

When Great Scholars Disagree

Alan Sica

When Weber analyzed Judaism as part of his series concerning global religious practices and the economic arrangements that accompanied them, he decided to employ the term “pariah” as an analytic device, but without any of the pejorative connotations which are attached to the word today. Had he used instead Gastvolk (guest people) throughout his book rather than “pariah-people,” many subsequent scholars would not have objected to Ancient Judaism in the way they have over the last 90 years. Arnaldo Momigliano, probably the greatest classical historian of the mid-20th century, respected Weber’s work, but also took exception to his use of “pariah” regarding Judaism. This article investigates this troubling term and the scholarship that it inspired.

“Many Jews had recently been taken and brought to trial on a charge of clipping coin, and early in the next year [A.D. 1279] nearly 300 were put to death.” Gregory’s ‘Chron.’ (Camd. Soc.), p. 70; Stow’s ‘Annals’ (1592), p. 299; Fabyan’s ‘Chron.,’ p. 386.” (from Sharpe, 1899: 26n2)

“With his fellow gamblers he was straight as a string at all times—to be otherwise would have meant that when he went broke he would stay broke, because none of the fraternity would ‘stake’ him. But with his patrons—being regarded by them as a pariah, he acted toward them like a pariah—a prudent pariah. He fooled them with a frank show of gentlemanliness, of honesty to his own hurt; under that cover he fleeced them well, but always judiciously.” (Phillips, 1905: 234)

“That the status of the Jews in Europe has been not only that of an oppressed people but also of what Max Weber has called a ‘pariah people’ is a fact most clearly appreciated by those who have had practical experience of just how ambiguous is the freedom which emancipation has ensured, and how treacherous the promise of equality which assimilation has held out. In their own position as social outcasts such men reflect the political status of their entire people.” (Arendt, 1978 [1944]: 68)

Two Distinct Modes of Living

It is sometimes illuminating in unanticipated ways to consider the lives and ideas of scholars in tandem, particularly those seldom viewed together. Reflect upon September, 1908, when Max Weber was 44 years old, only several years after becoming famous among attentive scholars for his two “Protestant Ethic” essays, saturated with and inspired by his own ancestors’ commercial history. Weber was slowly, sufficiently recovering from his catastrophic emotional collapse of 1897 to resume writing, reading, and inventing German sociology. Meanwhile, on September 5, 1908 in Caraglio (a northwestern Italian town of 5300 souls, 20 miles east of the French border, 50 miles north of Nice), Arnaldo Dante Momigliano was born to an influential family of enlightened Jews “in a house full of books; Italian books, Hebrew books, French books, Latin and Greek writers either in the original or in translation” (University of Chicago 1987: 4).

Weber and Momigliano were as much “born scholars” as anyone has ever been. Among other early achievements in vastly different fields of endeavor, Weber had written a precocious habilitation in 1891 on Roman agricultural history, defending it successfully in person before Theodor Mommsen himself (a humbling figure in 1892, even for Mark Twain [Meltzer, 2002: 217; Mommsen, 1958: 1]; Mommsen wrote a 50-page review-essay about the book, picking it apart, but praising the young titan nonetheless; see Mommsen, 1892). Similarly, Momigliano at the age of 24 became associate professor of Greek history at the University of Rome, and at 28 the Professor of Roman History at the University of Turin. According to his most perspicuous biographer, “By 1934, when he was twenty-six, he had already published three important monographs—on the historiography of the Maccabean revolt, on the reign of the Emperor Claudius, and on the political ideals of the Greek cities in the age of Philip of Macedon—besides one hundred and fifty articles and reviews. These studies showed that Momigliano already possessed extraordinary competence in the interpretation of almost every sort of ancient evidence... combined with an uncanny gift for intuiting, behind conflicts in the sources, the contours of precise cultural and political situations” (Brown, 1989: 409).

By odd and perverse coincidence, Weber wrote *Ancient Judaism* around 1914 when Momigliano was a child, while the latter owed to his Judaism the “opportunity” of fleeing to England in 1938, penniless with a wife and daughter, at the age of 30, having been relieved of his professorship by fascists in Turin due to the Racial Laws that condoned his persecution. Moreover: “The last letter that Momigliano received from his father reached him in 1942... It urged him to take comfort in the prophets, and in Spinoza... Riccardo and Ilda [his parents]... had been arrested in late 1943, deported to Germany

and killed in an extermination camp. He later told a friend that, at the news, he could not even bring himself to cry; he had lost, for the rest of his life, the ability to weep” (Brown, 1989: 412).

