

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

# SCEPTICISM AND ANTI-SCEPTICISM IN JEWISH AVERROISM



**MAIMONIDES CENTRE  
FOR ADVANCED STUDIES**

NOVEMBER 12–14, 2018





VENUE:  
**MAIMONIDES CENTRE  
FOR ADVANCED STUDIES**  
SEMINAR ROOM 5060  
SCHLUETERSTRASSE 51  
20146 HAMBURG

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

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

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

**Monday, November 12, 2018**

9:30–10:00 Welcome and Opening Remarks  
Racheli Haliva (Universität Hamburg/Germany)

**Keynote Lecture**

10:00–11:00 **Was Al-Ghazālī an Avicennist? Some Provocative Reflections on Jewish Averroism**  
Steven Harvey (Bar-Ilan University, Ramat-Gan/Israel)

**Panel 1**

11:15–13:00 **What is Jewish Averroism?**  
Chair: Yonatan Shemesh  
**Averroism and Interreligious Polemics in Late Medieval Iberia**  
Daniel J. Lasker (Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, Beer-Sheva/Israel)  
**Similarities and Dissimilarities between Jewish and Latin Averroism**  
Giovanni Licata (Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa/Italy)  
**Who and What is a Jewish Averroist? Remarks on Averroes' First Jewish Readers**  
Reimund Leicht (Hebrew University, Jerusalem/Israel)

13:00–14:00 Lunch

**Panel 2**

14:00–15:30 **Reason, Scriptures, and Jewish Law**  
Chair: Hannah Kasher  
**The Interpretation of the Garden of Eden among Averroistic Maimonideans and the Scope of Human Knowledge**  
David Lemler (Université de Strasbourg/France)  
**Is Maimonides' Biblical Exegesis Averroistic?**  
Mercedes Rubio (Polis–The Jerusalem Institute of Languages and Humanities, Jerusalem/Israel)  
**Double Truth in Jewish Averroist Philosophy**  
Shalom Sadik (Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, Beer-Sheva/Israel)

15:30–16:00 Coffee Break

**Panel 3**

16:00–17:30 **Averroistic Maimonideanism I**  
Chair: Yoav Meyrav  
**Between Scepticism and Anti-Scepticism in Judah ha-Cohen's Presentation of Averroes in the *Midrash ha-Hokhmah***  
Resianne Smidt van Gelder-Fontaine (Universiteit van Amsterdam/Netherlands)  
**Socratic Scepticism in Hebrew: Al-Ḥarīzī and Shem Ṭob Falaquera and Their Influence**  
Yehuda Halper (Bar-Ilan University, Ramat-Gan/Israel)  
**Averroes' Influence upon Theological Responses to Scepticism in Late Medieval Jewish Philosophy**  
Shira Weiss (Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, Beer-Sheva/Israel)

19:00 Dinner

**Tuesday, November 13, 2018**

10:00–12:30 Visit to the Jewish Cemetery, Altona

13:30–15:00 Lunch

**Panel 4**

15:00–16:30 **Averroistic Maimonideanism II**  
Chair: Warren Zev Harvey  
**Scepticism and Anti-Scepticism in Samuel Ibn Tibbon's Work**  
Rebecca Kneller-Rowe (Independent Scholar)  
**Averroes' *Incoherence of the Incoherence* and Narboni's Commentary on the *Guide of the Perplexed***  
Yonatan Shemesh (University of Chicago/USA)  
**Isaac Polqar's Anti-Sceptical Approach towards Miracles**  
Racheli Haliva (Universität Hamburg/Germany)



Wednesday, November 14, 2018

Panel 5

10:00-11:30

**Physics**

Chair: Resianne Smidt van Gelder-Fontaine

**Gersonides and Ibn Kaspi on Scepticism about the Future**

Alexander Green (SUNY, University at Buffalo/USA)

**Sources of Knowledge about the Heavens: Profayt Duran and Averroes**

Maud Kozodoy (Independent Scholar)

**Crescas' Attitude towards Averroes**

Warren Zev Harvey (Hebrew University, Jerusalem/Israel)

11:30-12:00

Coffee Break

Panel 6

12:00-13:30

**Metaphysics and Theology**

Chair: Racheli Haliva

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

Michael Engel (Universität Hamburg/Germany)

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

Esti Eisenmann (The Open University of Israel)

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

Yoav Meyrav (Universität Hamburg/Germany)

13:30-15:30

Lunch

Panel 7

15:30-17:00

**Prophecy and Human Perfection**

Chair: Alexander Green

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

Giada Coppola (Universität Hamburg/Germany)

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

Bakinaz Abdalla (McGill University, Montreal/Canada)

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

Adrian Sackson (Tel-Aviv University/Israel)

17:00-17:30

Coffee Break

Keynote Lecture

17:30-19:00

**The Jewish Averroists—Linking Thoughts between Maimonides and Spinoza**

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

19:30

Dinner

### Was al-Ghazālī an Avicennist? Some Provocative Reflections on Jewish Averroism

Steven Harvey will begin by considering a fascinating but somewhat complex question: was al-Ghazālī an Avicennist? In short, it may be argued that no medieval scholar understood and valued Avicenna's philosophy and science as much as his learned critic and accuser al-Ghazālī. But what is an "Avicennist," or, for that matter, an "Avicennan" or an "Ibn Sīnian"? What do we mean by these terms? This question is addressed as a means of offering perspective on the meaning of terms such as "Averroist," "Averroistic," "Averroean," "Ibn Rushdian," and "Averroism" that lie at the heart of our conference, its very title, most of its session titles, and many of its lectures. Do we adopt these terms from the medieval Latins? Or perhaps from historians of Scholastic thought? And if so, do they also apply to medieval Jewish thought as they may to Scholastic thought? Harvey will point to some pitfalls and snags inherent in the use of these terms, particularly in the context of post-Maimonidean Jewish thought, and suggest a simple working definition of "Averroist" that may be more effective for discerning and understanding the scepticism and anti-scepticism of medieval Jewish followers of Averroes. To what extent did those medieval Jewish Averroists perceive Averroes to be a sceptic and to what extent did they perceive him to be an anti-sceptic? Harvey will also discuss in what sense Averroes was considered "The Commentator" by Jewish and Christian philosophers.

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

Steven Harvey is a professor emeritus of philosophy at Bar-Ilan University in Ramat-Gan. He is the president of the Commission for Jewish Philosophy of the *Société Internationale pour l'Étude de la Philosophie Médiévale* (SIEPM). He has published extensively on medieval Jewish and Islamic philosophers, with special focus on Averroes' commentaries on Aristotle and on the influence of the Islamic philosophers on Jewish thought. He is the author of *Falaquera's Epistle of the Debate: An Introduction to Jewish Philosophy* (1987) and the editor of *The Medieval Hebrew Encyclopedias of Science and Philosophy* (2000) and *Anthology of the Writings of Avicenna* (2009 [in Hebrew]). He received his PhD from Harvard University.

### Averroism and Interreligious Polemics in Late Medieval Iberia

During the period of mass Jewish conversions to Christianity in Iberia in the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, a number of Jewish authors accused philosophy, most notably what might be called "Averroism," of undermining Jewish loyalty in light of Christian pressures. The opponents of philosophy, many of whom were advocates of the competing theology of the Kabbalah, argued that since Averroism teaches that no religion is rationally superior to any other and that permanence of the soul is dependent upon intellectual rather than religious accomplishments, many Jews had concluded that there was no reason to suffer for their Judaism in this world when it would make no difference to them in the next. Thus, the spread of philosophy among the general Jewish population of late medieval Iberia had a deleterious effect on Jewish continuity. This attack has been repeated by some modern historians, especially Yitzhak Baer.

