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THINKERS ■ ARTISTS ■ LEADERS ■ AND THE WORLD THEY MADE

MAKERS OF JEWISH MODERNITY

Edited by Jacques Picard, Jacques Revel, Michael P. Steinberg, Idith Zertal

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MAKERS OF JEWISH MODERNITY



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THINKERS, ARTISTS, LEADERS, AND THE WORLD THEY MADE

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Princeton University Press ■ *Princeton & Oxford*

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Funded by Fondation Berma, Geneva, Switzerland

Copyright © 2016 by Princeton University Press
Published by Princeton University Press, 41 William Street, Princeton, New
Jersey 08540

In the United Kingdom: Princeton University Press, 6 Oxford Street,
Woodstock, Oxfordshire OX20 1TR

press.princeton.edu

Jacket art: Mark Rothko, *Untitled (Red, Orange)*, 1968. Oil on canvas. 233 x 176 cm. Founda-
tion Beyeler, Riehen/Basel. © The Beyeler Collection, Switzerland. Photo: Robert Bayer,
Basel. © 1998 Kate Rothko Prizel & Christopher Rothko / 2015 ProLitteris, Zurich

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Makers of Jewish modernity : thinkers, artists, leaders, and the world they made /
edited by Jacques Picard, Jacques Revel, Michael P. Steinberg, Idith Zertal.

pages cm

ISBN 978-0-691-16423-6 (hardcover : alk. paper) 1. Judaism—History—Modern period,
1750– 2. Jews—Intellectual life—19th century. 3. Jews—Intellectual life—20th century.
4. Jews—Intellectual life—21st century. 5. Jews—Civilization. 6. Civilization, Western—
Jewish influences. 7. Jewish scientists—Biography. 8. Jewish artists—Biography. 9. Jews—
Identity. I. Picard, Jacques, editor. II. Flem, Lydia. Sigmund Freud (1856–1939). Container
of (work):

BM195.M35 2016

909'.0492408—dc23 2015025101

British Library Cataloging-in-Publication Data is available

This book has been composed in Stempel Garamond LT Std and
Franklin Gothic Std

Printed on acid-free paper. ∞

Printed in the United States of America

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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Arnaldo Momigliano (1908–1987)

JUDAISM PAST AND PRESENT

Silvia Berti

OVER TWENTY-FIVE YEARS AGO, WHEN I FIRST MENTIONED TO ARNALDO MOMIGLIANO my idea of publishing a one-volume selection of his writings on Judaism,¹ few people would have recognized in this strong sense of belonging the most intimate source of his relationship with the past—the *primum mobile* of his work. This is not a question of affirming that Momigliano is essentially a historian of Judaism or of its contemporary interpreters and theorists. A statement of the kind would go against all the evidence and deconstruct all the connotations that Pierre Vidal-Naquet's adjective *momiglianesque* intrinsically conveys. What the anthology (selected in agreement with Momigliano himself) was foregrounding was the way in which the lines of his thought on Judaism gradually built up an accurate and detailed self-portrait, besides throwing light on his studies overall and the deeply rooted motivation behind them.²

Today this is widely accepted, and not simply as regards his intellectual biography. Life, doctrine, and *métier d'historien* all converge in a very original approach to the problems of Judaism in the modern world today. Central to his position is an insistent and mandatory defense of historical truth and truthfulness, with which his commitment to what may be termed the “ethical experience” of Judaism is so closely interconnected that it is difficult to speak of unless all its discrete components are read as an entirety.

Arnaldo Dante Momigliano (1908–1987) was one of the great twentieth-century historians, and left an indelible mark on both European and American culture. For more than sixty years his influence was felt far beyond the field of ancient history, his chosen area of specialization, particularly as regards intercultural relations in the Hellenistic and Roman world and the related historiography. Anyone who came in contact with him in individual or academic discussions, above all younger scholars, was immediately aware of his prodigious intellectual energy, a second nature in him, forcing his interlocutor to confront more extensive issues and test them against the most rigorous analytical enquiries. Momigliano studied at Turin University under Augusto Rostagni and Gaetano De Sanctis, graduating in 1929. He then moved to Rome to work with the latter, who had supervised his thesis. In



1933 he accepted the Chair of Greek History that De Sanctis himself had had to vacate on refusing to swear loyalty to the fascist regime (1931). In 1936 he moved back to Turin to lecture in Roman history, but after the Race Laws were enacted in September 1938 he was forced to leave and go into exile. These were difficult months in which, besides the horror of racial persecution, he was subjected to the unexpected and unbearably painful scission of the double Italian-Jewish identity in which he had been raised, and which was nourished by its enthusiasm for the ideals of the Risorgimento and for the opening of the ghettos. This also marked the beginning of an anxious search for an academic post abroad. Momigliano explored all avenues in American academia,³ but initially with no success despite the very vocal support of such figures as Benedetto Croce and Giovanni Gentile and intellectuals of the caliber of De Sanctis, Rostagni, Luigi Russo, and Lionello Venturi. The opening came, unexpectedly, from Britain, and with the help of Hugh Last he was able to move to Oxford in 1939. Despite a sense of isolation and initial language difficulties, through his work at University College (1951–1975) and at the Warburg Institute, where he taught and held seminars for almost twenty years (1965–1983), Momigliano gradually began to create a position for himself in a world and culture on which he was to have a strongly transforming power, especially in the field of historiography. For the last twelve years of his life, after retiring from University College, he held seminars and courses at the University of Chicago in the spring and fall. This was probably the place where his teaching, study, and chosen way of life came together most productively, and it was in Chicago that he formed the friendship with Edward Shils that lasted to the end of his life. When he finished his term of seminars in Pisa, every February, it was with an amused and satisfied smile that he would leave as his contact address “the Quadrangle Club.”