As everyone knows, both men produced scholarship of stupendous quantity and quality, Weber’s mostly unpublished and left in the capable hands of his wife and students, Momigliano’s carefully and scrupulously collected in nine large volumes that brought together over 775 separate pieces of writing in four languages, plus a half-dozen books (Momigliano, 1992). Just as Weber never wrote *The Magnum Opus* one is supposed to create in order to be remembered as a great, transformative scholar, leaving that job to his wife and her assistants when they assembled *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft* following his sudden death, so Momigliano resisted the call of the Great Book. Instead he wrote a lifelong stream of short monographs amidst hundreds of essays and reviews, all of them miraculously informed, cosmopolitan, philosophically adept, and uncannily sophisticated in a unique style that became his hallmark: “He also wrote more than 400 articles, some quite long, for encyclopedias. These were never publicistic articles: practically every one of them, also his book reviews, was a work of the most rigorous scholarship with numerous footnotes most of which contained several bibliographical references, with full details about volumes, issue numbers, year of publication, and pages. His memory was as capacious and precise as his interests were broad and deep...” (Shils, 1997: 220).

Momigliano’s former student and longterm friend, Peter Brown, thought that the book form constrained Momigliano’s hungry imagination and constant search for better evidence to support his ever-expanding arguments and interests; they were “unnecessarily monumental for a man of his style: for a book sought a range and a transcendence that did not interest him” (Brown 1989: 441). One could say almost the same thing regarding Weber. One suspects that had Momigliano been born when Gyorgy Lukács or Ernst Bloch were, and had he, like they, been invited to the Webers’ salon in Heidelberg, Weber would have found in the Italian historian a boon companion, someone from whom he could have learned a great deal, but who would likewise have been an avid student of the German’s similarly enormous learning and analytic capacity. Yet in lieu of having “his Weber,” Momigliano used Gaetano de Sanctis and Benedetto Croce as senior sounding boards and inspiring guides for correct behavior, politically as well as academically (for Momigliano’s unequalled estimate of each, see Momigliano, 1994: 54-71 and 80-96 respectively). While the former remains little known in the U.S. owing to a lack of translations, the latter became the official spokesman for “civilized, liberal Italy” during and after Mussolini’s reign, and it was he who invited Momigliano to head a cultural institute in Naples following WWII, to be set up in Croce’s own mansion. Luckily for us all, Momigliano wisely refused, becoming in-

stead a cosmopolitan intellectual with academic homes in Chicago, London, and Pisa, and a global audience which would have escaped him had he moved to Naples. The *Times* of London referred to him in his obituary as “the most learned and the most universal historian of his age” (September 7, 1987).

In the anglophone sphere, Weber’s life and work have become almost too well known, with speculations sinking to the level of “serious” debate about whether Marianne Weber was the true “love of his life” (see recent issues of *Max Weber Studies*), or whether Weber’s four uses in private letters of the perjorative term *Knalljude* makes him ipso facto an anti-Semite (Roth, 2012). Momigliano, on the other hand, if known at all beyond the small circle of scholars interested in the history of historiography, or the ancient Occident, is remembered mostly for his more “popular” writings in *The New York Review of Books* and *The Times Literary Supplement*. In 2009 an online debate erupted regarding the lack of youthful participants in a Warburg Institute conference celebrating Momigliano’s work. One younger scholar wisely reminded his older colleagues that during the ensuing 22 years since his death in 1987, novice historians have not found his name on their doctoral reading lists mostly because the “one big book” is missing, and many of his essays remain in foreign languages (Magistra et Mater, 2009). This neglect was not always the case. Not only did he help inform Robert Graves when writing his best-selling novels about Claudius (Graves, 1989, p. viii) and the great BBC show which followed it, but he figured centrally in Iris Murdoch’s 1956 novel, *The Flight from the Enchanter* as Peter Saward (see Chapter 3 for a comical portrait of Momigliano’s office and research practices; Murdoch, 1956)—an immortalization which the real Saward himself was not hesitant to point out when talking with friends.

Momigliano’s devoted, adoring friend, Edward Shils, begins his memoir about him this way: “Arnaldo Dante Momigliano was a very great scholar. Officially he was an ancient historian, a historian of Greece and Rome. He was, however, as much at home in Jewish history. He was, of course, a master at the highest level of political history but even more of the culture of all Mediterranean antiquity, especially its religious and historical writings. Administrative organization, military affairs, law, education—he read all the literature of all these subjects in all the languages in which such works appeared” (Shils, 1997: 219).

One Scholar to Another

Sad to say, though, Momigliano did not comment at length on Weber’s Roman historiography (the sole instance is Momigliano, 1982: 29-31; reprinted in 1994: 248-51) even though Weber seemed to become his model of sociologi-

cal reasoning whenever he wished to deal in “large perspectives” (Shils, 1997: 229). Eight entries, some redundant, for Momigliano’s work are found in the largest bibliography pertaining to Weber in English (Sica, 2004: 234). Shils claims that “He wrote five papers in which Max Weber was the main object of discussion... But he himself did not adduce Max Weber’s ideas in his own analyses. In the one essay devoted exclusively to Weber, i.e, on the Jews as a ‘pariah-people,’ he thought Max Weber was wrong. Nevertheless, Weber’s work was frequently invoked as indicative of the kind of thing ancient historians should deal with. Sometimes other scholars were censured for having failed to consider Weber’s views” (*ibid.*)

