



Universität Hamburg

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ספקנות

Maimonides Centre for Advanced Studies
JEWISH SCEPTICISM

LECTURE SERIES WINTER TERM 2016/17



**SCEPTICISM AND
ANTI-SCEPTICISM IN
MEDIAEVAL JEWISH
PHILOSOPHY AND
THOUGHT**

DFG





THE MAIMONIDES CENTRE OF ADVANCED STUDIES

The central aim of the MCAS is to explore and research scepticism in Judaism in its dual manifestation of a purely philosophical tradition and a more general expression of sceptical strategies, concepts, and attitudes in the cultural field. Scepticism is understood here as the enquiry of a 'perpetual student' who harbours doubts about different dimensions and systems of (secular or revealed) knowledge and raises the question of authority. It is not merely an intellectual or theoretical worldview, it also implies an attitude toward life that provides a basis for numerous and diverse phenomena and informs essential processes and categorizations within Jewish philosophy, religion, literature, and society. More specifically, scepticism is applied to expressions of social deviance from, and conformity with, political structures, as well as to systems of governance when responding to and in exchange with adjacent cultures. By further opening up this unexplored field, scholars will considerably profit from comparative perspectives. Gaining new insights into both Western philosophy and culture and its inherent connections to texts and other manifestations of Eastern cultures is essential to mapping the transcultural dimensions of the research field.

The Maimonides Centre is designed to offer ideal conditions for research and for a fertile exchange of ideas. The successful creation of an inspiring atmosphere, favouring original research based on continuous dialogue, will depend on the establishment of an interconnected academic community of scholars. Experts from different fields will gather in the Maimonides Centre in order to develop innovative approaches and methods.

LECTURE SERIES WINTER TERM 2016/17

SCEPTICISM AND ANTI-SCEPTICISM IN MEDIEVAL JEWISH PHILOSOPHY AND THOUGHT

The tension between reason and revelation has for centuries occupied Jewish philosophers who were committed, on the one hand, to defending Judaism, and, on the other hand, to remaining loyal to philosophical principles.

Maimonides is considered the most prominent Jewish religious philosopher, whose aim was to reconcile philosophy, in particular Aristotelian philosophy, with the fundamental principles of Judaism. But many other Jewish thinkers, before and after him, also struggled with this task, raising the question whether it is possible to attain this reconciliation.

The connection between philosophy and religion was often not an obvious one. As a consequence, it could serve in some cases as grounds for supporting Maimonides' project, while in others it could lead to rejection.

The lecture series "Scepticism and Anti-Scepticism in Medieval Jewish Thought" focuses on sceptical questions, methods, strategies, and approaches raised by Jewish thinkers in the Middle Ages. In the series of lectures, we wish to examine the variety of attitudes presented by these thinkers, and the latest readings of contemporary scholars concerning those attitudes.

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29.11.16: ON THE ROLE OF CERTAIN AND NEAR-CERTAIN KNOWLEDGE IN MAIMONIDES' RELIGIOUS PHILOSOPHY

CHARLES MANEKIN (UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND, COLLEGE PARK/USA)

ABSTRACT

In his famous parable of the palace in the Guide of the Perplexed, Maimonides claims that one who has achieved demonstration to the extent possible of everything demonstrable, and who has come close to certainty in those matters in which one can only come close to it – draws near to “the ruler”, i.e. God (Guide, 3.51). Yet why should the psychological state of certainty be relevant for approaching God? Wouldn't it be more appropriate to emphasize the attainment of knowledge? And why would anything less than demonstrated truths affect this process? In my talk I plan to consider these questions in light of the importance Maimonides' accords towards the possession of well-established truths in the rational soul. I will discuss this importance with special reference to his views on the education of the multitude, the indubitability of the prophetic message, and the necessity of putting deviant philosophers to death. I will argue that the possession of well-established or well-grounded truths in the rational soul lies at the heart of his project, and that the achievement of rational certainty and near-certainty are among the means for achieving this goal.

