach seinen Vortrag über *Die Erhaltung der Arbeit* lesen und ich erhielt, so wenig ich damals von mathematischer Mechanik verstand, einen Anstoß, der ohne mein Wissen durch Jahrzehnte fortgedauert haben muß. Denn als ich fast dreißig Jahre später diesen Vortrag las, ohne mich der ersten Lektüre zu erinnern, war ich über die sprachkritischen Ahnungen erstaunt und hatte plötzlich die entschiedene Vorstellung, alle diese schlagkräftigen Formulierungen schon einmal in mich aufgenommen zu haben. Machs erkenntnistheoretischer Positivismus—der die metaphysischen Worte nicht, wie Auguste Comte, haßt, sondern psychologisch beschreibt, also erklärt—hatte in meinem Unterbewußtsein nachgewirkt.'

36 Cf. Katherine Arens, *Functionalism and Fin de Siècle: Fritz Mauthner's Critique of Language* (New York/Berne/Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1984). Arens shows the influence of Mach's work on Mauthner philosophy, by asserting a kind of functionalism, seen as the use of different theoretical models to explain by contingence a certain *phenomena*.

anti-idealistic, and anti-realistic perspectivism. Our images of the world are always mediated by language.[37]

According to Mauthner, there are three grammatical categories that mediate three different points of view: the adjectival category concerns the immediate sense-apprehension of reality and the object's properties, perceived as different qualities; the nominal category gives ontological status to objects and experience, and—by combining the adjective with a hypostatisation—leads us to the mystic constitution of reality; the verbal category refers to scientific words and turns sensation into memory in a process of becoming, dealing with causes and effects. If reality is a flux in incessant change, adjectives and verbs are more adequate than substantive, which gives the illusion of permanency. The three grammatical categories are unable to express the truth or to grasp the world.[38]

Words are Concepts, Concepts are Words: the Identity of Language and Thought

The belief that language is a cloth for thought is, according to Mauthner, a myth. As we have seen, Mauthner states that thinking is always an articulation of on-going inner processes in an historical language; hence it's impossible to distinguish thinking and speaking. The coincidence between them is always experienced in everyday speech; only if we introduce a theoretical order does the relation between them become problematic. The boundaries of language set the limits of thought: 'There isn't thinking without speaking, i.e., without words. There isn't thinking, there is only speaking. Thinking is speaking when judged for its cash-value.'[39] What Mauthner wants to deny is the abstract faculty of thinking, which is supposed to exist somewhere. This supposition comes from a trick of linguistic reification, which forces us to believe that each noun corresponds to a substance that exists.

Furthermore, both speaking and thinking are connected to the definite movements of the organs of speech and brain processes. The relevance of practice is stres-

37 Cf. Fritz Mauthner, *Drei Bilder der Welt: Ein sprachkritischer Versuch*, ed. Monty Jacobs (Erlangen: Verlag der philosophischen Akademie, 1925): 2: 'Wir haben von der Welt keine anderen Bilder als sprachliche; wir wissen von der Welt nichts, weder für uns selbst noch zur Mitteilung an andere, als was sich in irgend einer Menschensprache sagen läßt.'

38 Cf. *ibidem*, 167: 'Keines der drei Bilder kann richtig sein, weil jedes mit dem Fluche seiner besonderen Bildsprache belastet ist; die Vereinigung wird wahrscheinlich nicht möglich sein, weil eine Vereinigung der drei Sprachen—bisher wenigstens—nicht anders möglich was als in einer unserer Gemeinsprachen, die eben zur Welterkenntnis noch ungeeigneter sind als die von mir im Geist erdachten Teilsprachen der drei aller möglichen Weltansichten.'

39 Mauthner, *Beiträge*, I, 176: 'Es gibt gar kein Denken, es gibt nur Sprechen. Denken ist das Sprechen auf seinen Ladenwert nur beurteilt.' In fact, there is no English translation of Mauthner's works. However, in his *Mauthner's Critique of Language*, Weiler translated several passages and this quotation is taken from his book.

sed in order to bring a critique to abstraction, which is why memory needs memory-marks and signs are in a broad sense linguistic deeds.[40] With a brilliant intuition that anticipates the discussion of performativity in the philosophical debate, Mauthner connects speech-acts ('Sprechakte') with thought-acts ('Denkakte').[41] Word and concept are identical, because the former is nothing but the public articulation of the latter, which is primarily a psychological product that doesn't exist at all until we pronounce it. At the same time, the word is not an adequate expression of our inner processes because it is a transposition of them into an inherited historical grammar, syntax, and semantic.

There is a coincidence between speaking and thinking, but—as we have seen—there is a distinction between knowledge and thought.[42] It seems that the process of knowledge-acquisition based on our senses is interrupted when our on-going inner perception is articulated in language. When one starts to think, that is, to speak, each form of knowledge is denied. Thinking is a construction created by articulating words and by exercising linguistic habits that are preserved by memories.[43] Furthermore, the preserving role of memory is also underlined with respect to oral and written language; if the former is the sum of thought and phonemes and a form of human memory, the latter is a composition of speech and graphemes and an artificial improvement of memory-indices. In fact, alphabetical characters have preserved the notions for centuries and, as Hegel had already claimed, they are an exercise in abstract thought as well.[44]

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40 Cf. *ibidem*, I, 226–227: 'Gibt es Denkakte ohne Sprachakte? [...] Fast alle Empfindungen und sehr viele Wahrnehmungen haben wir ohne Hilfe der Sprache; und die Empfindungen und Wahrnehmung uns leicht zu verständigen Handeln veranlassen, was ungenau auch auf Denken zurückgeführt werden kann, so gibt es da so etwas wie Denken ohne Sprechen. Verstehen wie jedoch unter Denken nur diejenigen Prozesse in unserem Gehirn, bei denen sich Empfindungen oder Wahrnehmungen mit Vorstellungen assoziieren oder Vorstellungen untereinander, so kann von einem Denken ohne Sprechen nie die Rede sein. Denn die Vorstellung ist ein Erinnerungsbild und unterscheidet sich etwa von der Erinnerung an eine einfache Empfindung gerade dadurch, daß sie ein Bild ist, ein Zeichen für die Beziehungen verschiedener Erinnerung. Wir kommen da ohne das Bild von Bildern oder Zeichen nicht aus. Gedächtnis ohne Gedächtniszeichen ist nicht möglich; und Zeichen sind im weitesten Sinne sprachliche Akte.'

41 One can say that Mauthner's was a precursor of Austin's theory of language. Cf. John L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962).

42 Cf. Weiler, *Mauthner's Critique*, 16: 'The isolated acts of thought are real for the person in whom they take place but once we proceed from these particular occurrences to the notion of thinking in general or to a characterisation of acts of thought in a public language, we lose our grip on the occurrences itself. Thinking is but a construction and is different from individual acts of thought.'

43 It would be interesting to analyse the theoretical value of habits in sceptical studies from Ancient philosophy to the twentieth century.

44 Cf. Mauthner, *Beiträge*, I, 213–214: 'Die sichtbaren und darum dauernden Schriftzeichen lassen die Begriffe länger und ungestörten festhalten als die flüchtigen Lautzeichen. So hat die Schrift gegenüber der Sprache Vorteile und Nachteile, ist aber im Grunde die gleiche Geistestätigkeit;' referring to Hegel's analysis of language, cf. George Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Hegel's Philosophy of Mind*, *Being*

Memory plays a central role because it is nothing but language and vice versa; it is not separable from concepts, words, or experiences. Mauthner doesn't distinguish memory as a faculty from its effects and that's why there is only an illusory divergence between language, memory, ego, and conscience. Memory is essentially unreliable because it can only approximate past sensory experience. The approximation of our accidental senses and the ambiguity of words necessarily lead to metaphorical representations of the reality. Since the net of accidental senses is partially saved, memory reproduces a false perspectivism;[45] furthermore, it is an unreliable process because it is necessarily based on forgetfulness.[46] However, memory—thanks to its preservation of tradition and habits—has a social role that coincides with the common use of language.

Utopia of Communication: Language as the Rule of a Game

In a strategic move, Mauthner turns Humean habits of thought into the habits of language, which is inner process and social product too. The antinomy between the individual and the social aspects is only apparent. Mauthner takes linguistic conventionalism to the extreme by asserting that language is only an inherited catalogue and a sharing of traditional metaphors that is far removed from knowledge. In fact, the collection of words is nothing but a sharing of linguistic habits ('Sprachgewohnheiten')[47] which are supposed to be similar for everyone. This commonality attests to the nonexistence of private language and, furthermore, such sharing is based on a supposed family-resemblance of meaning, which is the weak foundation for human communication. Language is a random and conventional construct that contains within its structure the totality of the speaker's experience; it doesn't have any epistemological values and it can't communicate any provisory form of truth, because there are no guarantees of an objective knowledge of the word or of inner experience. The difficulty of capturing the inner

Part Three of the Encyclopaedia of Philosophical Sciences, trans. William Wallace (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971): § 459.

45 Kurzreiter, *Sprachkritik als Ideologiekritik*, 161: 'Auch die Leistung des Gedächtnisses beruht auf einer Fälschung, d. h. sie gründet in einem speziellen Perspektivenzusammenhang. Nicht alles, was durch das Netz der Zufallssinne geht, wird im Gedächtnis gespeichert, denn es ist kein Reservoir zahlloser, regelloser Eindrücke; es registriert, vergleicht und interpretiert, ist also beständig in Bewegung.'

46 Cf. Mauthner, *Beiträge*, I, 531: 'Aber das Gedächtnis ist auch wesentlich untreu. Das Gedächtnis wäre unerträglich, wenn wir nicht vergessen könnten. Und die Worte oder Begriffe, die erst durch das falsche Gedächtnis entstanden sind, wären für den Alltagsgebrauch ungeeignet ohne die Eigenschaft des Gedächtnisses: untreu zu sein. Es trifft sich nur gut, daß alle diese (menschliche gesprochen) Fehler des Gedächtnisses im Interesse des menschlichen Organismus liegen. Wir könnten weder leben noch denken, wenn wir nicht vergessen könnten.' Notice that *Funes the Memorious* of Borges was deeply influenced by these words of Mauthner, cf. Jorge Luis Borges, *Funes the Memorious*, in idem, *Labyrinths*, trans. Donald A. Yates and James E. Irby (New York: New Direction, 1964): 59–66.

47 Mauthner, *Beiträge*, II, 117.

self comes from the absence of a self-observational organ and, since the ego has no way of articulating itself, it cannot be known.

Language as an inner product is connected to the idea of psychology.[48] Mauthner's position in respect to this discipline is twofold:[49] on the one hand, he defines psychology as a pseudo-discipline of mental acts, created by a kind of duplication of the external world and by an unfair application of the same criteria to a supposed interior state. On the other hand, this connection of inner and external world is the same movement of language, and, for this reason, it is hard to neglect it. It is clear that, although there is no method for studying the inner world, we are aware of the fact that there are inner goings-on, or better, 'experiences' ('Erlebnisse'), which cannot be described.

Since a private language cannot exist, language is only a shared means of communication, even if true communication between people is impossible. In fact, as we have seen, it is impossible to say that the meaning and the reference of a word are the same for everybody, since words precede us and do not correspond to our sense experience. Hence, communication is a utopia and the commonality of meaning, which exists only in its shared use, is as arbitrary as the 'rule of a game' ('Spielregel'), which acquires value only if it shared by two or more players;[50] unlike a prescription, a rule here is something that deals with habits and regularity concerning a use.[51] In-between people ('zwischen den Menschen'), this is the *milieu* of language

48 The connection between language and psychology is first brought to light by Aristotle, but it acquired more relevance thanks to Mendelssohn during the Enlightenment in Germany. According to Jewish philosophers, psychology is the human faculty for the production of signs. Cf. Moses Mendelssohn, *Gesammelte Schriften, Jubiläumsausgabe*, 27 vols. (Stuttgart: Frommann Holzboog, 1971 ff.).

49 On Mauthner's idea of psychology, cf. Elisabeth Leinfellner, "Fritz Mauthner," in *Sprachphilosophie, Philosophy of Language, La philosophie du langage*, eds. Marcelo Dascal, Dietfried Gerhardus, Kuno Lorenz, and George Meggle (Berlin and New York: De Gruyter, 1992): 495–509, 496: 'Einerseits lehnt Mauthner aus empirischen bzw. empiristischen Gründen die traditionelle Form der Psychologie ab: die Introspektion sei unwissenschaftlich und unsere sensualistische, nach außen gerichtete Sprache könne auf unser Innenleben nur völlig uneigentlich, d. h. poetisch angewendet werden. In der Psychologie ist demnach, wie in der Philosophie, für Mauthner die Sprache zugleich Objekt und Mittel der Analyse. Andererseits aber konnte Mauthner aus empirischen und erkenntnistheoretischen Gründen dem Psychologismus nicht ablehnen. [...] Mauthner war davon überzeugt dass unsere psychologischen Funktionen unsere Auffassung der Welt bestimmen, und dass die Sprache mit diesem psychologischen Funktionen, dem Denken (als Vernunft) mehr oder minder identisch ist: die Logik ist ein Teil der Psychologie.'

50 Cf. Mauthner, *Beiträge*, I, 25: 'Die Sprache ist nur ein Schein wert wie eine Spielregel, die auch umso zwingender wird, je mehr Mitspieler sich ihr unterwerfen, die aber die Wirklichkeitswelt weder ändern noch begreifen will.' However, the notion of *Spielregel* is not itself free of theoretical misunderstandings; cf. Weiler, *Mauthner's Critique*, 109–111.

51 Cf. *ibidem*, 114: 'There is no prescriptive rule we could appeal to, such that we could infer from it in advance a decision for all possible cases of doubt. We can only consider what the accepted usage of the word is and what the reasons for this usage are. And these reasons, again, cannot be stated by referring to a prescriptive rule but rather they must be put in empirical terms and mention similarities

that works as an exchange, by leading to an arbitrary commonality of meaning, like a rule of a game, without grasping the real world. But in its practical purposes, in its everyday use, far away from any kind of abstraction, language can also be a useful tool because it is a sign.[52]

To consistently conceive of only one speaker is impossible. Linked to this topic is the affinity between language and socialism, discovered by Mauthner and later developed by Gustav Landauer.[53] In fact, in his *Critique*, Mauthner argues that only field for the realisation of communism is language, where there is no privacy at all and common property ('Gemeineigentum') is a set of shared *Weltanschauung*.[54] The semantic and syntactic rules are necessary and paradoxically anarchic at the same time, because they don't have a metaphysical foundation or an ontological premise.[55]

Mauthner's conception of the social role of language is connected to the notion of use. Since language cannot correspond to reality, it is a *Spielregel* that acquires validity only when it is submitted to by more than one speaker. If meaning is nothing but use, Mauthner rejects every kind of reference theories.[56] By seriously doubting the possibility of absolute communication, he throws off the teleology of signs and this revolutionary suspension of the teleology is nothing but an *epoché* of meaning that is the dark side of Mauthner's philosophy of language.

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and dissimilarities obtaining between objects which are being considered together for the purposes of a particular naming-decision.'

52 Cf. Mauthner, *Beiträge*, I, 48: 'Die Sprache ist also als Sprache [...] etwas Reales. Ist so real wie eine Zeichnung, wie ein Zeichen. Als Zeichen, als hörbare Signale, müssen wir uns die Anfänge vorstellen.'