There are a number of reasons for rejecting this attack on philosophy. Shalom Sadik has pointed out that none of the most prominent Jewish intellectuals who converted to Christianity during this period relied on Averroism to justify their actions. Those conversos who left explanations for their abandonment of Judaism were motivated by other intellectual considerations. Daniel Lasker discussed the major role played by Iberian Jewish philosophers of this period in the polemical opposition to the Christian mission and the specifically Averroistic aspects of their criticism of Christian doctrines in an article published almost forty years ago entitled "Averroistic Trends in Jewish-Christian Polemics in the Late Middle Ages," *Speculum*, 55:2 (1980): 294–304. Of course, these arguments against Baer's position do not rule out the possibility that the average converso's Jewish faith was indeed undermined by rationalistic ideas before conversion and thus that Averroism did contribute to the mass conversions in some way.

In the talk, Lasker proposes to revisit this issue and to discuss whether any conclusions can be drawn concerning the part played by Jewish Averroism in the mass conversions of Sephardic Jewry.

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

Professor Daniel J. Lasker is the Norbert Blechner Professor of Jewish Values (emeritus) in the Goldstein-Goren Department of Jewish Thought at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, Beer-Sheva in Israel. He holds a BA, MA, and PhD from Brandeis University and also studied at the Hebrew University. Lasker has taught at Yale University, Princeton University, the University of Toronto, Ohio State University, the University of Texas, the University of Washington, Boston College, and other institutions. He is the author of over 250 publications in the fields of medieval Jewish philosophy, especially on the thought of Rabbi Judah Halevi, the Jewish-Christian debate including editions of a number of central Jewish polemical texts and Karaism. Among his publications are: *Theological Encounters at a Crossroads*—an Edition and Translation of Judah Hadassi's *Eshkol ha-Kofer*, First Commandment, and Studies of the Book's Judaeo-Arabic and Byzantine Contexts (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2018) (together with Johannes Niehoff-Panagiotidis); *From Judah Hadassi to Elijah Bashyatchi: Studies in Late Medieval Karaite Philosophy* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2008); *The Sage Simhah Isaac Lutski. An Eighteenth-Century Karaite Rabbi. Selected Writings* (Jerusalem: Ben-Zvi Institute, 2015 [in Hebrew]); and *Jewish Philosophical Polemics Against Christianity in the Middle Ages*, 2nd ed. (2007).

### **Similarities and Dissimilarities between Jewish and Latin Averroism**

Today Averroism is a controversial historiographical concept among historians of Latin philosophy. This was not the case in the period ranging from the second half of the nineteenth century until the first half of the twentieth century, when this historiographical label was widely accepted thanks to the pioneering studies of Ernest Renan (*Averroès et l'averroïsme*) and Pierre Mandonnet (*Siger de Brabant et l'averroïsme latin au XIII<sup>e</sup> siècle*). Afterwards, under the criticisms of various historians among them Fernand van Steenberghen and René Antoine Gauthier the term "Averroism" was used with suspicion and frequently replaced with that of "radical Aristotelianism," at least for the Aristotelians of the thirteenth century, such as Boethius of Dacia and Siger of Brabant. Less controversial among historians is the existence of Averroist thinkers in the Renaissance, as has already been shown, for example, by the fundamental studies on Paduan Aristotelianism by Bruno Nardi.

Although the notion of "Jewish Averroism" also sprung from Renan's masterpiece, it was not questioned in Jewish studies, and until today has been considered a valuable tool for describing an effective current of thought, as Steven Harvey showed in an important article published in 2000 ("On the Nature and Extent of Jewish Averroism: Renan's *Averroès et l'averroïsme Revisited*," *Jewish Studies Quarterly*, 7:2 (2000): 100–119).

Indeed, whilst Averroes' influence on the Latin philosophy of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries is still debated, it is beyond any doubt that the Jewish philosophers of the Middle Ages who came after Maimonides had a deeper knowledge of Averroes' thought than their Christian contemporaries, thanks to the Arabic-into-Hebrew translations made by the enlightened circles of Provençal Jews who had escaped from Spain.

The momentous impact of Averroes' translations on medieval Jewish philosophy cannot be underestimated, although it is obvious that reading Averroes' texts or even commenting on them is not a sufficient condition to be considered a Jewish Averroist. Yet Averroes' more faithful followers among them Isaac Albalag, Moshe Narboni, Isaac Polqar, Joseph ibn Kaspi, and Elijah Del Medigo seem to have shared a common interpretation of Averroes' legacy on the following themes: the legitimacy and necessity of philosophical investigation for the enlightened few, the rhetorical nature of the Torah, the elitism of knowledge, the achievement of beatitude through speculative knowledge, the conception of the First Mover as an efficient cause (not only final), eternal creation, the immutable order of nature, and so on.

It is worth noting that, with some significant exceptions, Jewish Averroists did not support two doctrines which are commonly attributed to Latin Averroists: the unicity of the material intellect and the double-truth theory. Thus, it could be helpful to investigate the analogies and differences between Jewish and Latin Averroism (which have precise historical reasons in the transmission of Averroes' texts) for a better understanding of what Jewish Averroism really is. Moreover, we also need to investigate whether or not the history of Jewish and Latin Averroism run on parallel tracks.

**Giovanni Licata** (Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa/Italy)

Giovanni Licata (PhD 2012 in history of philosophy) is a post-doctoral researcher at the Scuola Normale Superiore of Pisa in collaboration with the Istituto Nazionale di Studi sul Rinascimento (Florence). He is currently working on the edition and translation of Elijah Del Medigo's commentary on Averroes' *De substantia orbis* (with Michael Engel). His main fields of research are the philosophy of Spinoza, Averroism, and Renaissance philosophy. Among his publications are *La via della ragione. Elia del Medigo e l'averroismo di Spinoza* (2013), *L'averroismo in età moderna (1400–1700)* (ed., 2013), and *Tradizione e illuminismo in Uriel da Costa* (ed. with O. Proietti, 2016).

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

Averroes' name is not mentioned anywhere in Maimonides' own philosophical and religious works, but in his letter to Samuel ibn Tibbon he famously recommends—at least according to some of the surviving manuscripts—the study of Aristotle's works together with the latter's commentaries. Little is known about the addressee's immediate acquaintance with these commentaries, let alone with their author's philosophy. However, the subsequent development of Jewish philosophy during the thirteenth century can indeed be described as a story of the gradual integration of Averroes' works into the Jewish philosophical curriculum in medieval Europe. The literary history of the Hebrew translations of Averroes' works has been intensively studied since the nineteenth century, but there is still considerable uncertainty regarding the inner dynamics of the early reception history of Averroistic thought among thirteenth-century Jews. What were the motives for translating and studying Averroes side by side or beyond the recommendation found in Maimonides' letter to Samuel ibn Tibbon? Who of the Jewish thinkers, authors, and translators who read Averroes became aware of the fact that he might be much more than a mere "commentator" and that his works contained a distinct philosophical outlook which stood in contrast to other medieval "Aristotelianisms" like those of al-Fārābī and Avicenna? These questions have a direct impact on the question of the profile of what can be called "Jewish philosophy" during the thirteenth century and what can appropriately be called "Jewish Averroism"—perhaps also in contradistinction to contemporary "Latin Averroism"—in that period of time.