LECTURER

Charles H. Manekin is Professor of Philosophy at the University of Maryland. He specialises in the history of philosophy, specifically medieval Jewish and Islamic philosophy. The focus of Manekin's research has been the history of logic in Hebrew, the thought of Moses Maimonides and Levi Gersonides, and the problem of free will in Jewish philosophy. He has written books on Maimonides and Gersonides and has edited and translated anthologies of Jewish philosophy for Routledge and Cambridge University Press. Dr. Manekin was awarded a three-year collaboration grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities to prepare a translation and revision of Moritz Steinschneider's Hebrew Translations of the Middle Ages, the first volume of which appeared in 2015. He has taught at the University of Pennsylvania, Bar-Ilan University, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, and Ben-Gurion University of the Negev.

06.12.16: JEWISH AVERROISTS AGAINST KABBALAH: EXAMPLES OF SCEPTICAL STRATEGIES AND ARGUMENTATION

BILL REBIGER (UNIVERSITÄT HAMBURG)

ABSTRACT

From the perspective of rational philosophy, it is not surprising that many of the early opponents of the Kabbalah belong to the camp of the so-called “Jewish Averroists.” Despite the generally accepted opinion that these philosophers were anti-sceptics, certain sceptical elements can be detected in their works. In my lecture I will present and discuss texts written by authors such as Jacob Anatoli, Isaac Albalag, Isaac Polqar, Moses Narboni or Elijah Delmedigo, who are attacking various Kabbalistic claims, with a focus on sceptical strategies and argumentations used by these philosophers.

LECTURER

Bill Rebiger is Research Associate at the Maimonides Centre for Advanced Studies at the University of Hamburg. His current research focuses on the early opponents of Kabbalah with a special focus on sceptical argumentations. He studied Jewish studies and philosophy at the Free University in Berlin and at the Hebrew University Jerusalem (PhD Free University Berlin, 2004), writing his dissertation on „Sefer Shimmush Tehillim: The Book of the Magical Use of Psalms.“ He has written several studies on rabbinic and Hekhalot literature, medieval Jewish magic, and Jewish-Christian relations. Among his publications: „Gittin – Scheidebriefe“ (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008); „Sefer ha-Razim I und II – Das Buch der Geheimnisse I und II“, edited with Peter Schäfer (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009, 2 vols.); and „Sefer Shimmush Tehillim – Buch vom magischen Gebrauch der Psalmen. Edition, Übersetzung und Kommentar“ (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010).

13.12.16: HASDAI CRESCAS' SCEPTICAL CRITIQUE OF MAIMONIDES

WARREN ZEV HARVEY (THE HEBREW UNIVERSITY OF JERUSALEM/ISRAEL)

ABSTRACT

In his "Guide of the Perplexed" Maimonides (1138-1204) sought to anchor the Jewish religion in the principles of Aristotelian science and philosophy. Rabbi Ḥasdai Crescas (c. 1340-1410 or 1411), in his "Light of the Lord," presented a radical critique of Aristotelian physics and metaphysics, and on the basis of this critique he rejected Maimonides' approach. According to Crescas, human reason can prove the existence of a first cause, but cannot prove God's unity or goodness, that is, it cannot prove the God of the Bible. Religion, he argues, is based on prophecy not philosophy.

LECTURER

Warren Zev Harvey is Professor Emeritus in the Department of Jewish Thought at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem where he has taught since 1977. He studied philosophy at Columbia University, writing his PhD dissertation on „Hasdai Crescas' Critique of the Theory of the Acquired Intellect“ (1973). He taught in the Department of Philosophy at McGill University before moving to Jerusalem. He has written more than 150 studies on medieval and modern Jewish philosophers, e.g. Maimonides, Crescas, and Spinoza. Among his publications is "Physics and Metaphysics in Hasdai Crescas" (Amsterdam 1998). He is an EMET Prize laureate in the Humanities (2009).