53 It's worth drawing attention to Mauthner's linguistic socialism: he uses the Darwinian concept of progress in a messianic sense. Cf. Mauthner, *Beiträge*, III, 591: 'Wir denken nämlich alle, wenn wir Entwicklung oder Evolution sagen, an ein Fortschreiten von niedrigeren, schlechteren Formen zu höheren, besseren Formen. Wenn der sozialistische Volksredner es als Ziel der Entwicklung hinstellt, daß der Individualismus der Vergangenheit einem Sozialismus der Zukunft Platz machen werde, so schwebt ihm und uns die Zukunft als eine höhere, bessere Gestaltung vor.' The political consequences of Mauthner's scepticism have been highlighted by Landauer. According to van den Berg, Mauthner was persuaded that a political revolution had to begin with a revolution of language. Cf. Hubert van den Berg, *Avantgarde und Anarchismus. Dada in Zürich und Berlin* (Heidelberg: Winter, 1999), 257; Walter Fähnders, "Sprachkritik und Wortkunst, Mystik und Aktion bei Gustav Landauer," in *Anarchismus und Utopie in der Literatur um 1900. Deutschland, Flandern und die Niederlande*, eds. Jaap Grave, Peter Sprengel and Hans Vandervoorde (Würzburg: Könighausen & Neumann, 2005), 139–149.

54 Mauthner, *Beiträge*, I, 27: 'So ist sie (die Sprache) dafür bis heute die einzige Einrichtung der Gesellschaft, die wirklich schon auf sozialistischer Grundlage beruht.'

55 Cf. *ibidem*, I, 249: 'Die Wirklichkeit in der Sprache, wie in aller Natur, ist gesetzlos, trotzdem sie notwendig ist.'

56 Cf. Leinfellner, "Fritz Mauthner," 499: 'Die Referenztheorie der Bedeutung hat Mauthner jedenfalls abgelehnt: wir geben Worte aus wie Banknoten und fragen nicht ob dem Wert der Note im Schatz etwas ein empirisches Referenzobjekt entspricht.'

The Mendacious Trope: Semantic, Anthropoetic, and Metalinguistic Metaphors

Mauthner's dismissal of the doctrine of meaning, seen as the purpose of communication, marks a divide in the history of philosophy of language. It's worth analysing how the semantic *epoché* is connected to the identification of word and metaphor that plays a pivotal role in Mauthner's linguistic scepticism. The peculiarity of Mauthner's conception consists in the fact that this trope is not only a rhetorical figure, but reveals the linguistic mode of operation; or better, language is a sum of metaphors: it can only refer to the world metaphorically, because words are "pictures of pictures of pictures.'[57] Not only poetry or novels, which have an aesthetic value,[58] but all the supposed truths and sciences are a collection of metaphors, which contain an anthropomorphic horizon.[59] Through his conception of metaphor, Mauthner connected truth and grammar by drawing attention to the linkage—which gained huge popularity in the second half of twentieth century—between theology and linguistic research, power and language. According to him, the belief in language—and the belief in God as well—hides an anthropomorphic view. This topic was extremely important to Mauthner, who spoke of 'logocracy' in his 'Dictionary'.[60] Even if words are unable to describe and express reality, they are persuasive because they exercise a social and political power.[61] If substantives seduce us into admitting an entity or a sub-

57 It's worth noting that the same expression can be found in Landauer's writing, speaking of the community as 'bond of bonds of bonds;' cf. Gustav Landauer, *Aufruf zum Sozialismus* [1911], 2nd edition (Berlin: Paul Cassirer, 1919): 132: 'Gesellschaft ist eine Gesellschaft von Gesellschaften von Gesellschaften; ein Bund von Bünden von Bünden.'

58 However, according to Mauthner, language can't be an artistic product, because it's not the creation of something but can only be a means for poetry. Cf. Mauthner, *Beiträge*, I, 26: 'Ein Kunstwerk kann die Sprache schon darum nicht sein, weil sie nicht die Schöpfung eines Einzigen ist.' Nevertheless, poetic language, as articulated in Mauthner's work, is at the root of the development of language and science, in accordance with the tradition that starts with Vico.

59 Cf. *ibidem*, I, 367. According to Mauthner, metaphors are vocal images of images and his position is very similar to Nietzsche's in *Wahrheit und Lüge*, where he defines the truth as 'a mobile army of metaphors, metonyms and anthropomorphisms [...], a sum of human relationship.' Cf. Friedrich Nietzsche, "On Truth and Lies in Extra-Moral Sense," in *The Portable Nietzsche*, ed. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Viking Press, 1954): 42–46, 42. However, Mauthner stresses the differences, because, from his point of view, Nietzsche's critique of language was not particularly radical, in fact it dealt only with moral and ethical factors, but not with knowledge as such.

60 Mauthner, *Wörterbuch*, II, 305.

61 Cf. Mauthner, *Beiträge*, I, 42: 'Weil die Sprache zwischen den Menschen eine soziale Macht ist, darum übt sie eine Macht aus auch über die Gedanken des einzelnen. Was in uns denkt, das ist die Sprache; was in uns dichtet, das ist die Sprache.' With respect to power and language, Mauthner follows Stirner's ideas. In the study entitled *Die Sprache*, he stresses the relevance of anarchism in the matter of language: 'Die Macht der Sprache über die Sitte, über die gemeinsten Gewohnheiten menschlichen Handels hat vorher niemand so zornig erkannt wie Max Stirner in seinem feuerbrünstigen Feuerwerk *Der Einzige und sein Eigentum*. Stirner sagt [...] ‚die Sprache und das Wort tyrannisieren uns am meist ärgsten, weil sie ein ganzes Heer von fixen Ideen gegen Uns aufführt';' cf. Fritz Mauthner, *Die Sprache* (Frankfurt am Main: Rütten

stance, language is a weapon or a whip and, since language is a collection of illusions, it constitutes a useful tool for political systems.[62]

Certainly, Mauthner uses this rhetorical trope in a sceptical way even if his theorisation stems from a constant dialogue with the philosophical tradition. Discussion of rhetoric was the trend of the moment, taking into consideration the works of Biese, Bruchmann, and Gerber, whose *Die Sprache als Kunst* was the theoretical foundation of Nietzsche's theory of language.[63] Mauthner is aware of previous debate on metaphors in the history of philosophy, but—in spite of this serious confrontation with the most important doctrines—his conception is peculiar: he elaborates an original theory of metaphor by underlining its semantic role, anthropo-poietic value and meta-linguistic function.

In order to shed light on the semantic role of metaphor, Mauthner identifies a shift of meaning in the linguistic mechanism and—since there is no difference between word and thought—with the thinking process too. We are able to draw analogical connections because we have the capacity to note similarities and to connect what is unlike; this ability is nothing other than faculty to create metaphors that, according to Aristotle, is also the peculiarity of philosophising. Hence, if according to the Greek philosopher this was a step towards knowledge, in Mauthner's view this net of similarities is at the root of linguistic misunderstandings. By breaking with the Aristotelian tradition whereby metaphors have a cognitive function,[64] analogic is a logical error that infers from similar properties to unknown similar properties.[65]

The etymological meaning of transmission ('Übertragung') is used by Mauthner as a working principle of language; it is the nourishment of words and it is also the heart of his semantic conception that is always ambiguous. Far from being univocal, the meaning of the word is connected to a plurality of representations, which is the reason for linguistic polysemy and the consequent misunderstanding. Furthermore,

& Loening, 1906), 83. However, Mauthner criticised the solipsism in Stirner's thought. Cf. Kurzreiter, *Sprachkritik als Ideologiekritik*, 106: 'Mauthner sieht in Stirners Auffassung des Selbst einen weiteren Markstein der Ideologie. Stirner hat niemals das endliche Ich sprachkritisch hinterfragt, sondern es vielmehr zum alleinigen Ausgangspunkt seiner Philosophie erhoben. Mauthner irrt sich zwar grundlegend, wenn er Stirners Intentionen als Solipsismus auslegt.'

62 Cf. Mauthner, *Beiträge*, I, 86: 'Die Sprache ist die Peitsche, mit der die Menschen sich gegenseitig zur Arbeit peitschen. Jeder ist Fronvogt und jeder Fronknecht;' idem, *Die Sprache*, 89: 'Die Volksprache als wirkende Macht ist demokratisch. Die abstrakte Volkssprache als Objekt der Wissenschaft sowohl wie als Wertobjekt des Gefühls ist sozial.'

63 Cf. Alfred Biese, *Die Philosophie des Metaphorischen* (Hamburg and Leipzig: Leopold Voss, 1893); Kurt Bruchmann, *Psychologische Studien zur Sprachgeschichte* (Leipzig: W. Friedrich, 1888), Gustav Gerber, *Die Sprache als Kunst*, 2nd edition (Berlin: Gaertners, 1871).

64 For instance, Mauthner stresses the ambiguous Aristotelian use of metaphor, seen as a synonym of trope and of translation in general and as metaphor itself. On the gnoseological value of metaphor in Aristotle, cf. Umberto Eco, "Aspetti conoscitivi della metafora in Aristotele," *Doctor Virtualis* 3 (2008): 5–7; Samuel R. Levin, "Aristotle's Theory of Metaphor," *Philosophy & Rhetoric* 15.1 (1982): 24–46.

65 Cf. Mauthner, *Wörterbuch*, I, 145.

the meaning is exposed to an on-going change, a kind of semantic *Heraclitism*,[66] which is the basis of the same metaphorical process.

However, metaphor is not only a transmission, it is also, and even more so, a translation from the unspeakable to the speakable that is the basis of all grammar and syntactical rules according to him. The institution of meaning is an on-going metaphorical process and a transposition through analogies, which is the constitutive mechanism of language. In fact, metaphors are the primary sources—as Vico first noted—of the linguistic growth process: "each word contains the infinite development from a metaphor to another metaphor.'[67]

Mauthner also confronts the gradual loss of sensible figures in the historical development of language. The emergence of a complex vocabulary stands at a progressive distance from sensibilities and a process of abstraction;[68] each word stores its own metaphors. The correspondence between name and reality is always ambiguous and metaphors hide in the world in some way. However, the metaphorical shift didn't only work in an immemorial past, it consists in an on-going translation from an impression to a word already defined. This aspect deals with the question of the heterogeneity of languages, which doesn't concern different tongues, but rather the same one: "there are no two men who speak the same tongue.'[69] Metaphors cope with

66 Mauthner utilised the famous image of the river, adapting it to language; cf. Mauthner, *Beiträge*, I, 7: 'Man kann nicht zweimal in denselben Fluß hinabsteigen gilt auch für die Sprache.' See Ludger Lütkehaus, 'Im Anfang war das Wort, und Gott war ein Wort. Sprachkritik bei Fritz Mauthner und Goethe,' in *Fritz Mauthner—Sprache, Literatur, Kritik: Festakte und Symposion zu seinem 150. Geburtstag*, eds. Helmut Henne and Christine Kaiser (Berlin and New York: De Gruyter, 2010): 13–32, 27: 'Kernüberzeugung von Mauthners Sprachkritischen Heraklitismus: die Sprache ist prinzipiell nur dem Sein gewachsen, nicht dem Werden, dem Geschehen, dem Prozess.'

67 Mauthner, *Beiträge*, I, 115: 'Jedes einzelne Wort trägt in sich eine endlose Entwicklung von Metapher zu Metapher;' *ibidem*, I, 113: 'Die Sprache ist durch Metaphern entstanden und durch Metaphern wächst, wenn dichterische Phantasie die Worte immer wieder ergänzen und bleiben muß.' The first philosopher to stress this conception was Vico, who systematically connected the origin of human language and the conception of an archaic poetry with metaphors. Cf. Giambattista Vico, *New Science*, trans. Dave Marsch (New York: Penguin, 2001); Donatella Di Cesare, "Sul concetto di metafora in G.B. Vico," *Bollettino del centro di studi vichiani* XVI (1986): 325–334; eadem, "De tropis: Funktion und Relevanz der Tropen in Vicos Sprachphilosophie," *Kodikas Kode* 11 (1988): 7–22.

68 Mauthner, *Beiträge*, I, 124: 'Die Metapher in der Sprachentwicklung wird mechanisiert dadurch, daß die Vergleichung aus dem Bewusstsein schwindet und das Wort eben eine neue Bedeutung zu gewinnen scheint. In der Poesie, wo das Bildliche aus dem Bewusstsein nicht schwinden kann, ist eine solche Mechanisierung immer eine Abgeschmacktheit.' Another point of similarity between Vico and Mauthner is the relevance of wit ('Witz') which is the translation of Vico's notion of *ingenium*, so important for the activity of comparison. Cf. Libera Pisano, "Nastri d'eloquenza. Sulla retorica di Vico," *Filosofia italiana* 1 (2014): 1–16.

69 Mauthner, *Beiträge*, I, 56: 'Es gibt nicht zwei Menschen, die die gleiche Sprache reden. [...] Kein Mensch kennt den anderen. Geschwister, Eltern und Kinder kennen einander nicht. Ein Hauptmittel des Nichtverstehens ist die Sprache. Wir wissen voneinander bei den einfachsten Begriffen nicht, ob wir bei einem gleichen Worte die gleiche Vorstellung haben. Wenn ich grün sage, meint der Hörer vielleicht blaugrün oder gelbgrün oder gar rot.'

the radical difference that traverses language itself, and the issue of the diversity is contained in every single utterance.[70]

Speaking deals with an on-going translation from one vocal picture to another, from a lie to a misunderstanding.[71] It always contains a failure; the word misses the reality.[72] However, metaphors have the same anthropo-poietic function and they forge the representations and creations of the human sphere.[73] In the history of humankind, language worked as the only means of ordering experience according to human beings' interests. This is also the function of concepts, which stem from a process of abstractions through metaphors too.[74] But the rhetorical origin is at the root of the mistrusting of every form of truth.

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70 Mauthner deals with the diversity of historical languages by arguing that when we speak another language we realise that the individual language is also an abstraction; cf. Mauthner, *Beiträge*, I, 196: 'Dann ist Denken und Sprechen nur beim Franzosen identisch. Bei mir freilich nicht; aber nur darum nicht, weil ich gar nicht meine Sprache rede, sondern bloß mühsam zu meiner Sprache oder meinem Denken fremde Zeichen gebrauche. Ich rade-breche französisch und denke deutsch. Durch große Übung oder durch längeren Aufenthalt in Frankreich bringe ich es aber langsam so weit, französisch zu denken, trotzdem Deutsch meine Muttersprache ist.'

71 By asserting that Mauthner follows Hamann, who brings together thinking, speaking, and translating; but Mauthner rejects Humboldt's idea of a spirit commonality, which is the basis of human understanding. In the wake of Mauthner's critique of Humboldt's inner form, one can say that Mauthner would also criticise the generative grammar of Chomsky for the same naïve conception of an interior that is supposed to exist. According to Mauthner, Chomsky's idea would be a kind of dogmatic philosophy that would not only be poles apart from a philosophy of language, but also incompatible with an anarchic political attitude. There is, in fact, a deep connection between the theory of language and anarchy, as one can see in the relationship between Mauthner and Landauer, which constitutes my research project at the Maimonides Centre.