Momigliano only gave sustained attention to Weber’s lifework in “Two Types of Universal History” (Momigliano, 1986), a unique comparing of E.A. Freeman (1823-1892), a once famous British historian of the grand scale, with Weber’s most synoptic analytic aspirations procured by “ideal types.” Whereas Freeman’s ideas and dreams of a world propitiously arranged and sustained for white Europeans, by means of a global federation of governments, have become impossible to review without accompanying laughter, “Max Weber stands for the sociologist who most precisely tried to define the methods and the limits of understanding alien civilizations when the conflict of values and presuppositions becomes patent” (*ibid.*, 122). Momigliano wanted to answer an ancient but no less pressing question: How does an historian or social scientist reasonably and responsibly compare societies with sharply differing normative structure so that something approaching “objectivity” might be delivered? “Consequently the problem arose whether the members of one group or race, being conditioned in their mental equipment by the culture to which they belonged, were qualified to pass judgment on the members of another group or on other groups as such... Any recent attempt to write universal history has had to reckon with this preliminary problem—namely, the legitimacy of understanding another culture in terms of the categories of one’s own culture” (*ibid.*). Momigliano believed that Weber, almost despite himself, came to realize that in order to achieve his analytic goal of understanding global socio-economic processes over time, he “was increasingly driven to place religion at the centre of his historical understanding.” This was so much the case that “there is some justification in taking Freeman’s universal history as oriented towards the Greek type and Max Weber’s universal history as oriented towards the Jewish type” (*ibid.*, 123), presumably due in part to Weber’s fascination with the Jewish prophets.

Weber comes in for praise by Momigliano because he overcame a vigorous nationalistic, patriotic worldview as necessary to his scholarly responsibilities, especially when assessing “the co-existence of incompatible racial groups... The great German patriot refused to consider race, nation, and

even state, as objective realities from which to start” in his pursuit of “*Universalgeschichtliche Probleme*” with which he began his *Sociology of Religion* (*ibid.*, 128). It is clear from Momigliano’s analysis that he admires Weber’s strenuous attempt to gain the moral highground of scholarly objectivity, to guide sociology away from the rampant chauvinisms which plagued Europe in the *belle époque*, and from which early social scientists were hardly immune. Reading Momigliano is seldom anything short of bracing and surprising at turns, as when he modestly admits “I must immediately add that I am under no illusion of having fully understood the limits and the function of religion in Weber’s thought. Religion is clearly not the only form of subjective experience indisputably leading to social action (it is worth remembering the place music had in Weber’s theory)” (*ibid.*, 129). Who but Momigliano would remember Weber’s *Musiksoziologie* in this context?

In pages filled with precise and fair-minded summaries and plumbing of Weber’s sociology of religion, his theory of political power, the city, social action and meaning, formal versus substantive rationality, and the function of secular and sacred intellectuals, Momigliano gives Weber his due even when correcting him in small points or large. E.g., “What was new was the attempt to analyse with a uniform method the role of Confucian literati, brahmins, prophets and rabbis inside their respective societies. I am not aware that anything of similar scope had been attempted before... For Max Weber, the task of the intellectuals was to give worldly dimensions to unworldly creeds” (*ibid.*, 130-31). The issue of rationality loomed large both in Weber’s work, and in Momigliano’s appraisal of it: “Rationality, needless to say, is another difficult and complex notion in Max Weber who sometimes opposed rationality in relation to plurality of values... But Max Weber was never absolutely certain that the rationality he found most congenial was that of capitalism. Many of the most difficult questions Weber asked himself come to the surface in his treatment of Judaism, the most extensive and ambitious he ever planned for any religion. What we have is only a small part of what he intended to write” (*ibid.*, 131-32). As is his style when appraising the quality of historiography produced by scholars from various epochs, from Herodotus to Gibbon, to Ranke, Grote, Mommsen or Weber, Momigliano judiciously pointed to certain weaknesses in *Ancient Judaism*, mostly concerning Weber’s limited knowledge of the requisite languages, especially Aramaic. Weber also relied upon standard historians of Jewish thought who are no longer viewed as unimpeachable, e.g., Julius Wellhausen. But even with qualifications, Momigliano observes that “Unlike his Protestant colleagues, he could understand both prophets and rabbis; and unlike Jewish scholars, he knew about other religions” (*ibid.*, 132), a capacity he admires.

It is only when Weber’s text displays “certain ambivalences in [his] attitude to the Jews” that Momigliano pulls away from admiration and begins

to register minor dismay. In fact, it is here where Momigliano's capacity for wide-scale synthesis comes into play, providing the most intriguing part of his critique.

Intellectually, it is easy to find in the research on Judaism even more echoes of Nietzsche than in Weber's other works. As always, he must have had Marx in mind. He certainly demonstrated that he knew much more about Jews and Judaism than Marx ever did. The very word *pariah* which he chose to define the Jews even before the destruction of the Second Temple is an indication of this ambiguity. Hannah Arendt—the pupil of Max Weber's friend and pupil, Karl Jaspers—did much to rescue the word *pariah* in her fine collection of essays published in 1947, *Die verborgene Tradition*, but the ambiguity remains and has more than biographical implications (133).