דע כידון הקדמים האלה רבנו עובד בקט שיהי בקטוה וכוהו
התשובה על שיהי הקט שיהי הקטוה הוא בקטוה
יהיה שיהי הקטוה האלו וכוהו והקטוה השנית

20.12.16 THE SEX LIFE OF A METAPHYSICAL SCEPTIC: PLATONIC THEMES IN GERSONIDES' COMMENTARY ON SONG OF SONGS

YEHUDA HALPER (BAR-ILAN UNIVERSITY, RAMAT-GAN/ISRAEL)

ABSTRACT

Gersonides' "Commentary on the Song of Songs" transforms the celebration of the erotic courtship between Solomon and a young woman into a tale of longing between the material intellect and the acquired intellect. On the whole, the "Commentary's" presentation is Aristotelian: longing is connected to actualising potential, and the active intellect is acquired through the orderly study of the sciences – beginning with logic, then continuing on to mathematics, physics, astronomy, and metaphysics. Yet, at the same time, many main themes of the "Commentary" are Platonic. Like Diotima's description of eros in Plato's Symposium, the object of desire is never reached in the "Commentary". Indeed, this kind of eros comes from "Song of Songs" itself, where the erotic courtship is never consummated in the work. In Gersonides' reading, metaphysics is not grasped by the intellect in the way that mathematics and physics are, since it is not grounded in sensory perception, but in common opinions. Moreover, Gersonides' tale of the material intellect's journey to scientific knowledge is similar in a number of ways to the account of Plato's search for scientific knowledge – and ultimately Plato's lack of solid metaphysical knowledge – in Al-Farabi's "Philosophy of Plato." Gersonides probably did not read Arabic, but could have read Falaquera's paraphrase of Al-Farabi's work in Reshit Hokhmah, or else Falaquera's own account of a similar journey to philosophy in Sefer ha-mevaresh. According to Al-Farabi and thus Falaquera, Plato's intellectual journey ends with the formation of a city that uses the myth of creation presented in the Timaeus as the basis of opinions on which a metaphysics can be built. For Gersonides the Bible, when properly understood, can provide a similar basis of common opinions for grounding metaphysics. Nevertheless, Gersonides himself preferred to study mathematics, physics, and astronomy – sciences he viewed as properly grounded in sensory observation.

LECTURER

Yehuda Halper is Senior Lecturer in the Department of Jewish Philosophy at Bar-Ilan University, Ramat Gan, Israel. He was awarded the Alon Fellowship for Outstanding Young Faculty by the Israeli Council for Higher Education. Previously he taught Philosophy, Jewish Studies, and Hebrew at Tulane University, New Orleans. He studied at Bar-Ilan University (PhD in Jewish Philosophy), the Hebrew University of Jerusalem (MA in Philosophy), and the University of Chicago (BA in Mathematics and Classical Studies).

10.01.17: BETWEEN PHILOSOPHIC OPTIMISM AND FIDEISTIC SCEPTICISM: AN OVERVIEW OF MEDIEVAL JEWISH PHILOSOPHY

HOWARD KREISEL (BEN-GURION UNIVERSITY OF THE NEGEV, BEER-SHEVA/ISRAEL)

ABSTRACT

In this talk I would like to show that the philosophic tradition that penetrated Jewish thought was essentially an optimistic one grounded primarily in the Arabic translations of the writings of Plato, Aristotle and the Neoplatonic philosophy of Plotinus. The Jewish thinkers, following in the footsteps of the Islamic ones, essentially believed that the intellect was capable of apprehending the most fundamental truths regarding God and the structure of the world, whether these truths are attained by way of logical syllogism in the tradition of Aristotle or by way of the illumination of the intellect in the tradition of Plotinus. This optimism can already be detected among the Islamic theologians (Kalām) and it also influenced R. Saadiah Gaon (tenth century). Philosophic optimism also characterises the Islamic philosophers, beginning with Al-Kindi (ninth century), and in the Jewish world, beginning with Isaac Israeli, Saadiah's older contemporary. Subsequently, the Jewish philosophic tradition in Andalusia, particularly the philosophy of Solomon Ibn Gabirol, gives expression to this optimism. In later periods, philosophic optimism characterises the Jewish philosophers of Provence (thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries), whose most important exponent was Gersonides, as well as most of the Jewish philosophers of Spain up to the expulsion.