72 Cf. Mittermüller, *Sprachskepsis und Poetologie*, 25: 'Sprechen ist für Mauthner, ganz ähnlich wie für Nietzsche, immer schon uneigentliches Sprechen, Resultat einer unendlichen Übertragungsbewegung von Metapher zu Metapher.'

73 Cf. Jörg Kilian, "*Die Geschichte ist die wahre Kritik jedes Worts.* Fritz Mauthner und die klassische Semasiologie," in *Fritz Mauthner—Sprache, Literatur, Kritik:* 109–131, 127: 'Die Metapher ist ihm eine 'Übersetzung' und nicht nur eine 'Übertragung,' und zudem ist diese 'Übersetzung' nicht nur innerhalb der sprachlichen Sphäre möglich, sondern auf der Metapher ruht vor allen Dingen die Übersetzung von Außersprachlichen in Sprachliches. Mittels der Metapher holt sich der Mensch die Welt in die Sprache.' This connection between metaphors and anthropogenesis was stressed for the first time by Vico, but it is also traceable in the work of Hermann Paul, quoted several times by Mauthner. Cf. Paul, *Prinzipien der Sprachgeschichte*, 94: 'Die Metapher ist eines der wichtigsten Mittel zur Schöpfung von Benennungen für Vorstellungskomplexe, für die noch keine adäquaten Bezeichnungen existieren.'

74 For instance, the general representation of a tree is the result of a subtraction of all the physical particulars such as color, size, height, shape of the leaves, and so on. Mauthner follows Berkeley's argument against abstract ideas, but it's the same argument that Nietzsche gives in *Wahrheit und Lüge*. Berkeley—against Locke—refuses the possibility of creating abstract ideas, which are but a philosophical abuse of language. Yet he doesn't refuse the human faculty of abstraction. According to Mauthner, concepts do not arise through comparison, but rather are the acts of comparison themselves. Cf. Mauthner, *Beiträge*, III, 284.

The metalinguistic value of metaphors is underlined in Mauthner's prose, which is full of metaphors, which led him to write his 'Contributions'. In fact, Mauthner utilised metaphors instead of general and universal definitions, as a substitution for logic. This trope is the tool whereby Mauthner can say something about language. Instead of grasping a general definition, Mauthner uses a certain amount of metaphors in an estranging manner. If *Sprachkritik* should lead to liberation from tyranny of language, the spontaneous question is whether a metaphor is able to save us. But if the last step of his critique is mysticism, metaphor—insofar it is a word—cannot have a soteriological value. If metaphors lead to an on-going misunderstanding, liberation from language is a liberation from metaphors as well. However, it is not by chance that a de-metaphorisation of the world corresponds to mystic silence.

Against the Limits of Language: Philosophy as an Exercise of Liberation

Mauthner's critique of language invests the entire field of humanity, from religion to science, from ethics to history.[75] He interprets all these fields in the spectrum of language in order to unmask the metaphysical fetishisms of the word that they incorporate.[76] All metaphysical abstractions are falsities and the result of a linguistic trick, which forces us to believe that each noun corresponds to a pre-existing substance. If the word is not representative of reality, the most important task of philosophy is the critique of language, i. e. liberation from the superstitions and the tyranny of words, which exercise control against our will: 'Even for the anarchist, language is the rope of the law bound around his neck; even the freest philosopher thinks with the words of philosophical language.'[77]

75 With reference to Mauthner's conception of history, one can say that he refuses a scientific approach because his philosophy of language operates as a deconstruction of any form of dogmatism; additionally, he denies the teleological process of history in the wake of Schopenhauer and Nietzsche. His idea of history is more similar to the life praxis, tradition, and heritage of a single individual. If on the one hand history means change that is on-going and involves the flux of reality and the language, because the meaning of the world is continually subject to change; on the other hand, history is also a word and Mauthner attempts to escape from abstractions and dogmatic definitions of this discipline.

76 Cf. *ibidem*, III, 637: 'Jedes Wort hat eine Geschichte, eine Geschichte seiner Formen und seine Geschichte seiner Bedeutung [...] Der Zufall der kleiner persönlichen Erfahrung bestimmt, was der Einzelne bei den Worten sich vorstellt. Die Sprache ist kein Besitz des Einsamen, weil sie nur zwischen den Menschen ist; aber die Sprache ist auch zwei Menschen nicht gemeinsam, weil auch bloß zwei Menschen niemals das gleiche bei den Worten sich vorstellen. Die Worte der Geisteswissenschaften haben ihre Geschichte, die in dunkle Zeiten zurückreicht. Ebenso reichen die Worte der Naturwissenschaften zurück und wieder zurück.'

77 *Ibidem*, I, 221: 'Die Sprache legt auch dem Anarchisten den Strickt des Gesetzes um den Hals und auch der freieste Philosoph denkt mit den Worten der philosophischen Sprache.' This is the theoretical premise of Landauer's anarchy. One important feature of Landauer's thought is the connection

Mauthner's attitude toward the history of philosophy is paradoxical because on the one hand the attacks on metaphysical abstractions and the radical break with all preceding thinkers are the crucial task of his scepticism;[78] on the other hand he develops a philosophy by reinterpreting its role and anchoring in the tradition. His rejection of metaphysical doctrines is based on his philosophy of language; for instance, Cartesian dualism is a non-sensical idea, according to Mauthner, because the terms 'mind' and 'body' exist only in language. In the same way, he refuses the opposition between subject and object, or between universal and particular. These are just deceptive issues caused by language; but he rejects the idea of a perfect language, which was stressed by Lull, Leibniz, and so on, as well as the conception of a philosophical grammar, by which some attempted to dissolve language into logic.[79] Since philosophy as a dogmatic system is no longer possible, it has to deal with a permanent critique of words and with a complete change of attitude towards language.

Mauthner values the history of philosophy from a sceptical point of view and sees himself as a follower of Hume, but he gives his general scepticism a new foundation by means of linguistic criticism. He moves beyond Hume—as we have seen—by turning the habits of thought into habits of language. Real truths, God, laws of nature, or even self-knowledge are illusory words and even the conception of causality is, in Mauthner's view, a metaphor.

The main sources of his thoughts are Sextus Empiricus, the medieval nominalists, the British empiricists, Kant, Schopenhauer, and Nietzsche. A pivotal role, according to Mauthner, is played by the critique of language developed by English empiricists, such as Locke and Berkeley. If the former stressed the value of language for one's gnoseological theory in the constitution of abstract notions, by underlining the difference between representations and words, the latter shed light on the signs of

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between language and action, *Sprache und Handlung*. This was a peculiar trait of his philosophy, even if it has perhaps not yet received its proper degree of attention. Our approach is to read Landauer's work in accordance with Mauthner's critique of language, without considering Landauer a follower of Mauthner, for three reasons: first, Landauer's sceptical philosophy is the ground and strategy for a peculiar idea of anarchy and also justice, which stands far from Mauthner's political ideas; second, Landauer's philosophy was deeply influenced by Eckhart's mysticism, but also the Jewish tradition as mediated by Buber; and third, Landauer's radical scepticism is connected to a *Gemeinschaftsleben* and the anarchy of language is a model for a political conception. On the differences between Landauer and Mauthner, see Berlage, *Empfindung, Ich und Sprache*, 132: 'Für Landauer ist Mystik die notwendige Konsequenz aus der radikalen Skepsis; Mystik, die sich als Dichtung manifestiert, könne auch vom Unaussprechlichen noch sprechen und so die Skepsis überwinden. Mauthner hingegen bleibt der kritische Haltung treu.'

78 Cf. Fritz Mauthner, *Gespräche im Himmel und andere Ketzereien* (Munich and Leipzig: Müller, 1914): 56: 'Die großen Skeptiker, die den Wert der philosophischen Begriffe genauer bestimmten und tote Worte, tote Symbole aus den Zierschränken hinauswarfen, waren bessere Mehrer des Sprachschatzes als die Konservatoren alles alten Gerümpel.'

79 Cf. Leinfellner, "Fritz Mauthner," 497: 'Die Sprache ist weder ein formal perfektes System, d. h. eine Maschine (ein Kalkül), noch ein ästhetisch perfektes System (ein Kunstwerk), noch ein perfektes lebendiges System, d. h. ein Organismus.'

language as a sum of abstractions far removed from perception, on which our knowledge is based. Mauthner's motto—taken up by Salomon Maimon and Gottlob Ernst Schulze (Pseudo-Aenesidemus)—is "Back to Hume!' as opposite to the "Back to Kant!' of contemporary Neo-Kantian scholars.

However, Mauthner's debt to Kantian philosophy is undeniable. Mauthner accepts the notion of the thing-in-itself as the boundary of human knowledge, but he doesn't give—contrary to Kant—objectivity to the human experience of phenomena and he denies the existence of logically necessarily concepts. Furthermore, according to Mauthner, Kant missed the relevance of language and he would have achieved more if had given up on the personification of reason: the *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* would have been a *Sprachkritik*.[80] Mauthner's approach to Kantian philosophy clearly follows the meta-critique of Hamann.[81] Indeed the ambitious Mauthnerian undertaking was not only to carry on the ideas of Hamann, but also to complete Kant's venture through the transformation of his formal logic into a linguistic matter.[82]

Another important role is played by Humboldt, who completely transformed the approach to language by asserting that it is dynamic *energeia* instead of a defined *ergon*. Furthermore, it's worth remembering that Humboldt was the first thinker to connect thinking and the use of language.[83] However, Mauthner refuses the Humboldtian definition of language as a manifestation of spirit, even if he belongs to the tradition of the dynamism of language.[84] In a fascinating way, Mauthner brings all previous philosophers of language together, from medieval nominalists to romanticists.[85]

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80 Scepticism plays a central role in Kant's philosophy for many reasons. First of all Kant—as stated in his *Prolegomena*—was a follower of Hume, who famously interrupted his dogmatic slumber; second, his Copernican revolution puts a limit on human knowledge, which concerns only phenomena and not *noumena*; third, he draws a distinction between a good *skepticismus criticus* and a bad *skepticismus dogmaticus*. On Kant's scepticism, cf. Michael N. Forster, *Kant and Skepticism*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008). Forster distinguishes three forms of scepticism in Kant's philosophy, i.e. the veil of perception, Humean scepticism, and Pyrrhonian scepticism.

81 In the exergues of the first volume of his critique, Mauthner quotes Locke, Vico, Hamann, Jacobi, and Kleist. But the quotation of Hamann has a special relevance; cf. Mauthner, *Beiträge*, I, III: 'Verstehst du nun mein Sprachprinzipium der Vernunft, und daß ich mit Luther die ganze Philosophie zu einer Grammatik mache?'

82 Cf. *ibidem*, I, 300: 'Das ist die überaus wichtige Parallele zwischen der Sprachkritik und der Kritik der reinen Vernunft. Da für uns Vernunft nichts anderes ist als Sprache, so hätten wir im voraus wissen müssen, daß die Kritik der einen wie der anderen zu dem gleichen Ergebnisse führen würde.'

83 Cf. Wilhelm von Humboldt, "Einleitung zum Kawi-Werk," in idem, *Werke*, ed. Albert Leitzmann, vol. VII (Berlin: B. Behr, 1907): 1–144; Jochem Hennigfeld, *Die Sprachphilosophie des 20. Jahrhunderts: Grundpositionen und -probleme* (Berlin and New York: De Gruyter, 1982): 936: 'Erst Humboldt gelingt es durch die Unterscheidung von *Ergon* und *Energeia* und ihre transzendentalphilosophische Begründung, das Verhältnis von Sprache und Denken auf den Begriff zu bringen. Indem er darlegt, daß die Sprache Tätigkeit (Energie als Tätigkeit des neuzeitlich verstandenen Subjekts) ist, daß die Sprache also nichts anderes ist als die Totalität der jeweiligen Sprechakte, verweist er eine Zeichentheorie in ihre Schranke.'

84 Cf. Lia Formigari, *Il linguaggio. Storia delle idee* (Rome and Bari: Laterza, 2001): 238.

According to Mauthner, language is an 'unessential non-object'.[86] On the one hand he attempts to fight linguistic constrictions; on the other hand there is a kind of unavoidability in language. In the third volume of his 'Contributions', Mauthner defines his critique of language in an ironic way, as 'Hominismus', that reveals a perspectivism of knowledge. This neologism shows how all language is the embodiment of the human point of view and it should be sharply distinguished from *Humanismus*, which contains the cult of *Menschengeist*. His bitter critique of the 'Anthropolatrie'—human idolatry—passes through a radical redefinition of philosophy that can no longer be an abstract science or a sterile collection of meaningless words.[87] It's simply wrong to think that both science and philosophy stand apart from ordinary language, which is the only one we have, since ideal language is impossible. In addition, philosophy, insofar as it wrestles with the limits of our language, should be a permanent grammatical critique.[88] The risk implicated in this new task of philosophy determines a transformation of linguistic critique into an epistemological model, which rejects a supposed *a priori* structure of knowledge and is based on an historical horizon. In fact, every word contains the history of its meanings preserved in memory and, as far as language is always an (illusory) sharing, it always has a social value.

85 At the opening of his work, Mauthner quotes Busse, Haym, and Levy as thinkers who seem not to have continued in the wake of Humboldt, Herder, and Hamann. However, Mauthner's confrontation with the romantic treatment of language is twofold: on the one hand he rejects the romantic comparison between organism and language because it is not fertile and only repeats sterile tautologies; on the other hand, regarding the relevance of the social function of language, he compares it to the ether —a comparison that was very popular in the literature of the nineteenth century.

86 "Wesenloses Unding," cf. Mauthner, *Beiträge*, I, 181.

87 Cf. Kühn, *Gescheiterte Sprachkritik*, 70: 'Philosophie wird möglich durch den Mißbrauch einer völlig entleerten Sprache, deren Worte den Schein eines Inhalts nur deshalb vortäuschen können, weil sie in das grammatische System passen wie sinnvolle Worte und analog dazu hinter ihnen Bilder vermutet werden, die gar nicht existieren.'

88 Cf. Mauthner, *Beiträge*, III, IX-X: 'Wenn ich meine skeptische Sprachkritik nun in einer lachenden Stunde "Hominismus" zu nennen bereit war, [...] so war ich mir bewußt, den allzu geläufigen Ausdruck "Humanismus" nur darum vermieden zu haben, weil sich die Anthropolatrie—die Anbetung des Menschengeistes, die wie unlöslich mit dem Begriffe "human" verbunden ist, die "Menschenwürde" des uns Deutschen bekannteren Schiller—gar so schlecht mit dem Kern und Wesen meiner Erkenntnistheorie verträgt. Denken ist Sprechen: das ist meine letzte Meinung *cum beneficio inventarii*. Es ist nicht genug, wenn man etwa sagt: Philosophie sei nur in Sprache möglich; in Menschensprache, aus Menschensprache. Philosophie ist die Grenze der Sprache selbst, der Grenzbegriff, der *limes:* ist Kritik der Sprache, der Menschensprache.'

