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Scepticism in Jewish Philosophy and Thought: A Status Quaestionis

Scepticism is a concept and a practice of numerous facets.[1] In its historical development the two branches of Academic and Pyrrhonian philosophy are still highly relevant to the enquiry of the reliability of secular and sacred knowledge.[2] Scepticism as a general term denotes putting every belief and all knowledge into question. Since the Early Modern period, it has also been used to designate atheism, agnosticism and criticism. In the context of following contribution, scepticism is used in its general meaning as *enquiry into (secular and sacred) belief and knowledge, the expression of doubts about any kind of authority – comprising the question of the criterion of truth*[3] *and including implicit and explicit sceptical paradoxes – and the purposefully evoked suspension of judgement to avoid dogmatism*.[4]

Many authors researching scepticism follow two very different objectives; firstly, the study of the (critical) reception of ancient sceptical philosophy as

1 The study of Jewish scepticism addressed here is mainly concerned with historical developments of sceptical concepts, modes of learning and social manifestations of a refusal or acceptance, as well as their integration into philosophical, literary, and social aspects of Jewish culture. In that particular sense, research on Jewish scepticism is at the interface between philosophy, the history of ideas and cultural history. Regarding the concept, extension, and field of research on scepticism, see for example Michael Albrecht: Skepsis, Skeptizismus. In: *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie* 9 (1995), pp. 950 – 974; Julia Annas / Jonathan Barnes: *The Modes of Scepticism. Ancient Texts and Modern Interpretations*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1997. A good introduction to the problem of definition is Robert J. Hankinson / Ted Honderich: *The Sceptics*. London / New York: Routledge 1995, pp.12 – 27; for new insights into the definition of idealistic elements in ancient scepticism see Markus Gabriel: *Skeptizismus und Idealismus in der Antike*. Universität Heidelberg, Habilitations-Schrift. Frankfurt am Main 2009.

2 Enquiring into belief and/or knowledge is, of course, relevant for ancient scepticism. Here, however, I am referring to the entire phenomenon of sceptical philosophy and to cultural expressions of scepticism.

3 The question on the 'criterion of truth' is used in this contribution as part of the question of authority; see Mordecai Roshwald: Authority, Skepticism and Dissent in Judaism. In: *Jewish Social Studies* 40,3 – 4 (1978), pp. 189 – 230. Authority is also synonymous with dogmatism, see Cicero: *Academica*, 2:8 – 9 according to the edition of Harris Rackham: *De natura deorum. Academica*. Reprint. London: Heinemann 1961.

4 As it is well known, the aim of ancient scepticism was the *ataraxia* (a tranquil and untroubled state of mind).

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"sceptical tradition"[5] (Academic scepticism and Pyrrhonism), where techniques and concepts were translated into other models and patterns of discourse. This entails an examination of the presence or absence of ancient scepticism during the Middle Ages, research into the Early Modern reception and further developments, as well as the emergence of modern and contemporary scepticism since Descartes (that is, scepticism in a narrow sense).

The second crucial objective of sceptical enquiry is in a more metaphorical and performative sense: it relates to sceptical strategies, concepts and attitudes, in areas that are not clearly defined as 'philosophical'; where doubts, criticism and questions are expressed to effect the suspension of judgement. It is the educational and social reverberations of these strategies that one could call sceptical in a wider sense.[6] While the first concept is clearly and narrowly defined within the research community, the latter is considered as rather diffuse,[7] and hence of particular interest for this proposal's research focus.

From the 20th century until today, the study of scepticism has enjoyed a lively academic interest with wide popularity. Ancient Eastern and Western schools of sceptical thought and philosophy have been the subjects of tractates, books, articles and comments; both historical Pyrrhonian philosophy and the classical academies have already been explored, analysed and elaborated upon. Likewise, there is no lack of studies on the development of sceptical methods and the sceptical tradition,[8] however, only when not taking into account Judaism and Jewish philosophy.

To understand and situate Jewish scepticism within a wider context, a few examples regarding the state of current research on general scepticism will fol-

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5 The term 'tradition' (see Myles Burnyeat: *The Skeptical Tradition*. Berkeley: University of California 1983) is essential to the reception of ancient and modern philosophical scepticism.

6 The term "cultural scepticism" is to be avoided (see Sante De Sanctis: *Religious Conversion, a Bio-Psychological Study*. With assistance of trans. Helen Augur. London: Harcourt, Brace & Company 1927, p. 112), because of the general question of what is culture and how to distinguish it from philosophy.