The most blatant example of philosophic scepticism in medieval Jewish philosophy can be found in the thought of Judah Halevi (twelfth century), who on this issue may have been inspired by Al-Ghazzali. Yet in his case, as in the case of Al-Ghazzali, the use of scepticism came in order to defend religious doctrines and the truths of revelation (what some scholars have termed "fideistic scepticism"). In later periods, the use of scepticism was often tied to the defence of religion, and did not come to question all forms of knowledge, most notably knowledge attained through revelation.

I would like to conclude with the problem of how to interpret Maimonides on this issue. Maimonides' approach to the ability of philosophy to discover fundamental truths, while at times stressing its severe limitations in the area of metaphysics and even natural philosophy, has led to widely divergent interpretations of his thought. I will argue that Maimonides was a qualified optimist in his philosophic approach, and that some of his more radical sceptical statements regarding the limitations of philosophic knowledge may have served a religious purpose.

LECTURER

Howard (Haim) Kreisel teaches in the Department of Jewish Thought at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev. He holds the Miriam Martha Hubert Chair in Jewish Thought and is the Director of the Goldstein-Goren International Center for Jewish Thought. He has written extensively in the field of medieval Jewish philosophy. Among the books he has authored are "Maimonides' Political Thought", "Prophecy: The History of an Idea in Medieval Jewish Philosophy", and "Judaism as Philosophy: Studies in Maimonides and the Medieval Jewish Philosophers of Provence."

לואני אעשה על טוב על כנך ונאמ לו במענה הטאלה הטנית
לאהבכל נאווה את פי וכו' אמנס אמרו כל טוב הוא כמז
כהראוה אוה הנמצאות כלם הנאמר עליהם ירא שהם את
כל אשר עשה והנה טוב מאד' כל בהראוה אוהם אלו טיעז
טבעם והחשדם קצתם בקצתם ידע הנהגות להם בגלג
ופרטואלזה הענין כמו באמרו בכל ביתי נאמן הוא כלומר
שהוא הבין מצאוה עולמי כל הבטה אמהית קיימת כי
הדעה שאינם אמהיות לא יהקיימו אם כן הטנה הפעולות
ההם הם נארו יתעלה אשר כולד מצדס והדאיה על עהדבר

17.01.17: HALAKHIC DOGMATISM, AGGADIC SCEPTICISM: A DUALITY OF MEDIEVAL PHILOSOPHICAL EXEGESIS

DAVID LEMLER (UNIVERSITÉ DE STRASBOURG/FRANCE)

ABSTRACT

As regards the legal aspects of the Jewish tradition, Maimonides might be described as a dogmatic. In his Mishneh Torah, he proposes a final and exhaustive codification of the law, without mentioning the diverging views expressed in his Talmudic sources. He also proposes a dogmatic lists of compulsory beliefs. When we turn to the non-legal aspects of the Biblical and rabbinical tradition, Maimonides appears far lesser assertive. He proposes philosophical allegorical interpretations of prophetic parables, but often stresses the fact that other interpretations are possible and sometimes offers several interpretations of one and the same passage. Maimonides' abandoned project of writing a treatise dedicated to deciphering rabbinical aggadot was taken over by post-Maimonidean philosophers especially in Provence. In their philosophical exegeses of aggadot, authors such as Moses Ibn Tibbon or Levi ben Abraham of Villefranche show the same doubts as regards the possibility of offering a „true“ and final interpretation. What is at stake in this dual epistemic attitude of these philosopher-exegetes? We will argue that it reflects an essential aspect of their philosophical practice understood as a Foucauldian „spirituality“.

LECTURER

David Lemler teaches Jewish thought and philosophy at the Department of Hebrew and Jewish Studies, Université de Strasbourg, France. He completed his PhD in 2015 at the École Pratique des Hautes Études (Sorbonne, Paris) on the different “arts of writing” employed by Medieval Jewish philosophers, from Saadya to Crescas, in relationship to the question of the creation of the world. In his dissertation, he has challenged the paradigm of political esotericism and proposed to see these writing strategies as a genuine philosophical engine to cope with epistemological difficulties raised by the question. In 2014 he published a French translation of Shem Tov Falaquera's Iggeret ha-wikuaḥ.