Judaism and Scepticism: A Controversial Relationship

The relationship between Judaism and scepticism is treated in one article that appeared posthumously in English in 1924,[89] in which Mauthner discusses whether scepticism is simply a tendency or whether it is characteristic of Jewish thinkers. At the beginning of the article Mauthner asks two questions: whether scepticism coincides with a bad *Weltanschauung* and whether there is an affinity between scepticism and Judaism. He quotes the German poet Christian Morgenstern, who reiterates the connection between Jews and sceptics; their common ground—according to Morgenstern—is a form of a destruction that Mauthner also acknowledges.[90] Mauthner's definition of scepticism follows the etymology of the word, i.e. *skeptesthai* is connected to the gaze, because it means 'to look, to observe;' hence, sceptics are people, who—before making a judgment on a specific topic—look around and observe with attention. Mauthner distinguishes two forms of mistrust that are not scepticism: a little doubt ('kleiner Zweifel'), which coincides with a mistrust of frankness, and a scientific doubt that concerns representations and general definitions. In this latter field the role of Jews was crucial in terms of their contribution to science and philosophy. However, both forms are different from high mistrust, i.e. scepticism proper, which starts with Socrates and concerns the possibility of knowledge.

Concerning the relationship between scepticism and Judaism, Mauthner begins by remarking on the paradox of religion and scepticism: if the Jews believe in one God, creator of the world, it's a contradiction to consider them sceptics. But on the other hand the Jewish idea of an unmentionable and unknowable God prepares the ground for a deep scepticism, whose clues are traceable in Qohelet. However, Mauthner refuses any form of generalisation and he doesn't agree with Morgenstern, according to whom Jesus and Spinoza were also Jewish sceptical figures. In fact, Jesus—as far as we know about his thought—was more of a creator than a destroyer; and while Spinoza criticised the canon of the Bible his critique wasn't sceptical, especially because, in his 'On the Improvement of the Understanding', he issued harsh words against scepticism and agreed with Descartes on the possibility of getting and knowing the truth.[91]

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89 Cf. Fritz Mauthner, "Skepticism and the Jews," in *Menorah Journal* 1 (1924): 1–14. This article was first published in an English translation; the German version appeared many years later; cf. idem, "Skeptizismus und Judentum," in *Studia Spinozana* 5 (1989): 275–307.

90 Cf. Christian Morgenstern, *Stufen. Eine Entwicklung in Aphorismen und Tagebuch-Notizen* (Munich: Piper, 1918), 105–106: 'Alles Jüdische ist vorwiegend destruktiv. Jesus, der größte Jude, ist auch der größte Destruktor der Welt. Spinoza ist nichts andres und wird darum auch von dem jüngsten jüdischen Destruktor Mauthner in seiner Eigenschaft als Antiteleologe über alle andern Denker erhoben. Mit Mauthner selbst kommt vielleicht die tollste Zerstörung in Gang, die die Geschichte des Geistes bisher erlebt hat.'

91 Benedict de Spinoza, *On the Improvement of Understanding*, trans. Robert H.M. Elwes, in *The Chiefs Works of Benedict de Spinoza*, vol. 2 (London: George Bell, 1884): 1–44.

Moreover, Mauthner rejects the common view that Jews introduced the world to doubt or negation, because the history of scepticism began in Ancient Greece and developed throughout the history of philosophy. He makes a distinction between Eastern European Jewish thinkers such as Maimon, who offers a clear example of Jewish sceptical thought,[92] and Western European Jews such as Spinoza, who doubted the value of scientific language without a sceptical outcome. Mauthner rejects an absolute coincidence between his scepticism and his being a Jew, because there isn't a Jewish scepticism, seen as a philosophical school. On the other hand he admits that his linguistic scepticism deals with religious critique, as liberation from religious lies; one can say that his relation to Judaism is as estranged as his relationship to language.[93] Furthermore, his unsystematic philosophy and mistrust of systems in general can be connected to the Jewish attitude of retiring against systematisation.

Logos-Scepticism and Mystic *epoché* of Language

Mauthner's scepticism deals with a deep logological destruction; in fact he criticises language seen as *logos*, which means at the same time 'word' and 'thought'; but the dismantling of language, by showing all the tricks and deceptions, happens in language itself. Even if thinking and speaking are the same deeds and are useful for human orientation, they are inexact and they fail as a means of grasping the truth. Hence, concepts and words are also vague social products that allow a sharing of information without touching the ground of reality. Instead of a philosophical realism, Mauthner speaks of word-superstition, which constitutes the thread of his critique.[94] Nevertheless, his radical scepticism is not 'postmodern', because the non-sense of reality is rooted in human boundaries, and there is something that exceeds language and thought: the mystical truth that can be experienced in silence.

The peculiarity of his theory lies in the coincidence of philosophy and scepticism, avoiding the risk of dogmatism.[95] In fact, the task of his work is conceived

92 Cf. Fritz Mauthner, "Skeptizismus und Judentum," 305: 'Salomon Maimons atomistisch, mikroskopisch eingestelltes Denken ist (bei aller Übertreibung) Maimon.'

93 Cf. Mauthner, *Erinnerungen*, 50: 'Wie ich keine rechte Muttersprache besaß als Jude in einem zweisprachigen Lande, so hatte ich auch keine Mutterreligion, als Sohn einer völlig konfessionslosen Judenfamilie. Wie mir mit meinem Volke, dem deutschen, nicht die Werksteine ganz gemeinsam waren, die Worte, so war mir und ihm auch das Haus nicht gemeinsam, die Kirche.'

94 Cf. Weiler, *Mauthner's Critique*, 141: 'Word-superstition is Mauthner's word for word-realism and it is his acceptance of its ideality which forces him to acknowledge the impossibility of eradicating it from language.'

95 Cf. Mauthner, *Beiträge*, III, 204: 'Das letzte Worte über das Verhältnis zwischen Denken und Sprechen kann von der Sprachkritik nicht gefunden werden, weil die Sprachkritik sowohl an der Bedeutungskonstanz der zu erklärenden und zu vergleichenden Begriffe oder Worte zweifeln muß, als auch an der wissenschaftliche Brauchbarkeit der für die Erklärung und Vergleichung notwendigen psychologischen Begriffe oder Worte.'

as an on-going critique of language by revealing linguistic deception and the grammatical illusion. Linguistic critique is a self-critique of philosophy itself, which lead to a permanent deconstruction: "I must destroy language behind me and in me, step by step: I must destroy every rung of the ladder while climbing upon it.'[96] Dismantling the ladder of knowledge—this metaphor was used also by Wittgenstein—is the same process of dismantling language. In fact, the impossibility of knowledge is not a mere exercise of negation, but this awareness is the high point of our knowledge. Mauthner's theoretical operation is closer to the outcome of negative theology, even if his mysticism is a godless and silent appropriation of the world.[97]

In his autobiographical notes Mauthner sheds light on the relationship between scepticism and mysticism, which is a critique of language or knowledge.[98] He admits that his scepticism does not call the contradictions of the world into doubt, because all contradictions happen in language, not in speechless nature.[99] His scepticism deals with the limits of humankind which can not grasp the unity of nature through speaking or thinking but can only feel and live this mystical union. Mauthner is aware of the practical task of his thought, but this kind of liberation from the tyranny of language, according to him, has no absolute value, because it is not a dogma, but a way of life.[100] Mauthner warns of the risk of negative dogmatism and he asserts that only the biggest sceptics were mystics.[101]

96 *Ibidem*, I, 1–2: 'So muß ich die Sprache hinter mir und vor mir und in mir vernichten von Schritt zur Schritt, so muß ich jede Sprosse der Leiter zertrümmern, indem ich sie betrete.'

97 Cf. Mittermüller, *Sprachskepsis und Poetologie*, 27: 'Insgesamt lässt sich resümieren, dass die Sprache für Mauthner aufgrund ihrer syntaktischen und semantischen Struktur eine angemessene Wirklichkeitserfahrung verhindert. Nicht zufällig kulminieren daher seine sprachskeptischer Reflexionen in einer Affirmation der sprachlosen Weltaneignung, die auf mystische Konzepte rekurriert.'

98 Cf. Fritz Mauthner, "Selbstdarstellung," in *Die Philosophie der Gegenwart in Selbstdarstellungen*, ed. Raymund Schmidt, vol. 3, (Leipzig: Meiner, 1922): 120–144, 138: 'Man kann das auch Mystik nennen, erkenntniskritische, sprachkritische Mystik, zum Unterschiede von der dem abgründigen Meister Eckhart nachgestammelten Schablone der vielzuvielen gottseligen Mystiker.'

99 This idea of a speechless nature is a *topos* in the philosophy of language. But in the twentieth century, starting from Mauthner, acquired a big attention, just thinking for instance of Benjamin. Cf. Walter Benjamin, 'On Language as such and on the Language of Man,' in idem, *Selected Writings, Vol. I, 1913–1926*, eds. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings, (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1996): 62–74.

100 Cf. Mauthner, *Die Sprache*, 84: 'Ich lehre die Befreiung der Menschen von der Sprache als einem untauglichen Erkenntniswerkzeug; aber ich wüßte nicht, wie man sich befreien könnte von der Macht der Sprache über die Sitte, die Gewohnheit, das Handeln, das Leben.'

101 Cf. Mauthner, *Beiträge*, III, 627: '[...] Aber die erkenntnistheoretischen Skeptiker sind im Kampfe mit dem philosophischen Dogmatismus immer wieder negative Dogmatiker geworden, während die Kritiker bleiben wollten. Nur die ganz großen Skeptiker waren zugleich Mystiker;' see also idem, *Der Atheismus*, I, 4: 'Sprachkritik war mein erstes und ist mein letztes Wort. Nach rückwärts blickend ist Sprachkritik alles zermalmende Skepsis, nach vorwärts blickend, mit Illusionen spielend, ist sie eine Sehnsucht nach Einheit, ist sie Mystik. Epimetheus oder Prometheus, immer gottlos, in Frieden entsagen.'

The peculiarity of Mauthnerian scepticism consists in its practical consequences; in fact, it is the way to a silent resignation.[102] Mauthner's scepticism places him in an apophatic tradition that doubts the reliability of words, stemming from Plotinus, Cusano, and Eckhart. This idea received a great deal of attention from those working in the tradition of German Romanticism, from Schelling, Hegel, and so on. But—starting with Mauthner and later mediated by Landauer—the limits and the failure of language became a recurrent trope which is revived in the central Jewish thinkers of the early twentieth century, from Wittgenstein to Rosenzweig, from Celan to Jabès.[103]

According to Mauthner, his linguistic critique leads necessarily to ignorance ('Nichtwissen')[104] and that's why it is a practical exercise. There is a deep-rooted difference between thinking and living, but this praise of life is a result of scepticism and not a vitalistic affirmation in Nietzsche's sense. Speechless and thoughtless are the only adjectives for Mauthner's mystical experience, which is a non-linguistic feeling of unity between the single entity and the entire world.[105] Thanks to its function of laying out the path toward mysticism, Mauthner's philosophical gesture is authentically sceptic. Not only because the act of negation and liberation from false knowledge is at the heart of the scepticism as philosophy, but also because of its therapeutic strategy—in fact, like ancient scepticism, it is a strategy or better an auto-suppressing system, whose function is the achievement of a different way of life—, Mauthner's scepticism has a clear practical aim: one can say that his mystic and silent resignation is a modern form of *ascesis* and the extreme version of *ataraxia* or *apraxia*.

However, even if his *logos-scepticism* is the highest form of suspension of signification through a radical *epoché* of language and thought, his step back from misunderstanding has a tragic flavour, as the silence of nature. Mauthner's disclosure of the fallacies, lies, and tricks of the human sphere is, at heart, a desperate philosophical attempt to cross the boundaries of human being that is—as Aristotle stated—the only living thing that has logos—*zóon logòn échon*. The risk of errors and the

102 Cf. Mauthner, "Skeptizismus und Judentum," 290: 'Diese hohe Skepsis sucht keinen geschäftlichen Vorteil für das Individuum, das sich durch die Lüge des Verkehrs nicht betrügen läßt, sie sucht auch keinen Comfort für die Menschheit, die materialistisch ihre Lebenswirklichkeit entschleiern muß, sie will nichts, sie schafft nichts, sie lehrt uns die letzte Resignation des erkennenden Menschen, die stille Einsicht, daß wir mit der armen Menschensprache niemals herankommen können an das, was diese Sprache etwa das Sein oder die Erkenntnis nenn.' However, not only is silence the apophatic consequence of his radical scepticism, but also the liberating laughter that corresponds to a political and social resignation; cf. Mauthner, *Beiträge*, III, 634: 'Die niederste Erkenntnisform ist in der Sprache, die höhere ist im Lachen; die letzte ist in der Kritik der Sprache, in der himmelsstillen, himmelsheiteren Resignation oder Entsagung.'

103 Cf. William Franke, "Franz Rosenzweig and the Emergence of a Postsecular Philosophy of the Unsayable,' *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 58 (2005): 161–180.

104 Mauthner, *Beiträge*, I, XIV: 'Wer Sprachkritik treiben will, ernsthaft und radikal, den führen seine Studien unerbittlich zum Nichtwissen.'

105 Cf. Krieg, *Fritz Mauthners Kritik*, 193: 'Zugleich mit der Skepsis ist die echte, die große Mystik ihm aufgegangen, die einzige Weisheit, die fraglose, sprachlose Hingabe an das All, die Natur, das unendliche Leben.'

semantic shift pass through all human fields; one can say that without the challenge of permanent misunderstanding we would stop speaking, acting, and living as human beings. Hence, is silence the antidote to anthropomorphism or does it rather hide a metaphysical will to power for shaping a new model of human being? Even answering this open question requires words, grammar, signs, and mistakes; from a hermeneutic point of view, the veil of uncertainty leads us not to absolute certainty, but to new questions, new doubts, and new metaphors. The desert of misunderstanding is the linguistic way to a precious and dangerous form of freedom.

Part II: **Reports**

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
Senior Fellow
Goethe University Frankfurt
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
Senior Fellow
McGill University, Montreal
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
Senior Fellow
Free University Berlin
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'.

Proposals of the Fellows who arrived after 30 June, 2016

Dr. Evelien Chayes
Junior Fellow
Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, Paris
Project: Gender and Modes of Scepticism in and out of the Venetian Ghetto: Sara Copia Sulam (1592–1641) and the *Accademia degli Incogniti*
Period of Fellowship: July 2016

Unlike the Venetian poetess Gaspara Stampa, who kept a salon during the early sixteenth century, the Jewish writer Sara Copia Sulam transgressed the boundaries that early seventeenth-century Venetian society set out for such a woman. Don Harran (2009) observed that she 'broke the rules[,] read, wrote, studied, and speculated; she opened her house to Jews and Christians; she sounded them out for their views on poetry, philosophy, and religion; and she defended her person against slanderers and her faith against scoffers.' Copia Sulam probably served as a courtesan, deploying her skills in order to publish her own works while struggling not to betray her identity as a Jew or as a female intellectual. She was subject to a simultaneously eroticising and anti-feminist male environment, sharing the predicament of contemporary Venetian women of artistic and intellectual ambitions and achievements, like the singer-composer Barbara Strozzi and the literary nun Arcangela Tarabotti. But Copia Sulama's commitment, from a learned Jewish viewpoint, to the philosophical debate evolving around the (im)mortality of the soul and its relation to the body and terrestrial matters, placed and kept her at the core of intellectual life and emancipatory discourse. Beyond the connotative influence of her Jewish identity, her immediate environment, the Venetian ghetto, performed as a 'laboratory' for experimental, polymorphic scepticism, wherein scientific approaches were tested against the background of Talmudic learning and continuous, critical reading of mystical texts. Copia Sulam's salon, we have every cause to presume, was hospitable to exchanges of poetry and music between Jews and non-Jews, and she was close to rabbi Leone da Modena.