The components feeding into a lifelong project of this extent must inevitably be many and considerably different. It is to the ethical nucleus of the Jewish tradition, however, that Momigliano refers in the very moving preface to *Pagine ebraiche* written from the hospital of the University of Chicago a few weeks before he died (inexplicably not republished in either the ninth or the tenth of his *Contributi*). This preface is a vivid recreation of his all-embracing and rigorous upbringing in a fiercely intellectual and intensely devout Jewish household. He describes the two fundamental figures in his development, Amadio and Felice Momigliano. Amadio, his grandfather's brother, was a very fine biblical scholar specializing in talmudic and particularly kabbalistic studies (a contributory factor in his relationship with Elia Benamozegh, the mystic rabbi of Livorno), who introduced Arnaldo as a child to the study of Hebrew texts. They were in close and continuous contact: from 1914 to 1924, the year Amadio died, Arnaldo's family was living in his grandfather's house. In an interview that he gave me in March 1987, only recently published, Momigliano stated: “We had two apartments, one above the other, and met frequently during the day; every evening he read the *Zohar*. It was he who taught me Hebrew; he wrote me a complete grammar, which I kept for years.”⁴ Felice, Momigliano's cousin, on the other hand, was a socialist and dedicated scholar of Renan, of propheticism, and of Mazzini; he read Spinoza to the eleven-year-old Arnaldo and instructed him in a more open form of reformed Judaism: “I remember Felice Momigliano would arrive, and we would have him read Spinoza.”⁵

Momigliano inherited, absorbed, and always retained these two very different ways of interpreting and practicing the Jewish tradition, although less as the unresolved conflicts they potentially were than as heuristic elements in his ongoing critical and exegetical study of Judaism, where his method was continually to pose new questions rather than to find conciliatory solutions. The two elements in this very productive comparison-contrast between what we might hesitantly define as “Jewish modernism” and the observance of tradition share an element of constancy that, while not resolving the contrast, would seem to constitute the fulcrum of his reflection: the consideration of Judaism as an axiomatic ethical experience, essentially comprising “the first monotheistic and ethical religion in history, the religion of the prophets of Israel” on which, he writes, “to this day our morality depends.”⁶ It may be objected that biographical notes such as the above have little to contribute to the view of Jewish modernity Momigliano constructed over the years. This is not the opinion of the present writer. In a recent, seminal essay to which we shall return, Moshe Idel too compares Momigliano’s idea of Judaism with that of Scholem and of Rosenzweig and attributes theoretically structuring weight to the education and example he received from Amadio.⁷

Numerous other autobiographical testimonies and passages from essays poured into the posthumous *Ottavo contributo* confirm the thesis posited in *Essays on Ancient and Modern Judaism*, like the following one:

I was born in a house full of books: Italian books, Hebrew books, French books, Latin and Greek writers either in the original or in translation. Jewish was our tradition, and indeed my house had the reputation of a patriarchal Jewish house. . . . The need to put order between the Jewish and the Italian side of ourselves daily conditioned our life, besides filling our reading and our conversation. Having been introduced to Spinoza and modern Bible criticism long before I was a Bar-Mitzva, there was no serious conflict between reason and faith, rather a question of evaluating the components of the multiple civilizations of which I was a conscious heir. In a sense, in my scholarly life, I have done nothing else but try to understand what I owe both to the Jewish house in which I was brought up and to the Christian-Roman-Celtic village in which I was born.⁸

Ten years earlier, the synthesis, which is presented here in autobiographical terms of reminiscence, had read as an intellectual assessment when, in a letter to Sebastiano Timpanaro, on July 30, 1967, he writes: “If I had to define what I have been interested to find out in the study of history so far, I would say roughly three things: the influence of Greco-Roman and Jewish historical thought on subsequent historical thought; the organisation that the ancient political and social structures gave or didn’t give to themselves to stabilize peace and to ensure freedom of decision and of discussion; the position of the Jews and of Jewish civilisation in the ancient world and after.”⁹ The assessment is shrewd and anticipatory in foregrounding the Jewish question as a conspicuous part of the whole (interestingly, as regards the historiographical issue too).

However, the horizons widened considerably beyond the pillars of tradition. Momigliano was raised in a family environment that left no doubt as to how the

birth of Christianity and the encounter between Greek and Hebrew civilizations constituted the definitive turning-point in our history.¹⁰ This intellectual experience then became historiographical knowledge under the guidance of Gaetano De Sanctis, and a magisterial conceptualization of the idea of Hellenism in his interpretation of the work of Johann Gustav Droysen.¹¹

If Momigliano quickly realized that lacking from Droysen's reconstruction of the encounter between Greek and oriental culture in the early days of Christianity was any trace of the Hebrew component, it was because all the urgency and disquiet of his historical enquiry was concentrated on precisely this point. Many years later he was to speak of it when revisiting his early writings from an autobiographical slant: "above all, Hellenism meant to me the period when the Jews were confronted with Greek civilization."¹² He added that he took precisely *this* Droysen "as a *vitaculum*, starting from a Jewish household in a Piedmont village."¹³ The problem of Judaism's function in the modern world, which Momigliano had dealt with well before the Shoah, in an essay published as early as 1931,¹⁴ for him meant above all a historical enquiry as to how it had survived the centuries of the clash/encounter with other cultures and other governmental and religious organizations. In considering such a crucial issue, Momigliano pondered the relationship between document and historical truth, reviewed the intellectual biographies of Jewish scholars of the classical world, and questioned, without repudiating it, the fertile historicist tradition in which he had been educated. What all these passages particularly evince is his personal relationship with Judaism united with his specific philosophical inclination, the latter quality noted by Croce with his habitual perceptive succinctness. In a cover letter of December 18, 1938 backing Momigliano's application for a position in America or Britain after his dismissal, as a Jew, from Turin University, Croce wrote: "He combines philological expertise and philosophical intelligence in a rare union."¹⁵

This was confirmed by Carlo Dionisotti, his friend from 1925 onward. Speaking of Momigliano's readings of Immanuel Kant, he emphasizes "the conjunction, characteristic of his whole work, of a preoccupation which is both philosophical and religious."¹⁶ It was this particular fusion of philosophical, religious, and ethical interests, with his exceptional flexibility and intellectual curiosity, which opened up a dialogue with the more radical intellectual experiences of contemporary Judaism: those of Gershom Scholem, Walter Benjamin, and Leo Strauss.

Indicative of all his historiographical essays is an underlying autobiographical trait, which became more insistent in his last years as his own life and that of Jewish culture and tradition interpenetrated still further. Hence the charged significance of his work on the history of religions, on the relations between philology and the comparative method, and on language and myth in the history of historico-religious studies. His profiles of Müller, Usener, Schwartz, Wilamowitz, and Wellhausen, written in 1982, are also portraits of German cultured society of the period, as well as a revelatory *mise au point* of classical scholarship in Germany.¹⁷ It is certainly no coincidence that the two historiographical studies that, in the present writer's opinion, are insuperable in Momigliano's oeuvre concern two philologists, or more precisely two creators of philology who were closely involved with the religious question: Jacob Bernays and Hermann Usener.¹⁸ Like them, Momigliano felt with urgency the need for truth/fulness (in this quasi-philosophical sense), which is intrinsic to philological enquiry¹⁹.

