

Activities and Events

compiled by Maria Wazinski

Annual Lecture

Opening of the Fourth Academic Year 30 October 2018

Julie R. Klein, Villanova University/USA

Scepticism in Spinoza and the Project of Critique

Spinoza famously opposes political rebellion, or what we would call “revolution,” on the grounds that it reproduces, and may even worsen, just the conditions it was intended to replace. Yet Spinoza’s theoretical and practical philosophy is marked by philosophical rebellion and conceptual revolution: he invites, even demands, that we criticise and move beyond our usual horizons, lest we reproduce old problems. In this talk, Julie Klein considered Spinoza’s relation to scepticism and his practice of critique as a philosophical strategy. She focused particularly on his account of the freedom to philosophise in order to clarify his view of what makes philosophising possible.

Regular Events

In order to explore the different manifestations of scepticism in different contexts, the Maimonides Centre for Advanced Studies organises internal events in which junior and senior fellows as well as members of the Centre discuss their research. These events are not open to the public.

Dialectical Evenings

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 Maimonides Centre and occasional guests convene to challenge, doubt, and explore theses in various subject areas.

[DE 24] 4 September 2018

Israel Netanel Rubin and Bill Rebiger

Why Is A Sceptic Worse Than An Atheist?

In contrast to the religious philosophers who exploited scepticism to serve faith, such as Pascal in his famous gamble, Sa'adya Gaon expresses views in *The Book of Beliefs and Opinions* which indicate a firm position against scepticism. In Sa'adya's opinion, the sceptic who claims that "nothing possesses any reality whatever" and therefore, for example, that the problem of the eternity of the world cannot be resolved is even worse than a heretic who claims that the world is definitely eternal or an Epicurean who teaches that the world was created by accident. It is enough to refute such heretics philosophically, but sceptics must "be struck so painful a blow that they would weep and cry out. When they finally acknowledge the experience of... the smart of a blow, they will have admitted the reality of sensation." Why does the sceptic upset Sa'adya so much? During the Dialectical Evening, the convenors discussed Sa'adya's perception of scepticism as cynicism and the position of Jewish rationalism that the belief in reason and its ability to reach certainty precedes even the belief in God, for it is God who wants man to know Him through reason.

[DE 25] 20 November 2018

Máté Veres and Yoav Meyrav

"The Second Speaker Must not be Heard"

In response to him who said, "Do not pass judgement until you have heard both sides," Zeno stated the contrary thesis, with this sort of argument: "The second speaker must not be heard, whether the first speaker proved his case (for the inquiry is then finished) or did not prove it (for that is just like his not having complied when summoned, or his having complied by talking nonsense). But either he proved his case or he did not prove it. Therefore the second speaker must not be heard" (Plutarch of Chaeronea, *On Stoic Self-contradictions*, 1034E).

We tend to assume that, other things being equal, one stands to benefit from hearing both sides on any given question. Yet it appears that, if Plutarch is to be trusted—and that is a strong "if"—the founder of the Stoic school condemned the practice of offering counterarguments. In this Dialectical Evening, the convenors discussed the possible motivations behind Zeno's striking claim and its background in his epistemological theory; they then left history behind and reflected on whether we can conceive of situations in which it is indeed rational not to attend to opposing considerations.

[DE 26] 22 January 2019

Daniel Davies and Florian Lützen

Al-Ġazālī (d. 1111) and Maimonides (d. 1204) on the Simile of the Water Clock—Knowledge and Negative Theology

- Al-Ġazālī says in *The Highest Goal*: “The cause that causes the movement of the spheres, the stars, the sun, and the moon according to a known calculation is like that aperture, which necessitates the flow of water according to a known measure. That the movement of the sun, the moon, and the stars lead to temporal results on earth is similar to the fact that the movement of the water leads to those movements that result in the ball’s falling, indicating that the hour has come.”
- Maimonides in the *Guide for the Perplexed* says: “Whenever the onlooker sees a movement, he obtains new knowledge. And by not ceasing to look on and gradually to obtain increase of knowledge, he acquires in this way a knowledge of the whole of the instrument. However, if you suppose that the motions of this instrument are infinite, the onlooker could never contain them in his knowledge.”

Both al-Ġazālī and Maimonides used the simile of the water clock. Al-Ġazālī, in two of his later works, used it to explain how humans can relate to the divine attributes, whereas Maimonides employed it in the *Guide* to illustrate how one might think about the relation between God’s knowledge and creation and to indicate why it is impossible for humans to grasp such a relationship.

In this Dialectical Evening, the convenors first looked at each of the two cases, the methodology underlying them, and how the two scholars presented their arguments. Subsequently, they discussed ensuing questions about the comparability or incommensurability of the cases presented. Can we look at the world as a mechanical device, or is the simile rather an allegory alluding to a higher purpose concerning the limitations of knowledge?

[DE 27] 26 February 2019

Haim Kreisel and Daniel Davies

Reading Maimonides: Esotericism vs. Exotericism. The Case of God’s Knowledge of Particulars

In the first part of the presentation Haim Kreisel gave a brief introduction to the esoteric reading of Maimonides’s *Guide of the Perplexed*: the justification for this approach and its history. He then discussed Maimonides’s theory of divine providence and tried to show why Maimonides’s presentation strongly suggests that he holds an esoteric position on the subject—namely, his approach is a completely naturalistic one. Given the fact that Maimonides presents his view of God’s knowledge of particulars within the context of his discussion of divine providence, he further argued that Maimonides hints to an esoteric position on this topic as well. Daniel Davies responded by suggesting that this conclusion is not warranted, and that one should

read Maimonides's view of God's knowledge of particulars exoterically, irrespective of his position on divine providence.