The poetess corresponded with Baldassare Bonifaccio and Ansaldo Cebà, both in their time members of the *Accademia degli Incogniti*, whose lives and works are listed in the 1647 *Glorie degli Incogniti*. Although having been a *habitué* of h e r salon and despite calling himself Copia Sulam's 'pupil', Baldassare Bonifaccio aggressed Copia Sulam in 1621, accusing her in a public letter of denying the immortality of the soul. She refuted his accusation and their polemics were eventually published by Antonio Pinelli in Venice. Neither Bonifaccio nor Cebà could refrain from pressing Copia Sulam to convert to Christianity. In her correspondence with Bonfaccio, her firmness and intellectual superbness elicited disdainful and notably misogynistic re-

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plies. In the case of Cebà, with whom she exchanged letters and poems between 1618 and 1622, the tone was more respectful, even amorous.

Copia Sulam and the *Incogniti* were especially keen to develop body-soul dualism, inscribed in ongoing millenarian debates. While pursuing this question along their own lines, they did not fail to heed ancient traditions—Greek and Latin, Jewish and Christian—, with special attention to Aristotelian as well as Pythagorean principles and to Jewish learning. The soul, its ascent by the dialectics of intellect and will, and its transmigration, was the central topic *par excellence* of the Italian academies since 1550. In the Incogniti's *Discorsi* of 1635, this core issue experiences an epistemological shift. It is 'free will' that now challenges cognition and established authority itself; will has become desire for nothing but *libertà*. Reason replaces not only authority, but also intellect as the motor of man's striving for knowledge.

We can connect this orientation towards the immortality and transmigration of the soul directly to contemporary—including Jewish—sources. In their *Discorsi* on debates in the domain of natural philosophy, the *Incogniti* show direct inspiration by talmudic and kabbalistic sources. At the same time, as several historians have noticed, the Incogniti, as authors of *novelle*, became involved not only with religious scepticism but also with the (rhetorical) promotion of libertinism and sodomy in correlation with misogynistic ideas. The most flagrant and famous specimen is Antonio Rocco's *Alcibiade fanciullo a scola*. The context these writings allude to is one of theatre, farce and opera, wherein drag queens appear. Misogyny, and the central role accorded to figures or variants of conversion and disguise manifest in the Incogniti's writings, makes the plural connections indwelling in Copia Sulam's intellectual defence and self-definition all the more interesting. While historians of recent decades have shown interest in her case, we require assessments of her writings via an approach that centralises themes (and schemes) of gender, scepticism and emancipation, taking into account the use the poetess makes of the different learned traditions evoked above.

Some of Copia Sulam's poetry was composed in response to poems that the two men dedicated to her, some is found in manuscript in the 'Notices from Parnassus' (Biblioteca del Museo Correr, Ms Cicogna 270). It shows some concession to eroticising within a male-female relationship defined by her counterparty. Her prose, however, exhibits strong non-conventional tones, corrective of her male opponent(s). Or, to use different terminology, her poetry can be perceived as masculine-normative, and her prose as feminine-authoritative, unconditioned as well as unconditional.

How does Copia Sulams's 1621 *Manifesto* correspond with or fit with the current of Venetian scepticism between 1580 and 1650? I propose to analyse her argumentation in the context of older traditions: into what argumentative and philosophic traditions does she inscribe her work, how does she perceive her work within her contemporary intellectual environment, in particular that of the writings of the Incogniti and as related to the multiple environments of Leone da Modena?

The project aims to

1) extend Giuseppe Veltri's studies by illuminating the role of gender through the prism of Jewish philosophy and mysticism in Copia Sulam's management of the debate within the context of a society of forcibly-controlled female sexuality.
2) clarify the role of philosophic and literary genres in her writing and interplay with the Incogniti.
3) analyse on a more specific level, the function of the distribution of role-plays (as in theatre) in behaviour and discourse of conversion and emancipation, with attention to Copia Sulam's differentiated treatments—her stance in prose, her stance in poetry.
4) explain the role of different argumentative traditions—Jewish, Aristotelian and Pyrrhonian—in Copia Sulam's sceptical discourse.

Finally, in collaboration with other Fellows at the Centre I propose to prepare a first solid scholarly Italian edition of Copia Sulam's complete works, accompanied by a palaeographic study of her unpublished autographs and a book-historical analysis of manuscripts and earliest editions of her works.

Prof. Dr. Yuval Harari
Senior Fellow
Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, Beer Sheva
Project: Dream Enquiry: Theory and Praxis of Dreaming in Medieval and Early Modern Judaism
Period of Fellowship: July to August 2016

Aiming to publish a book dedicated to Jewish dream magic, I have already completed two chapters that deal with dream divination through the dead and through demons. The bulk of evidence regarding dream-divination by means of magic, however, is related to 'dream enquiry' (*še'elat ḥalom*), that is, dream divination through angels or direct contact with God. During my stay at the Centre I intend to focus on this issue and write the third chapter of my planned book.

The primary sources for my research are Jewish manuscripts of magic and practical Kabbalah, in which practices of dream magic are explicit and abundant. I also take into consideration halakhic, kabbalistic and narrative sources, which shed light on the phenomenon and especially on the attitude of Jewish elites towards it and the debates concerning its legitimacy and efficacy. Both dreams and magic undermine the borderlines of nature and society, they are in conflict with 'rational' interpretations of the human experience. Although they raised scepticism and ridicule, the topic of dreams and magic kept a strong hold among Jews in the East and West alike. 'Dream enquiry,' which seems to have been a prevalent practice in the medieval and early modern periods, is an especially interesting test case of this debate. Posing a *she'elat ḥalom* in order to gain 'one sixtieth of prophecy' from God's mes-

sengers was not perceived as sinful by everyone, let alone as useless—unlike the illicit appeal of magical practices for dream divination through ghosts and demons. On the one hand, then, it was criticised and condemned as 'magic' and 'idolatry' by those who aimed at maintaining the normative practices of contact between man and Heaven. On the other hand, it helped laymen as well as rabbis to attain desired knowledge in various fields, including the Halakhah. My study will concentrate on this controversial practice and its place in Jewish culture.

Še'elat ḥalom is the common pattern of magic dream divination in Jewish culture. In Jewish textbooks of magic (*grimoires*), this term is usually used to denote a ritual act that involves an adjuration. This act aims at the summoning of an angel or another holy agent to one's dream—for the purpose of attaining required knowledge from him; or this act aims at the calling of certain hidden information to reveal itself in the dreamer's mind—either explicitly or through a certain sign, e. g. a vision or a biblical verse. A few aspects of this cultural phenomenon have been discussed in a handful of works by scholars like Israel Ta-Shema, Nahman Danzig, Abraham Joshua Heschel, Moshe Idel, Ephraim Kanarfogel, Gideon Bohak, Alesia Bellusci and myself. None of them takes into consideration instructional books of magic outside the Cairo Genizah.

Initiated actions for dream revelation are absent from the Bible. The story of Solomon's dream in Gibeon after the massive sacrifice at the local high place might be a rare echo of shrine incubation (2 Kings 3). But that is all. In talmudic times, the rabbis were apparently acquainted with this and other practices of dream enquiry that prevailed in their vicinity. However, no concrete information concerning 'dream man' (*iš ha-ḥalom*) or 'the master of dream' (*baʿal ha-ḥalom*), whom they mention, or concerning the way to manipulate them, is exposed in their writings. In contrast, among the early Jewish mystics dream enquiry was one of the prominent expressions of human control over angels. In Heikhalot and Merkavah literature detailed instructions are given for the adjuration of the 'Prince of Dream' (*śar ha-ḥalom*) to occur in one's dream and to reveal to him any required information.

Evidence concerning dream enquiry highly expands throughout the Middle Ages. Karaite polemic writings that ascribe this praxis to the rabbanites, as well as the letter of the sages of Kairouan to Rav Hai Gaon and his responsum, attest to the place of dream enquiry among Jews living in the Muslim world at the turn of the first millennium. Sources from the beginning of the second millennium that originate in France and Ashkenaz demonstrate its importance also in this region. Dream enquiry is mentioned in biblical and talmudic commentaries; in the influential and widely referred-to work of R. Jacob of Mervege, *Še'elot u-Tešuvot min ha-Šamayim* ('Heavenly Responsa'), dating to the early thirteenth century; in the writings of Ashkenazi pietists, first and foremost in *Sefer Ḥasidim*; in prayer books; and in many writings of both Halakhah and Kabbalah. The main source of information concerning this practice in both east and west, however, are manuscripts of magic and practical Kabbalah.

Many recipes for dream enquiry, mainly from the eleventh to the thirteenth centuries, were found in the Cairo Genizah and many more are included in later litera-

ture from all over Europe. Instructions vary from one recipe to another, but behind them a ritual pattern can be identified that includes (in diverse combinations): purity, fast, immersion, prayer and adjuration. In order to enable the continuous performative effect of the adjurations and the holy names interwoven in them throughout the night sleep, they have to be written down either on parchment or paper, or on the body itself, particularly on the left hand. The answer is commonly expected to occur in the dream itself in an audial or visual pattern. In rare cases the answer is expected to be written down on a blank sheet of paper which is to be placed under the dreamer's head.

The praxis of dream enquiry spanned the Jewish world and was apparently carried out by members of all layers of society. At the beginning of the sixteenth century it was incorporated by R. Shlomo Almoli into his highly influential theory of dreams. At the end of the sixteenth and in the seventeenth century instructions for *še'elat ḥalom* were collected by great authorities like R. Haim Vital and R. Moses Zacuto and saved in their books of magical recipes (*Sefer ha-Pe'ulot* and *Sefer ha-Sodot*). Rabbis and Kabbalists referred to dream enquiry, questioning or supporting its validity and efficacy, up to the twentieth century.

The most significant source for understanding this practice, the worldview in which it was anchored, and the criticism and disdain it raised, are the dozens of recipes for dream enquiry scattered in the broad and yet unexplored corpus of Jewish manuscripts of magic and practical Kabbalah from the Middle Ages and the early modern period. My research will focus first and foremost on this corpus, aiming at a comprehensive survey of the phenomenon and its place in Jewish thought and action. The results will be published as a chapter of my planned book on Jewish dream magic.

Prof. Dr. Almut-Barbara Renger
Senior Fellow
Free University Berlin
Project: Between Fascination and Scepticism: Charismatic Authority Figures in Religion and Philosophy
Period of Fellowship: July to September 2016

The type of charismatic authority figure which acts within hierarchically organised social structures as a teacher in the field of religion and philosophy, and in the broader context thereof, laying claim to specific knowledge (usually revelation-based knowledge), wisdom and/or truth, has been omnipresent in the cultural and religious history of Europe since antiquity. Writings on this type have reflected the fascination associated with such actors, but also scepticism and ambivalence, right up to the present. Alongside exaltations, consisting solely of the veneration and glorification of a charismatic leader and teacher figure, are also found condemnations, denouncing the religious or philosophic 'master' as the exploiter of those

subject to his authority, as well as reflections on his charisma, which coalesce amidst the tensions between faith and doubt, commitment and critique.

In my project I will examine this ambivalence and scepticism, and by doing so use the example of this type to explore a central focus of enquiry at the Centre: the relationship between scepticism and authority. This relationship will be the focus of my investigation, supported by reflexion in the tradition of historical philology and literary studies as well as by orientation towards the sociology of religion and historical anthropology. The spectrum of actors extends from Pythagoras to Apollonius of Tyana, on through to charismatic leaders of recent new religious movements, such as Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh/Osho, whose impacts testify in exemplary fashion to the volatile nature of the dynamics between 'East' and 'West' in a religious context.

I intend to scrutinise the claims to authority laid by such actors and the understandings of legitimation linked with these claims, and investigate the recognition and denial of their authority by other individuals and organisations within and outside of the groups and communities in which they operate. The project will devote particular attention to cognitive and emotional aspects and to concepts constitutive for the withdrawal of an authority previously recognised or the recognition of an authority previously denied, such as faith and doubt, trust and distrust.

Sceptical depictions of persons and figures who correspond to the charismatic type of authority figure under investigation, for instance those mentioned in the Platonic Socrates dialogues or in works by Lucian of Samosata, lend succinct expression to this ambivalence vis-à-vis authority as well as the associated claim of validity and understanding of legitimation. Recognising no dogma, scepticism contrasts each judgement with an opposite judgement that appears equally plausible. Authority has thus always been subjected to scrutiny.

Focusing on this topic, I am aiming to pursue one of the central research objectives of the Centre: an examination of 'whether the method of enquiry, as implied in the term "skepticism", could be regarded as anthropological constant in the context of an alleged dialectic difference between "Eastern" and "Western" philosophy and culture' (Veltri). In light of this objective, I will examine the extent to which attitudes and approaches comparable to the sceptical posture and practices of antiquity can be identified in the cultural and religious history of Europe (as possible consequences of ancient scepticism) or in non-European contexts, particularly in Asia.

It is through its comparative perspective, which takes the sceptical posture of antiquity as its starting point and *tertium comparationis*, that my project can make a valuable contribution to the work of the Centre. The aim is to use analytical descriptive approaches to enquire into similarities, parallels, and analogies in various languages, cultures, religions, and world views; through interdisciplinary discussions involving representatives not only from the fields of Jewish and Religious Studies, but also a whole series of other disciplines in the Humanities, Cultural Studies, and Social Sciences. This enquiry is not intended as an attempt to arrive at normative statements or definitions of the nature of phenomena with respect to human beings,

philosophy or religion. Rather, my objective is to contribute to the understanding of the philosophical and religious contexts specific to each case, while avoiding generalisation and premature conclusions about commonalities. The aim will be to use metalinguistic categories and concepts that permit systematisation on a scientific basis and open up scope for differentiation.

To this end, I would like to define guiding questions and concepts in connection with a review of primary and secondary sources, in consultation with other Fellows and members of the Centre. Focuses of enquiry will include, for instance, how and when faith, doubt, trust, and mistrust take shape; what chain of psychosocial reactions they entail and how their relation to authority is characterised in terms of effect, e. g. stabilising or destabilising.

I plan to prepare a publication, either a special journal issue or a monograph in the Centre's publication series 'Jewish Thought, Philosophy, and Religion.' I look forward to contributing to Reading Evenings and Dialectical Evenings at the Centre, dedicating sessions to figures such as scholarchs, religious leaders, priests, prophets, scribes, and Torah scholars—agents in leadership and teaching positions to whom certain persons or groups turn for guidance with respect to their own thinking or behaviour, yet whose authority can also be called into question. The aim of my planned publication is to examine such actors with a view to two considerations: one being the form of organisation they act within, the other, the cognitive and emotional aspects and concepts that are constitutive for the recognition and withdrawal of their authority, such as faith and doubt, trust and mistrust. I shall examine the relationship between these aspects and authority, on the one side; and the agents' claims to the validity of their knowledge, wisdom and truth, on the other.