**Reimund Leicht** (Hebrew University of Jerusalem/Israel)

Reimund Leicht (PhD 2004, Freie Universität Berlin) is the Ethel Backenroth Senior Lecturer in Jewish thought and history and the head of the programme for history and philosophy of science at the Hebrew University, Jerusalem. His fields of research are the ancient and medieval history of science, medieval Jewish philosophy, and Christian Kabbalah (Johannes Reuchlin). Together with Giuseppe Veltri, he is the academic director of the DFG-funded "PESHAT in Context" research project on premodern scientific and philosophical Hebrew terminology. Among his publications are *Astrologumena Judaica* (Tübingen: 2006) and *Verzeichnis der Hebraica in der Bibliothek Johannes Reuchlins* (with W. v. Abel, Ostfildern: 2005).

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

Maimonides' interpretation of the Garden of Eden is located in two strategic places in the *Guide of the Perplexed* (*Guide* 1:2 and 2:30). It is both one of the most complete interpretations of a biblical parable in the *Guide* and one which requires a close reading and "connecting chapters one with another." This interpretation involves a reflexion on the kind of knowledge accessible to man as a corporeal being endowed with an intellect. The story of the Garden of Eden is a metaphor for the relationship between the diverse faculties of the soul. The intellect is prevented from grasping intellectual knowledge because of the influence of the imaginative and appetitive faculties. While commentators on the *Guide* have discussed which faculties were represented by each of the different characters of the story, Josef Stern has recently suggested a radical consequence of Maimonides' interpretation: since "according to what has been laid down by divine wisdom, it is impossible for matter to exist without form and for any of the forms...to exist without matter" (*Guide* 3:8, 341), human knowledge is fundamentally limited as regards metaphysical objects. If this interpretation is correct, the interpretation of the Garden of Eden is a strategic *locus* for a sceptical interpretation of the *Guide*. Averroistic Maimonideans, in their commentaries on the *Guide* or in other writings, offered alternative interpretations of the story, with major implications for the question of the scope of human knowledge. The positions of several authors such as Levi ben Avraham, Moses of Marseilles, Moses Narboni, Josef ibn Kaspi, and Gersonides will be examined in the lecture.

**David Lemler** (Université de Strasbourg/France)

David Lemler is an assistant professor in Jewish thought at Université de Strasbourg (France). He wrote his PhD dissertation (2015) on the issue of esoteric writing in medieval Jewish philosophy. Among his publications, he has translated Shem Ṭob Ibn Falaquera's *Iggeret ha-Wikkuaḥ* into French.

### Is Maimonides' Biblical Exegesis Averroistic?

Maimonides was a contemporary of Averroes and one of the first Jewish scholars to express appreciation for Averroes' writings. Even if it is not possible to ascertain whether the latter's teachings influenced Maimonides' work, there are striking similarities between their philosophical standpoints.

Both of them consider Aristotle to be their main source of philosophical inspiration. Both defend the need to restrict the teaching of philosophy to certain intellectual elites. Both are concerned with the relation between philosophy and religion, between reason and faith. Both of them examine the exoteric and esoteric teachings of Scripture and the role of allegory in sacred texts. Both were attacked at one point or another for eroding the foundations of religion with their teachings.

Contrary to what Latin Averroists claimed, in his *Decisive Treatise* Averroes asserts that there is one single truth that is offered at different levels of interpretation and comprehension. For him, both the literal and the allegorical meanings of a biblical text are relevant for the transmission of truth because they are addressed to different audiences. In this context, he considers logical demonstration as the paradigm and decisive referent of truth, with the power of determining when the meaning of the sacred text should be interpreted as an allegory. This begs the question of the extent of the intellectual apprehension obtained through the literal sense.

Maimonides' main concern in the *Guide of the Perplexed* is the use of language and the role of reason in the apprehension of truth about God and the created world through individual terms and parables in the Bible. Like Averroes, Maimonides focusses on rational demonstration as the paradigm for the correct interpretation of the sacred text. Unlike Averroes, he outright dismisses the use of the literal meaning of a text that can be understood allegorically and warns of the danger of following one's own imagination.

Both Averroes and Maimonides follow Aristotle closely. However, Aristotle had pointed to a more suitable method than demonstration for attaining knowledge of difficult matters based on the notion of signs, which allows for the apprehension of the unknown through that which is known. The lecture will be devoted to exploring the similarities and differences between Averroes' and Maimonides' hermeneutic principles, focusing on their acquaintance with Aristotle's notion of signs, a key gnoseological element for biblical exegesis.



**Mercedes Rubio** (Polis—The Jerusalem Institute of Languages and Humanities, Jerusalem/Israel)

Mercedes Rubio graduated in philosophy from the Universidad de Navarra in 1991. The following year, she obtained the *Diplome Européen d'Études Médiévales* in Rome and in 1993 she moved to Israel, where she received her PhD from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem in 2002 with a dissertation later published as *Aquinas and Maimonides on the Possibility of the Knowledge of God*. She has been a member of the international *Corpus Thomisticum* project since 2009 and a faculty member of Polis—The Jerusalem Institute of Languages and Humanities since 2012, where she currently holds the position of director of research and institutional relations. She has publications in the field of comparative medieval thought and is interested in exchanges among Greek, Latin, Hebrew, and Arabic thinkers on issues relating to the theory of knowledge and the philosophy of language.

### **Double Truth in Jewish Averroist Philosophy**

Shalom Sadik will analyse the use of the theory of double truth by some Jewish Averroists. This theory claims that there are two different truths that contradict each other: truth of religion and truth of philosophy. For example, according to this theory it is possible to believe as Jews that the world was created by God while as philosophers to accept that the world is eternal. There are two Jewish authors, Isaac Albalag and Elijah Del Medigo, who clearly explain this theory. However, it may also be found in the writings of other Jewish Averroists such as Isaac Polqar.

In this lecture, the opinion of Albalag on this question will be firstly analysed (or summarised). It will be shown that in the introduction to his work *Tiqqun ha-De'ot* [Correction of the Opinions] he describes prophetic truth as completely incomprehensible to non-prophets; only prophets can understand prophecy. According to Albalag, there were no prophets in his time, which meant that nobody could understand the true prophetic meaning of prophecy. In note 30 of his book (the lengthiest note), Albalag firstly gave philosophical proofs of the eternity of the world and secondly interpreted the Bible according to this opinion. However, he thirdly said that he did not believe in the eternity of the world and, as a good Jew, that he believed in the prophets who proclaimed creation. In the final section of the lecture, it will be concluded that Albalag did not truly believe in double truth. However, he wanted to speak to two kinds of people. While addressing people who believed that religious beliefs came from the authority of the prophets, he said he believed the literal meaning of the prophets. While addressing people who understood that philosophy has to define belief, he exposed his true position that the Bible must be interpreted according to the true philosophy.

In the last part of the lecture, Sadik will analyse one example of the use of double-truth theory, although its author did not describe it in those terms. Isaac Polqar, after his arguments against the immorality of states, also gave philosophical proof that the situation of the Jews was morally better in exile than in their own state. By the end of this passage, he had also said that he did not truly believe his precedent opinion, but believed, like all Jews, in the redemption of a Jewish state by the Messiah.