[DE 28] 19 March 2019

Carlos Lévy and Giuseppe Veltri

Philo of Alexandria: The First Jewish Sceptic?

The studies on scepticism are currently flourishing, but the benefit from them for the analysis of Philo is quite small. In studies on and companions to scepticism, the focus is mainly on Sextus Empiricus, a thinker who lived two centuries after Aenesidemus (ca. middle of first century BCE), who refounded scepticism almost three centuries after Pyrrho. Philo ought to be considered a privileged witness in the history of scepticism, but he is not, though he is the closest to Aenesidemus from both a historical and a geographical point of view.

The first question of this Dialectical Evening was: why this quasi omission nowadays, while a century ago Hans von Arnim devoted an entire book to the analysis of sceptical tropes in Philo?

Second: are there sceptical strategies in Philo, or something else? In the first case, are they comparable to those of Greek pagan texts? In the second, can we escape overly general concepts such as eclecticism and utilitarianism?

Third: what are the possible meanings of "Jewish scepticism" and can Philo be considered the first "Jewish sceptic?" What are the elements of a Jewish sceptical tradition?

Fourth: fideism is a concept of great importance in the history of Western culture, especially during the Renaissance. Can it be affirmed that Philo laid the foundations of this concept?

[DE 29] 4 June 2019

José María Sánchez de León Serrano and Jason Yonover

Genealogical Scepticism

Each of us was born in a particular place at a particular moment, and may boast of a unique trajectory from there to here. Common sense would indicate that the special trajectory specific to someone has a decisive influence on their beliefs. Yet what does this mean for the truth of said convictions? This sort of question is in the background of genealogical thinking. Genealogical thinking questions the validity of a given belief, concept, or idea by tracing its emergence from contingent circumstances. Thus, we might criticise a philosophical conception by showing how it originated in a historical and cultural context that no longer corresponds to ours. Can genealogical critiques ever be valid? Do they commit the so-called "genetic fallacy," the allegedly misled assessment of a claim based on its origin alone? And is the scepticism genealogical thinking may lead to—where we begin to broadly question our convictions given their apparently contingent origins—justified?

[DE 30] 2 July 2019

Aryeh Botwinick and Daniel Boyarin

A Rabbinic Genealogy: Rabbi Akiva as a Precursor of Maimonides's Negative Theology

Two overarching themes concerned the convenors during this Dialectical Evening. The first was to enquire if there are indigenous Rabbinic sources that could be said to serve as precedents for Maimonides's negative theology. The second theme (which is closely wrapped up with the first one) was whether there could be said to be a genre or sub-genre of Talmudic discourse that could be categorised as a philosophical *maḥloqet*—a philosophical division of opinion over a second-order philosophical question. Aside from the issue of whether one can deduce the possible from the impossible which was dealt with at the Dialectical Evening, five immediate examples that come to mind are *brera* (Does the arrow of time move in two directions simultaneously—from future to past as well as from past to future?); *zeh we-zeh gorem* (What is the most elegant way to theorise overdetermination—patterns of multiple causation?); Is nominalism true or false? and, related to this, how does one demarcate between identity and difference? and, *Kul milsa' d'amar raḥmana' lo' s'evid, ei 'avid mehani o lo' mehani*, which forms the subject matter of a *maḥloqet* between Abaye and Rava in Temurah 4b, but which is echoed elsewhere in the Babylonian Talmud. This latter topic raises the spectre of how to theorise the relationship between the normative and the descriptive. Unearthing a Rabbinic pedigree for Maimonides's negative theology is important not only academically, but also existentially. Following the sterling example of Joseph Levenson in his classic work, *Confucian China and its Modern Fate*, we can assume that unless Maimonides had established for himself a homegrown Rabbinic pedigree for negative theology (that in an important sense there was an *equivalence* between the two), he would not have done it. He could only do it because *Ḥazal* had been there first. The anxiety of influence can also work to curb the desire for innovation.

[DE 31] 6 August 2019

Reimund Leicht and Ariel Malachi

Is Logic a Tool for Producing Certainty and/or Conviction in Judah ha-Levi's *Sefer ha-Kuzari*?

Judah ha-Levi's *Sefer ha-Kuzari* is a work about controversy that arouses controversy. If its author wanted to use this literary dialogue between the king of the Khazars and a philosopher, a Christian, a Muslim, and finally a Jew to show that philosophers (and historians of philosophy, for that matter) are not able to reach a real consensus about the most fundamental questions, the interpretation history of this book can be taken as a proof in itself: What is its basic intention? What is the appropriate way to describe its literary genre? What were its intellectual sources? Does the book form a literary and intellectual unity, or is it piecemeal? Is this a book of philosophy, and if

so, to which philosophical strand does it belong? Or is it rather a religious critique of philosophy? Is it anti-philosophy in a philosophical garb? Is it a piece of medieval rationalism, anti-rationalism, or both at the same—or different—times?

