

Call for Applications

Summer School

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF SCEPTICISM IN PHILOSOPHY, JUDAISM, AND CULTURE

16–19 July 2024

Hamburg, Germany

Application Deadline: 29 February 2024

Topic and Purpose

The value of scepticism in philosophy has been judged in different ways throughout history. To name but a few examples: Pyrrhonists conceived of scepticism as a means of reaching happiness, while later philosophers, especially in early modern times, came to equate a sceptical attitude with an incurable malady.

Despite their differences, however, all thinkers agreed on seeing scepticism as something deeply bound up with the human condition; that is, with the fundamental contradiction of both being finite and also having to come to terms with an infinitely complex world.

As MCAS's research from the last years has shown, however, scepticism is also relevant beyond philosophy, in other domains of human thought and practice that are characterised by a finite nature and are therefore far from certain. In Judaism, for instance, scepticism has been considered a threat to religion because of its tendency to undermine religious beliefs, but also as a useful set of dialectical strategies to prove opponents wrong or to lead them back to (relatively) certain matters, such as the halakha. Cultural scepticism, moreover, plays an important role in questioning authoritative norms, thereby paving the way for change and renewal.

The fourth summer school convened by the Maimonides Centre for Advanced Studies—Jewish Scepticism will explore the varied significance of scepticism from a novel, interdisciplinary point of view, paying particular attention to Jewish thought and culture. More precisely, it will bring together philosophers, experts in religious and Jewish studies, art historians, and literary scholars, in order to investigate the multifaceted phenomenon of early modern scepticism from three perspectives:

1. *The Significance of Scepticism in Philosophy*: What makes scepticism such a pervasive and persistent topic in philosophy? Why did it matter to philosophy, and is it still important to it?
2. *The Significance of Scepticism in Judaism*: To what extent is scepticism an element of Jewish life, thought, and culture? And is there a form of scepticism that is distinctively Jewish?
3. *The Significance of Scepticism in the Fine Arts*: To what extent do some works of art reflect a sceptical attitude on the part of the artist and to what extent do they seek to elicit such an attitude from their audience? And what is the precise significance of the scepticism involved in the fine arts?

The aim of this summer school is to explore the various ways in which scepticism can be significant in different domains. It is intended for students and scholars from different backgrounds (ranging from history of philosophy to Jewish studies, religious studies, theatre and literary studies, and art history). MA and PhD students as well as early postdocs are invited to consider the multifaceted significance of scepticism and to share their unique views on it.

The participants will also have the opportunity to present their work at the “Significance of Scepticism in Philosophy, Judaism, and Culture” conference, which will take place after the summer school from 21 to 24 July.

Lecturer Team

The course leaders are Stephan Schmid and Giuseppe Veltri. They will be supported by an international team of experts in philosophy, religious and Jewish studies, art history, and literature—such as Daniel Boyarin, Annalisa Coliva, Michael Della Rocca, Yehuda Halper, Christine Hayes, Adi Luria-Hayon, Diego Machuca, and others.

Maimonides Centre for Advanced Studies at the University of Hamburg

The Maimonides Centre for Advanced Studies is a Humanities Research Institute at the University of Hamburg funded by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (German Research Foundation). Its central aim is to explore and research scepticism in Judaism in its dual manifestation as a purely philosophical tradition and as a more general expression of sceptical strategies, concepts, and attitudes in the cultural field.

Target Group

This summer school is intended for MA students and PhD candidates from the humanities. Depending on capacity, BA students in their last year of studies may also be accepted.

Application

Up to **fifteen fully funded scholarships**, covering accommodation as well as travel expenses, are available. Applicants are requested to submit the following documents **in a single PDF file**:

- curriculum vitae
- personal statement outlining motivation and academic background
- letter of recommendation
- copy of academic degree(s) or transcript of records

Participants can gain up to 5 ECTS credit points for successful participation in the summer school.

For further information and to submit an application, please contact Dr. Beniamino Fortis: beniamino.fortis@uni-hamburg.de.

Applications may be submitted until 29 February 2024.
Acceptance letters will be sent out by the end of March 2024.