7 To clarify the difference between the two areas of research, it will be enough to refer to the short comment of the editor of the blog *Aporia* in the book by Michelle Zerba: *Doubt and Skepticism in Antiquity and the Renaissance*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press 2012: "It doesn't seem to be a philosophy book in the proper sense of the word", see http://blogaporia.blogspot.de/2013/02/skepticism-in-antiquity-and-renaissance.html (access: June 10, 2013). The book is in fact an essay on forms and uses of doubt in works by Homer, Sophocles, Aristophanes, Cicero, Machiavelli, Shakespeare, and Montaigne.

8 The vivid interest in the topic can also be inferred from numerous recent publications like the *International Journal for the Study of Skepticism* (Brill, first number 2011), websites, online fora and blogs like *Aporia* at http://blogaporia.blogspot.de/ (access: June 10, 2013).

low. Considering the amount of publications and numerous complex debates on various related topics, the outline below is far from comprehensive.

1 Research on Scepticism(s)

As already mentioned above, two significant research fields can be distinguished: a philosophical approach based on an analytical and diachronic-historical perspective and an approach of elements of sceptical strategies, contents, and attitudes (here called 'cultural expressions of scepticism'). Both fields relate to ancient scepticism and its transformation and reception during the Renaissance. There are several studies that are concerned with the Academies, the Platonic, the Middle and the New Academy.[9] Some scholars have examined different forms of sceptical knowledge dissemination such as medical tracts.[10] Furthermore, a number of monographs, surveys and editions of key texts, especially relating to Pyrrhonism (*Outlines of Pyrrhonism* by Sextus Empiricus,[11] or Diogenes Laertius' *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*),[12] have recently been re-published.[13]

Other studies have focused on Cicero and his 'disciple' Augustine, examining their sceptical and anti-sceptical positions. Augustine's critique of sceptical philosophy is especially relevant for the study of ancient Jewish scepticism.[14]

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9 James Allen: Academic Probabilism and Stoic Epistemology. In: *Classical Quarterly* 44 (1994), pp. 85–113; Charles Brittain: *Philo of Larissa: The Last of the Academic Sceptics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press 2001.

10 See e. g. James Allen: Pyrrhonism and Medicine. In: Richard Bett (Ed.): *The Cambridge Companion to Ancient Scepticism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2010, pp. 232–248.

11 See Julia Annas / Jonathan Barnes (Eds. / Trans.): *Sextus Empiricus. Outlines of Scepticism*. Second Edition. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2000.

12 Miroslav Marcovich (Ed.): *Diogenis Laertii Vitae philosophorum*. Stutgardiae: Teubner 1999; Robert Drew Hicks (Ed.): *Diogenes Laertius. Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, 2 vols. Reprint. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press 1979.

13 For a bibliography see Diego E. Machuca, in https://sites.google.com/site/diegomachuca/bibliography-on-skepticism (access: July 7, 2013); see also the articles of Katja Vogt: Ancient Skepticism. In: *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2011 Edition). Edited by Edward N. Zalta (http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2011/entries/skepticism-ancient/) (access: November 11, 2015); Peter Klein: Skepticism. In: *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2013 Edition). Edited by Edward N. Zalta (http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2013/entries/skepticism/) (access: November 11, 2015); and Charles Bolyard: Medieval Skepticism. In: *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2013 Edition). Edited by Edward N. Zalta (http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2013/entries/skepticism-medieval/) (access: November 11, 2015).

14 To name but a few examples: Therese Fuhrer: Das Kriterium der Wahrheit in Augustins *Contra Academicos*. In: *Vigiliae Christianae* 46 (1992), pp. 257–275; Gonzalo Soto Posada: La muerte

The bishop of Hippo offered a topical and typological description that prevailed through the 4th and 5th centuries CE: He particularly elaborated on (anti-)sceptical thoughts and strategies using the (classical) literary dialogic system.[15] He also argued against the principle of authority and truth. Doubt and methods of enquiry (the truth)[16] or silence and suspension of judgement, are obviously highly relevant for rabbinic literature. Augustine's strong arguments against scepticism turned out to be substantial for medieval anti-scepticism.[17]