With all this in mind, Momigliano ends his all-too-brief examination of *Ancient Judaism* with this remarkable comment: "In spite of his own warning against the prophets Max Weber had gone back to the prophets to try to unravel the inner structure of social action" (*ibid.*, 134).

Whose "Pariah"?

Easily the most widely quoted of Momigliano's comments about Weber's work, as Shils hints, is "A Note on Max Weber's Definition of Judaism as a Pariah Religion" (Momigliano, 1980; reprinted in Momigliano, 1984). In fact, it is likely the best known of all his writings in English simply because it mixes several "irresistible" ingredients: Weber, Judaism, and the troubling concept of "pariah." The fact that Momigliano takes exception to a fundamental tenet of Weber's sociology of comparative religion makes it all the more intriguing and worth quoting in today's atmosphere, wherein broad-scale studies of religion have once again become fashionable among even the most sophisticated thinkers (e.g., Habermas, Charles Taylor, Robert Bellah, et al.).

For some Weberians or specialists in Jewish history, this small argument might seem to have run its course. It has been on the agenda ever since Itzak Schiper, a Polish sociologist, evaluated Weber's sociology of Judaism in 1924 (Schiper, 1959) and Julius Guttmann wrote about it in 1925, soon after Weber's sociology of religion was published as part of *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft* (Guttmann, 1925). Neither of these early evaluations seriously damaged Weber's overall interpretation of ancient Jewish thought and its manifold connection to socio-economic action, though both pointed out shortcomings qua Jewish theological history. Schiper rejected the pariah motif, as have so many following him.

The most thorough, nearly heroic interpretation of Weber's portrait of Jews as a pariah-people was published in 1968 by Efraim Shmueli, a virtual monograph, which would seem to lay the entire debate to rest (Shmueli, 1968: 167-247). Shmueli's analysis serves as the touchstone for all commentaries attempted in the decades since he voiced his objections, most of which turned around Weber's view, based on his theory of social action, that Judaism affected an individual's behavior rather than seeing its believers as part of a collective identity. He also faulted Weber regarding the role of political leadership among the "charismatic" Jews. Both Abraham (1992: 12n33-13n34, who misspells Shmueli's name throughout) and Wolfgang Schluchter (1989: 526n70) take issue with Shmueli in part, but also give him credit for reasonable objections to Weber's broad strokes when assessing Jewish history. Schluchter also chronicled the debate in detail, mentioning a string of interrelated interrogations by Werner Cahnman, Jakob Taubes, Günter Stemberger, and Hans G. Liebeschütz (Schluchter, 1989: 534-35).

Freddy Raphael tackled *Ancient Judaism* along with others who joined the fray (Raphael, 1973), like Tony Fahey (1982), so it became clear that there were certain features of Weber's treatment that Jewish scholars in particular found bothersome, and these objections often turned around the term "pariah." Taking a slightly different approach, Jack Barbalet reconsiders *The Protestant Ethic* in its first (1905) and second (1920) editions, pointing out that Weber introduced the notion of Jewish pariah capitalism in the second in order to defuse Sombart's famous claim in 1911 about their role in the origin of capitalist practices (Barbalet, 2005). The problem obviously continued to bother Weber well after the first flurry of *PE* critiques had subsided, and he chose no longer to participate. For the fullest examination of Weber's monograph in terms of his own writerly intentions, and the history of the text as a component of Weber's "master plan" in the sociology of religion, the best source is Schluchter's 2004 article. He also adverts to "the pariah problem" briefly—"a constant narrowing of spiritual horizons" that surfaced among Jews as their theocratic organization strengthened—giving a sensible response to Weber's critics, though not one that will likely satisfy historians of Judaism who are fully versed in its intricacies, which are vast (Schluchter, 2004: 48-50).

Gary Abraham rendered a detailed chronology of the arguments for and against Weber to 1991 or so in his *Max Weber and the Jewish Question*, the only monograph of its kind in English (Abraham, 1992: 8-20). Despite its intrinsic qualities and obvious seriousness (his guide in the work was Fritz Ringer at the University of Pittsburgh), the study was not warmly received by a significant cadre in the ranks of notable Weberians, mostly, I suspect, because the tiny suspicion was aroused that Weber participated in the anti-semitism

typical of his era, even if in an unconscious way. That Weber ever wrote or mouthed vigorously anti-semitic sentiments neither Abraham nor any other reputable scholar has ever claimed. But that he was a nationalistic German “of his age” would indeed have allowed him, without much thought, to view certain components of Judaism, real or imagined, in an unflattering light, or to write about it in a way that might be construed negatively by its proponents or champions, especially as sensitivities to such slights have grown exponentially since his day. An example of one frontal assault on Weber for his alleged eurocentric insensitivity is Hans Derks’s “Nomads, Jews, and Pariahs” (1999), where he notes that Weber’s appraisal of the Bedouin is “almost aggressively negative... a description dominated by strong language like ‘adventurous,’ ‘blood vengeance,’ ‘war,’ (street) robbing, etc.’ Their political organization is highly unstable (*höchst labil*) because they usually do not have strong top-leaders (Derks, 1999: 27). Derks does not ask if Weber’s appraisal has any empirical validity, but instead chastizes him for describing the Bedouins in an uncomplimentary way. This rhetoric expresses the *Dances with Wolves* syndrome among modern scholars when any criticism of premodern societies becomes *verboten*.