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

Shalom Sadik is a senior lecturer in the Department of Jewish Thought at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev. He has written more than fifty articles on different topics including free will in medieval Jewish philosophy, the question of natural law in medieval Jewish philosophy, the religious thinking of the Jewish apostate in medieval Spain, and the translation of philosophical texts from Greek and Arabic into Arabic Latin and Hebrew. Among his publications are two books: *Essence of Choice in Jewish Medieval Philosophy* (Magnes: Jerusalem, 2017 [in Hebrew]) and *Ideology of Apostasy* (Magnes: Jerusalem, 2019 [in Hebrew]).

### Between Scepticism and Anti-Scepticism in Judah ha-Cohen's Presentation of Averroes in the *Midrash ha-Hokhmah*

The thirteenth-century Hebrew encyclopaedia *Midrash ha-Hokhmah* represents a unique case in the reception history of Averroes among Jews. Written originally in Arabic in Toledo in the 1230s, it offers its readers an extensive survey of Averroes' commentaries on Aristotle's treatises on natural philosophy and on Aristotle's *Metaphysics*. Its author, Judah ha-Cohen of Toledo, composed his book at a time when Averroes was not yet widely studied either among Jews or among Christians. It thus seems to constitute the first case of the large-scale general reception of Averroes. Later, in Italy, Judah ha-Cohen made a Hebrew translation of his work (c. 1247) at a time when Averroes' commentaries on natural philosophy had, for the most part, not yet been translated into Hebrew. For some decades, therefore, the *Midrash ha-Hokhmah* was the only Hebrew source for Jews to study Averroes. Judah ha-Cohen presents the commentaries in an abridged form, alternating partial literal translations with paraphrases or summaries of Averroes' words. It is obvious that the Hebrew author regards Averroes as *the* authoritative source for studying Aristotle.

Yet this first large-scale reception of Averroes' commentaries in Hebrew is marked by an ambivalent attitude on the part of its compiler. Although Judah ha-Cohen clearly aims to make contemporary science and philosophy available to his coreligionists, he is also very critical of Aristotelian philosophy in general and of Averroes' adherence to Aristotle in particular. Indeed, he questions the very reliability of philosophical knowledge as expounded by Averroes. Absolute certainty, he holds, can only be provided by religious knowledge, that is, Jewish tradition.

In her lecture, Smidt van Gelder-Fontaine will first address the way in which Judah ha-Cohen presents and uses Averroes' commentaries, as well as his critical stance towards his sources. She will then focus on the question: to what extent does the *Midrash ha-Hokhmah* belong to "Jewish Averroism"? Put differently: can an author who divulges Averroes' commentaries but at the same time warns against their contents be considered to be an Averroist?

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

Resianne Smidt van Gelder-Fontaine lectures at the Universiteit van Amsterdam at the Department of Hebrew and Jewish Studies. Her field of research is medieval Jewish philosophy and science. Among her publications are *In Defence of Judaism: Abraham Ibn Daud* (Brill, 1990); *Latin-into-Hebrew: Texts and Studies* (Brill, 2013) (together with Gad Freudenthal); and *Otot Ha-Shamayim: Samuel ibn Tibbon's Hebrew Version of Aristotle's Meteorology* (Brill, 1995).

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

How did medieval Hebrew readers encounter Socrates? Was the Socrates they knew the same as the Socrates we know from Plato's dialogues? Some of the most important sources for the character of Socrates came from loose, heavily edited translations of Arabic works. Among these, perhaps the most important were Judah al-Ḥarīzī's *Musare ha-filosofim*, a modifying translation of Ḥunain ibn Ishāq's *Ādāb al-Falāsifa*, and Shem Ṭob Falaquera's *Reshit Hokhmah*, which contained short accounts of Socrates derived from Abu Naṣr al-Fārābī's *Philosophy of Plato*. It is not entirely clear where Ḥunain ibn Ishāq and al-Fārābī obtained their accounts of Socrates, but both are relatively far from Plato. Both portray Socrates as an erotic lover of wisdom; indeed, one absorbed in a kind of divine madness, who chose to die rather than give up philosophy. In both accounts, especially in their Hebrew versions, Socrates is not a particularly appealing person, but a symbol of a choice that would be best avoided: the choice between philosophy and state-sanctioned beliefs, i.e. in the eyes of these thinkers, religiously sanctioned beliefs. The Hebrew Socrates thus represents a paradox: as one absorbed in divine madness, he epitomises a kind of religious philosophy. Yet it is precisely this philosophy that runs counter to the religious views of the people, who accordingly force him to choose between divine madness or death.

This paradox is somewhat similar to the paradox of the *Apology*, according to which Socrates is led by the Oracle of Delphi and his *daemonion* to question everything, including his own religious beliefs and those of the city. A similar paradox emerges in Falaquera's *Epistle of the Debate*, in which a philosophically oriented Sage debates with a religious Hasid. The Sage claims that philosophy is the best way to understand and worship God, while the Hasid is concerned that philosophy undermines religion. Ostensibly, the debate concludes with the agreement of both thinkers that philosophy is the proper way to become closer to God, and the Sage accordingly agrees to write books of Averroean philosophy for the Hasid. However, in order to reach this agreement, the Sage gives up free, open questions of philosophy since they can potentially undermine faith; that is, he gives up unfettered philosophy. Falaquera thus presents the Sage as saving philosophy by giving up divine madness in favour of moderation. Such moderation may save the philosopher from death, but is he or she then still truly a philosopher?

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

Yehuda Halper is a senior lecturer in the Department of Jewish Thought at Bar-Ilan University. He is the recipient of the Yigal Alon Fellowship for Outstanding Young Researchers and he is an organiser of the “Reception and Impact of Aristotelian Logic in Medieval Jewish Culture” research group at the Israel Institute for Advanced Studies in Jerusalem. Previously, he taught Jewish thought and Hebrew at Tulane University in New Orleans, USA. He studied at Bar-Ilan (PhD, with highest distinction), the Hebrew University of Jerusalem (MA), and the University of Chicago (BA in Classics and Mathematics with honours in both as well as general honours).

### **Averroes’ Influence upon Theological Responses to Scepticism in Late Medieval Jewish Philosophy**

In his introduction to *Sefer ha-'Iqqarim* [Book of Principles], Joseph Albo argues that philosophy is not only permitted, but necessary for one to arrive at true faith, as argued by Averroes in his *Faṣl al-Maqāl* [Decisive Treatise], despite the concern that such inquiry could lead to scepticism or disbelief. In an effort to demonstrate the superiority of Judaism, Albo, among other Averroistic Jewish polemicists, drew upon Maimonides’ distinction between the logically impossible, which even God cannot make possible, and the naturally impossible, which is impossible according to the laws of nature but which God can make possible (*Guide of the Perplexed* I:73 and III:15).