His choice of the “form” of his enquiries is equally significant. Imposing and exhaustive monographs and general histories were rejected (at least after the 1930s, the main production of which however were two essays) in favor of the fragment, the essay, and the specific analysis: “a more honest history,” as he liked to put it. But equally striking in these detailed analyses is the constant presence of the historical question: the insuperable ability to invest single facts, concerning even the smallest detail, with the significance of a problem anchored to a resounding need for truth. This probably derives, in part, from the British academic training he acquired later in life; but I would adduce this attention to detail, this exegetical quality of Momigliano’s work, where an exquisitely analytical mentality is predicated on a universalizing tension, as evidence also of his profound links with the interpretive method of the rabbinical tradition.

In a rare passage in which he speaks of himself and the motivation behind his research, the value of documentation emerges fully: “I am a Jew myself and I know from my own experience what price Jews had and have to pay to be Jews. I am not collecting facts for academic purposes when I try to understand what moved the Jews to refuse assimilation to surrounding civilizations. But I could choose to give an answer to this question in religious and moral terms. If instead I choose to clarify my ideas on this matter in historical terms . . . I subordinate myself *ipso facto* to what the specific evidence . . . will tell me. . . . Whatever ideological considerations guide my research, I shall be judged by my use of the evidence.”²⁰ This underlining of the importance of documentary analysis in historical research, while particularly insistent after World War II, is already well in evidence in earlier work. In an important essay from his youth, when Croce’s influence on him was particularly strong, an anticipatory note can be heard of his taste for erudition and natural philological inclination: “The evocation of the single fact is magisterial since . . . it is always dominated by the need for precise comprehension.”²¹ He is speaking of Gibbon, but the words are almost a prefiguration of what was to become his own method and historiographical style. In this sense it was Gibbon who furnished the model: like him, Momigliano decided to be both *érudit* and *philosophe*. A celebrated essay, “Ancient History and the Antiquarian” (1950), makes explicit this intention of combining philosophical history and the antiquarian method: “This remains the aim which many of us propose to ourselves.”²²

This strong commitment to the value of evidence and the antiquarian method, esteemed not simply as an evolutionary stage in the historical method but as a goal in itself, and structurally essential in historical research on account of its autonomy, inevitably conflicted with Croce’s idea of philological history. Although himself the most erudite of scholars, Croce famously leaned toward a decided theoretical undervaluing of erudition in the work of the historian. Philological history forms part of his list of pseudo-histories; it lacks *das geistige Band*, the spiritual nexus: it is merely *richtig* but not *wahr*, correct but not true.²³ The divergence between Momigliano and Croce is accentuated in an essay from 1955. First, a distinction is made between the ascertaining of facts and evidence and the act of interpretation: “The true difficulty in the historian’s trade consists, it seems to me, in the relationship existing between establishing the facts and interpreting them.”²⁴ On another, no less weighty question, however, Momigliano analyzes a number of Croce’s celebrated theses and expresses increased dissent: “I see no reason why I have the right

to pronounce moral judgment on my contemporary, the mayor of Pocapaglia, but not on the Athenian archon Themistocles. We have been brought up to consider judging the mayor of Pocapaglia equivalent to seeking to improve him . . . while no purpose would be served by judging the archon of Athens, who has been dead for centuries and whose possible actions are now over. But in truth few of us judge our contemporaries to improve them; we judge them, as we judge the men of the past, to affirm our own convictions, posit values, and establish solidarity with some individuals and distance ourselves from others. We wish to orientate ourselves in the world . . . and thus judge as we are judged.” Further on he reiterates: “We judge Moses, Socrates or St. Paul . . . because their actions are still morally important for us too.”²⁵ He is clearly referring to the pages in which Croce maintains that, as a logical and not practical consciousness, “history should not apply the qualifications of good and evil to the facts and the people it studies.”²⁶ This criticism of historicism puts Momigliano squarely on “Gibbonian” — or, equally, enlightenment — ground, in its reaffirmation of the right to moral judgment. Moreover, in an important essay, “Historicism Revisited,” Momigliano turns a critical eye on a further characteristic of historicism: relativism. Influenced also by Leo Strauss,²⁷ his friend and colleague at the University of Chicago, who relegated Weber and historicism to the (moral) meagerness of a perspective that considered it could jettison value judgments, Momigliano repositioned the work of the historian in terms that distanced themselves from historicism while maintaining solid ethical and theoretical presuppositions. In tones that echo a series of passages in *Natural Right and History*, Momigliano writes: “Either we possess a religious or moral belief independent of history, which allows us to pronounce judgements on historical events, or we must give up moral judgment. Just because history teaches us how many moral codes mankind has had, we cannot derive moral judgment from history.”²⁸ And like Bernays, having received and nurtured a set of ethics and a faith, Momigliano “had no need to look to history for one.”²⁹

If the ethical-religious foundation remained intact, actually intensifying in his later years, the mediation between faith and reason was from his earliest works represented by history. This historicization, which studies the different forms of religious experience on a par with other historical manifestations, is however predicated on a firmly rooted principle that would seem to contradict it: “Even the notion of transforming history by studying history implies a meta-historical faith.”³⁰ Indeed, the complexity, which includes the different phenomena as historically determined without subordinating its foundations to diachrony and history, and thus the risk of reducing them to amorphous relativism, comprises one of the supreme and indelible points of Momigliano’s teaching.

While his point of departure continued to operate as a constant in Momigliano’s work, it was in concrete historical research that he exercised the ancient obligation of memory. I well remember his comment to me during a discussion of Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi’s questions as to the relations between Jewish memory, history, and historiography: “Historical thinking which looks at these things seriously is a form of religious life.”³¹ Beyond its intrinsic value, such a personal response was also implicitly referring to the fact that “the Jews are the only people of antiquity in whom a reflection as to their historical destiny lay at the centre of their spiritual life: a part of their religion.”³²

On the one hand, then, is Jewish religious life, which found its position, secularized, within historical thought; on the other, the idea—not actually new in twentieth-century Jewish thinking—that observance of the law and due meditation on the Jewish past and destiny are one and the same process.