In spite of all these uncertainties, there can be little doubt that the *Sefer ha-Kuzari* is intended to convince. Moreover, the question of how to produce conviction and certainty looms large in a book telling the story of a pagan king who converts to Judaism after he finds it to be more convincing than all the competing alternatives (philosophy, Christianity, and Islam). But how does Judah ha-Levi argue for his ideas and how is conviction and perhaps even certainty achieved? What is the role of rational argumentation based upon and drawn from the tools provided by philosophical logic and epistemology in a dialogue that opposes Jewish religion to other world-views? The apparent ambivalence between the religious motives of the book and the necessity of using rational, logical, and philosophical tools of persuasion leads to the question of whether and how logic can serve as a tool to produce certainty and/or conviction in Judah ha-Levi's *Sefer ha-Kuzari*.

[DE 32] 20 August 2019

Stephan Schmid and Yoav Meyrav

Metaphysics and Truth?

For a long and venerable tradition in philosophy, metaphysics—the study or “science” of being *qua* being and its ultimate causes—has been considered to be not only the most fundamental, but also the most noble form of intellectual activity. At the same time, various philosophers have doubted the very possibility of this science: even if there were any, the purported objects of metaphysical investigation, they maintained, are too remote to be grasped by us through our limited cognitive capacities. This kind of suspicion towards metaphysics is well-known, but relies on the question what metaphysics is supposed to be. In this evening, the convenors took up this issue by exploring a logically prior question regarding the allegedly essential connection between metaphysics and truth.

Reading Evening

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

[RE 27] 21 August 2018

Ronny Vollandt

Divine Determination and Wisdom

The Reading Evening offered a critical re-evaluation of the very beginning of commentary on the Book of Genesis by Sa'adya Gaon. In contrast to Sa'adya's translation, the commentary of which the former was initially part survived in a very sketchy form. In 1984, Moshe Zucker furnished an edition of the first half of the book of Genesis, in which he assembled hundreds of Genizah fragments and brought the commentary back to life for modern scholarship. Since then, numerous additional texts have appeared that can improve our understanding of Sa'adya's exegesis and its context. The passages that were read attempt to prove that the biblical account of creation is a universally acceptable theory, contrary to the belief of some sceptics, which can be defended also on the grounds of scientific literature.

[RE 28] 25 September 2018

Rachel Aumiller

The Body of Belief: Augustine's *Confessions* and Derrida's *Circumfession*

In this Reading Evening, several passages from Augustine's *Confessions* were compared to passages in Jacques Derrida's *Circumfession*: an experimental homage to and parody of the *Confessions*.

While Augustine describes the decisive event in which he turns toward the God of his mother, Derrida reflects on the moment when he turns away from the God of his mother (his "cut with Kippur"). And yet, both (de)conversion stories are also confessions of the failed attempt to leave behind a former way of life, the memories of which reverberate on the narrators' bodies.

Augustine and Derrida question how belief first enters us in our infancy. Belief is articulated on our skin through both a gentle and violent touch: the caress of the caregiver, the switch of the schoolmaster. Because belief exists on the level of bodily memory, it is difficult to shed when we later sceptically engage our inherited values. Our skin continues to cling to beliefs that we denounce.

The Reading Evening explored (1) Derrida's sceptical framing of his relationship to Judaism, (2) dogma in the form of bodily affect/memory, (3) the disjunction between what we say we believe/disbelieve and bodily affect.

[RE 29] 9 October 2018

Yoav Meyrav

Is God an Intellect? Themistius between Aristotle and the Platonists

Themistius (c. 317–388 CE), a philosopher and political figure in the imperial court in Constantinople, composed paraphrases of several of Aristotle's works. These paraphrases were pedagogical tools intended to elucidate Aristotle's arguments, but also

functioned as vehicles for Themistius's own philosophical innovations. Since his paraphrases adopt Aristotle's voice, it is difficult to discern at which point in the text Aristotle ends and Themistius begins. What is more, since Themistius's philosophical training was independent from the established schools of his time, his doctrinal affiliation has been the subject of much scholarly debate, especially concerning the question whether he was a Peripatetic or a Platonist. Whereas formulating the question in this manner is somewhat over-reductive, it might nevertheless be valuable to explore how Themistius engages with those of Aristotle's ideas that are known to have been criticised in the Platonic circles with which Themistius was familiar.

In this Reading Evening, selected passages were read from a forthcoming English translation of Themistius's paraphrase of Aristotle's *Metaphysics* 12 alongside passages from Aristotle himself and a few passages from Plotinus (204/5–270 CE), whose *Enneads* shaped the Platonic school in Late Antiquity. Yoav Meyrav explored the possibility that in his paraphrase, Themistius implicitly responds to some Platonic critiques of Aristotle, especially concerning Aristotle's identification between God and Intellect and its various ramifications. He thus, perhaps, attempts to soften the notion of divine otherness and resist the idea of divine transcendence. Consequently, his paraphrase might have had a moderating effect on the sceptical expressions of these elements in medieval Arabic and Hebrew thinkers.