Dr. Asher Salah
Senior Fellow
Bezalel Academy of Arts and Design, Jerusalem
The Hebrew University of Jerusalem
Project: Scepticism and Anti-Scepticism in the Jewish Intellectual Debate of Nineteenth-Century Italy
Period of Fellowship: July to September 2016

In his influential work 'The History of Scepticism', edited and expanded on in several editions from 1960 to 2003, American historian of philosophy Richard H. Popkin (1923–2005) identifies the early modern recovery of Pyrrhonian scepticism and its application in religious polemics as a major source for modern Western thought. More specifically in the Jewish context, scepticism in the early modern period has been instrumental in contrasting the corrosive attacks of rationalism and of experimental sciences on the revealed religions. Demonstrating the weakness of every philosophical enquiry was a way of strengthening the truths of faith and introducing doubts about the disruptive power of reason. This explains the appeal of Pyrrhonian pos-

tures to many Jewish apologists in Europe in the period marked by what Pierre Hazard has called 'the crisis of reason.' Italy has been an important crossroads and a breeding ground for Jewish sceptic thought, as demonstrated by the example of the epistemological scepticism of Simone Luzzatto, distinct but at times dangerously close to the theological scepticism promoted by Spinoza and his followers.

The situation changes radically at the turn of eighteenth century with the slow, sometimes hindered, yet unrestrainable advance of the emancipation process of the Jewish minority in Italy. The term 'sceptic' now became unequivocally endowed with extremely negative connotations on the side of the defenders of traditional religion. Scepticism, together with its corollary 'indifferentism,' was associated with agnosticism, thus becoming the bogeyman uniting Jewish conservatives and reformers in their fight against the progressive alienation of the vast majority of Jews from every kind of religious practice and belief.

This is why, for instance, the orthodox Elia Benamozegh (1822–1900), a noted kabbalist, highly respected in his day as one of Italy's most eminent Jewish scholars, attempted to discredit the whole philological enterprise of the Italian Jewish orientalist David Castelli (1836–1901), who was inspired by contemporary biblical criticism, accusing him of having transformed the book of Qohelet into a modern manifesto of sceptical thought.

The liberal modernist Felice Momigliano (1866–1924), promoter of an ephemeral reform movement in Italy, directed a similar accusation against the Italian Jewish semitist Giorgio Levi Della Vida (1886–1967), for having been perverted by 'the scepticism that afflicts the Jewish people, which is typical of peoples in their way to decomposition.' The two had previously been companions in the fight for reforms in Judaism.

My research project aims to analyse the context and the uses of the term 'sceptic' in the writings of Italian rabbis of the nineteenth century. It will include a survey of the term 'sceptic' and its occurrence in the Jewish press of the time, in private correspondences, in doctrinal pamphlets and in biblical exegesis.

In particular, I will focus on the revival of the anti-Karaitic polemic in nineteenth century Italian Judaism. The Karaites, a Jewish sect with origins in the eighth century, rejected the authority of the postbiblical Jewish tradition. Karaite Judaism attracted the attention of many Christian Hebraists in the early modern period. In the 1674 French edition of Leon Modena's *Historia de' Riti Hebraici*, the translator Richard Simon (1638–1712), an Oratorian priest, added two essays on the Samaritans and the Karaites. Jews also used the label of 'Karaite,' and sometimes the terms 'Sadducee' or 'Boethusian,' in order to discredit those in their community who doubted the validity of the Oral Law, such as Immanuel Aboab (1555–1628), Isaac Orobio de Castro (1617–1687), or Moshe Hagiz (1671–1750) in Amsterdam; Avraham Viterbo (late seventeenth c.—early eighteenth c.) in Venice; and David Nieto (1654–1728) in London. Johann Christoph Wolf (1683–1739) refers in his bibliographical oeuvre *Bibliotheca Hebraea* to a work by Modena on the Karaites, now lost, similar to another work in defence of the oral tradition by Simone Luzzatto. These are but a few examples

demonstrating the importance of the Karaite question in religious polemics, not only among Christians but also within the Jewish community in the early modern period.

However, in the nineteenth century 'Karaitic' is a label targeting contemporary—not only deist—philosophies and religious reforms, but first and foremost positivistic systems of disbelief and secularism. The interest in recovering classical defences of Jewish Oral Law, in order to counter modern phenomena of assimilation, is attested by the numerous translations into Italian of the *Maṭe Dan* by David Nieto, by the renewed interest in the commentaries of Judah Halevi's *Kuzari*, as well as by the proliferation of self-defined 'anti-Karaitic' tractates signed by the most illustrious representatives of the Italian rabbinate, such as Avraham Cologna (1755–1832), Eliseo Pontremoli (1778–1851) and Isaac Samuel Reggio (1784–1855), for whom the word 'Karaite' is often associated with the figure of the modern sceptic.

As part of the effort to counter the spread of sceptical ideas, Italian rabbis in the nineteenth century engaged in an unprecedented and intensive activity of dogmatic interpretation of Judaism—carried out, among other ways, through the printing of countless catechisms conceived for the Jewish educational system.

Moreover, the philosophy of emotions developed by Samuel David Luzzatto and the counter-enlightenment thrust present in Catholic romanticism, which exerted a momentous influence on Jewish intellectuals trained at the rabbinical seminaries of Padua and Leghorn, has to be understood against the backdrop of the fundamental refusal of the heritage of Jewish scepticism that was so important in the apologies of Judaism written in the early modern period. Thus, particular attention will be devoted to the virulent debates stirred by the appreciation of the figure of Spinoza and his intellectual legacy, as well as to the reception of Kant in traditional Jewish circles in nineteenth-century Italy.

I shall argue that scepticism is the best way to understand the Jewish confrontation with the challenges of modernity and emancipation in Italy. On the one hand, anti-sceptical stances crosscut the divide between orthodoxy and reform, which concerned only a minority of the Jewish population in Italy, shifting the focus unto the less-studied but wider debate between religious and secular Jewish thinkers. On the other hand, scepticism allows insight into the intellectual dimension of Jewish attitudes toward secularisation, a dimension that is expunged when using exclusively socially connoted terms such as 'assimilation' and 'segregation'. From the vantage point of the battle against or in favour of sceptically-oriented philosophies, such as criticism, materialism, positivism, and agnosticism, it becomes possible to pinpoint important cultural phenomena that have been overlooked by contemporary scholarship of nineteenth-century Italy, such as those concerning the challenge to rabbinic authority, the convergence of Catholic and Jewish apologetics against modernity, as well as the continuities and discontinuities with previous Jewish philosophical traditions.

Dr. Cedric Cohen Skalli
Senior Fellow
University of Haifa
Project: Don Isaac Abravanel and the Role of Sceptical Arguments in the Delimitation of Religion
Period of Fellowship: July to September 2016

Don Isaac Abravanel (1437–1508) was a renowned political, commercial, and intellectual Jewish figure. He lived and operated in Portugal and Castile, and after the 1492 expulsion found refuge in southern Italy and Venice. He is acknowledged as one of the first early modern Jewish thinkers to integrate the humanistic trends of the Renaissance into his exegetical and philosophical work, and also as one of the leaders of Sephardic exiles in the years after the expulsion. His monumental oeuvre comprises biblical exegesis, philosophical tracts, and messianic works. It can be seen as a project that not only stands in the long tradition of Jewish medieval philosophy, but also opened itself to the new Renaissance trends. For this reason, Don Isaac Abravanel was an important transitional figure which embodied many of the ambiguities of early modern Jewish existence and thought.

In a certain sense, Abravanel's large exegetical and philosophical oeuvre epitomises the final period of Jewish medieval philosophy. It is deeply marked by an epistemological and theological evolution, being informed by (1) a transformation of the definition of philosophy and its relation to science, religion, and history; (2) a change in the perception of medieval Aristotelian philosophy and a renewed access to other ancient traditions such as Stoicism, Platonism, Hermetism, and Republicanism; (3) a preference for more direct models of interaction between humans ('rhetoric'), between man and God ('fideism,' 'direct providence'), and between God and the world, often expressed in the rejection of the earlier central role of the *intellectus agens* ('active intellect'). Moreover, Abravanel's work is also defined by a new attitude towards religious and literary sources, which takes further into account the historical and rhetorical conditions of their composition.

The research which I intend to develop at the Center will focus on the new delimitation of the realms of religion and science suggested by Isaac Abravanel in his philosophical and exegetical works, written in the historical context of the fifteenth-century Iberian and Italian peninsulas. I believe that this new delimitation of religion and science, shared by many Jewish philosophers of the fifteenth century, can be best studied in the works of Isaac Abravanel, since they reveal—more than any other works of fifteenth-century Jewish philosophers—their Jewish, Christian, Islamic, and Graeco-Roman background. My intention is to show how this new delimitation of religion and science is grounded on sceptical claims on the limitation of human knowledge and on the uncertainty of scientific models. These sceptical claims play an essential role in the delimitation of the realm of religion and its distinction from scientific epistemological models. The sceptical argumentation often functions in Abravanel's work as a discursive justification and preparation for a more fideistic

or literal approach to religious events like miracles or prophecy. The sceptical arguments used by Abravanel are not meant to invalidate neither science nor philosophy, but rather to justify the possibility of religious events defined as 'supernatural'. This sceptical argumentation developed by Abravanel has often been approached by modern scholarship as marking the end of medieval Jewish philosophy (Leo Strauss), or as a sign of Jewish backwardness vis-à-vis early modern rationalism (Benzion Netanyahu). In my intended research, I hope to demonstrate that the disjunction of the realms of religion and science made by Isaac Abravanel contributed to a redefinition of religion, philosophy, and science in the early modern period.

The research on Isaac Abravanel which I intend to develop further during my stay at the Centre builds on many years of research in the field of early modern philosophy. In my work, I attempt to disclose new connections between Jewish and Christian thinkers and to develop a new cultural and social framing of early modern Jewish thought. The current project is part of my broader investigation into fourteenth- to sixteenth-century Jewish thought, which seeks to propose a new picture of the Jewish encounter with Renaissance humanism.

During my stay, I plan to write an article on Abravanel's new delimitation of science and religion focusing on his use of sceptical claims. To this end, I intend to study Abravanel's later works written in Italy during the years 1492–1508, especially *Mif'alot Elohim*, *Šamayim Ḥadašim*, and his Commentaries on Genesis and Ezekiel.

Reports of the Research Associates

Dr. Anna Lissa
Project: Preparation of a Critical Edition and English Translation of Simone Luzzatto, *Discorso sopra il stato degli Hebrei* (1638), in Bilingual Format
Since September 2015

I started my work at the Maimonides Centre on 1 September, 2015. In the same month, I attended our first internal workshop on 'Philosophical Scepticism and its Criticism,' which was lead by Dr. Alexander Dinges. The workshop focused on early-modern sceptical authors such as Descartes, Berkeley, and Hume; as well as on contemporary philosophers like Putnam, BonJour, and Cohen.

In the months following, I took part in Dialectical Evenings, Reading Evenings, and workshops at the Centre. I particularly profited from a workshop on Henry Dodwell the Younger (ca. 1705–1784), organised by Prof. Diego Lucci and Prof. Paolo Bernardini in October 2015.

In the course of this year I have been working on the following projects:

1) Preparation of a bilingual edition of Luzzatto's *Discorso*;
2) Research on sources of the *Discorso*, especially the identification of non-classic authors indirectly quoted by Luzzatto;
3) Preparation of two articles accompanying the bilingual edition of the *Discorso*. The first focuses on Luzzatto's sources of classical and modern scepticism; the second is more theoretical and tries to highlight the philosophical-sceptical background of Luzzatto's political thought.

Preparation of a bilingual edition

My main responsibility in the course of this year has been the preparation of a critical edition and English translation of Simone Luzzatto's *Discorso circa il stato degli Hebrei et in particular dimoranti nell'inclita città di Venetia* ('Discourse Concerning the Condition of the Jews, and in particular those living in the Fair City of Venice', 1638), to be edited in bilingual format by Professor Giuseppe Veltri and myself. It will form part one of a two-part English edition of Simone Luzzatto's Italian works. The projected title of the edition is 'Simone Luzzatto—Political and Philosophical Writings of a Sceptical Venetian Rabbi.' The second part, 'Socrates on Human Knowledge' (1651), is being prepared by my colleague at the Centre, Dr. Michela Torbidoni.

Our English edition of Luzzatto's Italian works will inaugurate the new publication series of the Centre 'Jewish Thought, Philosophy, and Religion,' to be published with De Gruyter, Berlin. At the same time, it forms the conclusion of a larger DFG-funded research project on Luzzatto, entitled *Werk und Wirkung des Rabbiners und*

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Philosophen Simha (Simone) Luzzatto (1583?–1663). In the course of this project Giuseppe Veltri, at the head of a team of editors, published the first modern edition of Luzzatto's Italian works and a collection of essays on the author (*Simone Luzzatto. Scritti politici e filosofici di un ebreo scettico nella Venezia del Seicento,* 2013; *Filosofo e rabbino nella Venezia del Seicento*, 2015).

I presented the results of my research as well as drafts of the translation during a Dialectical Evening at the Centre on 30 November, 2015, and at a Reading Evening on 30 March, 2016.

I am currently working on the conclusion of the edition that will appear in the autumn of 2016.

Sources of the *Discorso*

I spent several days at the Biblioteca Marciana in Venice in order to check sixteenth- and seventeenth-century editions Luzzatto might have used for his classical quotes and modern references, such as Tacitus' *Annales* (Aldine edition, 1534) and Dante's *Commedia*, in the editions of Alessandro Vellutello (1544) and of Bernardino Daniello (1568).

Luzzatto's sources for classic and modern scepticism and the background to his political thought

In my research for the article on the sources of the *Discorso*, I have concentrated on the Aristotelian background of the work and the presence of sceptical authors, focusing on Montaigne for modern Pyrrhonian scepticism and on probabilism for Academic scepticism. My theoretical article then analyses the extent of the influence of the authors who are listed in the article on sources. This influence can be traced in the concept that underlies the structure of the *Discorso* and *Socrates*. I have striven to highlight and delineate the continuity and coherence between the *Discorso* and *Socrates*. Such continuity and coherence are visible in the connection between philosophy and politics. The motif that creates such continuity from a narrative point of view is the trial. The concept of trial involves three problems: 1. the possibility of knowing something or someone; 2. formulating a judgement about it/him/her; and 3. the legitimacy and validity of the authority that formulates the judgement.

The trial is founded on the basic idea that it is possible to know the thing, or the person, that is under judgement. Once this knowledge is gained, it is possible to formulate an exhaustive judgement. Finally, the authority that elaborates and utters the judgement is reliable and authoritative.

In the *Discorso* and *Socrates*, these three basic assumptions are undermined and finally debunked because they cannot withstand the confrontation with the sceptical philosophic method Luzzatto uses against them. The confrontation with the sceptical

method is not confined to philosophic discussion. Instead, it has relevant political implications and consequences. This is in essence the philosophical and sceptical background of Luzzatto's approach to political thought that will be investigated here. In the *Discorso*, the political implications play a major role for the survival of the Jewish people. In *Socrates*, the problem of a fair judgement is enlarged and extended to a general human level while retaining its political implications, since Socrates, for Luzzatto, was first and foremost a 'master of civil life'—already at the time of his writing the *Discorso*.

