**Statement of Purpose – Amir Abahel**

When I started getting into the history of capitalism, I took an "Economics for Non-Economists" course, where I learned the standard supply-and-demand model in which price and quantity counter-balance each other until an equilibrium is reached. Although I understood the basic logic of the system, as someone with a more historical turn of mind and training, I was bothered by the level of abstraction of what must in practice be a very complicated and messy process. The neat model left many questions in my head: How do changes in supply and demand translate into changes in price and quantity? By what process do all the individual actions of buyers generate the aggregate phenomenon of an agreed-upon equilibrium? To what extent does the existence of a theoretical understanding of this process affect the process itself?

These sorts of questions fascinate me. Broadly speaking, I am interested in the history of capitalism and economic life – in the everyday practices that economic agents have used when buying, selling, and producing goods, and in the way in which their aggregation has led to economic change. How has market activity been conducted? How did merchants and customers decide what and where to buy or sell? How has economic activity been regulated, and how has this regulation been enforced? Equally important and interesting to me are the cultural, moral, and conceptual aspects of economic activity. Which practices have been considered legitimate, and which have been frowned upon, and why? How have new practices and new products been accepted? How has changing economic practice interacted with the development of economic thought, and vice versa?

More generally, I am interested in the creation of the modern economic world and the fundamental changes in people’s lives caused by this process since its origins. This was not a transformation that was planned and implemented in an orderly fashion, but the result of countless decisions of a great multitude of people. What interests me most are the changes in the ways that these people conducted their lives, and the manner in which these changes coalesced into the features of the modern economy, such as the reliance on trust and credit, standardization, and global interconnectivity, among other things. The economic sphere appeals to me because it deals with some of the most basic and mundane aspects of life, and because economic changes are revealed in changes in people's mode of life. What I really wish to explore is how these changes look "from below", in the way people behave and go about their lives.

I am particularly interested in the early modern period, the era in which the foundations of capitalism and the modern economy were laid and one that saw great transformations in the making. It is fascinating to see how things we accept as normal today were once experienced as novel and groundbreaking. New ways of conducting business, new products, new religious divisions, new forms of political power and many other factors all affected everyday life in this period.

In terms of my PhD dissertation, I am considering taking a closer look at changes in pricing practices in the early modern Atlantic world, especially at the use of fixed prices in the market and the interrelation between these changes and changes in social values. Although pricing is one of the most basic economic practices, there are still many gaps in our knowledge of how it was done. One way of tackling the problem would be to examine a single product or a group of several products and track the ways in which they were priced over time and space. Another approach would be to examine the pricing practices of specific groups of economic agents. My idea is to focus on Quakers, since for religious reasons they adopted the practice of fixed prices fairly early and therefore offer an interesting starting point for research. I could expand on this by looking at groups elsewhere, such as Jewish or Middle Eastern merchants, as well.

History has been my passion since youth. When I was ten, I found a copy of Liddell Hart's *The Strategy of Indirect Approach*. Although at the time many aspects of the book were over my head, what remained with me was a fascination with the past as well as the curiosity and desire to continue learning about the ways in which the past has formed and influenced our present world. Since then, my fields of interest have evolved significantly, and I am currently most drawn to the history of capitalism. I wish to specialize in this sub-field for several reasons. First, it deals with one of the greatest and most consequential transformations in history, one that is still unfolding in our times. Second, it bears a direct relation to the way in which people conduct their ordinary, day-to-day lives, whether through choice of occupation, place of residence, or patterns of consumption. Finally, this is a field that calls for a transnational or even global perspective as well as an interdisciplinary approach, cultural research, legal research, economic research, and other methodologies are all equally relevant to it. The methodological challenge is to figure out how and when each should be applied in order to reach the most accurate historical picture possible.

I believe that my academic record indicates that I am well prepared for the project I have outlined above. I hold both a BA and an MA from the outstanding history department at Hebrew University, where I was in the honors program. As a result, I have significant experience doing historical research with primary sources, including projects on a larger scale, such as an MA thesis. I have a strong background in languages, which enables me to conduct research on different geographical areas. Apart from English, I have studied German and some French, so my foundation in European languages is solid. I am a native Hebrew speaker, but also have an extensive knowledge of Arabic, which may be useful should sources direct my research to the Mediterranean or Middle East. I have taken courses in calculus and probability to prepare myself for quantitative analysis and have even audited classes in law. Indeed, desiring to be a historian, I am happy to learn anything I may need in order to do the research that I love.

The History Department at the University of Chicago would be a great place for me to study and conduct my research. As one of the most prominent such departments in the world, it would offer me an ideal environment in which to sharpen my historical analytical skills. For me, a crucial advantage lies in the department’s many prominent researchers who share my interests in terms of both theme and historical period: Professor Pincus, Professor Levy, Professor Cheney, Professor Jonsson, and Professor Pomeranz. I believe all would be great advisors and guides for my research.

I sincerely hope that you will grant me the opportunity to study in your department.

Sincerely yours,

Amir Abahel.