Albo argues that a religion may demand a belief in a doctrine that contradicts natural impossibility, but not in a doctrine that assumes a logical impossibility. In his polemic against Christianity in III:25 of *Sefer ha-'Iqqarim*, he argues that a belief must be conceivable by the mind, even if it is impossible in nature, and attempts to demonstrate the logical impossibility of Christian tenets. Other Averroistic Jewish polemicists similarly argue for the rational superiority of Judaism by defending the rational possibility of Jewish beliefs, such as creation and revelation, while discrediting Christian doctrines that the mind cannot conceive, such as the Trinity, the incarnation, and the virgin birth. Such philosophical argumentation was particularly significant in the late Middle Ages, due to Christian efforts to encourage scepticism in order to convert Jews and Jewish efforts to resist their persecutors’ pressure and demonstrate Judaism to be the authentic divine law.

**Shira Weiss** (Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, Beer-Sheva/Israel)

Shira Weiss is a postdoctoral fellow at Ben-Gurion University and the author of *Joseph Albo on Free Choice: Exegetical Innovation in Medieval Jewish Philosophy* (Oxford University Press, 2017). She holds a PhD in medieval Jewish philosophy and has taught at Yeshiva University.



### Scepticism and Anti-Scepticism in Samuel Ibn Tibbon's Work

The question which this paper shall try to tackle is whether and in what way can Samuel ibn Tibbon be considered a sceptic—does he leave room for alternative interpretations? How does his work relate to the issues of the limitation of human knowledge, to doubt, to scepticism, and how does it express itself in the literary form of his work?

The issue of scepticism (in medieval Jewish philosophy) revolves mainly around matters of metaphysics. It is in this realm that certitude is inherently lacking. The *locus classicus* that has aroused a vivid debate from the Middle Ages until now is Maimonides' admission in *Guide* 2:24 that the eternal revolution of the heavens cannot serve as proof of the existence of God. As is well known, Samuel Ibn Tibbon's comment on this statement tries to do away with the heavy shadow of doubt cast upon what was considered the strongest argument on this cardinal question. His (seemingly) confident attitude towards metaphysics is also apparent in his criticism of Maimonides' limitation of the vision of the Lord (in Jacob's ladder, Isaiah 6, and Ezekiel 1) to a representation of the physical realm or at most of the separate intellects. Not "seeing the Lord" at the climax of these visions is, according to Ibn Tibbon, betraying the essential message of the revelations, namely that all of existence stems from the Lord. However, a closer reading of his work reflects a far more complex attitude. In Ibn Tibbon's exegesis of *Qohelet* basic questions of providence and the eternity of the soul are being challenged. Ibn Tibbon's semi-confident stance noted above is replaced here by incessant questioning, doubt, and scepticism, both essentially and methodically, questioning man's ability to know, questioning the knowability of the subject matter, and questioning the value of the investigation.

In Ibn Tibbon's mature work, *Ma'amar Yiqqawū ha-Mayim*, the limitations of human knowledge and uncertainty are present or even central to his interpretation of the Merkavah, as well as, albeit to a lesser extent, to his exposition on providence and creation. In the face of much uncertainty, doubt, and contradictions, Kneller-Rowe will try to trace Samuel ibn Tibbon's stance in theory and in method, and hopefully also to touch upon the question whether or to what extent Ibn Tibbon was an Averroist.

**Rebecca Kneller-Rowe** (Independent Scholar)

Rebecca Kneller-Rowe holds a PhD from Tel Aviv University. She has taught at Tel Aviv University and Jerusalem College Michlala for higher education, on the graduate programme in Jewish thought and oral law. Her main interests are the thought of Maimonides, Samuel ibn Tibbon, Maimonideans, and the hermeneutics of rationalistic Bible interpretation. She is currently preparing a critical edition of Samuel ibn Tibbon's *Ma'amar Yiqqawū ha-Mayim*.

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

Many readers of Moses Narboni's commentary on Maimonides' *Guide of the Perplexed* recognise the commentator's Averroistic, anti-Avicennian orientation. Narboni mentions Averroes by name nearly eighty times in the commentary. Moreover, since Maimonides—according to Narboni—had adopted some of Avicenna's faulty views, Narboni says that he will address certain issues on which philosophers disagree. When it comes to litigating these issues, Narboni typically uses Averroes' ideas to criticise Maimonides' opinions. But the Averroistic elements of Narboni's commentary extend far beyond these targeted Averroistic critiques of Maimonides' Avicennian tendencies. Narboni also cites Averroes when he wants to elaborate on Maimonides' points or when he wants to provide the reader with more detailed explanations of certain philosophical ideas. In making these interventions, Narboni draws from many of Averroes' works, but the one he seems to cite most frequently is the *Incoherence of the Incoherence*—the rebuttal of al-Ghazālī's *Incoherence of the Philosophers*, which attacks the philosophers' teachings. This paper contends that Narboni uses Averroes' arguments against al-Ghazālī as a key to interpreting the teachings of the *Guide*. By reading closely from a small set of examples, the paper compares Narboni's citations of the *Incoherence of the Incoherence* with their roles in their original contexts; it also examines the ways in which Narboni subtly rewrites passages from the *Incoherence of the Incoherence* in accordance with his own commentarial purposes. It concludes by asking what Narboni's adaptation of Averroes' case against al-Ghazālī reveals about his broader understanding of the methods and arguments of the *Guide*.

**Yonatan Shemesh** (University of Chicago/USA)

Yonatan Shemesh is a PhD candidate in the History of Judaism at the University of Chicago Divinity School. His dissertation is about Moses Narboni's commentary on Maimonides' *Guide of the Perplexed*. The dissertation will include a critical edition of Narboni's commentary. Shemesh is also a co-editor of *Maimonides' Guide of the Perplexed in Translation: A History from the Thirteenth Century to the Twentieth*, forthcoming from the University of Chicago Press.

### Isaac Polqar's Anti-Sceptical Approach towards Miracles

There are two main views towards miracles; the first is that a miracle is a result of a direct divine intervention which is not in harmony with the natural order. The second view is that "miraculous" events are to be explained according to the laws of nature and not by supernatural interferences. Rationalists such as Maimonides, Averroes, and their like sought to explain the occurrence of miracles within the natural framework.

One might ascribe both positions to Maimonides: on the one hand, in the *Epistle to Yemen* and *Treatise on Resurrection*, his position is exoteric, traditional; namely he allows a divine intervention that goes against the laws of nature. On the other hand, in the *Guide of the Perplexed*, at least in some paragraphs, he seems to adopt a naturalistic view, namely that God occasionally interferes with the natural order. Averroes, in his *Tahāfut al-Tahāfut* (§514), addresses al-Ghazālī's criticism of the logical necessity between cause and effect. According to al-Ghazālī: "We must occupy ourselves with this question [causal efficacy] in order to be able to assert the existence of miracles and for yet another reason, namely to give effective support to the doctrine on which Muslims base their belief that God can do anything." Averroes' account of miracles is connected to his view that the relations between causes and effects are necessary, though in several texts he admits that instances of miracles did exist in the past.

Isaac Polqar (fourteenth century) rigorously defends a radical naturalistic view and discusses a threefold view of miracles: (1) miracles in the eyes of the multitude; (2) miracles performed by the prophets (excluding Moses); and (3) miracles performed by Moses. These three types of miracle are connected with each group's intellectual level and with the interpretation of the word "nature" (*teva*).