A historicist and antihistoricist position would then seem to coexist in Momigliano, as Moshe Idel perceived with great acumen.³³ The real issue is a consensus as to what this means. In agreement with my point as to Leo Strauss's importance for the development of Momigliano's antihistoricist position, Idel reinforces Momigliano's antihistoricism by comparing a number of his statements with others expressed by Scholem and Rosenzweig in order to hone the dialectics of the relationship between historicity and ahistoricity in Jewish history. Momigliano considered Scholem the greatest contemporary historian of Judaism;³⁴ he was certainly in a position to appreciate Scholem's exceptional skills in retrieving and interpreting the many facets of the mystical tradition that before his work was largely unknown (and even where known, largely disparaged: see the classic example of Heinrich Graetz, whose rationalism deemed the kabbalists "irregular" when they were not out-and-out scoundrels). He equally admired the acuity Scholem brought to bear on the whole Jewish question, in search of the element that had kept Judaism vibrant through the centuries, resisting all assimilationist tendencies. What he rejected was Scholem's solution: the search for the mystic foundation of Halakhah, and the acknowledgment of Zionism as the redemptive force of the whole of Jewish history, an idea in which a messianic inheritance and Zionism as an actual historical movement converge. The solution was highly individualistic, and for Momigliano indicated a tendentially anarchic personality,³⁵ dangerously akin to his objects of study, Sabbatai Zevi and Jacob Frank, and impossible to transmit, not least because, as he wrote in an essay from 1986, "within Judaism, messianism finds its limits in the statement constantly reaffirmed by major thinkers like Saadya Gaon, Maimonides (d. 1204), and Chasdai Crescas (fifteenth century) . . . that the Torah, the Law, remains valid for the messianic age also; in fact, it is strengthened by the joy of a contemplative life under the Law. . . . The anomic impulse is repressed by normative Judaism practically until the nineteenth century; anomie was brought back into fashion by G. Scholem in the twentieth century."³⁶

Idel suggests that Momigliano's antihistoricist stance was influenced by Rosenzweig's position on the ahistorical character of Jewish history, which considers all its phases as simultaneous, a hypothesis that for the present writer is not entirely persuasive for a number of reasons. First, because this would involve the idea—which, indeed, Idel sustains—that "Momigliano is inclined to envisage Judaism as a phenomenon that transcends history."³⁷ Second, it is improbable that in aiming at an autonomous position with respect to the radically historicist culture in which he was raised, Momigliano would embrace an idea of Judaism like Rosenzweig's, distorted by the heavy weight of Hegelian idealism (see Momigliano's judgment of the more Hegelian aspects of Droysen's work as interpretative weaknesses). When asked, in the interview mentioned above, for his opinion on Scholem's violent rebuttal of Rosenzweig's theories, Momigliano replied, including himself in his answer: "He must have felt that there was an element of falseness in Rosenzweig's work. A great man, most certainly. But this uniting of Hegel and the Jewish world: what are we to make of it? They just don't go together."

This in no way undermined his explicit admiration for the strenuous intellectualism of Rosenzweig who, had he lived longer, would in Momigliano's opinion have been "the only scholar capable of challenging Scholem's interpretation of Judaism."³⁸ An identical intellectual trajectory of admiration for him mixed with sharp criticism is also to be found in Strauss and Scholem. Strauss dedicated his book on Spinoza to Rosenzweig, while observing that the *Stern der Erlösung* constituted a philosophical system rather than a reflection on Judaism (a similar position to Momigliano's);³⁹ Scholem considered him a genius,⁴⁰ but deplored his determined efforts to maximize the idea of *Deutschjudentum*, and "the way he saw Judaism as a kind of pietistic Protestant church."⁴¹

It is difficult, however, to believe that for Momigliano Judaism transcended history, and that he applied to the study of his own tradition confessional criteria he would not have applied to other religions; certainly, it would be more difficult to demonstrate it. Any number of statements can be adduced against the idea, not least the following, devoid of all equivocation: "Let me admit from the start that I am rather impervious to any claim that sacred history poses problems which are not those of profane history. . . . It must be clear once and for all that Judges and Acts, Herodotus and Tacitus are historical texts to be examined with the purpose of recovering the truth from the past."⁴² And indeed the scholar who at twelve was *au fait* with Spinoza and Renan could hardly write otherwise.

This profession of faith in the historical method, necessarily placing Jewish history on a par with that of the other nations with which, over the centuries, the Jews had found themselves cohabiting, was clearly the expression of a consciously secular awareness: an awareness that denied legitimacy to the notion of Judaism's ahistorical character, thereby simultaneously excluding an internalist reading of Jewish history. Momigliano of course knew more than most to what extent the study of the Torah and its interpretations had been a structuring element of Jewish tradition through the centuries, but he was also aware that the ongoing, vibrant Jewish contribution to the history of civilization was equally due to their ability to absorb values and ideas from other cultures. This is probably the point on which he takes most serious issue with Scholem who, despite having more than once rejected the possibility of defining an "essence" of Judaism, insisted on interpreting the essential points of rupture in Jewish history, such as the Sabbatian crisis after Sabbatai Zevi's apostasy, as exclusively confined to the Jewish world. For his part Momigliano remained loyal to the lesson of Eduard Meyer, whom he was already reading as a student under De Sanctis: a vision of the ancient world that went beyond Greece and Rome to consider Persia, Judea, Mesopotamia, and Egypt as elements in an interplay of cultural, religious, and institutional refractions. Years of pondering the historiographical results of Meyer's work immunized him permanently against the illusion of interpreting Jewish—or indeed any other—history by following exclusively the immanent lines of its development. On the other hand, Scholem and Momigliano are closer in position in emphasizing the religious dimension that separates them both from mere orthodoxy and secularization: Scholem always rejected both terms in the orthodoxy-atheism polarization while roundly declaring that he failed to understand what being Jewish meant if it excluded the ethico-religious dimension.⁴³

A review of the different points in Jewish history that particularly concerned him reveals very clearly that in the clash/encounter with other cultures, the Jews had remained Jews in their determination to remain faithful to the Law, and not to be assimilated to other faiths and their related historic-juridical cultures; this is not, of course, to imply that their faith remained unmodified by these contacts, as variously conflictual as they were fruitful.