Currently, the status of medieval (anti-)sceptical philosophers receives much more scholarly attention after having been largely ignored for decades.[18] Traces of ancient scepticism are evident during a period when strong anti-sceptical currents prevailed. Adherents of the latter are well known authors, such as John Buridan or Thomas Aquinas. Similarly established, sceptical learning is prevalent in the works of Henry of Ghent, Duns Scotus, William of Ockham, or Nicholas of Autrecourt.[19]

Contrary to these well-researched texts, the field of (Arabic-)Islamic philosophy and theology has only been partially studied and examined with respect to scepticism, for example al-Ghazālī (1058 – 1111)[20] who is often regarded as the

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del escepticismo o san Augustín y los académicos. In: *Estudios de Filosofía* 26 (2002), pp. 277–292; Brian Harding: Skepticism, Illumination and Christianity in Augustine's *Contra Academicos*. In: *Augustinian Studies* 34,2 (2003), pp. 197–212; Giovanni Catapano: Quale scetticismo viene criticato da Agostino nel Contra Academicos? In: *Quaestio* 6 (2006), pp. 1–13; Luca Castagnoli: *Ancient Self-Refutation. The Logic and History of the Self-Refutation Argument from Democritus to Augustine*. New York: Cambridge University Press 2010.

15 Theme and bibliography in Daniel Boyarin: *Socrates and the Fat Rabbis*. Chicago / London: University of Chicago Press 2009; see also Jacob Howland: *Plato and the Talmud*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2011 (http://www.loc.gov/catdir/enhancements/fy1011/2010030597-d.html) (access: November 11, 2015).

16 See for example Malcolm Schofield (Ed.): *Plato and the Talmud*. Reprint. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1989 (http://www.loc.gov/catdir/enhancements/fy1011/2010030597-d.html) (access: November 11, 2015).

17 See Henrik Lagerlund: *Rethinking the History of Skepticism. The Missing Medieval Background*. Leiden / Boston: Brill 2010.

18 See the 'turning point' in Richard H. Popkin: Amos Funkenstein and the History of Scepticism. In: Robert S. Westman / David Biale (Eds.): *Thinking Impossibilities. The Intellectual Legacy of Amos Funkenstein*. Toronto: Toronto University Press 2008, pp. 281–288.

19 Ibid.; there is a good outline with an updated bibliography in an article of the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, contributed by Bolyard: Medieval Scepticism. Again, there is no mention of Horovitz' contribution (see below).

20 Leor Halevi: The Theologian's Doubts: Natural Philosophy and the Skeptical Games of Ghazali. In: *Journal of the History of Ideas* 63,1 (2002), pp. 19 – 39.

precursor of Cartesian doubt.[21] Furthermore, Ibn Al-Haytham's (965–1039), *Kitāb al-Manāẓir* (Book of Optics) and *Al-Shukūk ʿalā Batlamyūs* ("Doubts concerning Ptolemy") should be mentioned in this context. Nevertheless, there are still vast areas of uncharted territory, such as the influence of scepticism on the schools of Mu'tazila and Ash'ariyya.[22] The sceptical outlook of al-Rāzī (c. 865–925), Ibn Ḥazm (994–1064) and of the Jewish philosopher Sa'adya Gaon are also underresearched and the influence of Pyrrhonism on Arabic writers "is still to be fully explored."[23]

One of the most popular research areas is the development of sceptical philosophy and cultural history during the Renaissance.[24] Henri Estienne's Latin translation of Sextus Empiricus' *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* from 1562 was certainly one of the corner stones of Renaissance scepticism that strongly influenced the dissemination of humanism throughout Europe. Richard Popkin[25] and Charles Schmitt[26] have foregrounded this period in the history of scepticism by analysing numerous (including lesser known) authors and introducing their developments and contributions to present academia. Additionally, modern studies include an entire range of philosophical, political and social theories

21 Sami M. Najm: The Place and Function of Doubt in the Philosophies of Descartes and Al-Ghazali. In: *Philosophy East and West* 16,3–4 (1966), S. 133–141.

22 See the relevant article of Josef van Ess: Skepticism in Islamic Religious Thought. In: *Al-Abhath* 21 (1968), pp. 1–17.

