**Statement of Purpose – Amir Abahel**

When I started getting into the field of the history of capitalism, I took an "Economics for Non-Economists" course, where we learned the standard supply-and-demand model in which price and quantity balance each other until equilibrium is reached. The basic logic of the system was understandable, but being of a more historical 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 open: How do changes in supply and demand translate into changes in price and quantity? By what process do all the individual actions of buyers and produce the aggregate phenomenon of an agreed equilibrium? To what extent does the presence of a theoretical understanding of this process affect the process itself?

This is an example of the sort of questions in which I am interested. Broadly speaking, I am interested in the history of capitalism and economic life – in the everyday practices used by economic agents when they engaged in buying, selling, producing, and how their aggregation creates economic change. How was market activity conducted? How did merchants and customers decide what and where to buy or sell? How were economic activity regulated, and how was this regulation enforced? Equally important and interesting to me are the cultural, moral, and conceptual aspects of economic activity: Which practices were considered legitimate, and which were frowned upon, and why? How were new practices and new products accepted? How did the changing economic practice interact with developing 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 that were involved in such a process since the early modern era. 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 most interests me is the changes in the ways those people conducted their lives, and how those changes coalesced into the characteristics of the modern economy, like the use of trust and credit, standardization, and global interconnectivity, among others. I find the economic sphere so fascinating because it deals with some of the most basic and mundane aspects of life and therefore economic changes express themselves in great changes in people's way of life. What I really want to see is how these changes look "from below", in the way people behave and go about their lives.

I am particularly interested in these questions in the early modern period, an era in which the foundations of capitalism and the modern economy were created. It's an era when great transformations are still in the making, and it is interesting to see how things we accept as normal were first experienced as new and groundbreaking. New ways of doing business, new products, new religious divisions, new forms of political power and many other things were all changing everyday life for everybody in this period, and that is why I find the early modern period especially interesting.

As an idea for a PhD dissertation, I thought about taking a closer look at changes in pricing practices in the early modern Atlantic world, especially on the use of fixed prices in the market, and the interrelations between these changes and changes in social values. Pricing is one of the most basic economic actions, and yet there are still many gaps in our knowledge of the subject. One way to tackle this subject could be to examine a single product or a group of several products, and tracking the changes in the ways they were priced over time and space. Another approach is to look at the pricing practices of specific groups of economic agents. My idea was to focus on the Quakers, since they adopted the practice of fixed prices rather early for religious reasons, and therefore offer an interesting starting point for research. This direction could be expanded by looking at other groups in other areas as well, like Jewish or Middle Eastern merchants.

History has been a passion of mine since a young age. When I was 10 I found a copy of the Liddell Hart's "the Strategy of Indirect Approach". While many aspects of the book certainly went over my head when I was a young boy, something that has stayed with me ever since is a fascination with the past, as well as curiosity and a desire to keep learning more about the ways the past formed and influenced our present world. Since then my fields of interest have evolved significantly, and I now focus more on the history of capitalism. I wish to specialize in this field for several reasons. It deals with one of the greatest and most consequential transformations in history, one that is still unfolding in our times. It has a direct relation to the way people conducted their ordinary, day-to-day lives, whether through their choice of occupation, place of residence, or patterns of consumption. Finally, this field calls for a transnational and even a global perspective, as well as for an interdisciplinary approach: cultural research, legal research, economic research, and other methodologies can all be used. The fascinating methodological challenge is figuring out how and when each one should be applied, so that the most accurate historical picture possible will be reached.

I believe that my academic record indicates that I am well prepared for the project I've outlined. I have both a BA and an MA from the excellent history department of the Hebrew University, and I was also a student in the history department's honors program. As a result, I have significant experience in historical research based on the analysis of primary sources, including projects of larger scale such as an MA thesis. I have a strong linguistic background, which would allow me to conduct a more geographically diverse research. Apart from English, I have studied German and some French, giving my solid foundations in European languages. I am a native Hebrew speaker, and I also have an extensive experience in Arabic, which might become useful should sources direct the research to areas like the Mediterranean. I have taken courses in calculus and probability to prepare for a more quantitative approach, I've audited courses in the law school, and I'll be happy to learn how to use any tool needed. My desire is to be a historian, so I can keep doing the research that I love.

The University of Chicago history department would be a great place for me to study and conduct my research. It is one of the most prominent departments in the world, and it is the best environment in which my skills of historical analysis can be sharpened. An important advantage of the department for me is that it includes many prominent researchers who share my interests both in terms of theme and of historical period, such as Professor Pincus, Professor Levy, Professor Cheney, Professor Jonsson, and Professor Pomeranz. I believe this could make them great advisors and guides for my research.

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

Amir Abahel.