Two classic examples to emerge forcefully from Momigliano will suffice here. If it is true that what preserved religious unity and reestablished the devotion to the Law was the outcome of the revolt of the Maccabees, thereby avoiding the cultural victory of a profoundly hellenized Judaism such as that of Flavius Josephus was to become, considering Moses more a legislator than a prophet, it is equally true that the debt toward the Greek concept of *paideia* helped to form the Jewish ideal of a life dedicated to study and focused on the teacher-student relationship.⁴⁴ As he wrote in a significant passage, part of Jewish intellectualism derived from the close interrelation of piety and study. Thus while in the Athenian and Roman models, “thinking about religion usually made people less religious, among Jews the more you thought about religion the more religious you became.”⁴⁵ To return, then, to the question of the simultaneous coexistence in Momigliano of a historicist and an antihistoricist position, it is perhaps possible to state that while the study of Judaism, like any other historico-religious entity, necessarily requires historicization, the “metahistorical faith” he brought to bear in interrogating past civilizations, Judaism included, depended on his relationship with “the religion of the prophets of Israel.”⁴⁶ Hence his decision to dedicate his *Ottavo contributo* “to the memory of Amadio Momigliano (1844–1924) who taught me to study and love the tradition of the Fathers Ps.1:2; 146:8–9,”⁴⁷ while as early as 1958 he had thought of the following words for his own epitaph: “His faith was that of a free-thinker, without dogma and without hatred. But he loved with a son’s devotion the Jewish tradition of the Fathers.” And how closely his inexhaustible requirement for truth was linked to his commitment to that tradition is stated directly: “the battle between true and false, fought out by the Greek historians, is still our battle, though we need to fight it with the more general and profound historical awareness inherited not from Herodotus and Thucydides but from the Old Testament.”⁴⁸

Momigliano’s insight into the questions posed by twentieth-century Jewish intellectuals is considerable, yet he failed to address the issues of Zionism, the Shoah, or the ways in which the founding of the state of Israel reconstituted a political and state entity originally lost with the destruction of the Second Temple. That Momigliano chose not to live and teach in Israel is a fact, and perhaps not only because, living and studying between London, Chicago, and Pisa, he felt more in sympathy with the cosmopolitan intelligentsia of the diaspora. Like Benjamin, Strauss, and Rosenzweig, he did not follow Scholem’s and Goitein’s example, and did not go to Jerusalem. And again like Benjamin, who as late as 1936 published an anthology titled *Deutsche Menschen*, a searing elegy to a lost and much-lamented Germany,⁴⁹ Momigliano nurtured his own, inner Germany, the Germany of great philologists and scholars of the ancient world, many of whom were Jews. For all the empathy someone like Momigliano—brought up in the cult of the Risorgimento, which liberated Italian Jews from the ghettos—would necessarily have felt for the idea of Jewish national

emancipation,⁵⁰ it is difficult to believe that he could have failed to perceive how the very degeneration of the nationalist ideal led to the devastation of Europe under fascism and Nazism. Once the primacy of the nationalist principle has been established, it is conceptually impossible to deny others access to it, and history bulges with ideals degenerated into their opposites, as Momigliano was certainly well aware.

At this point the example of the ancient world returns paradigmatically, in the ways Judaism kept itself vibrant and faithful to itself while interacting with a number of the adjacent cultures. It could also be added that a great historian's work on the past acts as backlighting, as it were, for the moral anxieties and intellectual preoccupations of the present rather than prophesying about the future. It also stands as reminder and admonition that the Nazi extermination of millions of Jews—among which were eleven members of his family, including his parents—“would never have taken place in Italy, France, and Germany (not to say more) had there not been a centuries-old indifference on the part of the peoples of these countries toward their Jewish fellow citizens”: an indifference that was “the ultimate result of the hostility of the churches, which viewed ‘conversion’ as the only solution of the Jewish problem.”⁵¹ The idea, so deeply rooted in the Christian world, that Jewish destiny lay in conversion, denying Jews the right to remain Jews, had left Europe defenseless and culturally incapable of reacting against the exterminating will of the Nazis.⁵² A short, only recently published text, left on a note pad, moves along the same lines and is still meaningful to us: “The main obstacle that a Jew encounters in Western Europe, after all, is that of not being a Christian . . . [Judaism] is a tradition that as such seems worthy to be preserved and developed in competition with, along with and even as a possible alternative to Christianity. For the reason that it requires less faith, but more study, than the Christian religious tradition, it is worthy of consideration.”⁵³

It would be impossible to end this piece without mentioning the much-debated question of Momigliano's presumed compromise with fascism.⁵⁴ The issue is a painful and disturbing one, and greater intellectual honesty (among his critics) might have spared his memory. It is not a question of ignoring or, worse, of concealing documents that might destabilize and create unease, but of contextualizing and understanding them. The first of these documents is a card from 1928 that Riccardo Di Donato found among Momigliano's papers attesting to his membership in Turin University's GUM (Gruppo Universitario Musicale), founded in 1921, which slowly moved into the force-field of the fascist GUF.⁵⁵

In my opinion the best and most contextually conscientious response to the tragic moment in history that Momigliano was forced to steer his course through is given in Carlo Dionisotti's writings. A lifelong friend from undergraduate days, no one was better positioned to evaluate his actions. Dionisotti indignantly states that “the accusation against Momigliano of concealing his immediate Fascism, or at least of endorsing it very early on,”⁵⁶ the putative proof of which is the membership card giving him access to performances at the Teatro Regio in Turin, is quite simply unfounded. Had he had fascist leanings, there was nothing to stop him directly and openly becoming a member of GUF or, after the age of twenty-one, of Partito Nazionale Fascista.

Putting into context also means bearing in mind what is already a well-known fact, not least from Giorgio Bassani's novels: that fascist sympathies were common among Italian Jews, particularly in Ferrara and Piedmont, partly the consequence of an extreme form of patriotism and nationalism within an acquired Risorgimento *ethos* that blinded them as to the true authoritarian, illiberal, and very quickly antisemitic nature of the fascist dictatorship.⁵⁷ This was the case in Arnaldo's family, including his parents, unquestioning supporters of the "fascio" in Caraglio, his native town in the Cuneo area. An important exception was his beloved cousin Felice, a socialist and admirer of Mazzini. Many of his fellow university students such as Leone Ginzburg, Aldo Garosci, and Massimo Mila, equally embracing Gobetti and Croce, joined the antifascist front. Momigliano concentrated exclusively on his studies, and held no explicit political position: neither fascist nor antifascist, he was, as he was later to say, a *NONFASCIST*.⁵⁸ The only political consideration of the period (in a comment on Croce's *Storia d'Italia*) was on liberalism and on the level of political theory: "Every revival of liberalism is conditioned by its capacity to transform itself into a party of the people. . . . Formulating and developing this new liberalism may be a sound way of preparing for the future, albeit distant."⁵⁹ Once again, we see detachment from the present and, certainly, no trace of fascism. Events were closing in, however. In 1931 his mentor Gaetano De Sanctis refused to swear the oath of loyalty to fascism requested by Giovanni Gentile, and he immediately lost his Chair in Greek history. Momigliano joined the PNF on November 6, 1932, the condition for taking the post himself when it was offered by Rome University in March 1933. The choice still seems inconceivable to us today, yet it was the only way to continue his studies and, paradoxically, preserve his mentor's intellectual heritage. It was certainly taken with De Sanctis's blessing; years later De Sanctis wrote to him: "You have the knowledge to continue and indeed improve on my work in the teaching profession and in books, and make a real contribution to the study of antiquity."⁶⁰