23 See Luciano Floridi: The Rediscovery and Posthumous Influence of Scepticism. In: Richard Bett (Ed.): *Cambridge Companion to Ancient Scepticism*. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge 2010, pp. 264–287 (Preprint: http://uhra.herts.ac.uk/bitstream/handle/2299/6995/903253.pdf?sequence=1) (access: November 11, 2015), p. 274: "A final remark must concern the coeval influence of Pyrrhonism on Arabic writers. The field is still to be fully explored however, in this case too, there seems to have been a wider availability of original texts than in Western countries. A philosopher like al-Ghazzali (ca.1058–1111), with his *The Incoherence of the Philosophers*, exercised a direct influence on the work of the Hebrew philosopher Judah Halevi (ca. 1085–1141) – a key figure in twelfth century Jewish thought, whose Kusari displays an interesting use of sceptical arguments against Aristotelian philosophy and in favour of religious faith – and some conjecture that he might have acted as a cultural bridge between Greek scepticism and the later critical philosophy of Nicholas of Autrecourt, especially as far as the analysis of the notion of causality is concerned".

24 See Gianni Paganini / José R. Maia Neto (Eds.): *Renaissance Scepticisms*. Dordrecht: Springer 2009.

25 I quote here only Richard H. Popkin: *The History of Scepticism. From Savonarola to Bayle*. Revised and expanded. Oxford: Oxford University Press 2003.

26 Richard H. Popkin / Charles B. Schmitt: *Scepticism from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment*. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz 1987.

emerging from scholars such as Machiavelli in Italy,[27] Montaigne in France,[28] and Pedro de Valencia in Spain,[29] Francisco Sánchez in Portugal and later in France,[30] Sir Francis Bacon in England, Baruch Spinoza in the Netherlands and back to the sceptical turning point of Descartes,[31] just to chart a few stages in the development of scepticism in Europe.

Whereas the humanist influence on this development originated in Italy, the religious impetus was provided by Humanism and Reformation in Germany. Not only did newly founded academies show traces of stoic and sceptical thinking, but they also played a crucial role in the development and conceptualisation of literature[32] and drama during that time.[33] The notion of 'scepticism' in a general and rather diffuse meaning, as we know it today, certainly derived from the debates and developments in the arts and literature so prevalent during the Renaissance and Early Modern period. However, what freshly emerged during the 15th and 16th century was sceptical contentions against the rapidly developing sciences.[34]

It would certainly be too bold and in fact compromise the aims of this proposal, to assert the comprehensiveness of an overview about the developments of sceptical philosophy since Descartes. After all, strategies of methodological doubts and critique for and against the reconstruction of dogmatic philosophical systems as well as the (im)possibilities of metaphysical theories (see David

27 Aryeh Botwinick: *Participation and Tacit Knowledge in Plato, Machiavelli and Hobbes*. Lanham: University Press of America 1986; id.: *Skepticism and Political Participation*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press 1990; id.: *Skepticism*. Philadelphia, Pa.: Temple University Press 2010; Zerba: *Doubt and Scepticism*.

28 See e. g. the contribution in Nicola Panichi in Paganini / Maia Neto: *Renaissance Scepticisms*, pp. 183 – 212.

29 See John Christian Laursen's contribution in Paganini / Maia Neto: *Renaissance Scepticisms*, pp. 111 – 124.

30 See e. g. Kaspar Howald (Ed.): *Francisco Sánchez. Quod Nihil Scitur. Dass nichts gewusst wird*. Hamburg: Felix Meiner 2007.

31 See Popkin: *History of Scepticism*.

32 See e. g. Graham Bradshaw: *Shakespeare's Scepticism*. Brighton: Harvester Press 1987.

33 See e. g. the doctrine of the characters by Theophrastus and the ethical teachings by Seneca in their humanist reception; see Giuseppe Veltri: 'Dannare l'universale per il particolare'? Colpa individuale e pena collettiva nel pensiero di Rabbi Simone Luzzatto. In: *Rassegna Mensile d'Israele* 77,1 – 2 (2012), pp. 65 – 81.

34 See Giuseppe Veltri: Principles of Jewish Skeptical Thought. The Case of Judah Moscato and Simone Luzzatto. In: id. / Gianfranco Miletto (Eds.): *Rabbi Judah Moscato and the Jewish Intellectual World of Mantua in 16th–17th century*. Leiden / Boston: Brill 2012, pp. 15 – 36.

Hume)[35] are always at the core – and at stake – in those areas of philosophy where metaphysical notions and epistemology have to be negotiated. This certainly involves a balance between the world of ideas and the methods of securing historical approaches that verify or falsify 'truths' and 'beliefs'.