**Racheli Haliva** (Universität Hamburg/Germany)

Racheli Haliva is a junior professor and a co-director at the Maimonides Centre for Advanced Studies—Jewish Scepticism at Universität Hamburg. In her research, she focusses on scepticism and anti-scepticism in medieval Jewish philosophy. In particular, she concentrates on Jewish Averroism, whose members' key challenge was to reconcile Averroes' confident rationalism with Maimonides' scepticism. Among her publications are *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 Apikoros* [A Response to the Heretic] (Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter, 2019). She has edited two books: *Scepticism and Anti-Scepticism in Medieval Jewish Philosophy and Thought* (Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter, 2018) and *Sceptical Paths: Essays on Scepticisms from Antiquity until the Early Modern Period and Beyond* with Giuseppe Veltri, Emidio Spinelli, and Stephan Schmid (Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter, 2018).

### Gersonides and Ibn Kaspi on Scepticism about the Future

Two of the most prominent Provençal Jewish philosophers of the fourteenth century, Gersonides (1288–1344) and Ibn Kaspi (1279–1340), were students of Averroes' commentaries on Aristotle who attempted to determine the ethical and political implications of Averroistic science. For both Gersonides and Ibn Kaspi, scepticism lay in the inability to know the long-term future with any certainty, and as a result, not knowing how to act correctly to respond to the unknowns of the future. Both interpreted different parts of Aristotle's *Physics* to give unique explanations of the uncertainty of knowing the outcome of human events. Gersonides understood the future as being determined by the chance effects of the stars, though he contended that we cannot have certain knowledge of how it correlates to human events. As a result, we need to cultivate certain arts and virtues that will withstand the deleterious effects of the stars. Ibn Kaspi understood the future as being determined by the rise and fall of nations in competition with one another. Knowing which nation is going to rise and which is going to fall is based upon many contingent factors, such that prophecy can only predict the immediate and not the long-term future. A comparison of these two models presents two different practical responses to the uncertainty of the future: the individual striving to overcome chance, or the nation striving to overcome the vicissitudes of history.

**Alexander Green** (SUNY, University at Buffalo/USA)

Alexander Green is an assistant professor in the Department of Jewish Thought at SUNY, University at Buffalo. His research focusses on medieval Jewish philosophy, ethics, and the history of biblical interpretation. His first book is *The Virtue Ethics of Levi Gersonides* (Palgrave: 2016) and his second book, *Joseph Ibn Kaspi: Power, Progress and the Meaning of History*, is forthcoming with SUNY Press.

### Sources of Knowledge about the Heavens: Profayt Duran and Averroes

As is well known, in *Guide* II.24 Maimonides points to the evident conflict between the mathematical models of Ptolemy, with their epicycles and eccentrics, and Aristotelian physics, which posit that celestial matter is by nature constrained to move in perfect circles of constant motion around the centre of the earth. In the twelfth century, criticism of Ptolemy on these grounds was shared by Ibn Bajja, Ibn Ṭufayl, al-Biṭrūjī, and Averroes, who for this very reason chose to reject Ptolemaic astronomy altogether. Two hundred years later, at the end of the fourteenth century in Perpinyán, Catalonia, Profayt Duran and his students were once more deeply interested in the validity of the Ptolemaic system. They studied Averroes' *Abbreviation of the Almagest* at length in Hebrew translation, as well as Jābir ibn Aflaḥ's *Correction of the Almagest*; Duran himself read Joseph Ibn Naḥmias' *Light of the World*, a fourteenth-century attempt to construct an astronomical model with neither epicycles nor eccentrics.

For Duran, knowledge of the heavenly realm is derived from our sensory perception—what has been visually observed by astronomers. He criticises Ibn Naḥmias's system for assuming that the moon's distance from the earth never varies, since this is “denied by sensory perception, according to those who observed [the visible variation in the size of the moon], all of them in ancient days, and reported that it was perceived by them, without a doubt.” Furthermore, he comments in his commentary on Averroes' *Abbreviation of the Almagest* that regarding the shape of the celestial sphere itself, observation does not demonstrate that a celestial orb is actually spherical, but only that its motion is circular. Duran's concern with the limits of observation when it comes to the heavens suggests an awareness of Maimonides' more controversial statement in the same chapter of the *Guide*, II.24, which suggests that the heavens are unknowable and cannot provide proof for the existence of God.

There are eleven extant manuscripts of the Hebrew translation of Averroes' *Abbreviation of the Almagest*, three of which, rather surprisingly, passed through the hands of Duran's students; some of the marginal glosses in them are attributed to Duran. Duran's own full commentary, as a separate text, appears in two manuscripts, and is as yet unpublished. This paper analyses both the commentary and the marginal notes for Duran's attitudes towards Averroes' treatment of Ptolemaic astronomy, particularly with respect to the knowability or unknowability of the heavens.

### Maud Kozodoy (Independent Scholar)

Maud Kozodoy currently works for the Posen Foundation on the editorial staff of the Posen Library of Jewish Culture and Civilization. Her research interests are medieval Jewish history and the history of science. She is the author of *The Secret Faith of Maestre Honoratus: Profayt Duran and Jewish Identity in Late Medieval Iberia* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015), and, more recently, “Prefatory Verse and the Reception of the *Guide of the Perplexed*,” *Jewish Quarterly Review*, 106:3 (2016): 257–82.



### Crescas' Attitude towards Averroes

Together with Maimonides (1138–1204) and Gersonides (1288–1344), Averroes (1126–98) is one of the three medieval philosophers who constitute the main target of the radical critique of Aristotelianism by Rabbi Hasdai Crescas (c. 1340–1410/11) in his Hebrew book *Or Adonai* [The Light of the Lord]. However, these three philosophers did not only constitute the target of Crescas' critique; they also provided the framework within which he developed his own rigorous and creative philosophy.

Averroes is mentioned by name 20 times in 16 different passages in the *Light of the Lord*. 16 mentions are found in Book I, which contains the critique of Aristotelian physics and the discussion of the proofs of God. One mention is found in Book II, which deals with the fundamental beliefs of Judaism; one mention is found in Book III, which deals with the non-fundamental beliefs of Judaism; and two mentions are found in Book IV, which deals with disputed questions.

In the major philosophical debates between Avicenna and Averroes, Crescas usually sides with Avicenna (*Light*, I, 3, 1–3). Similarly to Aquinas, he rejected Averroes' theory of the unity of the intellect (*ibid.*, IIIa, 2, 1). In his critique of Aristotelian physics, Crescas often borrows an Aristotelian argument from Averroes, gives it a new twist, and turns it into an anti-Aristotelian argument (see *ibid.*, I, 2, 1–20).

Crescas generally shows Averroes great respect and counts him among the "great philosophers" (*gedole ha-filosofim*) (*ibid.*, I, 3, 3; IV, 13; cf. I, preface). Nonetheless, with regard to Averroes' prolix arguments against the existence of a vacuum, Crescas did not hesitate to apply the dictum of Ecclesiastes 6:11: "many words that increase vanity" (*devarim harbeh marbim havel*) (*ibid.*, I, 2, 1).

### Warren Zev Harvey (Hebrew University of Jerusalem/Israel)

Warren Zev Harvey is a 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).

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

Elijah Del Medigo's *Two Investigations*, written in Padua during the last quarter of the fifteenth century, concerns the nature of the human intellect. Methodologically, the work seems to follow the structure of a Scholastic *quaestio*. Del Medigo presents a thesis (the plurality of human intellects), and through a dialectical procedure he arrives at his own opposite conclusion regarding the problem at hand (the unicity of the intellect). While the unicity debate was a well-known theme within Latin Scholasticism, Del Medigo mentions Averroes' *Long Commentary on the Posterior Analytics*, a work which at that time was not available to a Latin readership, as his methodological source. In his talk, Engel will examine the extent of the impact which the *Long Commentary* had on Del Medigo's treatise. He will then turn to examine the impact that the *Long Commentary on the Posterior Analytics* had on other Scholastic authors during the Italian Renaissance—both Jews and Christians—once it was translated from Hebrew into Latin by Abraham de Balmes during the sixteenth century.