There were, it is true, few—unfortunately very few—individuals who immediately and unhesitatingly embraced open opposition to fascism. As, needless to say, I wholly sympathize with those few, including close members of my family, who chose militant antifascism and therefore exile, I trust that no one will be induced to read my observations as a legitimation of those who joined the PNF as a means of staying safely in Italy. The explicitly antifascist choice of those who opted for direct political engagement and opposition, however, cannot be retrospectively required from those who, like Momigliano, were obeying above all "an imperious vocation of scholars and maestri"⁶¹. Once again, Carlo Dionisotti makes a just and balanced observation: "I have no doubt at all that he reluctantly took out membership of the Fascist Party, but I equally have no doubt that in his situation it was the inevitable and irreproachable thing to do. Born for the intellectual life, and not the political, Momigliano simply tried to adapt to conditions he was unable to change."⁶² In the same way the letter Momigliano wrote to Bottai in 1938, setting out the fascist virtues of his family (himself included), which it is very hard to read without moral and even physical distress, surely testifies, however, to an extreme and desperate attempt to escape the consequences of the Race Laws. It does *not* constitute a proof of any fascist faith on his part.⁶³

To summarize: (1) there exist no papers or letters of Momigliano's in which he expresses philo-fascist inclinations or beliefs, nor did he ever write in regime publications; (2) his scholarly work contains no trace of fascist leanings, not even in the darkest years of the regime (which for a scholar of Roman history would have been all too easy); (3) no one could reasonably suppose that the flagbearers of anti-fascist culture and enforced emigrants like Lionello Venturi and Gaetano Salvemini would have given their support in his favor⁶⁴ (to procure him a university post in the United States) if they had considered him in any way politically compromised.

The problem, then, is not Momigliano's presumed but unproven fascism. The more cogent question to ask is what exactly Italian academic culture of the 1930s must have been if only 12 professors out of 1,250 felt able to abjure the oath of loyalty to the regime requested by Giovanni Gentile.⁶⁵ Even more seriously, we have to wonder at the paucity of voices, even among the militant antifascists who had emigrated, raised clearly in denunciation of the national shame of the Race Laws.⁶⁶ These are the wretched, lacerating issues Italian history throws up, which still require attention and analysis.⁶⁷

Notes

1. See Arnaldo Momigliano, *Pagine ebraiche*, ed. and intro by Silvia Berti (Torino, 1987). The Italian title conveys the intimate quality of his meditations, less perfectly rendered in the more academic title of the American edition, *Essays on Ancient and Modern Judaism*, ed. and intro. Silvia Berti (Chicago and London, 1994), from which all present quotations are taken.

2. See my "Introduction" to Momigliano, *Essays on Ancient and Modern Judaism*, vii–xxiv. Along the same lines, see the recent contribution by Tessa Rajak, "Momigliano and Judaism," in *The Legacy of Arnaldo Momigliano*, eds. Tim Cornell and Oswin Murray (London and Turin, 2014), 89–106.

3. See the documentation collected by Annalisa Capristo, "Arnaldo Momigliano e il mancato asilo negli USA (1938–1941): 'I Always Hope That Something Will Be Found in America,'" in *Quaderni di storia* 63 (January–June 2006): 5–55.

4. Silvia Berti, "Conversando con Arnaldo Momigliano," in *Pagine ebraiche*, new edition (Rome, 2016), 294. See also "The Jews of Italy," *New York Review of Books*, October 24, 1985, reprinted in *Essays on Ancient and Modern Judaism*, 133. On Amadio, see Alberto Cavaglion, "La corrispondenza familiare di Amadio Momigliano (1844–1924) con una lettera inedita di Arnaldo Momigliano," in *Materia giudaica*, 15–16 (2010–2011): 111–19.

5. Silvia Berti, "Conversando con Arnaldo Momigliano," 296. See, particularly, Momigliano's personal recollections in the preface to *Essays on Ancient and Modern Judaism*, xxv–xxviii, and the short essay on his cousin, in the same volume, 144–47. On Felice, see Alberto Cavaglion, *Felice Momigliano (1866–1924): Una biografia* (Napoli, 1988).

6. Momigliano, preface to *Essays on Ancient and Modern Judaism*, xxvii–xxviii.

7. See Moshe Idel, "Arnaldo Momigliano and Gershom Scholem on Jewish History and Tradition," in *Old Worlds, New Mirrors: On Jewish Mysticism and Twentieth-Century Thought* (Philadelphia, 2010), 17–30 (previously appeared in *Momigliano and Antiquarianism: Foundations of the Modern Cultural Sciences*, ed. Peter N. Miller [Toronto, Buffalo, and London, 2007], 312–33).

8. See Arnaldo Momigliano, "After-Dinner Speech on the Occasion of the Award of the Degree of D.H.L.H.C. at Brandeis University, 22 May 1977," in *Ottavo Contributo alla storia degli studi classici e del mondo antico* (Rome, 1977), 431–32.

9. Quoted in Riccardo Di Donato, "Arnaldo Momigliano from Antiquarianism to Cultural History: Some Reasons for a Quest," in *Momigliano and Antiquarianism*, 68–69.

10. Further elucidation is given in the above-quoted interview (note 4): "In my home it was taken for granted that this was the decisive moment: the emergence of Christian culture and the contact of Greek with Hebrew culture. It may raise a smile but, literally, these were things I knew at the age of ten. . . . They are things we simply can't think of today, but I read Renan at about the age of eleven."