[RE 30] 11 December 2018

Behnam Zolghadr

Denying the Undeniable: Contra Aristotle's Arguments for the Law of Non-Contradiction

Aristotle devoted book Gamma of his *Metaphysics* to the defence of what we now know as the law of non-contradiction. His prominent defence of this law was so influential that it became the dominant view among western philosophers, albeit with very few arguable exceptions, such as Hegel and some of his followers. It is difficult to find a defence of the law after Aristotle's which is worth mentioning. However, with the contemporary developments in logic and metaphysics, some philosophers advocate views holding some contradictions to be true, and thus they challenge the law of non-contradiction. Hence, we may want to look back to the origins of the law of non-contradiction and question whether this so-called undeniable law is deniable or not. In this Reading Evening, the most important parts of Aristotle's arguments for the law of non-contradiction were explored. These arguments are not as crucial as they are usually thought to be. Then, the first arguments for explosion—i.e. that from an arbitrary contradiction, anything may follow—were discussed. These belong to Avicenna and the twelfth-century French logician William of Soissons. It is worth mentioning that Aristotle never argued for explosion. Thus, some passages of Avicenna's *Metaphysics of The Healing* were read as well.

[RE 31] 15 January 2019

Avraham Rot

Affective Scepticism: Between Descartes and Spinoza

Descartes excludes the passions from both the exposition and the domain of applicability of his method of doubt. Questioning the reality of an external world, he arguably presupposes the reality of internal experience. As with respect to other Cartesian convictions that have come to dominate modern thought, Spinoza's philosophy indicates an alternative way of thinking. Though Spinoza is commonly regarded as an anti-sceptical thinker, he presents us in effect with a more radical and truthful form of scepticism than Descartes. While on Descartes's account, the affects cannot be doubted and doubt is not significantly affective, on Spinoza's account the affects themselves are expressions of doubt while it is in fact clear and distinct ideas that cannot be doubted with earnestness. Cartesian scepticism is transitory and narrowly cognitive, and hence less radical than Spinozist scepticism, which is all encompassing, ongoing and, at once, cognitive, embodied, and affective. To assess these tentative claims, which potentially challenge received interpretations of Spinoza's philosophy, as well as to further explore the differences between the forms of scepticism respectively at work in the writings of Descartes and Spinoza, relevant excerpts from Descartes's *The Passions of the Soul* and Spinoza's *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect* and *Ethics* were read. Special attention was given to the emotional logic governing the relations between the affects of hope, fear, confidence, and despair as it pertains to doubt, the lack thereof, and certainty.

[RE 32] 5 February 2019

Steven Harvey

The Path of the *Falāsifah* to Knowledge and Ultimate Human Happiness... or Not

How did the medieval Aristotelians seek certain knowledge and pursue ultimate human happiness? How did they see their task as philosophers and scientists? Could intellectual perfection be sought and found in the confines of one's own abode, with little more than parchment, ink, and a reed brush? As one respected contemporary historian of medieval philosophy put it: [Jewish Aristotelians of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries,] "following their two philosophical authorities, Maimonides and Averroes, sought truth and human perfection through the orderly study of Aristotle's books on logic, natural science, and metaphysics, as they were paraphrased and explained by Averroes." And, one might ask: "If so, and if such bookish learning could be carried out alone in one's home, was the goal to learn what others have written and transmitted? Or, perhaps, was it to correct this knowledge and/or to progress to new knowledge?"

Some of the selected texts strengthen the conventional view that all the knowledge needed for attaining truth may be found in the Aristotelian corpus as interpreted by the great Greek, Islamic, and Jewish commentators; others suggest that these

texts should be studied carefully and corrected when necessary; and still others hold that all such study is, in fact, in vain, for the desired knowledge is illusory and cannot be attained by humans. But some of the texts allude to another way of searching for and attaining knowledge, one of observation and experience. To what extent were observation, experience, and experimentation a part of the medieval quest for certain knowledge?

[RE 33] 16 April 2019

Nancy Abigail Nuñez Hernández

“Elusive Knowledge” by David Lewis

Epistemic contextualism is a position developed by contemporary epistemologists to deal with the problem of philosophical scepticism, which in turn is understood as a problem that results from imposing unattainable standards for knowledge. In response to such excessive demands, epistemic contextualism proposes that knowledge attribution sentences of the form “*S* knows that *p*” are context-sensitive, so their truth conditions can vary from one context to another. By claiming that the same sentence can have different truth-conditions in different contexts, epistemic contextualism aims to show that there are contexts (both ordinary and scientific) in which we are safe from the sceptical threat because in those contexts, we do not have to meet unattainable standards for knowledge. This position has had a deep influence not only in epistemology, but also in philosophy of language and other areas of contemporary philosophy.

In this Reading Evening, one of the papers that laid the foundations of epistemic contextualism, David Lewis’s “Elusive Knowledge” (1996), was studied.

[RE 34] 30 April 2019

Jason Yonover

Spinoza and Nietzsche on the Erroneous Belief in Free Will (Selections from *Ethics*, Letter 58, and *Twilight of the Idols*)

Despite a highly suggestive letter in which Nietzsche labels Spinoza his only “precursor,” there is surprisingly little commentary on the relationship between the two thinkers. In this Reading Evening, the possibility was explored that the most important connection between Nietzsche and Spinoza has been missed and is methodological in nature. It was done on the basis of their rejections of free will in which, notably, they both not only (1) deny that we may boast of such a faculty, but furthermore (2) clarify the origins of our erroneous belief to the contrary (and indeed in a closely related fashion). Throughout questions pertaining to scepticism that are of epistemological interest were particularly explored.