The most recent re-examination of “the pariah question” occurs in David Nirenberg’s popularization, *Anti-Judaism: The Western Tradition* (Nirenberg, 2013), where he combines brief remarks about Weber with those on Werner Sombart, whose ideas about Jews and the origins of capitalism opposed Weber’s. Nirenberg incorrectly observes “It was in order to make this point and thus quarantine the ‘spirit of capitalism’ from those who would infect it with Jewish influence, that Weber invented the sociological concept of the ‘Jew as Pariah’... Once again sociology recapitulates soteriology and draws its tools from the same kit” (*ibid.*, 443-44). One wonders how Momigliano, whose annual residence at the University of Chicago worked so well for him and his large audiences, would evaluate Nirenberg’s breezy commentary, since the latter teaches in the Social Thought Program at this same university where Momigliano once delivered his extraordinary lectures.

Momigliano’s Critique

Momigliano’s own “Note” on the pariah question is characteristically dense, crisp, and unambiguous. As in all his works, he refers to his predecessors in the debate knowingly, so in order to follow his remarks accurately, one must backtrack to his sources, which, as often as not, were published in a cluster of foreign languages. (This perhaps more than anything is what accounts for Momigliano’s putative lack of influence among historians educated in

the last two decades or so: his arguments are simply too hard to follow or criticize sheerly in terms of his source material; plus, many items in his large bibliographies are not yet available online.) His footnotes were as famous as his texts, and Footnote 4 proves the case: “Among discussions of Weber’s texts on Judaism, I shall mention only W. Caspari, *Die Gottesgemeinde vom Sinai und das nachmalige Volk Israel. Auseinandersetzungen mit Max Weber*, Gütersloh, 1922” (which no other specialist who has written about the topic seems to know), followed by complete citations to the more standard works, by Schiper, Guttman, Taubes, Raphaël, and “the most important work,” by H. Liebeschütz. But he also brings in essays by J. Freund, F. Parente, and A. Causse, who are seldom invoked in this context, plus more standard works by Holstein and even Bourdieu. Even if a student knew enough French and German to read these articles, considerable time would be required to go through them with the kind of attention to detail that Momigliano always evidenced in his synthetic critiques. Luckily for his readers, though, his interpretations have proven resilient and reliable, so rather than chasing down his sources, one settles in for the comfortable guided tour through what are often very strange lands indeed.

Those familiar with Momigliano’s standard rhetorical procedures immediately note that despite his habitual critical bent, he shows great respect for Weber’s position, even when he disagrees with it. (Momigliano’s impatience for ordinary or substandard discourse was documented by a colleague while he taught in Bristol, UK in 1947: “Henry Gifford... remembers him sitting at meetings of the Arts Board, ‘against the wall, rapidly running through booksellers’ catalogues, and only now and then lifting his head to make a good-natured but caustic comment on the proceedings” [Brown, 1989: 419]). In workmanlike fashion, he goes through *Ancient Judaism* and quotes all the passages pertinent to his argument, both in English and in the original German, since no translation is ever quite adequate to his needs. He also informs his reader that although the word “pariah” as applied to Jews has a long history, back at least to Michael Beer’s play, *Der Paria*, in 1823, and culminating in Hannah Arendt’s famous 1944 essay, “Weber had something else in mind” (Momigliano, 1984: 342). Here he launches into a blow-by-blow recounting of Weber’s remarks about the pariah-condition of Jews, not only in *Ancient Judaism*, but also in famous passages from *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft* which have been available in *From Max Weber* for nearly 70 years (Weber, 1946: 66, 96, 114, 189-90, 399; see also Weber’s *Religion in India*, 11f, 17, 18, 19, 34, etc.).