The Enlightenment is a very complex phenomenon based on freedom of thought and political emancipation, [36] because or perhaps in spite of the insight that Socrates did not offer a solution to the problematic issue of authority.[37] In contrast to Enlightenment ideas prevalent in Christian Europe, thinkers such as Moses Mendelssohn,[38] were much less likely to receive recognition for their endeavours. Likewise, Salomon Maimon, the harshest and most sceptic critic of Kant, was largely ignored by his contemporaries.[39] In this context, the sceptical perspective can be viewed as a reaction to attempts of universalising 'reason' and knowledge. The responses to conflict in issues such as assimilation, acculturation, or preservation of identity in many circles of eighteenth century society, as well as within the Jewish communities themselves, were highly ambiguous, but always vehement. The emergence of a *critical* scientific philology during the 19th and 20th centuries was crucial for keeping alive the sceptical method of doubt towards dogmatic systems.[40]

Between the end of the 20th and the beginning of the 21st century, the emergence of Postcolonial studies have inspired ongoing debates on whether 'West-

35 David Frade Norton: *David Hume: Common-Sense Moralist, Sceptical Metaphysician*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press 1982; Paul Stanistreet: *Hume's Scepticism and the Science of Human Nature*. Aldershot: Ashgate 2002.

36 See Jonathan I. Israel: *Radical Enlightenment. Philosophy and the Making of Modernity 1650 – 1750*. Oxford: Oxford University Press 2001.

37 See Richard H. Popkin: *Scepticism in the Enlightenment*. Dordrecht: Kluwer 1997; Petr Lom: *Scepticism, Eclecticism and the Enlightenment. An Inquiry into the Political Philosophy of Denis Diderot*. San Domenico, FI: European University Institute 1998; Sébastien Charles / Plínio J. Smith (Eds.): *Scepticism in the Eighteenth Century: Enlightenment, Lumières, Aufklärung*. Dordrecht: Springer 2013.

38 Mendelssohn's theory of probability is very important in this context; see the contribution of Edith Dudley Sylla in: Reinier Munk (Ed.) (2011): *Moses Mendelssohn's Metaphysics and Aesthetics*. Dordrecht: Springer 2011, pp. 41 – 64.

39 See Gideon Freudenthal: *Salomon Maimon. Rational Dogmatist, Empirical Skeptic; Critical Assessments*. Dordrecht: Kluwer 2003 (http://www.loc.gov/catdir/enhancements/fy0814/2003056509-d.html) (access: November 11, 2015); id.: *Maimon's Subversion of Kant's Critique of Pure Reason. There are no Synthetic a priori Judgements in Physics* (Preprint / Max-Planck-Institut für Wissenschaftsgeschichte, 170). Berlin: Max-Planck-Institut für Wissenschaftsgeschichte 2001.

40 See Giuseppe Veltri: *Language of Dissent & Conformity. The Imaginative Grammar of Jewish Intellectuals in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*. Boston: Academic Studies Press 2013.

ern' philosophy and academic science, with their Eurocentric notions of knowledge production, are in a position to apply a just and appropriate stance towards the research of non-Western cultures. Doubt about the concept of 'reason' *per se* generated doubt about the transferability of this concept between cultures and continually challenged the question of whether the so-called postcolonial systems of knowledge did or did not obscure their use of methods generated by colonialist views.[41] This also applied and still applies to the notable absence of Jewish thought and thinkers in the study of philosophy.

Yet, if the Jewish tradition has hardly been considered in the general field of philosophy or within the history of philosophy, it remains to be examined whether Jewish scepticism features at least in the area of 'Jewish' philosophy?

2 Research on Jewish Scepticism

The sceptic is always viewed with suspicion, as a kind of 'malicious genius,'[42] because he/she doubts and mistrusts every belief. The sceptic asks questions; these questions may upset and disconcert firm opinions and alleged insights, especially if there are no ready-made responses and if there is much resistance against losing the certainty of knowledge about the world. This mistrust and suspicion is frequently applied to Judaism, which can be highly disconcerting, because one of its essential features is to critically interrogate every aspect of life.

This is manifest already in the Talmud: The Talmudic art of teaching is primarily aimed at invoking pleasure in closely studying objects and situations, and to find gratification in the acquisition and use of knowledge. In Judaism, the art of learning entails a continual raising of doubts about what the teacher thinks and says. Thus, there is no doctrinal theology at the core of studying the Torah. It is not a question of learning something by heart or endlessly repeating what the teacher says.