24.01.17: DOES MAIMONIDES' THEORY OF PARABLES IN THE GUIDE OF THE PERPLEXED SUPPORT A SCEPTICAL READING OF THE WORK?
LAWRENCE J. KAPLAN (MCGILL UNIVERSITY, MONTREAL/CANADA)

ABSTRACT

On the face of it there would seem to be little or no connection between Maimonides' theory of parables in the "Guide of the Perplexed" and a sceptical reading of the work. But is this the case?

Maimonides characterises parables as possessing either an external meaning (Arabic *zāhir*) or an internal meaning (Arabic *bāṭin*). In the "Guide's" introduction however, Maimonides seems to contradict himself regarding the value of a parable's external meaning. On the one hand, he states that the parable's *zāhir*, per se, is worth nothing—except that the *zāhir* serves the paradoxical dual function of first concealing the *bāṭin*, but then pointing to the *bāṭin*, once, that is, one has succeeded in, as it were, "decoding" the *zāhir*. On the other hand, he states that the parable's *zāhir* does possess intrinsic value, since it "contains wisdom that is useful in many respects, among which is the welfare of human societies."

How are we to resolve this contradiction? Might a sceptical reading of the "Guide" provide us with a solution to this problem? Or should we seek to resolve this contradiction in light of the more traditional view of the "Guide" as a bibliocentric work, concerned primarily with the meta-philosophical problem of showing how those parts of the Bible that appear to lack wisdom, do, in fact, if read and understood properly, contain it, if in different ways. My talk will be devoted to an exploration of these alternative approaches.



LECTURER

Lawrence J. Kaplan is Professor of Rabbinics and Jewish philosophy in the Department of Jewish Studies of McGill University, Montréal, Quebec, where he has been teaching for over the past forty years. He received his PhD from Harvard University, and his Rabbinic ordination from the Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary of Yeshiva University. He was a Starr Fellow at the Center for Jewish Studies of Harvard University in 2005, a Tikvah Fellow at the Tikvah Center for Law and Jewish Civilization of New York University Law School in 2011-2012, a Polonsky Fellow at the Oxford Center for Hebrew and Judaic Studies in 2013, and a Research Fellow at the Maimonides Centre for Advanced Studies – Jewish Scepticism at the University of Hamburg in 2016.

Kaplan has published widely in both medieval and modern Jewish thought. He has coedited both “The Thought of Moses Maimonides” and “Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook and Jewish Spirituality.” Perhaps he is best known for his many studies of the thought of Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik and for his translation from the Hebrew of Soloveitchik’s classic essays *Ish ha-halakhah* (“Halakhic Man”), and *Kol Dodi Dofeq* (“It is the Voice of my Beloved Knocking”). His most recent book is “Maimonides between Philosophy and Halakhah: The Lectures of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik on the Guide of the Perplexed” (2016). This comprehensive study by the noted twentieth-century rabbinic scholar and thinker Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik on the philosophy of Maimonides is based on a complete set of notes of R. Soloveitchik’s lectures given at the Bernard Revel Graduate School in 1950-51, taken by Rabbi Gerald (Yaakov) Homnick.

דע כבודן הקדושים משה רבינו עשה בקטנות בקטנות ובגדלות
בהשגחה על עמנו והקטנות שבקטנות היתה הוא בך עד מוצאי
יתעלה שירישיהו קאליו נבאנו ואמרנוג' והבקטנה הטענת



31.01.17: THE PASSION FOR METAPHYSICS IN MAIMONIDES' THOUGHT: A STUDY OF THE GUIDE OF THE PERPLEXED 1:31-35

DOV SCHWARTZ (BAR-ILAN UNIVERSITY, RAMAT-GAN/ISRAEL)