[RE 35] 21 May 2019

Bakinaz Abdalla

Prophecy, Philosophy, and Truth in the Thought of Isaac Albalag

Was the world created in time or does it exist from eternity? This question provoked heated disputations in medieval philosophical and theological writings. Answering this question in favour of either creation or the eternity doctrine had epistemological and theological implications respectively. Perhaps a less problematic answer would be that the universe is both created and eternal. A philosopher who is faithful to both science (philosophy) and revelation may find it legitimate to deem the teachings of Scripture and philosophy, though contradictory, to be true. Odd though this suggestion may appear, it is not unprecedented. The Jewish philosopher Isaac Albalag (thirteenth century) admits that prophetic knowledge and philosophy are sometimes in conflict. In cases where reason and revelation prove to be contradictory, as with the issue of eternity versus creation, one admits their veracity; neither philosophy nor religion overrides the other.

To support this claim, Albalag advances an unusual theory of prophecy that views prophets as extraordinary human beings capable of apprehending a body of knowledge that surpasses human knowledge in both quantity and quality. In some cases, this knowledge contradicts the conclusions of demonstration. Albalag's theory of prophecy, together with his view of the relationship between religion and philosophy, led many scholars to read his thought in terms of the double truth doctrine which was advocated by medieval Latin Averroists.

In this Reading Evening, the double truth hypothesis was investigated. The goal was to examine whether Albalag's theory of prophecy is compatible with the fundamental metaphysical premises and strong sceptical elements of his sole treatise, *Sefer Tiqqun ha-De'ot*.

[RE 36] 25 June 2019

Uta Lohmann

Scepticism in the Educational Philosophy of Joel Löwe as a Representative of the Berlin Haskalah

Joel Bril Löwe (1762–1802) was one of the most important proponents of the Berlin Jewish Enlightenment. He was a member of a small group of maskilim who spent a few years in close proximity to Moses Mendelssohn and who were regarded as his “true disciples.” The most outstanding characteristics of this group of young maskilim include their activities as translators of some of the Holy Scriptures and their engagement as private or public teachers.

The Reading Evening focused on the influence of Mendelssohn's philosophy on Löwe. How did the Haskalah's fundamental thoughts about humankind being destined for perfection (*Bestimmung des Menschen zur Vervollkommenung*) and Mendelssohn's sceptical posture towards writtenness and language shape Löwe's peda-

gological concepts, linguistic approaches, and translation method? What relevance did scepticism have to the educational philosophy (*Bildungsphilosophie*) of the Haskalah in general? What did scepticism mean for the perception of knowledge and for the pursuit of genuine truth in a pedagogical setting in particular? Last but not least: How can scepticism be systematically described not as a philosophical idea, but as a cultural form of application-oriented strategies and concepts of everyday (educational) practice?

Occasional Events

Conferences

12–14 November 2018

Scepticism and Anti-Scepticism in Jewish Averroism

Convenors: Racheli Haliva (Universität Hamburg/Germany), Yoav Meyrav (Universität Hamburg/Germany), Daniel Davies (Universität Hamburg/Germany)

“Jewish Averroism” is a concept that usually refers to Jewish philosophers from the thirteenth century onwards who philosophised within the context of Averroes’s interpretation of Aristotelian philosophy. At the same time, many of them were committed to Maimonides’s legacy of reconciling philosophical investigation with the Law of Moses. In order to settle this apparent tension, they interpreted Judaism in light of Averroes’s Aristotelianism on the assumption that Judaism and true philosophy must always coincide.

Although Averroes’s philosophy and commentary were attractive to some circles, others found it unsatisfactory or simply threatening to the traditional way of life. These thinkers responded with various critiques of Averroes, his followers, and the Averroistic approach to philosophy and its relationship to revealed religion.

The purpose of the conference was to crystallise the understanding of Jewish Averroism as a philosophical and cultural phenomenon. Special emphasis was put upon the Jewish Averroists’s engagement with Maimonides’s apparent sceptical approach, mainly concerning metaphysical knowledge about which Averroes is patently dogmatic. Finally, lectures about various aspects of anti-Averroism served as a necessary counterbalance.

Most of the conference’s lectures can be viewed online at Universität Hamburg’s lecture2go website: https://lecture2go.uni-hamburg.de/en_US/l2go/-/get/1/5089.

Programme

Keynote Lecture

Steven Harvey (Bar-Ilan University, Ramat-Gan/Israel)

Was Al-Ġazālī an Avicennist? Some Provocative Reflections on Jewish Averroism

Panel: What is Jewish Averroism?

Daniel J. Lasker (Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, Beer-Sheva/Israel)

Averroism and Interreligious Polemics in Late Medieval Iberia

Giovanni Licata (Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa/Italy)

Similarities and Dissimilarities between Jewish and Latin Averroism

Reimund Leicht (Hebrew University of Jerusalem/Israel)

Who and What is a Jewish Averroist? Remarks on Averroes's First Jewish Readers

Panel: Reason, Scriptures, and Jewish Law

David Lemler (Université de Strasbourg/France)

The Interpretation of the Garden of Eden among Averroistic Maimonideans and the Scope of Human Knowledge

Mercedes Rubio (POLIS Jerusalem/Israel)

Is Maimonides's Biblical Exegesis Averroistic?