### Michael Engel (Universität Hamburg/Germany)

Michael Engel did his PhD at Cambridge University and is currently a research associate at the Institute for Jewish Philosophy and Religion at Universität Hamburg. His research concerns the Hebrew, Arabic, and Latin Aristotelian traditions of the Middle Ages and Renaissance. Among his publications is the recent monograph *Elijah Del Medigo and the Aristotelian Tradition* (Bloomsbury: 2017), which investigates the Averroist school of Padua in the 15th century, and various other publications on medieval and Renaissance philosophy

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

Gersonides (1288–1344) was a Jewish thinker who, though loyal to Aristotelianism in its Averroistic interpretation, was well aware of its flaws and willing to criticise its weak points. His affinity for scholarly inquiry and the Aristotelian method of scientific thought and his sensitive critique of it are manifested in the series of supercommentaries he wrote on most of Averroes' commentaries on Aristotle. In these, he served as a mediator between readers and the text; hence we would expect him to keep his eye firmly on the text and avoid digressions. In practice, however, he expanded on the text and sometimes criticised Averroes' commentaries on Aristotle as well as Aristotelian notions in general.

Criticisms similar to those expressed in the supercommentaries are frequent in the *Wars of the Lord* as part of discussions of theological issues and the attempts to resolve the quandaries they raise. This leads to the question of how Gersonides related physics and metaphysics to theology. In the lecture, it will be examined the link between Gersonides' readings of Aristotle and Averroes on the one hand and his criticism of them on the other by means of a study of his supercommentary on the *Epitome of the Physics*—the first of Gersonides' supercommentaries on the physical treatises—which Eisenmann has been studying for the last three years while preparing a critical edition of the text. The fact that this was the first commentary on these works offers a good opportunity to study the issue closely. Gersonides declares at the outset that his intention is to explain Averroes' *Epitome*, but on many occasions he deviates from the main point to take up issues that go beyond the scope of a simple commentary, expresses his own views, and in 13 loci takes issue with Averroes' explanation of Aristotle. Some of these disagreements recur in the theological expositions in the *Wars*. Hence, Eisenmann will survey Gersonides' exegetical methods and discuss the novel aspects of this supercommentary, its criticism of Averroes and Aristotle, and the extent to which the opinions expressed are compatible with those found in his other works, especially the *Wars of the Lord*. She will also try to determine the extent to which this work can illuminate the way in which Gersonides arrived at his non-Averroean views on physics and metaphysics and how they relate to his criticism of theological topics.

### **Esti Eisenmann** (The Open University of Israel)

Esti Eisenmann is a researcher in medieval Jewish philosophy. Her research deals with Saadia Gaon, Ibn Ezra, Maimonides, Gersonides, Crescas, and others, with a particular emphasis on the thought of R. Moshe Ben Yehuda, the obscure author of a unique encyclopaedia of science and Judaism compiled in the fourteenth century. Among her publications are the books: *Moses B. Judah, Ahava ba-Ta'anugim, Part I (Physics), Discourses 1–7, Critical Edition, Introduction and Commentary* (Jerusalem: 2013 [in Hebrew]) and *The Commentary of R. Mordekhai ben Eliezer Komtiyano on Maimonides' Guide of the Perplexed, Annotated Critical Edition with Introduction* (with Dov Schwartz) (Ramat-Gan: 2016 [in Hebrew]). She teaches at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and the Open University of Israel.

### **Against Averroes:**

#### **Moshe Ha-Levī's Defence of Avicenna's Necessary Existent**

Moshe ben Yosef Ha-Levī (Mūsā b. Yūsuf al-Lāwī; c. thirteenth century), a Jewish Andalusian philosopher probably from Seville, wrote a *Metaphysical Treatise* [*Maqāla Ilāhiyya; Ma'amar Elohi*] in which he defended Avicenna against Averroes' attacks. The main point of contention with which Moshe Ha-Levī was concerned was Avicenna's distinction between the necessary existent (or God) and Aristotle's first unmoved mover. Averroes, in his attempt to return to Aristotle's identification of God and the first unmoved mover, criticised Avicenna's distinction in several works.

The *Metaphysical Treatise* has come down to us both in its original Arabic (in Hebrew characters) and in an anonymous Hebrew translation. The Arabic original is quoted in full in the Spanish Kabbalist ibn Waqar's (c. 1340) *Treatise of Reconciliation between Philosophy and the Revealed Law* [*Maqāla al-Jāmi'a bayn al-Falsafa wa-al-Sharī'a*]. Ibn Waqar thought highly of Moshe Ha-Levī, as did Hasdai Crescas, who, despite his disagreement with him, counted him among the "best philosophers" alongside Al-Fārābī and Avicenna. Although it was translated into French by Vajda seventy years ago, the *Metaphysical Treatise* is rarely studied, and was mainly used either for the reconstruction of a lost work by Averroes or as a token example of "Jewish Avicennism."

After a short introduction and contextualisation of Moshe Ha-Levī and his philosophical project, Meyrav's paper will discuss, analyse, and assess his response to Averroes' critique of the distinction between the necessary existent and the first unmoved mover from three perspectives: (1) the relationship between physics and metaphysics regarding the use of mutual premises; (2) the logical analysis of the concept of "the possible"; and (3) the late antique formula "from one, only one can proceed." Meyrav will suggest that while Moshe Ha-Levī is successful in denying the identification of God and the first unmoved mover, he is unsuccessful in upholding a coherent distinction between the necessary existent and the first unmoved mover, effectively leaving metaphysics at breaking point.

### **Yoav Meyrav (Universität Hamburg/Germany)**

Yoav Meyrav is a research associate at the Maimonides Centre for Advanced Studies – Jewish Scepticism at the Universität Hamburg. He holds a PhD in philosophy from Tel Aviv University and specialises in the transmission and reception of metaphysics from antiquity to the Arabic and Hebrew worlds. His new edition of the Hebrew and (partial) Arabic versions of Themistius' paraphrase of Aristotle's *Metaphysics* 12 (lost in Greek) is forthcoming, as is an English translation of the work (in collaboration with Carlos Fraenkel). Besides his studies about Themistius' paraphrase and its reception, Meyrav has written about the notion of the human body in medieval Jewish philosophy. He is currently working on a monograph about Moshe ben Yosef Ha-Levī, which will include an edition and translation of his *Metaphysical Treatise*.



### **Certainty and Uncertainty Regarding Metaphysics in Sforino's *Or 'Ammīm***

In Sforino's *Or 'Ammīm* [Light of the Nations], the Italian philosopher and exegete explores some of the deepest metaphysical issues in the history of Western thought. While the first part of his philosophical treatise is entirely devoted to some ontological aspects connected to the physical order of the celestial and sublunary worlds, the second part deals with theological and metaphysical enquiries. Once an analogical correspondence has been established between the sublunary and celestial worlds and between the heavens and the First Cause, is it therefore possible to corroborate the relationship between the heavenly bodies and humankind? To answer this question, Sforino not only cites the Averroean commentaries on Aristotle (*On Generation and Corruption*, *Metaphysics*, and *Physics*), but also some passages from *De Substantia Orbis* and the *Incoherence of the Incoherence*. Humankind and the human intellectual soul are nobler than all material substances, since the intellectual soul of men is a separate substance which is more similar to God than any other existent. Sforino concludes his enquiry by following the teachings of the Holy Scriptures, which show the singular and distinctive relation between God and humanity.