I have investigated the three above-mentioned issues in relation to the *Discorso*. As for *Socrates*, I have dwelt mainly on the passages where Luzzatto discusses the practical and political implications of the suspension of judgement, showing that he goes back to the topics discussed in the *Discorso*, sometimes by revising them and sometimes by elaborating upon them.

I presented a paper entitled 'Philosophic Scepticism and Political Thought—The *Discorso* of Simone Luzzatto' at the conference 'The Birth and Evolution of the Venetian Ghetto (1516–1797),' which was held in Venice on 5–6 May, 2016. This conference was part of a series of events organised to commemorate the 500-year anniversary of the Venetian ghetto.

Dr. Felix Papenhagen

Project: The Diffusion of Doubt: Cultural Expressions of Pessimistic, Sceptical, and Nihilistic Attitudes in Israeli Public Discourse
Since March 2015

Israeli Jewish citizens have acted and reacted in various ways to the desperate existential, political, and ideological situation of contemporary Israel: actively or passively, indifferently; in public or in private; with hope and despair, engagement and escapism, art and emigration, politicking and drug abuse, reproduction and suicide, and of course many things in between these poles. The divisive Israeli scholar of psychology Benjamin Beit-Hallahmi has discussed several painful subjects concerned with nationhood during his career, such as Israel's engagement with the Apartheid regime in South Africa, which can be understood as having been suppressed by, or hidden from, public discourse or consciousness. In his book 'Despair and Deliverance: Private Salvation in Contemporary Israel' (1992), he concludes with the following pessimistic words regarding the future: 'Israelis have become more cynical and more desperate about their fate. And who could blame them? If all they have to look forward to is more fighting and more hollow victories, their behaviour becomes more understandable. They feel themselves to be trapped, completely helpless in the face of a menacing world, regardless of what they do.' [p. 193]

I agree with Hallahmi's stance that '[t]he point of departure for any serious thinking about the future must be pessimism. This is the question.' [*ibidem*]

Unfortunately, sharing his negative assessment about the somewhat unchanging, or even worsened, political and philosophical status quo in Israel and the Middle East, I would like to show in the intended project where exactly (in my collection and definition of sources) and in which form (through my analysis and categorisation of the findings) 'pessimistic' stances toward this reality can be grasped in everyday public discourse in Israel. In speaking of and searching for 'pessimistic stances,' I intend to outline the semantic field around the term 'pessimism'. In the discussion of the findings, I will discern different attitudes within this field, alongside the often-used keywords of pessimism, scepticism, nihilism, cynicism, and the like. I will revaluate them and their usage within the semantic field and in relation to the public discourse. In his book 'Pessimism: Philosophy, Ethic, Spirit' (2006), the political scientist Joshua Foa Dienstag notes: 'A [...] reason that pessimistic theory has not been recognised as such is that it is often lumped together with nihilism, cynicism, scepticism, and other like philosophies. Few writers, of course, adopt the label of "nihilistic" or "cynic" for themselves (though there are many self-proclaimed sceptics).' [p. 4] He further distinguishes pessimism from other labels, because '[Pessimism] does not simply tell us to expect less. It tells us, in fact, to expect nothing. [...] It is neither sceptical (knowing nothing) nor nihilistic (wanting nothing). It is a distinct account of the human condition that has developed in the shadow of progress—alongside it, as it were—with its own political stance.' [p. 5]

Parallel to the discussion of those distinctions, I will further ask: who shares stances like these in public? Can this ever be opportune? How is it dealt with? I am not comfortable with postmodern 'isms', but still, it is worth tracing some distinctive lines of historical development that are bound to stances of writers and intellectuals traditionally connected to concepts such as scepticism, pessimism, nihilism, cynicism; and ideas, philosophies, or theorems of this sort. I plan to follow the lines of reception of known 'classical' pessimistic or sceptical stances that presumably influenced the intellectual landscape of Israel around the founding of the state, expressed by authors such as Arthur Schopenhauer, Friedrich Nietzsche, Hillel Zeitlin, Lev Shestov, Theodor Lessing, Josef Chajim Brenner, and Micha Yosef Berdichevsky, and also to look into expressions of pessimistic content in the religious sphere of the last fifty years.

Of course, concerning public discourse and the life of the everyday, it is difficult to discuss philosophies in the proper scholarly sense, but in scientific literature, there is also confusion and rarely clarity concerning the distinctions between the above-mentioned topics. This is mirrored even in encyclopaedias, where we find statements of the kind that 'pessimism is difficult to discern from practical scepticism or realism.' The task is not to retrace the philosophical debate(s) exactly, but rather to use them to enrich the description of the public discourse. This question naturally impacts on the choice of the sources being dealt with, which form the multi-functional public discourse, namely: contributions by politicians, intellectuals, speeches on ceremonial occasions, newspapers, books, TV-shows, radio programmes, and the like. I will also take a deeper look at existing philanthropic organisations, lobby groups and think tanks.

As a final step, I will conceptualise and categorise the identified sources in more detail and in their specific political and philosophical context.

One of the first intellectuals and admirers to wrote insightfully, even lyrically, about the above-mentioned maverick Lev Shestov (1866–1938) was the religious thinker Hillel Zeitlin (1872–1942). At a Reading Evening in July, 2016, I presented passages of my English translation of a Hebrew article written by Zeitlin on Shestov from the first half of the 1920s, entitled 'From the Depths of Doubt and Despair: on the Enormous Subversion of Lev Shestov.'

Dr. Bill Rebiger
Project: Early Opponents of the Kabbalah
Since March 2015

From the very beginning, the Kabbalah was neither totally undisputed nor completely unopposed. It is therefore surprising that no monograph has yet been devoted to early opponents of the Kabbalah and the history of their opposition. Articles and chapters in books have been dedicated to individual personalities and texts, but a comprehensive overview and discussion of these phenomena is still lacking. The period in question stretches from the emergence of the Kabbalah around 1200 CE until the seventeenth century when Leon Modena (1571–1648) composed the first full-fledged criticism of the Kabbalah entitled *Ari Nohem* ('Roaring Lion').

I would like to initiate research on early opposition to the Kabbalah by presenting case studies of some of its early opponents. Rather than writing a comprehensive history of the early opponents, I intend to focus on sceptical, anti-sceptical, and non-sceptical modes in specific discourses. The aim of my research is twofold.

First, I would like to study, translate, and discuss relevant texts written against certain aspects of the early Kabbalah or against certain early kabbalists, focusing on prominent opponents such as Meir ben Simon of Narbonne, Isaac Albalag, Isaac ben Joseph ibn Polqar, and Elijah Delmedigo. The result of this endeavour will be the publication of an anthology of texts containing historical introductions, individual commentaries, and analysis. I will attempt to reconstruct the specific historical context in which these authors were engaged. In the long term, this project could extend to include publications of texts by less-known published opponents, as well as evidence from the manuscript tradition.

Secondly, I would like to undertake a systematic study of the different claims of the early kabbalists and the arguments against them in order to discuss the diverging sceptical, anti-sceptical, and non-sceptical modes of polemics and dispute. In addition to a critical discussion of the various figures, circles, and schools of the Kabbalah and their various claims and arguments, I intend to present the kabbalists' reaction to this criticism. A study of the various modes of argumentation relating to scepticism will be presented in a monograph.

A summary of my research proposal and a presentation of the *status quaestionis* concerning my chosen topic is included in the present volume of the Yearbook, entitled 'The Early Opponents of the Kabbalah and the Role of Sceptical Argumentations: An Outline.'

The first case study of my research is devoted to the Jewish Averroist Isaac Polqar (second half of the thirteenth century—first half of the fourteenth century), who wrote a short passage rejecting several kabbalist claims in his *'Ezer ha-Dat* ('In Support of the Religion'). His arguments are directed against any kind of denial of the prevalence 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 such as the Holy Scriptures, and secondly a popular story about a specific magical act that is known as 'The Shortening of the Path.'

In May 2016, I presented my draft translation into English of this short passage by Polqar at a Reading Evening at the Centre, in order to obtain feedback after a joint reading. A discussion and interpretation of the text from a philosophical and sceptical perspective will take place during a Dialectical Evening at the Centre in July 2016. I plan to publish my translation of this passage and the results of both sessions in an article, as a study of sceptical elements in the argumentation of a philosopher who is widely known as an anti-sceptic.

Another project I am working on in this context is a brief commentary on a passage concerning the Kabbalah, written by the Venetian Chief Rabbi Simone Luzzatto (?1583–1663) in his *Discorso sopra il stato degli Hebrei* ('Discourse on the State of the Jews') in 1638, which will be included as an appendix in the English translation of the *Discorso* edited by Giuseppe Veltri and Anna Lissa, to be published in the Centre's series 'Jewish Thought, Philosophy, and Religion' at the end of 2016.

In December 2016, Racheli Haliva, a co-director of the Centre, will organise a series of lectures with the title 'On Scepticism and Anti-Scepticism in Medieval Jewish Philosophy and Thought.' I will present a lecture in the framework of this series, entitled 'Jewish Averroists against the Kabbalah: Examples of Sceptical Strategies and Argumentation.' The Centre aims to publish all the lectures in this series with De Gruyter.

My research benefits greatly from the outstanding opportunities offered at the Centre, where I am in daily communication with acknowledged experts and able to share information and discussions during our regular Reading Evenings, Dialectical Evenings, workshops, conferences, and lectures.

Dr. Michela Torbidoni
Project: English Translation and Bilingual (Italian/English) Critical Edition of Simone Luzzatto, *Socrate overo dell'humano sapere* (1651)
Since October 2015

The purpose of the project is to publish the first English critical edition of Rabbi Simone Luzzatto's philosophical work *Socrate overo dell'humano sapere* (1651). The project consists of three parts: 1) a translation into English supervised by Giuseppe Veltri, 2) an introduction and footnotes, and 3) two essays, one of which will be written by Giuseppe Veltri and the other by myself, concerning the nature of the sceptical philosophy of Simone Luzzatto's work. These will be published as appendices to the translation.

Simone Luzzatto (?1583–1663) was chief rabbi of the Jewish community of Venice. He was a highly talented classicist and conversant with Latin and Greek culture, as well as a passionate reader of medieval Italian literature. In addition to halakhic rulings ('Responsa') written in Hebrew, he also wrote two major books in Italian. One was the well-known apologetic treatise *Discorso circa il stato degli Hebrei et in particolar dimoranti nell'inclita città di Venetia* ('Discourse concerning the condition of the Jews, and in particular those living in the fair city of Venice'), published in 1638. The second, a work developed according to the sceptical method, was published in 1651 by Tomasini's printing house. The full title of the book is *Socrate overo dell'humano sapere. Esercitio seriogiocoso di Simone Luzzatto hebreo venetiano. Opera nella quale si dimostra quanto sia imbecile l'humano intendimento, mentre non e diretto dalla divina rivelatione* ('Socrates or On Human Knowledge: the serious-playful exercise of Simone Luzzatto, Venetian Jew. A book that shows how incapable human intelligence can be when it is not led by divine revelation'). The whole book represents a sceptical investigation of human cognitive faculties, cleverly developed as a piece of theatre in which Socrates, as lead actor, has the task of showing that human knowledge is inconsistent. He does so by interrogating the best-known Greek philosophers, politicians, and poets encountered along his path one by one. It is a hugely enigmatic work that had little success in Luzzatto's lifetime and was subsequently almost forgotten. Only a few copies existed before it was republished by Giuseppe Veltri in 2013—for the first time since 1651. For this reason, it is very difficult not only to trace its reception in the history of philosophical thought, but also to clarify the aim of the work as well as its intended readership.

Although there are some references to Luzzatto's *Socrate* in scholarly literature, a complete study of the entire work has never been carried out. The first mention of Luzzatto's philosophical book appears in the nineteenth century in a work by the historian Heinrich Graetz, who read it as an attempt to show the importance of harmonising *fides* and *ratio*. A brief account of the *Socrate* was then offered by Shmuel David Luzzatto, who mentioned in passing the role of scepticism in the method and the argumentations that Luzzatto developed. In 1936, Jehuda Bergmann published an article entitled 'Sokrates in der jüdischen Literatur' (*Monatsschrift für Ge-*

schichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums 80 [1936]) in which he traced the history of Socrates' appearance in Jewish tradition, including Luzzatto's *Socrate*. According to his interpretation, the main issue raised by Luzzatto was the necessity that neither reason nor authority should have supremacy, but that both should be equally honoured, because only by completing and limiting each other could they best rule human life. There have only been four more recent contributions to the research on Luzzatto's *Socrate*. A summary of its contents was written by David Ruderman in 2001, focusing on the difficulty of discovering Luzzatto's sources and on his place in the context of modern Jewish thinking. A dissertation by Ariel Viterbo, written in Hebrew and partly published in Italian in 1997, describes the text's contents and proposes interpreting it as an intellectual biography of Luzzatto. The most recent contributions were published by Giuseppe Veltri (*Simone Luzzatto. Scritti politici e filosofici di un ebreo scettico nella Venezia del Seicento,* 2013; *Filosofo e rabbino nella Venezia del Seicento*, 2015). Veltri highlighted the importance of Simone Luzzatto's work as the only Jewish example of sceptical thought in the early modern period. In my essay published in the last of the above-mentioned volumes, I analysed Luzzatto's practice of doubt in the *Socrate*. I also examined the influence and role of Sextus Empiricus' work 'Outlines of Pyrrhonism' on the entire structure of the *Socrate*.

The translation poses a challenge for the translator because the text was written in the Italian vernacular, with difficult syntax. The text abounds with Venetian dialectical expressions, Latinisms, and indirect quotations, bound together in a Latin sentence structure. The following reference works were consulted in the course of the translation process: G. Boerio, *Dizionario del dialetto veneziano* (Venezia: G. Cecchini, 1983); F. Calonghi, *Dizionario latino-italiano* (Torino: Rosenberg & Sellier, 1972); M. Pfister, *Lessico etimologico italiano* (Wiesbaden: Reichert, 1979–2012); *Oxford English Dictionary Online*. Alongside the translation into English and the critical apparatus of the new edition, the project includes new research into the main philosophical issues discussed by the rabbi in his writing.

In order to approach Luzzatto's scepticism, the reader faces three main philosophical issues. These constitute the subjects of my investigation:

1. The criticism of authority developed by Luzzatto, which includes criticism of tradition and antiquity

My enquiry aims to identify the subject of Luzzatto's polemic, in order to better understand his critical intellectual attitude, and to identify how he combines his polemic with his rabbinical office and with the dominant Christian society of the time.

2. Luzzatto's pessimistic approach to time and memory, which is coherent with an overall sceptical orientation and the philosophical trends of the early modern period

Luzzatto's approach shows strong similarities with the idea of the *vanitas* of human life expressed in Qohelet. Luzzatto was the author of a small introduction to Samuel ha-Cohen's commentary on Qohelet, published in 1656, which may explain his concern with the idea of caducity and the transitory nature of life.