Shalom Sadik (Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, Beer-Sheva/Israel)

Double Truth in Jewish Averroist Philosophy

Panel: Averroistic Maimonideanism

Resianne Smidt van Gelder-Fontaine (Universiteit van Amsterdam/Netherlands)

Between Scepticism and Anti-Scepticism in Judah ha-Cohen's Presentation of Averroes in the *Midraš ha-Ḥokhmah*

Yehuda Halper (Bar-Ilan University, Ramat-Gan/Israel)

Socratic Scepticism in Hebrew: Al-Ḥarizi and Shem Ṭob Falaquera and Their Influence

Shira Weiss (Herzl Institute, Jerusalem/Israel)

Averroes's Influence upon Theological Responses to Scepticism in Late Medieval Jewish Philosophy

Panel: Averroistic Maimonideanism II

Rebecca Kneller-Rowe (Independent Scholar)

Scepticism and Anti-Scepticism in Samuel ibn Tibbon's Work

Yonatan Shemesh (University of Chicago/USA)

Averroes's *Incoherence of the Incoherence* and Narboni's Commentary on the *Guide of the Perplexed*

Racheli Haliva (Universität Hamburg/Germany)

Isaac Polqar's Anti-Sceptical Approach towards Miracles

Panel: Physics

Alexander Green (University at Buffalo/USA)

Gersonides and Ibn Kaspi on Scepticism about the Future

Maud Kozodoy (Independent Scholar)

Sources of Knowledge about the Heavens: Profayt Duran and Averroes

Warren Zev Harvey (Hebrew University of Jerusalem/Israel)

Crescas's Attitude towards Averroes

Panel: Metaphysics and Theology

Michael Engel (Universität Hamburg/Germany)

Averroes's *Long Commentary on the Posterior Analytics* and Its Impact on Jewish and Latin Averroism during the Italian Renaissance

Esti Eisenmann (The Open University of Israel)

Gersonides's Critique of Averroes: Between Physics, Metaphysics, and Theology

Yoav Meyrav (Universität Hamburg/Germany)

Against Averroes: Moses Ha-Levi's Defence of Avicenna's Necessary Existent

Panel: Prophecy and Human Perfection

Giada Coppola (Universität Hamburg/Germany)

Certainty and Uncertainty Regarding Metaphysics in Sforzo's *Or 'Ammim*

Bakinaz Abdalla (McGill University, Montreal/Canada)

Reconsidering Isaac Albalag's Theory of Prophecy: A Sceptical Approach

Adrian Sackson (Tel Aviv University/Israel)

What is the Status of Prophets from Other Religions for the Jewish Averroists?

Keynote Lecture

Hanna Kasher (Bar-Ilan University, Ramat-Gan/Israel)

The Jewish Averroists—Linking Thoughts between Maimonides and Spinoza

23–25 September 2019

Simone Luzzatto's Scepticism in the Context of Early Modern Thought

Convenors: Giuseppe Veltri (Universität Hamburg/Germany), Michela Torbidoni (Universität Hamburg/Germany), Anna Lissa (Université Paris 8/France)

This conference aimed to call attention to the sceptical thought of Rabbi Simone Luzzatto (ca. 1583–1663) and its value within seventeenth-century philosophy and political thought. The three-day conference brought together established scholars and young researchers working in the field of the intellectual history of Judaism in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The lectures offered the opportunity to explore the philosophical sources and strategies of Luzzatto's scepticism, his intense dialogue with Christian philosophy, and his relationship to Judaism.

The discussion of Luzzatto provided the chance to investigate the role of scepticism within an era marked by paradoxes and contrasts between religious devotion and scientific rationalism, between rabbinical-biblical Jewish tradition and the open tendency towards engagement with non-Jewish philosophical, literary, scientific, and theological culture.

The conference's programme included a round table on Rabbi Simone Luzzatto's newly published works, *Discourse on the State of the Jews* (1638) and *Socrates, Or On Human Knowledge* (1651), discussed with the authors and translators.

Programme and Abstracts

Panel 1: Liberty, Religion, and Scientific Thought

Cristiana Facchini (Università di Bologna/Italy)

Practices of Critical Thought: The Rise of New Science, the Bible, and Jewish Thought

Evelien Chayes (Radboud Universiteit/Netherlands)

A Rabbi's Marks in Early Modern Subversive Literature. Simone Luzzatto and his *Nachleben*

Panel 2: Scepticism and Religion

Anna Lissa (Université Paris 8/France)

The Scepticism of Simone Luzzatto and his Appraisal of the *Book of Job*

Mina Lee (University of Tokyo/Japan)

The Concepts of Religion in Simone Luzzatto's *Discorso*

Panel 3: Sceptical Philosophy

Michela Torbidoni (Universität Hamburg/Germany)

Simone Luzzatto's Concept of Nature as a Source of Morality and Religiosity

Josef Stern (University of Chicago/USA)

What Kind of a (Sceptical) work is Simone Luzzatto's *Socrate*?