ABSTRACT

Numerous scholars have expressed their views on the nature of Maimonidean rationalism. For the most part, rationalism is judged by its ends and aims: rational conjunction or (according to the agnostic criticism) its absence; the immortality of the intellect, and the like. It is also gauged in relation to the sciences and their acquisition as a religious value. Others viewed the hub of Maimonidean rationalism in the meeting of the Aristotelian and Neoplatonic scientific conceptions and the Bible, that is, rationalist interpretation of Scripture and Aggadah. A passage in the "Guide of the Perplexed" (1:31-35) turns the focus of Maimonidean rationalism into a psychological principle. Everything is overshadowed by the psychological determination that the will to know the primal and the cosmic is inherent in human nature. Maimonides emphasises that even the common people seek universal knowledge and the source of all being, the structure of the psyche, and so forth. Moreover, the quest for knowledge is instinctive, and is characteristic of man as such.

The sexual motif concealed in the unit's discourse as a whole is expressed in the passion to know. Maimonides' use of sexuality is meant, from the outset, to highlight the negative and the harm to be expected. The use of this motif teaches that the passion for knowledge is almost as uncontrollable as the sexual act. And this is why the risk entailed in the passion for knowledge is so great. Maimonides views the sexual urge as man's great nadir. The „sense of touch“ is perceived as a disgrace. But it is specifically that sense that enables us to describe the fundamental passion for metaphysics, that is, the quest for knowledge of the most sublime sort. There is a sort of circularity here, in which the highest and lowest points meet.

Maimonides wove both the aim of knowledge and the political goal into his discussion. The ruler of the exemplary state must restrain the metaphysical drive, and turn it into a cathartic element. This task becomes central in the ruler's being. This unit of chapters presents an almost Copernican revolution in the rational hierarchy of values of Jewish society. This was a revolution from the perspective of the history of Andalusian ideas and philosophy. For Maimonides, there was no upheaval here; his commentary to the Mishnah already hints at these trends.



Now, the key to understanding the human psychological structure lies in the acquisition of knowledge. The darkest urges in the definition of man are the sexual drive and the urge for knowledge. Maimonides defines the two extremes between which man oscillates. He states at the beginning of his introduction to Tractate Avot that there is a single soul with many faculties. Psychological unity now acquires a new colouration: the animative dimension of procreation and the rational dimension of the acquisition of knowledge meet. Maimonides' approach can be defined as „belief in rationality.“ He composed a psychological theory of the passion for knowledge, anchored it in man's psychological structure, and found its full realisation in attaining the upper stages of knowledge.

LECTURER

Dov Schwartz is Professor in the Department of Jewish Thought at Bar-Ilan University, Ramat-Gan, Israel. He completed his PhD at Bar-Ilan University (1990), writing his dissertation on “The Philosophical-Religious Thought of Rabbi Samuel Z̄arza” (in Hebrew). He has published extensively on topics such as Maimonides' thought, Shem Tov Ibn Shaprut, Rabbi J. B. Soloveitchik, Rabbi A. I. Kook, magic, astrology, and messianism. Among his publications are “From Phenomenology to Existentialism: The Philosophy of Rabbi J. B. Soloveitchik”, translated by Batya Stein (Leiden: Brill, 2013); “Central Problems of Medieval Jewish Philosophy” (Leiden: Brill, 2005); and “Studies on Astral Magic in Medieval Jewish Philosophy”, translated by David Louvish and Batya Stein (Leiden: Brill, 2005). At Bar-Ilan University he has served as Dean of the Faculty of Humanities (2003-2006), Head of the Interdisciplinary Unit (2011-2016), Head of the Department of Philosophy (1999-2002), and Head of the Department of Music (2007-2011). Currently he is head of the Dr. Zerah Warhaftig Institute for the Research on Religious Zionism and Chair of the Nathalie and Isidor Friedman Cathedra for the Teaching of Rabbi J. B. Soloveitchik's Thought, both at Bar-Ilan University, and Senior Researcher at the Shalom Hartman Institute, Jerusalem.