**Giada Coppola** (Universität Hamburg/Germany)

Giada Coppola has been a research associate at the Universität Hamburg since September 2015. As part of the Sforino project, she attends to the Latin translation of Sforino's *Or 'Ammīm* [Light of the Nations] and a commentary on this work. She studied philosophy and the theory of human science at the Università degli Studi Roma Tre and completed her PhD at the INALCO (Paris). Her dissertation was entitled *David ben Yehudah Messer Leon, a Thinker of the Renaissance between Aristotelism and Platonism*. From 2014 to 2015, she worked on a collaborative research programme conceived at the INALCO and the MSHL-funded ALIENTO project.

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

Do prophets exist? As Abū Hāmid al-Ghazālī reports in his *Maqāṣid al-Falāsifa*, philosophers answer this question in the positive, providing an argument from the nature of both human beings and divine providence. Man is a political animal, and it is in his nature to live in society. Because human beings are inclined to pursue their own interests and follow their selfish desires, which would result in disorder and anarchy, the well-being of society necessitates the existence of a person who will enact laws and disseminate justice. Because the existence of this person who philosophers identify as a prophet is necessary for man's survival and the continuation of the human race, it is therefore impossible that divine providence would not ordain it.

In his commentary on the *Maqāṣid*, *Sefer Tiqqūn ha-De'ot* [Book of Rectifying of the Opinions], the thirteenth-century Jewish Averroist Isaac Albalag employs a similar argument, concluding that maintaining the proper functioning of society, and the subsequent continuation of the human race, necessitates the appearance of a person who will carry on the task of enacting laws and promoting the fear of punishment and the hope of a reward. Albalag refers to that person as a "just leader." But what about prophets? Is the leader the same as the prophet, or is he an ordinary leader gifted with political and oratorical skills whereas the prophet belongs to a different class? Since the Torah, which Albalag considers to be *the* tool for accomplishing social stability, is said to be a product of prophecy, Albalag's leader would presumably be a prophet.

In the proposed paper, Abdalla will argue that the leader is not necessarily a prophet, insofar as Albalag interpreted the term. Albalag's argument indicates nothing more than the contingency of social stability on organised law. The divinely ordained continuation of the human race is not exclusively tied to prophecy.

Albalag's omission of prophets from the argument is not without reason. It has to do, Abdalla will argue, with his secret scepticism towards the possibility of prophecy. In the *Tiqqūn*, prophets appear to be angelic human beings possessing supra-rational access to truth, an extraordinary epistemic advantage that separates them from the rest of mankind. This conception of prophecy is questionable. Considering Albalag's epistemology and conception of man, prophecy in that sense proves to be merely hypothetical. Not only does it fail to find a solid scientific account, it clashes with a number of Aristotelian doctrines that Albalag deems to be indubitably true.

**Bakinaz Abdalla** (McGill University, Montreal/ Canada)

Bakinaz Abdalla will be a postdoctoral fellow at the Maimonides Centre for Advanced Studies from 2018 to 2019. She is currently a PhD candidate in the Department of Jewish Studies at McGill University and is working on her dissertation, entitled *One Truth or Two? Jewish Averroists on the Truth of the Philosophers and the Truth of the Prophets: The Case of Isaac Albalag*.

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

Jewish philosophers influenced by Averroes (“Jewish Averroists,” but in most if not all cases also “Hebrew Maimonideans”) generally view prophecy as a “bottom-up” intellectual process in which a gifted individual acquires special knowledge through disciplined training which hones his naturally endowed faculties. Those prophets who wrote books did so, *inter alia*, as a political act, in order to establish order, cultivate desirable traits in the general population, and (according to some) reveal philosophical truths to the general public in an incremental fashion. These books, including the Torah, contain what Maimonides calls “necessary truths,” which are not strictly philosophically true, yet accord (at least superficially) with popular suppositions about God and the world’s workings.

If, according to these thinkers, Scripture incorporates propositions and presuppositions that are strictly false, what is the status of equivalent books and equivalent prophets from other religious traditions? This question is particularly poignant with respect to medieval Jewish philosophers, whose sources of intellectual inspiration were, to a large extent, Muslim.

One common avenue for polemical theological argument was unavailable to the Jewish Averroists, namely the claim that the Torah contains only truth while other religions’ scriptures—whether the New Testament or the Quran—contain falsehoods. After all, according to these philosophers, the Torah itself is largely “false” in the strict philosophical sense—even if they would not state their view of the text they hold sacred so plainly.

According to these thinkers, Moses wrote a book whose simple meaning incorporates false ideas. For them, Moses’ book serves a lofty purpose, but it does not achieve its aim by communicating pure philosophical truth. This view is similar to (and modelled on) the understanding of Muhammad’s project promulgated by Averroes and other Muslim Aristotelians. Muhammad, for them, was a philosopher-prophet. He too wrote a book written in language that presumes or entertains false concepts in order to ensure accessibility to, and acceptance by, the general public.

Given that some important medieval Jewish philosophers especially in Provence were familiar with Averroes’s writings and adopted many of his ideas, we are left with an important question: what was their attitude towards prophets of *other* religions, and especially towards the central prophet of the religion of their “teacher,” Averroes? What was the difference, in their view, between the philosophical/prophetic/political activity and agenda of the prophet Muhammad and those of the prophet Moses? And what is the broader significance of their approach?

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### **The Jewish Averroists—Linking Thoughts between Maimonides and Spinoza**

The late great Professor Harry Austryn Wolfson concluded his well-known book *Philo: Foundations of Religious Philosophy in Judaism, Christianity and Islam* (1947) by stating that Philo had opened a new period in the history of philosophy while Spinoza had finished it. This period, lasting seventeen centuries, is described by him as a synthetic philosophy devoted to the philosophical interpretation of Scriptures. Kasher does not wish to diminish the importance of the turning point created by these two great philosophers. However, the “synthetic philosophers,” the Muslims, Christians, and Jews who lived for so many years, do not seem to be so uniform in their worldviews, and the uniqueness of the most important among them cannot be blurred.

However, Kasher would like to argue another claim here. Although Spinoza apparently presented an extreme and incisive position on the relationship between the real meaning of the Scriptures and philosophical truth, certain thinkers may be presented as the precursors of this turning point. If the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* was partly against Maimonides’ *Guide of the Perplexed*, the missing link between them can be represented by Averroes’ Jewish followers. Some of them emphasised that the Bible was primarily intended for the uneducated masses, as it was in accordance with their poor perceptions; that the true theology includes claims that God himself never loves any creature, nor is He wholly transcendent; and that the biblical miracles were described in accordance with the lack of knowledge of the viewers and readers. All these and other examples support the claim that the transition between Maimonides and Spinoza does not have to be presented as an unbridgeable gap, but rather in such a way that the Jewish philosophers who were Averroes’ disciples may represent one of its milestones.

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