Evening Session

Ensemble Accademia dei Carpi (Anna Tarca, Silvia Valenti, Paolo Davolio, Lorenzo Ziller)

Musical Interlude: Sacred and Profane Polyphony by Salomone Rossi and Luca Marenzio

Giuseppe Veltri (Universität Hamburg/Germany)

Introduction

Warren Zev Harvey (Hebrew University of Jerusalem/Israel)

Keynote Lecture: The Image of King Solomon in Simone Luzzatto's Writings

Panel 4: Ancient and Medieval Sources

Joanna Weinberg (University of Oxford/UK)

The Jewish Debate over Philo in Early Modern Italy

Fabrizio Lelli (Università del Salento/Italy)

Simone Luzzatto's Scepticism in Light of Medieval Jewish Apologetics

Panel 5: Politics and Economics

Vasileios Syros (University of Jyväskylä/Finland)

A Venetian Rabbi and a Baroness from the Low Countries on the Condition of the Jews

Guido Bartolucci (Università della Calabria/Italy)

Simone Luzzatto's Political Thought: Between Scepticism and Reason of State

Panel 6: Politics and Economics

Luca Andreoni (Istituto Comprensivo "Caio Giulio Cesare"/Italy)

Simone Luzzatto and the Debate on the Economical Role of the Jews in Eighteenth Century Italy

Myriam Silvera (Università degli Studi di Roma "Tor Vergata"/Italy)

"Seek the Peace and Prosperity of the City...": The Political Use of Jer 29:7 by Simone Luzzatto and Other Jewish Sources

Panel 7: Anthropology, Society, and Tolerance

Giuseppe Veltri (Universität Hamburg/Germany)

Self-Love, Blood-Ties, and Amity in Simone Luzzatto's Philosophy

Book Launch

Scepticism and Tolerance: New Perspectives for the Jewish Intellectual History

Evelien Chayes (Radboud Universiteit/Netherlands)

Intellectual Life and Literature

Cristiana Facchini (Università di Bologna/Italy)

History

Guido Bartolucci (Università della Calabria/Italy)

History of Political Thought

Josef Stern (University of Chicago/USA)

Philosophy

Lecture Series "Feminism and Scepticism"

The Maimonides Centre for Advanced Studies established a lecture series which focuses on feminist approaches to and perspectives on scepticism. The Centre invites researchers to give a public lecture on this topic, and—following this lecture—to meet with the female researchers in order to share their experiences and career paths in their academic systems.

2 April 2019

Ruth Kara-Ivanov Kaniel (Shalom Hartman Institute in Jerusalem/Israel)

Scepticism and Gender. King David in the Image of the *Shekhinah*

King David is one of the most colourful heroes of Jewish myth; warrior and poet, sinner and penitent, conqueror and musician, adulterer and Messiah. The many facets of his character are rooted in biblical scripture and continued to develop in the literature of the Midrash and the Kabbalah. Each generation has added new layers to David's portrait, sketching him in a new light. Indeed, David's personality reflects the characters and hopes of his interpreters throughout generations. Embodying the hero "with a thousand faces" and representing the messianic idea, David is not merely a private character, but a collective entity, wearing many different forms. In the Zohar, David's collective image is identified with the *Shekhinah*, the Assembly of Israel [Knesset Israel] and the Divine Spouse.

Why was this figure of the warrior—the ultimate male, conqueror of cities and kingdoms, the redeemer, who was presented as a masculine hero in both Christian and Jewish literature—"converted" by the Zohar to signify a feminine image? In her lecture, Ruth Kara-Ivanov Kaniel tried to solve this riddle by using questions of scepticism, identity, and gender.

This year's lecture on scepticism and feminism was accompanied by a workshop.

1 April 2019

Biti Roi (Shalom Hartman Institute in Jerusalem/Israel)

Scepticism in Zoharic and Hasidic Literature

The Zoharic literature of twelfth- to fourteenth-century Spain, which has been defined as the most influential Kabbalistic movement in the Middle Ages, and its followers—the eighteenth-century Eastern European Hasidic movement—demonstrate an interesting window into the complicated relationship between scepticism and theological absolutism. In this workshop, the way in which scepticism defines affinity with God in the Jewish mystical tradition and the way non-philosophical texts deal with philosophical perceptions were explored. The role of gender issues in the Kabbalistic movement were also articulated. Texts which were examined included works of rabbinic, Zoharic, medieval, and Hasidic literature as well as the well-known liturgical foreword "Elijah opened and said" and its similarities to *Al-Fātiḥah*, the famous Islamic prayer.

Maimonides Lectures on Scepticism

Researchers focusing on various aspects of scepticism are invited to present and discuss their research in an evening lecture. The lectures are usually recorded and pub-

lished on the webpage of the Centre in order to make them available to a larger audience.

22 November 2018

Richard Bett (Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore/USA)

Can we be Ancient Sceptics?

The lecture considered how far Pyrrhonism might be a viable outlook today. The answer depends in part on what range of issues suspension of judgment might plausibly be generated in today's intellectual climate. On many ethical, religious, and philosophical issues, the prospects seem just as good as in Sextus's day. Concerning natural science, the matter is more complicated. Here there are many issues where we know too much for suspension of judgment to be realistic, and where science has infiltrated ordinary life. On the other hand, suspension of judgment is possible on some issues, such as climate change, where there is a vocal popular opinion about a scientific question. In addition, it is possible on philosophical questions concerning the status of science itself, questions that did not occur to the ancients. A further issue is the value of suspension of judgment. Here Sextus seems overly ambitious, because of exaggerated claims about *ataraxia* as its outcome. Whether suspension of judgment would yield *ataraxia* depends on people's character and circumstances, regardless of the perceived importance of the topic. What remains is a worthwhile recommendation to be open-minded.