The rabbinical school was vehement in opposing such commonplace views, which is manifest in didactical anecdotes, where the rabbi is making fun of the ig-

41 I will omit a detailed bibliography on the topic and instead refer to Sandra G. Harding: *Is Science Multicultural? Postcolonialisms, Feminisms, and Epistemologies*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press 1998.

42 As Markus Gabriel: The Art of Skepticism and the Skepticism of Art. In: *Philosophy Today* 53/1 (2009) (http://www.questia.com/read/1P3-1655856661) (access: November 11, 2015), s.p., calls him/her.

norant pupil. According to tractate Sota 22a of the Babylonian Talmud, a *tanna*[43] was hardly different from a magician (*magush*), because both repeated and learned by heart words in which they had not properly understood. Teaching in this sense also means understanding, instead of merely repeating. Accordingly, the Midrash Mekhilta de-Rabbi Yishma'el (*Bo', pisḥa* 18) states: "There are four types of pupils: the wise, the wicked, the simple, and the one who doesn't know how to ask."[44] In Talmudic and also subsequent periods, the goal of learning was to ask the rabbi the (right) question, to force him to find the weak point in his argumentation.[45]

Although scepticism is essential to the Jewish epistemological understanding of reality, as well as sources and systems of knowledge, it is rather surprising to note that it is still largely excluded from, or at least underrepresented in international research debates on scepticism and Jewish philosophy.[46] As an example, the entry of Alvin J. Reines in the old and new editions of the *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, only refers to the question of the unreliability of reason by quoting Judah Halevy and Chasday Crescas on the inadequacy of neo-Platonic and Aristotelian physics and metaphysics as naturally acquired knowledge[47] – a standpoint only recently and uncritically adopted by the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.[48] Significantly, Reines' article mentions some important studies of the Breslau scholar Saul Horovitz without integrating them into his outline of Jewish scepticism.

Horovitz addressed the study of Jewish scepticism as an important objective of medieval philosophy in 1912; in 1915 he returned to the topic and published an essay on the familiarity of medieval Muslim and Jewish authors with scepticism.[49] The neglect of Horovitz's contribution to Jewish philosophy[50] is all the

43 *Tanna* means 'repeater', 'transmitter' of the entire Tannaitic tradition. As a rule, the term is translated as 'teacher', but it can also include the pupil who is a transmitter of the teaching of the transmitter.

44 See Giuseppe Veltri: Freche Schüler vs. gescheite Rabbinen. Die Kunst des Lernens im antiken Judentum. In: Almut-Barbara Renger (Ed.): *Meister und Schüler in Geschichte und Gegenwart. Von Religionen der Antike bis zur modernen Esoterik*. Göttingen: V&R unipress, pp. 135–145.

45 This paragraph is taken from Giuseppe Veltri: Do/Did the Jews Believe in God? The Skeptical Ambivalence of Jewish Philosophy of Religion. In: Ra'anan Boustan / Klaus Hermann / Reimund Leicht / Annette Yoshiko Reed / id. (Eds.): *Envisioning Judaism. Studies in Honor of Peter Schäfer on the Occasion of his Seventieth Birthday*, Vol. 2. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, pp. 717–733.

46 See J. Goody: A Kernel of Doubt. In: *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 2,4 (1996), pp. 667–681 (http://www.jstor.org/stable/3034302) (access: November 11, 2015); Veltri: Principles of Jewish Skeptical Thought.

47 Alvin J. Reines: Skepsis and Skepticism. In: *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, vol. 18. Edited by Michael Berenbaum / Fred Skolnik. Second Edition. Detroit, Mich.: Macmillan 2010, pp. 657–658.

48 Bolyard: Medieval Scepticism.

49 Saul Horovitz (1909): *Über den Einfluss der griechischen Philosophie auf die Entwicklung des Kalam*. Breslau: Th. Schatzky 1909; id.: Über die Bekanntschaft Saadias mit der griechischen

more regrettable as he introduced the concept of a 'sceptical (under)current' ("skeptische Geistesströmung"),[51] referring to ideas and tropes that survive as fragments in various authors' texts and within movements of sceptical interests.

There are some rare examples of studies on Jewish scepticism from a later period, that are concerned with Jewish converts, [52] Uriel da Costa,[53] Salomon Maimon[54] or with the eternal question of whether or not, and if so, how the biblical book of Kohelet should be included in the history of scepticism.[55] Furthermore, studies on expressions of religious (or rational) and linguistic doubts,[56]

Skepsis. In: Ismar Elbogen / Benzion Kellermann / Eugen Mittwoch (Eds.): *Judaica. Festschrift zu Hermann Cohens siebzigstem Geburtstage*. Berlin: Bruno Cassirer 1912, pp. 235–252; id.: *Der Einfluss der griechischen Skepsis auf die Entwicklung der Philosophie bei den Arabern*. Breslau: Th. Schatzky 1915.

