

2001 Hans Sigrist Stipend

The issue of autoimmune disease is one of the more perplexing problems in modern biomedicine. The common view considers autoimmunity as a pathological condition involving the immune system confusing its host's own tissues with pathogenic invaders: the immune system practically destroys one or more types of tissues of its own body, bringing about what is usually considered as autoimmune disease (e.g. multiple sclerosis, or type 1 diabetes). My research project, for which I was granted a Sigrist Fellowship, is dedicated to a historical and conceptual analysis of autoimmune disease. In particular, I wish to challenge the common view and consider autoimmunity in its wider physiological context.

When I commenced my fellowship I had just completed the research phase for the project. I was thus grateful for the opportunity to spend a longer period at a calm place like Bern in order to write down my work. Indeed, the time in Bern has enabled me to work out most of my book, parts of which were published in a series of papers. I intend to submit the work to the Philosophisch-naturwissenschaftliche Fakultät in Bern within the next months.

Another aspect of the Hans Sigrist fellowship was the teaching that was associated with it. Among others, I gave two introductory courses at the Philosophisch-historische Fakultät: on the history of

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modern genetics and on the historical and conceptual foundations of evolutionary theory. However, my courses attracted also many students from the natural sciences. This posed a special challenge to construct a course that would appeal both to students with very little prior knowledge in biology and to students of the sciences. This was a most interesting experience, which will definitely help me in my future career.