9 July 2019

Nadja El Kassir (ETH Zürich/Switzerland)

How to Deal with Ignorance? Some Historical Suggestions

Ever since its early days, philosophers have been fascinated by ignorance. In her talk, Nadja El Kassir discussed historical answers to the question of how it should be dealt with. The question itself is seldom raised explicitly, but a number of philosophers have addressed the issue of dealing with ignorance. The lecture focused in particular on Socrates's, John Locke's, and Immanuel Kant's suggestions on the subject. Socratic ignorance can be read as a suggestion that knowledge and wisdom are the best ways of dealing with ignorance. Locke suggests that four principles (the principle of indifference, the principle of evidence, the principle of appraisal, and the principle of proportionality) are the best ways of dealing with ignorance and also with error. Finally, Kant argues that orienting oneself is the key to dealing with ignorance. Nadja El Kassir discussed and compared these three historical proposals and concluded by examining their relevance to today's question of how to deal with ignorance.

Lecture Series “Skepsis und Toleranz. Moses Mendelssohn, Salomon Maimon und die jüdische Aufklärungsphilosophie”

Organised by the Institute for Jewish Philosophy and Religion, in cooperation with the Maimonides Centre for Advanced Studies

Convenors: Ze'ev Strauss (HfJS Heidelberg/Germany), José María Sánchez de León Serrano (Universität Hamburg/Germany), Libera Pisano (Universität Hamburg/Germany)

The lectures within the framework of the lecture series provided an introduction into the innovative thought of the two central philosophers of the German-Jewish Enlightenment: Moses Mendelssohn and Solomon Maimon. Two concepts of their philosophical systems—tolerance and scepticism—gained centre stage. The main question that these lectures addressed is the reciprocal relation between tolerance and scepticism, and how each of these thinkers takes a stance in this regard. To answer this question, special attention was devoted to Jewish religion, inasmuch as it constitutes an elemental component of their Weltanschauungen.

Programme

1 April 2019

Giuseppe Veltri (Universität Hamburg/Germany) and Anne Fiebig (Universität Hamburg/Germany)

Toleranz als gesellschaftliche Herausforderung in jüdischen Quellen und Vorstellung des Toleranzprojekts

6 May 2019

Shmuel Feiner (Bar-Ilan University, Ramat-Gan/Israel)

Moses Mendelssohn: The Myth, the History, and the Jewish Battle for Religious Tolerance

13 May 2019

Jason Yonover (Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore/USA)

Mendelssohn and Maimon on Superstition

20 May 2019

Timothy Franz (New School for Social Research in New York City/USA)

“They Go From Strength to Strength”: Solomon Maimon’s Way from Critique to Transcendental Philosophy

27 May 2019

José María Sánchez de León Serrano (Universität Hamburg/Germany)

Abgötterei bei Mendelssohn und Spinoza

3 June 2019

Warren Zev Harvey (Hebrew University of Jerusalem/Israel)

Mendelssohn and Maimon on the Garden of Eden

17 June 2019

Ze'ev Strauss (HfJS Heidelberg/Germany)

Das Judentum als Grundlage im Religionsgebäude

24 June 2019

Grit Schorch (Hebrew University of Jerusalem/Israel)

Keine Philosophie ohne Sprache – Eine neue Perspektive auf Moses Mendelssohns Denken

26 June 2019

Idit Chikurel (Universität Potsdam/Germany)

Scepticism and Certainty in Salomon Maimon's Theory of Invention

1 July 2019

George Y. Kohler (Bar-Ilan University, Ramat-Gan/Israel)

Skeptische Aufnahme – Kritik an Mendelssohns Religionsphilosophie im deutsch-jüdischen Denken des 19. Jahrhunderts

8 July 2019

Libera Pisano (Universität Hamburg/Germany)

“Ein Wohltäter aller Deutsch redenden Juden:” Zunz' Deutung von Moses Mendelssohn

10 July 2019

Michah Gottlieb (New York University/USA)

Mendelssohn and Minority Toleration

MCAS Participation in External Conferences

4–7 March 2019

Annual Conference of the European Academy of Religion

Panel: Jewish Scepticism as Philosophical Question

Research on Jewish philosophical scepticism is still in its very early stages. This also holds true for cultural expressions of scepticism, i.e., modes of sceptical strategies

present in Jewish literature, cultural practices, history, the organisation of social groups, and especially education. This lack of interest in the intricacies of Jewish scepticism in Jewish studies may be rooted in the modality of Jewish philosophy as such, its being notoriously in-between, subsuming traditional wisdom, philosophy, theology, Jewish and general Weltanschauung, as well as cultural history, and representing a hazardous bridge between orthopraxy and orthodoxy. In this panel, the controversial binomial of Jewish scepticism was investigated from a philosophical perspective.

Chair: Libera Pisano (Universität Hamburg/Germany)

Giuseppe Veltri (Universität Hamburg/Germany)

Short introduction

Yoav Meyrav (Universität Hamburg/Germany)

The Danger of Perplexity: a Farabian Problem—and a Maimonidean Solution?

Michela Torbidoni (Universität Hamburg/Germany)

The Sceptical Socrates of Simone Luzzatto between Reason and Revelation

José María Sánchez de León Serrano (Universität Hamburg/Germany)

God's Transparency and Hyperbolic Doubt in Spinoza's Metaphysics