50 For the impact of Horovitz in recent studies of Arabic philosophy see Carmela Baffioni: Per l'ipotesi di un influsso della scepsi sulla filosofia islamica. In: Gabriele Giannantoni (Ed.): *Lo scetticismo antico, Atti del Convegno organizzato dal Centro di Studi del pensiero antico del CNR, Roma 5–8 nov. 1980*, Vol. 1. Napoli: Bibliopolis 1981, pp. 417–434; Josef van Ess: *Die Erkenntnislehre des ʿAḍudaddīn Al-Īcī. Übersetzung und Kommentar des ersten Buches seiner Mawāqif*. Universität Frankfurt Habilitations-Schrift 1964. Wiesbaden: Steiner 1966, passim; Horovitz: *Über den Einfluss*; and id.: *Der Einfluss der griechischen Skepsis* (1915), reprinted in Sezgin (2000), pp. 21–112 and pp. 113–161.

51 Horovitz: Über die Bekanntschaft, p. 239.

52 On Francisco Sánchez and whether he converted from Judaism to Christianity see Elaine Limbrick's introduction to Sánchez: *That nothing is known*. Edited by Elaine Limbrick. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1988, p. 6 ff. See also José Faur: Sánchez' Critique of Authoritas: Converso Skepticism and the Emergence of Radical Hermeneutics. In: Peter Ochs (Ed.): *The Return to Scripture in Judaism and Christianity. Essays in Postcritical Scriptural Interpretation*. New York: Paulist Press 1993, pp. 256–276, pp. 256–276; see also Martin Mulsow: Skepticism and Conversion to Judaism. The Case of Aaron d'Antan. In: Id. / Richard H. Popkin (Eds.): *Secret Conversions to Judaism in Early Modern Europe*. Leiden / Boston: Brill 2004, pp. 123–182.

53 Sanford Shepard: The Background of Uriel Da Costa's Heresy: Marranism, Skepticism, Karaism. In: *Judaism* 20 (1971), pp. 341–350.

54 Nathan Rotenstreich: The Problem of the 'Critique of Judgment' and Solomon Maimon's Scepticism. In: Saul Lieberman (Ed.): *Harry A. Wolfson Jubilee Volume on the Occasion of His Seventy-Fifth Birthday*, Vol. 2. Jerusalem: American Academy for Jewish Research 1965, pp. 677–702.

55 See for example James L. Crenshaw: The Birth of Skepticism in Ancient Israel. In: Id. / Samuel Sandmel (Eds.): *The Divine Helmsman. Studies on God's Control of Human Events. Presented to Lou H. Silberman*. New York: KTAV Publishing House 1980, pp. 1–19; Bernon Lee: *Towards a Rhetoric of Contradiction in the Book of Ecclesiastes*. Ph.D. University of Calgary 1997; William H.U. Anderson: What is Skepticism and Can it Be Found in the Hebrew Bible? In: *Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament* 13,2 (1999), pp. 225–257.

56 Gideon Freudenthal: The Remedy to Linguistic Skepticism. Judaism as a Language of Action. In: *Naharaim – Zeitschrift für deutsch-jüdische Literatur und Kulturgeschichte* 4,1 (2011), pp. 67–76.

and on literary genres and different social configurations (conversion strategies)[57] should not go unmentioned.

The important contribution of David Ruderman in Simone Luzzatto's *Socrate*[58] is particularly worth mentioning here.[59] Ruderman devoted a detailed chapter of his *Jewish Thought and Scientific Discovery in Early Modern Europe*[60] to Luzzatto's work, summarising its contents and focusing on the problem of Luzzatto's use of sources and his position within Early Modern and Jewish scholarship and sceptical tradition.[61] Two years later in 1997, Richard Popkin edited an insightful book *Skepticism and Irreligion* without a single contribution on Jewish thinking.[62]

Relying on publications such as these, it might seem as if the question of sceptical thinking had seldom been dealt with in the Jewish academies or amongst Jewish scholars.[63] Aryeh Botwinick is one of the few scholars who attended to the topic of Jewish scepticism in a monograph,[64] where he overemphasized the role of negative theology on the development of sceptical thought.[65] In his book, Botwinick draws a connection between the negative theology of Maimonides and the negative vision of the godhead in Nietzsche. He interprets monotheism as criticism and as sceptical attitude to knowledge based on the attempts to describe God by negation (*via negativa*).