3. The possibility of reading the *Socrate* as a sceptical discussion of the soul

The sceptical debate on the soul (or intellect), according to the Aristotelian tradition, developed an investigation about the soul on a gnosiological level. Luzzatto presents this debate in a 'serious-playful' manner, characteristic of the work as a whole, and thus manages to raise doubts about the dogma of the immortality of soul without the risk of encountering accusations of heresy. *Socrate* can be connected to the wider debate concerning the soul, which was a controversial topic in Luzzatto's time, not only among Christian but also among Jewish scholars. I presented some results of my research in a paper entitled 'The Serious-Playful Exercise of Rabbi Simone Luzzatto: A Sceptical Debate on the Soul' at an international conference entitled 'The Birth and Evolution of the Venetian Ghetto (1516–1797),' which was held in Venice on 5–6 May, 2016.

My translation of *Socrate* and the results of my additional research in collaboration with Giuseppe Veltri will be ready by the end of 2016. The edition will present a wider readership with the opportunity to appreciate the importance of the text. It provides further proof of the cultural dynamism and admirable modernity of Venetian Jewish culture, where the concept of 'the ghetto' was born and from whence it tragically spread throughout Europe. With the help of a new structured edition, we hope to assist the reader in appreciating this highly complex philosophical work, which demonstrates the Jewish participation in the philosophical debate of the time and thus the active role that Jews played in building a modern European culture.

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.

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[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 ḥamurot*) 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 *Aufruf 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 Ṣufim* 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 Ṣufim* ('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 keptical 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 overo 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 Papenhagen: **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 Papenhagen'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 Bragança (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-Meḥaref*, 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
'Judaeo-Christian Polemics, Religion and Scepticism in Judah Halevi's *Sefer ha-Kuzari*'

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 Colotes, 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-idealist 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.

Giuseppe Veltri

Bibliographical Report

Issue 12 (2015) of *Melilah. Manchester Journal of Jewish Studies*, devoted to *Atheism, Scepticism and Challenges to Monotheism. Proceedings of the British Association for Jewish Studies (BAJS) conference 2015*. Edited by Daniel R. Langton and Simon Mayers.[1]

After an introduction by the editor devoted to the importance of the topic, the first part deals with 'Challenges to Monotheism'. Kenneth Seeskin ('From Monotheism to Scepticism and Back Again,' 5–13) refers to the *theologia negativa* (monotheism as uniqueness or incomparability of God) as a basis of the sceptic side of monotheism. Joshua L. Moss ('Satire, Monotheism and Scepticism,' 14–21) maintains that 'Jews were non-believers and dissenters as far as the dominant religions were concerned.' David B. Ruderman ('Are Jews the Only True Monotheists? Some Critical Reflections in Jewish Thought from the Renaissance to the Present,' 22–30) explores the positions of a variety of thinkers on the question of the exclusive status of monotheism in Judaism from the Renaissance until the present day.

The second part focuses on 'Doubt and Scepticism in the Early Modern Period'. Benjamin Williams ('Doubting Abraham Doubting God: The Call of Abraham in the *Or ha-Sekhel*,' 31–42) examines Abraham ben Asher's interpretation of the exposition of the 'Call of Abraham' in Genesis Rabba 39:1. According to him, Abraham ben Asher 'deliberately led his audience to entertain the notion that Abraham once lacked a proper understanding of monotheism.' Károly Dániel Dobos ('Shimi the Sceptical: Sceptical Voices in an Early Modern Jewish, Anti-Christian Polemical Drama by Matityahu Nissim Terni,' 43–52) presents an analysis of Terni's drama 'as a very sensitive psychological portrayal of the complex personality of an average Italian Jew of the ghetto age.'

The third part is dedicated to 'Modern Jewish Philosophy, Atheism and Scepticism'. Jeremy Fogel ('Scepticism of Scepticism: On Mendelssohn's Philosophy of Common Sense,' 53–69) presents Mendelssohn's position 'as sceptical of what he took to be exceedingly speculative thinking in general.' Mendelssohn's scepticism emphasises trustworthiness but also the truthfulness of commonsensical thinking. Michael T. Miller ('Kaplan and Wittgenstein: Atheism, Phenomenology and the Use of Language,' 70–83) compares Mordecai Kaplan's reform of Jewish theology and Ludwig Wittgenstein's analytic philosophy. He argues that there is a current of immanence which unites their efforts and concludes that 'as a result of this de-ontologising, religion becomes a matter of ideology rather than objective truth and ethics becomes paramount.' Federico Dal Bo ('Textualism and Scepticism: Post-Modern

1 All the quotations are taken from the author's abstracts in this issue of Melilah.

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Philosophy and the Theology of Text,' 84–96) addresses the religious notion of 'textualism' as 'the formalistic assumption that a text is meaningful only when it is understood in itself and solely from itself.'

The fourth part is focused on 'Modern Jewish Theology, Atheism and Scepticism'. According to Norman Solomon ('The Attenuation of God in Modern Jewish Thought,' 97–109) modern 'Jewish theology changes the traditional attitude on account of the apparent injustice in the world, but also because the successes of science have made God redundant as an explanation for natural phenomena.' Melissa Raphael ('Idoloclasm: The First Task of Second Wave Liberal Jewish Feminism,' 110–121) shows how 'Second Wave Liberal Jewish Feminism' combined secular feminist criticism of the ideological roots of social injustice with traditional criticism of idolatry. Daniel R. Langton ('Joseph Krauskopf's "Evolution and Judaism": One Reform Rabbi's Response to Scepticism and Materialism in Nineteenth-century North America,' 122–130). According to Langton, Joseph Krauskopf adopted a sceptical approach to traditional readings of the Bible 'and yet which, in attempting to justify Jewish religious continuity, taught a Jewish form of panentheism that viewed the universe as an evolving phenomenon and hinted at the reality of life beyond death.' Avner Dinur ('Secular Theology as a Challenge for Jewish Atheists,' 131–144) uses 'the distinction between the ontological and the ethical "role" of God in the theology of Hans Jonas, Emmanuel Levinas and Martin Buber, [...] to create new borderlines between the secular and the religious—"soft" borders that do not exclude God from secular worldviews.'

The last part is concerned with 'Modern Jewish Literature and Scepticism.' Khayke Beruriah Wiegand ('"Why the Geese Shrieked": Isaac Bashevis Singer's Work Between Mysticism and Sceptics,' 145–157) presents Bashevis's narrators and protagonists 'as constantly questioning God and expressing their scepticism about traditional Jewish beliefs in contrast with his Jewish religious beliefs, especially Kabbalistic ideas.'

Wolfson, Elliot R. 'Skepticism and the Philosopher's Keeping Faith.' in *Jewish Philosophy for the Twenty-First Century: Personal Reflections*. Edited by Hava Tirosh-Samuelson and Aaron W. Hughes (Leiden: Brill, 2014): 481–515.

The author wants 'to forge an alliance between the spirit of Jewish philosophy and scepticism, that is, to survey the panorama of the former through the speculum of the latter.' [p. 484] And in the conclusions he writes: 'Jewish philosophy [...] would be immeasurably enriched if its protagonists were to inhabit this deeper cave [i.e. Nietzsche's terminology of the cave within the cave], the spot wherein absolute positivity and absolute negativity converge.' [p. 510]

Silke Schaeper

Report on the Library of Jewish Scepticism

Beginnings

The Institute for Jewish Philosophy and Religion at the University of Hamburg was founded in May 2014 with the creation of a Chair in Jewish Philosophy and Religion for Professor Giuseppe Veltri (April 2014). In October 2015, the Maimonides Centre for Advanced Studies was founded under the umbrella of the Institute, with generous support from the German Research Foundation. Each of the two institutions has an annual library budget for the joint creation of a Library of Jewish Scepticism, a non-lending reference library that provides the team of staff at both institutions and visiting Fellows at the Centre with source texts, secondary research literature, textbooks, and electronic resources. The library collections are recorded in the online campus catalogue of the University of Hamburg and made available on-site to members of the university and visitors.

Veltri library

During the founding phase of the Institute for Jewish Philosophy and Religion, Professor Giuseppe Veltri decided to make his private research collection in Jewish studies and philosophy available to his team. Shelved in proximity to the Centre's own growing library, the Veltri Library continues to serve as a valuable local source of reference for staff and visiting Fellows at the Centre.

The librarian

Silke Schaeper took up the position of librarian in October 2015. Her role at the Centre is to create and manage the Library of Jewish Scepticism within the budgets of the Institute and the Centre, and to provide bibliographic services to staff and Fellows. She also lends editorial support to the production of the Centre's academic publications.

Silke Schaeper studied Jewish studies, modern history, library science, and the history of the Hebrew book in Berlin and Jerusalem, graduating from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem (PgDip 1989, MLS 1995). Before coming to Hamburg, she curated Hebraica, Judaica, and early printed book collections in Israel and the United Kingdom. In her own research, she has focused on library history, Hebrew bibliography, and German-Jewish history.

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Since the opening of the Institute and the Centre, student assistants have contributed to the running of the library. We herewith thank our first assistants Ilya Shvartsman, Marlene Heider, and Femke Isermann. Femke has recently returned to the Centre after a year of study in Israel. From August 2016, she will be joined by Lina Kröhnert and Julius Mann.

Setting up

Managed by a part-time librarian, our special collection operates within a complex networked academic environment. The challenge in our first academic year was to set up all the relevant technical and administrative procedures.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank the colleagues involved, without mentioning individual names (those we are thanking know who they are!): the team at the Central Library for Philosophy, our colleagues at the Hamburg State and University Library, the excellent IT support team at the Faculty of Humanities, the team from central university IT support, and, last but not least, our wonderful colleagues from the university's Operational Purchasing team. Many other colleagues also held our hands in the first months, providing advice, and technical, administrative, financial, and professional support.

By the end of December 2015, we had succeeded in obtaining the requisite hardware, software, barcode readers, passwords, and permissions necessary for cataloguing and contributing records to the Hamburg University Library System ('Campus-Katalog Hamburg'). Since May 2016, our collections are listed in the Hamburg Library Guide ('Hamburger Bibliotheksführer'). Between September and November 2016, the librarian will attend a series of training sessions for users of the acquisitions and cataloguing modules of the local library management system.

Fellows first

Fellows stay at the Centre for periods of varying length. It can be mutually beneficial if the library prepares in advance for the arrival of a Fellow who intends to work on a particular topic, as some books can prove difficult to obtain. Fellows either register for their own library card at the Hamburg State and University Library or request borrowing and book return services on campus from our student assistants. Interlibrary loans are managed by the librarian.

Library collaboration

Library provision in the fields of Jewish studies and philosophy is excellent in Hamburg, and many literature requests can be satisfied by obtaining copies from the

State and University Library or from other libraries in the university, such as the Central Library for Philosophy, the library of the Asia-Africa Institute, the library of the Department of Protestant Theology, and the library of the Centre for the Study of Manuscript Cultures.

One of Germany's leading libraries in the field of Jewish history and culture is found at the Institute for the History of German Jews ('Institut für die Geschichte der deutschen Juden' = IGdJ), which was founded in Hamburg in 1966. The library of the IGdJ today holds around 70,000 titles, including many works relevant to our Centre's focus. Fellows and Research Associates of our Centre frequently use the library of the IGdJ. Since coming to Hamburg in October 2015, the librarian has received valuable technical and practical support from the librarian of the IGdJ, returning these favours by offering Hebraist cataloguing expertise.

Networking

Library managers from the university's Faculty of Humanities have formed a Humanities Faculty Library Committee which meets on a monthly basis in order to take stock and discuss budget and library policy decisions. Our special collection is represented by the manager of the Central Library for Philosophy. Every second month, the circle of the committee is extended to include a member of teaching staff from every department in the Faculty. Since October 2015, the librarian has regularly attended the Extended Humanities Faculty Library Committee meetings on behalf of the Institute for Jewish Philosophy and Religion, in lieu of Professor Giuseppe Veltri.

On 1 December, 2015, the librarian attended a meeting of Judaica librarians at the Centre for Jewish Studies in Berlin ('Zentrum Jüdische Studien Berlin-Brandenburg') in order to learn more about a new web portal for Jewish Studies ('Bibliotheksportal Jüdische Studien') created for the library network of the Berlin-Brandenburg region ('Kooperativer Bibliotheksverbund Berlin Brandenburg' = KOBV).

On 8 September, 2016, the librarian will give a presentation about the library of the Centre at the fourtieth annual meeting of the German Association of Jewish Studies Collections ('Arbeitsgemeinschaft Jüdische Sammlungen') in Berlin.

Cataloguing standards

New original cataloguing records are being created according to Resource Description and Access standard (RDA), the latest Anglo-American cataloguing rules for electronic and print resources adopted by the Western library world, including the German National Library. When adding our holdings to records that were catalogued to previous standards (AACR2, RAK-WB), the decision of whether to upgrade a record to RDA is taken *ad hoc*. The cataloguing of books printed in Hebrew characters is undertaken to the standard of the American Library Association and the Library of Con-

gress (Paul E. Maher, *Hebraica cataloging—a guide to ALA/LC romanization and descriptive cataloguing*, Washington: Library of Congress, 1987), which became the German standard in 2006 (DIN 31636: Information and Documentation—Transcription of the Hebrew Alphabet).

Electronic resources

The Centre has purchased access to *Oṣar ha-Ḥokhmah Online* and the *Bar Ilan Responsa Project*, two electronic full-text databases comprised of more than 75,000 Hebrew editions. Together, these two databases *de facto* represent a very large rabbinical library, giving quick access to important source texts in Hebrew, such as Bible commentaries and supracommentaries, editions of rabbinical law (Mishnah, Talmud) with commentaries and supracommentaries, Responsa literature, and a variety of reference works. Physically assembling such a large library in a short period of time would have been well-nigh impossible.

From October 2016, researchers at the Centre will be able to use two valuable resources that aggregate full-text content from periodicals in Hebrew and Jewish Studies: JSTOR Hebrew Journals and the JSTOR Jewish Studies Collection. These two collections were not previously accessible to members of the University of Hamburg. Users will be able to access this content via a new web portal created by the Subject Information Service Jewish Studies ('Fachinformationsdienst Jüdische Studien = FID'). This service is funded by the German Research Foundation.

Book donations

The library has received two particularly valuable and generous book donations: from Michael Studemund-Halévy (Eduard-Duckesz Fellow, IGdJ, Hamburg) and Giuseppe Veltri (University of Hamburg). We would also like to take this opportunity to thank Karin Hörner (Asia-Africa Institute, University of Hamburg), Jan Wiebers (Central Library for Philosophy, University of Hamburg), Susanne Küther (IGdJ, Hamburg), Barukh Yonin (Schocken Institute for Jewish Research of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, Jerusalem), Dorothea Massmann (Massmann Internationale Buchhandlung GmbH, Hamburg), and Giada Coppola (University of Hamburg) for their donations.

Statistics

Institute for Jewish Philosophy and Religion May 2014 to June 2016	Bibliographic units (editions)	433
	Of which: Donations (editions)	240
	Periodicals (larger runs)	4
	Physical volumes	474
	Full-text databases	2
Maimonides Centre for Advanced Studies October 2015 to June 2016	Bibliographic units (editions)	143
	Of which: Donations (editions)	2
	Periodicals (larger runs)	–
	Physical volumes	152
	Full-text databases	–

Newsletter

The librarian publishes an occasional newsletter entitled 'Library News' containing information about important acquisitions (databases, reference works) and guidance about the library system of the University of Hamburg (retrieval, interlibrary loan, document delivery). The newsletter is distributed by email to Fellows, Research Associates, members of staff, colleagues, and affiliates of the Institute and the Centre.