One of the main questions emanating from critics of Weber has been whether the Jews chose to segregate themselves, as he claimed, or if they were forced into behavioral, spiritual, or political ghettos by the host peoples surrounding them in their position as *Gastvolk*. As Momigliano puts it: “He em-

phasizes that the Jews deliberately chose to become pariahs—a choice arising from definite religious and moral beliefs and expressed by voluntary ritual segregation. As Weber says, the Jews segregated ‘voluntarily and not under pressure from external rejection’” (*ibid.*, p. 343). Another repeated criticism in the literature involves Weber’s apparent conception of Judaism as being fairly monolithic over time (between the 8th century B.C. and the modern day) in terms of its beliefs and accompanying practices of its followers. Many historians, including the dean of Jewish history, Salo Baron, have taken exception to this portrayal of Jewish ideas and practices (Baron, 1952, I:23-25, 297n1; Abraham, 1992: 11), which is all the more interesting since Weber reflected on this issue, as he did other thorny questions surrounding Jewish history, but decided to stick with his sense of things rather than bend to received wisdom. As Freddy Raphaël explains, Weber also bravely challenged the reigning orthodoxy espoused by Wellhausen and his followers regarding the living impact, meaning, and historical origins of the “ritual Decalogue” (*Exodus* 34) versus the “ethical Decalogue” (*Exodus* 20 and *Deuteronomy* 5), and seems to have been right despite his lack of access to archaeological or textual data (Raphaël, 1973: 47).

Swiftly laying out Weber on his pariah usage, Momigliano launches his critique: “Clarity, however, ceases at this point.” He wonders why Weber “does not yet explain why and in what sense a guest people necessarily lacks an autonomous political organization or vice versa,” and perhaps even more bothersome, “Weber seems to suggest that an ethic of resentment (*Ressentiment*) is characteristic of the Jews as pariahs,” (*ibid.*, 343) reminding readers of Weber’s fondness for Nietzsche. From this point Momigliano invokes fine points of Jewish history, political and theological, which require expert knowledge to decipher or criticize, and given the extraordinary complexity of the subject, very few modern sociologists would be equipped to do more than watch the performance unfold. Weber’s “feverish style of composition” (345) is blamed in part for confusions which Momigliano sees in Weber’s various treatments of the Jews, the Indian castes of pariahs, and the pariah condition in more modern societies. He takes pity on his uninformed readers: “Given these elements of obscurity, the best we can do is to outline the attitude of the Jews towards political power, remaining as it does fairly constant throughout the centuries. We want to see whether it is compatible with that feature of a pariah nation which emerges more clearly from Weber’s pages, namely the voluntary segregation and renunciation of political power with its implication of an ethic of resentment” (*ibid.*). And when Momigliano makes broad statements of fact, the reader must accept them as given, even if Weber might have argued to the contrary: “The whole Jewish religious tradition from the older strata of the Bible to the present day presupposes that the Jews are committed by pact to

obey a divine law and are entitled under certain conditions to own a territory granted to them by God” (*ibid.*).

One of Momigliano’s recognizable tropes is to imitate Weber at his best, comparing concepts and events over time and civilizations, performing a truly comparative historiography or sociology. Thus, he concludes a long disquisition on Jewish history and dogma with this intriguing query: “Weber’s primary contention is that the Jews themselves chose to be pariahs because of their religious attitude,” as opposed to the “new interpretation” holding that their segregation was forced upon them. This new interpretation “would not, therefore, explain what after all Weber wanted to explain when he labelled the Jews as pariahs: their inability to contribute to the modern forms of advanced capitalism, as the Calvinists did. It would also involve us in awkward comparative questions. Would Weber ever have referred to the Germans settled on Roman territory in the Late Empire as pariahs?” (346). Momigliano’s frisky sense of historical humor is never far beneath the surface of his arguments, especially when he is facing a foe whom he respects.

After this lightly mocking inquiry that Weber cannot answer, he settles into his most substantial and useful criticism of *Ancient Judaism*: “One could of course develop compromise interpretations trying to combine voluntary and involuntary forces of the pariah status of the Jews. For instance, one could argue that the Jews remained permanent foreigners in the countries in which they settled by refusing to give up their original land; or one could argue (with some support from Weber himself) that they were reduced to the status of pariahs by a mixture of subjective decisions about commensality and intermarriage and objective deprivations of territory and political rights. These compromise interpretations would certainly be nearer (almost by definition!) to the realities of Jewish ‘exile.’ But would they bring us nearer to the Indian model which was Weber’s starting point? What would *we* mean if we call the Jews pariahs?” (347).

This line of critique evolves into one of the most sensible extant approaches to Weber’s interpretation of the Jewish historical experience. Momigliano ends his observations by giving back almost as much as he took away: “Much of what Weber said on ancient Judaism remains valid even if we eliminate his definition of it as a pariah-religion... The sympathetic understanding of the rabbis, against the entire tradition of German scholarship, is perhaps the most remarkable feature of Weber’s interpretation of Judaism” (348). It was the Jews’ “pact with God” according to Momigliano that protected them from the sort of exploitation, inner and outer, which victimized the true pariahs in India and elsewhere; it “therefore saved the Jews from whatever self-abasement can be associated with the word *pariah*” (*ibid.*).