11. See Arnaldo Momigliano, "Genesi e funzione attuale del concetto di ellenismo" (1935), in *Contributo alla storia degli studi classici e del mondo antico* (Rome, 1955), 165–93.
12. Arnaldo Momigliano, review (1969) of Benedetto Bravo, *Philologie, Histoire, Philosophie de l'Histoire: Etudes sur J. G. Droysen, historien de l'Antiquité* (Varsovie, 1968), in *Quinto contributo alla storia degli studi classici e del mondo antico*, 2 vols (Rome, 1975), 2:902.
13. *Ibid.*
14. Arnaldo Momigliano, "Un'apologia del giudaismo: il "Contro Apione" di Flavio Giuseppe," in *Terzo contributo alla storia degli studi classici e del mondo antico*, 2 vols. (Rome, 1966), 1:513–22, reprinted in *Essays on Ancient and Modern Judaism*, 58–66.
15. Capristo, "Arnaldo Momigliano e il mancato asilo negli USA," 32.
16. Carlo Dionisotti, "Commemorazione di Arnaldo Momigliano," in *Arnaldo Momigliano e la sua opera*, in *Rivista storica italiana*, 2:350 (reprinted in *Ricordo di Arnaldo Momigliano* [Bologna, 1989], 11). The eighteen-year-old Momigliano had written to him: "I am unable to vanquish that sense of transcendence which I feel so often" (*ibid.*). The whole monograph issue of *Rivista storica italiana* dedicated to Momigliano is extremely interesting, as is the volume in his memory *The Presence of the Historian: Essays in Memory of Arnaldo Momigliano*, ed. Michael P. Steinberg, *History and Theory* (Beiheft, 1991).
17. The essays are included in the collection *Tra storia e storicismo* (Pisa, 1985).
18. See Arnaldo Momigliano, *Jacob Bernays* (1969), in *Quinto contributo*, 1:127–58, reprinted in *Essays on Ancient and Modern Judaism*, 148–70; Arnaldo Momigliano, *Hermann Usener* (1982), in *Tra storia e storicismo*, 145–67. On these issues, and on Momigliano's increasingly complex views on historicism, compare Silvia Berti, *Autobiografia, storicismo e verità storica*, in *Arnaldo Momigliano*, 297–312.
19. This quotation, putting philology on a par with the religious sense, sounds again as Momigliano's self-portrait: "Since Bernays was a philologist like himself, Usener probably recognized a shared religious experience beneath their mutual philological interests." See Momigliano, *Hermann Usener*, 167.
20. Arnaldo Momigliano, "The Rhetoric of History and the History of Rhetoric: On Hayden White's Tropes" (1981), in *Settimo contributo alla storia degli studi classici e del mondo antico* (Rome, 1984), 54.
21. Arnaldo Momigliano, "La formazione della moderna storiografia sull'Impero romano" (1936), in *Contributo*, 107–64. It is interesting to note that as early as 1936 his reading of Bernays influenced his analysis of Gibbon (*ibid.*, p. 137n100).
22. Arnaldo Momigliano, *Storia antica e antiquaria* (1950), in *Contributo*, 67–106.
23. Benedetto Croce, *Teoria e storia della storiografia* (Milan, 1989), 32–33.
24. Arnaldo Momigliano, "Il linguaggio e la tecnica dello storico" (1955), in *Secondo Contributo alla storia degli studi classici e del mondo antico* (Rome, 1960), 371.
25. *Ibid.*, 370–71.
26. Croce, *Teoria e storia della storiografia*, 95–96.
27. Arnaldo Momigliano, "Ermeneutica e pensiero classico in Leo Strauss" (1967), in *Quarto Contributo alla storia degli studi classici e del mondo antico* (Rome, 1969), 117–28, reprinted in *Essays on Ancient and Modern Judaism*, 178–88. On Momigliano–Strauss relations, see my introduction to the above, xix–xxii.
28. Arnaldo Momigliano, "Historicism Revisited" (1974), in *Essays in Ancient and Modern Historiography* (Middletown, CT, 1977), 365–73, reprinted in *Sesto contributo*, 2:23–32. Momigliano also directly acknowledges his appreciation of Strauss's antihistoricism: "From his chair at the University of Chicago L. Strauss has delivered a penetrating criticism of historicism in favour of the restoring of natural law"; compare "Lo storicismo nel pensiero contemporaneo" (1961), in *Terzo contributo*, 1:272.
29. Momigliano, *Jacob Bernays*, 179.
30. Momigliano, *Historicism Revisited*, 370. For the German–Jewish discussion on historicism, see David N. Myers, *Resisting History: Historicism and Its Discontents in German–Jewish Thought* (Princeton and Oxford, 2003).
31. Again in Berti, "Conversando con Arnaldo Momigliano," 305. Compare the very similar words in a passage quoted by Peter Brown: "in its turn the liberal mind is religious in examining the evidence." See Peter Brown, "Remembering Arnaldo," *American Scholar* 2 (1988): 252.
32. Arnaldo Momigliano, "Prospettiva 1967 della storia greca" (1968), in *Quarto contributo*, 57.
33. Idel, "Arnaldo Momigliano and Gershom Scholem," 18–20.
34. Arnaldo Momigliano, "Gershom Scholem's Autobiography," in *Essays on Ancient and Modern Judaism*, 190.

35. See Arnaldo Momigliano, "Jewish Stories and Memoirs of Our Times," in *Essays on Ancient and Modern Judaism*, 141.

36. See Arnaldo Momigliano, "Preliminary Indications on the Apocalypse and Exodus in the Hebrew Tradition," in *Essays on Ancient and Modern Judaism*, 93.

37. Idel, "Arnaldo Momigliano and Gershom Scholem," 21.

38. Momigliano, "Gershom Scholem's Autobiography," in *Essays on Ancient and Modern Judaism*, 192.

39. Leo Strauss, "Preface to Spinoza's Critique of Religion," in *Liberalism Ancient and Modern*, 237.

40. Gershom Scholem, *From Berlin to Jerusalem* (New York, 1976), 50.

41. "With Gershom Scholem: An Interview," in Gershom Scholem, *On Jews and Judaism in Crisis: Selected Essays*, ed. W. J. Dannhauser (New York, 1976), 20. On Scholem, see at least David Biale, *Gershom Scholem: Kabbalah and Counter-History* (Cambridge, MA, 1979). Scholem's rejection of the whole idea of a useful German-Jewish encounter is well known. For a discussion of it, see Silvia Berti, "A World Apart? Gershom Scholem and Contemporary Readings of Seventeenth-Century Jewish-Christian Relations," in *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 3 (1996): 212–24, where previous bibliography is quoted.