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57 See Mulsow: Skepticism and Conversion.

58 See, for example, Jehuda Bergmann: Sokrates in der jüdischen Literatur. In: *Monatsschrift zur Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums* 80 (1936), pp. 6–10.

59 For the very scarce impact of Luzzatto's *Socrate* see Giuseppe Veltri (Ed.): *Simone Luzzatto. Scritti politici e filosofici di un ebreo scettico nella Venezia del Seicento*. In cooperation with Anna Lissa / Paola Ferruta. Milan: Bompiani 2013, pp. LXXVI–LXXXV.

60 David Ruderman: Science and Skepticism. Simone Luzzatto on Perceiving the Natural World. In: Id.: *Jewish Thought and Scientific Discovery in Early Modern Europe*. Detroit, Mich.: Wayne State University Press 1995, pp.153–184.

61 The dissertation of Ariel Viterbo at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem is worth mentioning. In his book, which was partly published in Italian, Viterbo describes the content of *Socrate*; Ariel Viterbo: La mitzwàh di studiare le scienze nell'opera di Rav Simchah (Simone) Luzzatto. In: *Studi Veneziani* 38 (1999), pp. 79–128.

62 Richard H. Popkin / Arie Johan Vanderjagt (Eds.): *Scepticism and Irreligion in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*. Leiden: Brill 1993; but see Popkin: *History of Scepticism*, passim, where he refers to some Jewish sceptical thinkers like Halevy and Crescas without mentioning the question of Jewish scepticism.

63 On this aspect see Veltri: Principles of Jewish Skeptical Thought; id.: Do/Did the Jews Believe.

64 Aryeh Botwinick: *Skepticism, Belief, and the Modern. Maimonides to Nietzsche*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press 1997 (Contestations) (http://www.gbv.de/dms/bowker/toc/9780801432088.pdf) (access: November 11, 2015).

65 He is also the author of a numerous contributions on scepticism.

It becomes apparent from the previous paragraphs that the research on Jewish philosophical scepticism is still at its very beginnings. This also holds true for **cultural expressions of scepticism**, i.e. the modes of sceptical strategies present in Jewish literature, culture, history, societies, and education. The lack of interest in the intricacies of Jewish scepticism in Jewish studies may be rooted in the modality of Jewish philosophy as such, a concept that is notoriously in-between, and that subsumes and affects traditional wisdom, philosophy, theology, Jewish and general *Weltanschauung*, as well as cultural history, being a hazardous bridge between orthopraxy and orthodoxy.[66] The 'invisibility' of the particular (i.e. Judaism) due to its immersion into general philosophy could be one reason for the lack of interest. The focus on enquiry and doubt as a kind of Platonic *motor mobilis* will thus be a solution (and the paradox reason) of the *aporia*. Here, the need for 'imaginative grammar'[67] in the language of scepticism in the history of Jewish philosophy and cultural history, as well as the adjacent cultures becomes apparent, this issue is certainly addressed by researchers at the HCAS-JS.

To put it boldly, Jewish scepticism can be considered as a 'question mark' on the 'Eurocentric' dimension of critical reason.[68] Paradoxically, philosophies of Judaism – as the translator of Julius Guttmann called them[69] – are an expression of alternative *Weltanschauungen*, because they do not fit seamlessly into the worldview suggested by universal reason.

66 The relation of Jewish scepticism to Jewish philosophy is the topic to be dealt with by the director in the second period of HCAS-JS.

67 On the concept see Giuseppe Veltri: *Language of Dissent & Conformity. The Imaginative Grammar of Jewish Intellectuals in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*. Boston: Academic Studies Press 2013.

68 On the Eurocentric' dimension of critical reason issue see Aamir R. Mufti: *Enlightenment in the Colony: The Jewish Question and the Crisis of Postcolonial Culture*. Princeton: Princeton University Press 2008.

69 Julius Guttmann: *Philosophies of Judaism. The History of Jewish Philosophy from Biblical Times to Franz Rosenzweig*. Introduction by Zwi R. J. Werblowski, trans. by David W. Silverman. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul 1964.