Briefly Back to the Source

Thus, a great deal of ink has been consumed over the last 90 years worrying about what Weber meant by the term “pariah” and why he chose to use it, with most scholars, many of them experts on Jewish history, castigating him for what they regard as an inaccurate, if not demeaning, appellation. Strangely enough, though, among his most efficient defenders were Hans Gerth and Don Martindale in their concise introduction to *Ancient Judaism*, which they translated long ago (1952) into English. They do not apologize nor excoriate Weber, but instead place his use of “pariah” in the context of Salo Baron’s critique: “A final theme requiring special attention is Weber’s characterization of Jewry as a ‘pariah people.’ The term is unfortunately lending itself to misconceptions. Weber did not intend a contemptuous attitude toward Jewry. He uses the terms ‘pariah people’ and ‘guest people’ in a technical sense” (Weber, 1952: xxiii). They then commit four densely packed pages to an explanation and defense of Weber’s conceptualization, saying *en passant* that Salo Baron’s famous, critical footnote regarding Weber (Baron, 1937: III, footnote 6) – which likely inspired and legitimated most critiques that followed, *except*, very interestingly Momigliano’s, who never mentions Baron in this context – “rests essentially on reading too much into the concept” (Weber, 1952: xxiv). Gerth and Martindale then answer Baron with their own theory of how religious groups can weaken or heighten their “pariah status” as “guests” within a “host” culture by virtue of how vigorously they adhere to their original ideas, as opposed to blending or otherwise adapting to their new situation.

Gerth and Martindale continue with shrewd references on the one hand to Robert Ezra Park’s famous concept of “marginal man” (which he took from his teacher, Simmel, of course), and on the other to Bienenfeld’s lesser known study, *The Germans and the Jews* (Bienenfeld, 1939). More importantly, though, they explain that Weber’s meaning of pariah as applied to the Jews did not equate the Jews’ experience with that of the Indian pariah caste (originally drum-beaters in festivals, and as such, not used in a disparaging sense): “Rather, he emphasized three essential differences” (*ibid.*, xxvi). The Jews’ pariah condition occurred in social settings free of castes; reincarnation did not apply to them, but messianism did; and “ritualistic correctness, circumcision, dietary prescriptions and the Sabbath rules combined with ethical universalism, hostility toward all magic and irrational salvation striving” gave the Jews’ pariah condition its uniqueness.

Gerth and Martindale fortified these remarks with another pregnant footnote six years later when they published their translation of *The Religion of India* (1958a, 11n), where they give a three-point definition of “guest people” that this time focuses more on Gypsies than Jews: “Weber’s frequent comparative

references to the Jains, the ‘Jews of the East’ and to the Jews of the occidental Middle Ages seem evidence for the soundness of this procedure.”

Ancient Judaism is filled with references to the pariah-condition of Jews (Weber, 1952: 3, 51, 336-355 [“The Pariah Community”], 356, 363, 375-76, 417, 424, the final page of the book). He concludes the study with this sentiment: “And there is the strength of the firmly structured social communities, the family, and the congregation, which the apostate lost without the prospect of finding equally valuable and certain affiliation with the Christian congregations. All of this makes the Jewish community remain in its self-chosen situation as a pariah people as long and as far as the unbroken spirit of the Jewish law, and that is to say, the spirit of the Pharisees, and the rabbis of late antiquity, continued and continues to live on” (Weber, 1952: 424). This does not sound dismissive, critical, condemnatory, or insensitive. It reads like a sober reflection upon the condition of Jews as they “wandered” from place to place, host culture to host culture, either by choice or dire necessity.

When Momigliano and others have objected to Weber’s use of the term, it probably says more about our contemporary dislike of the word – “He became a pariah among his colleagues on Wall Street when his status as an informer against their insider trading was revealed” – than about the limitations of Weber’s conceptualization or about the actual experience of Jews through their extraordinarily durable history. Put another way, Weber admired the Jews for many reasons, those remembered only in texts, and those who visited his home regularly for intellectual exchange, yet he believed what he said to his student audience in “Science as a Vocation,” so he set aside his personal affections when “doing science.” When he was theorizing, he was all business and no sentiment, so for him “pariah people” was not an aspersion but an illuminating analytic device.

References

- Abraham, Gary A. 1992: *Max Weber and the Jewish Question: A Study of the Social Outlook of His Sociology*. Urbana, IL: The University of Illinois Press.
- Arendt, Hannah 1978 [1944]: “The Jew as Pariah.” Pp. 67-90 in Ron H. Feldman (ed), *The Jew as Pariah*. New York: Grove Press, Inc. (Reprinted in Hannah Arendt, *The Jewish Writings*, ed. by Jerome Kohn and Ron H. Feldman. New York: Schocken Books, 2007, pp. 275-297.)
- Barbalet, Jack 2005: “Max Weber and Judaism: An Insight into the Methodology of *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*”. *Max Weber Studies*, 5/6: 2/1 (July), 51ff.
- Baron, Salo Wittmayer 1937: *A Social and Religious History of the Jews*. 3 vols. New York: Columbia University Press.