42. Arnaldo Momigliano, "Biblical Studies and Classical Studies: Simple Reflections upon Historical Method" (1980), in *Settimo contributo*, 289, reprinted in *Essays on Ancient and Modern Judaism*, 3.

43. A significant illustration of his philosophy is in "With Gershom Scholem: An Interview," 32–35.

44. On this point Momigliano's and Bickerman's positions seem to converge; on Bickerman, see Albert I. Baumgarten, *Elias Bickerman as a Historian of the Jews* (Tübingen, 2010); on Momigliano, 193–205.

45. Arnaldo Momigliano, "Religion in Athens, Rome and Jerusalem in the First Century B.C.," in *Ottavo contributo*, 296.

46. See note 6.

47. The first of the two psalms states: "But his delight is in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night."

48. Momigliano, "Prospettiva 1967 della storia greca," 58.

49. In his epilogue to the anthology Adorno wrote that "it arose against the annihilation of the German *Geist*." See Walter Benjamin, *Deutsche Menschen: Eine Folge von Briefen* (Frankfurt, 1977), 126.

50. In one passage, Momigliano looks back with the utmost respect and affection to the old Italian Zionists he had known in his youth, like Dante Lattes and Alfonso Pacifici, while remarking that "their choice was not so simple." See "The Jews of Italy," in *Essays on Ancient and Modern Judaism*, 133.

51. Momigliano, preface to *Essays on Ancient and Modern Judaism*, xxvii.

52. This point is cogently examined in what is still today the best study of Momigliano: Peter Brown, "Arnaldo Dante Momigliano (1908–1987)," in *Proceedings of the British Academy* 74 (1988): 405–42.

53. Arnaldo Momigliano, "Pensieri sull'ebraismo" (1979), in *Decimo Contributo alla storia degli studi classici e del mondo antico* (Rome, 2012), 365–69 (368–69).

54. For a brilliant and original discussion of the issue see Michael P. Steinberg, "Momigliano and the Facts," in *Judaism Musical and Unmusical* (Chicago, 2008), 141–65 (154–58); see also the more recent, well-argued analysis of the question in Pierpaolo Lauria, "Studi recenti su Arnaldo Momigliano: Per una discussione critica," in *Bollettino di storiografia*, no. 14 (2010): 27–48.

55. See Riccardo Di Donato, "Materiali per una biografia intellettuale di Arnaldo Momigliano," in *Athenaeum* 83, no. 1 (1995): 213–244, after the publication of which William V. Harris's violent attack came out: "The Silences of Momigliano," *Times Literary Supplement*, April 12, 1996, 6–7.

56. Carlo Dionisotti, "Momigliano e il contesto," *Belfagor*, 52, no. 6 (1997): 637. See also Carlo Dionisotti, "Momigliano: Quella tessera non può infangarlo," *Il Corriere della Sera*, December 4, 1997, 31.

57. On the complex relationship between the Italian Jews and the fascist regime see Meir Michaelis, *Mussolini and the Jews: German Italian Relations and the Jewish Question in Italy* (Oxford, 1978); Renzo De Felice, *The Jews in Fascist Italy* (New York, 2001; first published in

Italian in 1961); Alexander Stille, *Benevolence and Betrayal: Five Italian Jewish Families under Fascism* (New York, 1991).

58. His words are cited in Dionisotti, *Ricordo di Arnaldo Momigliano*, 97.

59. Letter from Momigliano to Dionisotti, dated August 1, 1928, quoted in Dionisotti, *Ricordo di Arnaldo Momigliano*, 81–82.

60. De Sanctis's letter, dated December 30, 1937, is cited in Leandro Polverini, "Momigliano e De Sanctis" in *Arnaldo Momigliano nella storiografia del Novecento*, ed. Leandro Polverini (Rome, 2006), 20.

61. Dionisotti, *Ricordo di Arnaldo Momigliano*, 18.

62. Dionisotti, "Momigliano e il contesto", 643.

63. See Giorgio Fabre, "Documenti. Arnaldo Momigliano: materiali biografici/2", *Quaderni di storia* 53 (2001): 309–20. As anyone who has any familiarity with the archive documents of prisoners or political internees knows, explicit statements of fascist loyalty were required even to obtain access to a family member in prison. Ignoring this aspect of the question, Luciano Canfora and Ernesto Galli della Loggia found it preferable to discredit Momigliano by accusing him openly of being a convinced Fascist: see Simonetta Fiori's interview to Luciano Canfora, "Ministro mi creda sono un fascista," *La Repubblica*, March 16, 2001, 46. For an intelligently argued reply, see Alexander Stille, "Attenti a come si parla di storia," *La Repubblica*, April 5, 2001, 48–49.

64. See Capristo, "Arnaldo Momigliano e il mancato asilo negli USA," 50–51.

65. On the issue see at least Helmut Goetz, *Il giuramento rifiutato: I docenti universitari e il regime fascista* (Florence, 2000); and Giorgio Boatti, *Preferirei di no* (Turin, 2001).

66. Four names come to mind: Francesco Saverio Nitti, Giuseppe Di Vittorio, Emilio Lussu, and Franco Venturi. See Giuseppe Di Vittorio, "In aiuto degli ebrei italiani!" *La voce degli italiani*, September 7, 1938, reprinted in "1938, non tutti vollero tacere," with two notes by Silvia Berti and Alberto Cavaglion, in *pagine ebraiche*, mensile di attualità e cultura dell'Unione delle Comunità Ebraiche Italiane, no. 3, (March 2010), 27.

67. See, however, the relevant contributions of Eugenio Garin, "Fascismo, antisemitismo e cultura italiana," in *Conseguenze culturali delle leggi razziali in Italia*, Atti del Convegno (Rome, May 11, 1989), Accademia nazionale dei Lincei (Rome, 1990), 9–24; Annalisa Capristo, "Gli intellettuali italiani di fronte all'estromissione dei colleghi ebrei da università e accademie," in *Annali dell'Istituto Italiano per gli Studi Storici* (Naples, 2012/2013), 1039–65; Mario Avagliano and Marco Palmieri, *Di pura razza italiana: L'Italia ariana di fronte alle leggi razziali* (Milan, 2013).

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