07.02.17: SCEPTICISM AT THE SERVICE OF REVELATION: LOGIC AND EPISTEMOLOGY IN JUDAH HALEVI'S KUZARI

ARIEL MALACHI (BAR-ILAN UNIVERSITY, RAMAT-GAN/ISRAEL)

ABSTRACT

Many scholars have acknowledged the importance of Judah Halevi's criticism of philosophy. Some of them even indicated Halevi's use of philosophical tools to establish his criticism, in a way that might be regarded as a sceptical approach to philosophy. Nevertheless, the general impression from scholarly studies is that the criticism of philosophy is merely a secondary assisting goal for the main goal of the Kuzari, namely proposing revelation as an alternative to philosophy, and accepting revelation in a very unsceptical manner. Maybe that is the reason those scholars did not tend to analyse Halevi's criticism of philosophy systematically. In my talk, I will try to identify the principles of Halevi's criticism of philosophy. In this regard, I will try to argue: (a) that the criticism of philosophy represents a sceptical approach based on logical and epistemological principles of Aristotelian logic; (b) that this sceptical approach is used not only to criticise philosophy, but also to establish revelation. Consequently, I will try to suggest that for Halevi, the same sceptic approach can propose revelation not only as a philosophically legitimate option, but also more persuasive and therefore preferable.

LECTURER

Ariel Malachi is a PhD candidate in the Department of Jewish philosophy at Bar-Ilan University, Ramat-Gan. He also holds a Bachelor of laws degree (LL.B) from Bar-Ilan University. He is a member of the Israel Bar Association, and licensed to practice as a lawyer.

His main interests are medieval Jewish and Islamic philosophy. His research focuses on reason and revelation, philosophy and religion, their relations and interconnections. In his current research he is investigating the role of Aristotelian logic in twelfth-century Jewish thought in regard to these themes. He is also interested in the philosophy of Jewish law, and the influence of philosophy on halakhic rulings.

14.02.17: ANTI-SCEPTICISM WITHIN THE JEWISH AVERROIST SCHOOL

RACHELI HALIVA (UNIVERSITÄT HAMBURG)

ABSTRACT

Numerous attempts were made in the Middle Ages by philosophers and theologians to explain the origin of the world. Positioning themselves with regard to this crucial issue was particularly important for medieval thinkers of all religions, since it indicated their relation to one of the fundamental principles of their faith. The present lecture presents the anti-sceptical approach, offered by Yitzhak Albalag and Yitzhak Polqar – two Jewish Averroists of the fourteenth century who lived in northern Spain, to one of the most fundamental questions every religious philosopher has to address: is the world created by God ex nihilo, that is from absolute non-existence, as suggested by religious tradition, or, is the world eternal, as argued by Aristotle?

Albalag and Polqar adopted the philosophy of Ibn Rushd and considered him to be the best commentator of Aristotle. Their interpretation of Judaism, in light of Averroes' Aristotelianism, was based on the assumption that Judaism and true philosophy must always coincide. These two thinkers, then, explain the origin of the world, from a philosophical point of view which clearly rejects the traditional belief.

LECTURER

Racheli Haliva is Junior professor for Jewish philosophy and religion at the University of Hamburg and one of the Co-directors of the Maimonides Centre for Advanced Studies. She earned her PhD at McGill University in Montreal, Canada, in 2015. Her dissertation with the title "Isaac Polqar - A Jewish Philosopher or a Philosopher and a Jew? A Study of the Relationship between Philosophy and Religion in Isaac Polqar's ,Ezer ha-Dat ("In Support of the Law") and Teshuvat Apiqoros ("A Response to the Heretic")" was completed under the supervision of Professor Carlos Fraenkel and Professor Lawrence Kaplan. Her main research interests are Jewish Averroism, medieval Jewish and Islamic philosophy, political philosophy, philosophy of religion, and Jewish converts in the Middle Ages. She is currently working on scepticism and anti-scepticism in medieval Jewish and Islamic philosophy, and on scepticism in Jewish Averroism in particular. Among her publications are "Isaac Polqar", in: Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (forthcoming); "The Jewish Exile: Divine Punishment or Natural Event? Isaac Polqar's Novel Approach" (forthcoming).