- Bienenfeld, Franz 1939: *The Germans and the Jews*. New York: F. Ungar.
- Brown, Peter 1989: "Arnaldo Dante Momigliano" *Proceedings of the British Academy*, vol. 74 (1988): 405-442. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- Derks, Hans 1999: "Nomads, Jews, and Pariahs: Max Weber and Anti-Judaism." *The European Legacy*, 4:4, 24-48.
- Fahey, Tony 1982: "Max Weber's *Ancient Judaism*." *American Journal of Sociology*, 88:1 (July), 62-87. (Reprinted in Alan Sica (ed), *Max Weber*, pp. 451-76. Farnham, UK: Ashgate Publishing, Ltd.)
- Graves, Robert 1989 [1935]: *Claudius the God and His Wife Messalina*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Guttman, Julius 1925: "Max Webers Soziologie des Judentums." *Monatschrift für die Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums* 69. (Reprinted in Wolfgang Schluchter (ed), *Max Webers Studie über das antike Judentums: Interpretation und Kritik*. Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1981.)
- Magistra et Mater website 2009: "Arnaldo Momigliano: A Lack of Appreciation?" February 14, 2009. <http://magistraetmater.blog.co.uk/2009/02/14/arnaldo-momigliano-a-lack-of-appreciation>.
- Meltzer, Milton 2002: *Mark Twain Himself: A Pictorial Biography*. Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press.
- Momigliano, Arnaldo 1980: "A Note on Max Weber's Definition of Judaism as a Pariah Religion." *History and Theory*, 19:3, 313-318. (Reprinted in *Settimo contributo alla storia degli studi classici e del mondo antico*, Roma, Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1984, 341-348.)
- _____ 1982: "New Paths of Classicism in the Nineteenth Century." *History and Theory*, Beiheft 21:4, 1-64. Wesleyan, CT: Wesleyan University Press.
- _____ 1984: *Settimo contributo alla storia degli studi classici e del mondo antico*. Roma, Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura.
- _____ 1986: "Two Types of Universal History: The Cases of E.A. Freeman and Max Weber." *Studia classica*, 24; 7-17. (Reprinted in *Ottavo contributo alla storia degli studi classici e del mondo antico*. Roma, Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1987, 121-34.)
- _____ 1992: *Nono contributo alla storia degli studi classici e del mondo antico*. Ed. by Riccardo Di Donato, Roma: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura.
- _____ 1994: *A.D. Momigliano: Studies on Modern Historiography*. Ed. by G., W. Bowersock and T. J. Cornell. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Mommsen, Theodor 1892: "Zum römischem Bodenrecht." *Hermes* 27; 79-117; reprinted in his *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 5, pp. 85-122, Berlin, 1908.
- _____ 1958: *The History of Rome*. Introduction by Dero A. Saunders and John H. Collins. New York: Meridian Books.
- Murdoch, Iris 1956: *The Flight from the Enchanter*. New York: The Viking Press.
- Nirenberg, David 2013: *Anti-Judaism: The Western Tradition*. New York: W. W. Norton.
- Phillips, David Graham 1905: *The Deluge* (Indianapolis, IN: The Bobbs-Merrill Company).
- Raphaël, Freddy 1973: "Max Weber and Ancient Judaism." *Yearbook of the Leo Baeck Institute*, 18: 41-62. New York: Secker and Warburg.

- Roth, Guenther 2012: "Max Weber's Jewish Stereotype of the *Knalljude* in Regard to Persons and a Rembrandt Painting." *Max Weber Studies*, 12:2, 241-246.
- Schipper, Itzak 1959 [1924]: "Max Weber on the Sociological Basis of the Jewish Religion." *Jewish Journal of Sociology*, 1: 250-60.
- Schluchter, Wolfgang 1989: *Rationalism, Religion and Domination: A Weberian Perspective*. Trans. by Neil Solomon. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- _____ 2004: "The Approach of Max Weber's Sociology of Religion as Exemplified in His Study of Ancient Judaism." *Archives de sciences sociales des religions*, 127 (July-September), 33-56.
- Sharpe, Reginald R. (ed) 1899: *Calendar of Letter-Books Preserved Among the Archives of the Corporation of the City of London at the Guildhall. Letter-Book A. Circa A.D. 1275-1298*. London: John Edward Francis
- Shmueli, Efraim 1968: "The 'Pariah-People' and Its 'Charismatic Leadership,' A Reevaluation of Max Weber's Ancient Judaism." *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research* 36, 167-247.
- Sica, Alan 2004: *Max Weber: A Comprehensive Bibliography*. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers.
- [University of Chicago] 1987: *Arnaldo Dante Momigliano 1908-1987*. Chicago, IL. No editor, no author, no publisher listed; 107 pp. memorial pamphlet and bibliography of Momigliano's writings.
- Weber, Max 1946: *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*. Ed. and intro by Hans Gerth and C. Wright Mills. New York: Oxford University Press.
- _____ 1952: *Ancient Judaism*. Trans. by Hans Gerth and Don Martindale. New York: Free Press.
- _____ 1958: *Religion of India*. Trans. by Hans Gerth and Don Martindale. New York: Free Press.