Giuseppe Veltri

Individual Responsibility and Collective Punishment in the Thought of Rabbi Simone Luzzatto

Is it possible to punish a family, community, lineage, or nation for a crime perpetrated by a single individual? Is it lawful to let a person’s guilt fall on his natural (family) or socio-ethnic circle? This legal issue has never been easy to resolve, whether within national or international legal systems. Article 50 of the Hague Convention of 1907 (Hague IV) establishes: “No general penalty, pecuniary or otherwise, shall be inflicted upon the population on account of the acts of individuals for which they cannot be regarded as jointly and severally responsible.”

The Convention sanctioned the application of a general penalty in those cases in which a population could be considered “jointly responsible.” This article permitted the application of penalties and provisions whose nature – and especially whose military range – some populations had already experienced. After World War II, following the nefarious abuse of the right to inflict collective penalties, attempts were made at modifying the legislation. Collective penalties were declared illegal by the Geneva Convention of 1949, underlying the right to protection for civilians in times of war. Article 33 states:

No protected person may be punished for an offence he or she has not personally committed. Collective penalties and likewise all measures of intimidation or of terrorism are prohibited. Pillage is prohibited. Retributions against protected persons and their property are prohibited.

Obviously, the above articles concern war regulations, and war is subject to very specific laws. It is mostly protected persons who are excluded from penalties, and therefore it is not possible to use these regulations to discuss historical processes in which entire groups or societies were punished. However, the fundamental question of whether it would be legitimate to categorically exclude the direct or indirect application of collective punishment in peacetime still stands. From a societal and emotional point of view, there is no doubt that we tend to accuse and condemn an

1 The texts cited in this essay and relating to the Geneva Convention are available on the websites of many national and international organisations, e.g. the International Committee of the Red Cross (https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/applic/ihl/ihl.nsf/COM/380-6000038?OpenDocument&xp_articleSelected=600038, last accessed December 2011).
2 Ibid.
3 On this subject, see Paolo Colombati, “La protezione penale dei diritti umani dal processo di Norimberga allo Statuto di Roma” (PhD diss., University of Trento, 2001–2), 47 ff.

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entire ethnic group, nation, or crowd for an offence committed by an individual. Western laws – and here I want to underline that I am not an expert in either national or international law – establish that the notion of guilt is and should remain individual. Nevertheless, collective punishment in wartime cannot be excluded, especially if a group participated either directly or indirectly in a crime committed by an individual. There are also penalties that, because of the crimes perpetrated by an individual, affect an entire community by limiting its freedom. This usually happens when the freedom of an entire society or the prevention of crime are at stake and need to be defended. In these cases, it is possible to talk about collective responsibility. This is, however, beyond the scope of this essay, which only aims to examine the collective penalty (inflicted on adults or protected persons) for offences committed by individuals.

Therefore, it is not my place to summarise here the long process through which legal systems, and especially criminal law, came to put more emphasis on individual responsibility. It is however important to emphasise how religion played a significant role, in both a positive and a negative manner, as far as individual responsibility is concerned. Adam’s sin is explicitly declared as the sin of all humanity. Redemption, by a God which has now become the Christian God, is then to be understood as the redemption of a universal human being. The brand of Christianity originating in Augustinian thought considers sin as the constant characterising factor distinguishing the moral essence of both the individual and the collective. As a consequence, the dilemma still remains.

Judaism is caught between two poles: the first sanctions collective responsibility and the penalty inflicted on the entire Jewish community, freed from the Egyptian yoke, as in the episode of the golden calf; the second is represented by those who are inclined to consider the individual as the root of all evil and to understand sin as an act which the person should individually expiate. As far as collective responsibility is concerned, ancient and medieval Judaism formulated the doctrine according to which the sins of the fathers will fall on their children. There was also an established belief that individual crimes, punished or unpunished, could cause astrophysical phenomena, such as solar or lunar eclipses and earthquakes. This cosmogonic aspect was readopted by ancient, medieval, modern, and contemporary Christianity. Individual responsibility before God represents a complex chapter of Jewish doctrine. If on the one hand there is a process of collective expiation during

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5 The belief in the influence of the macrocosm on the microcosm and vice versa is ancient. See Veltri, *Renaissance Philosophy*, 126–27.
Yom Kippur, on the other hand only sins against God can be pardoned, to the exclusion of sins against fellow humans. The latter can only be atoned for by individuals.

Penance for sins, over the course of history, acquired a political dimension whose prerogative is to justify the supremacy of one class over another, and of the majority over a minority. In this way, the argument of collective responsibility becomes subservient to the objective of establishing and maintaining political and psychological control. The Christian explanation of the Jewish Diaspora as a divine punishment is well-exemplified by the legend of the notorious wandering Jew, sentenced by Jesus to roam eternally for having taunted him while he was on his way to Calvary. This myth, probably originating in the Middle Ages, spread throughout Europe thanks to a German pamphlet from 1602 in which the character of Ahasveros or Assueros appears. The fate of Cain, the murderer of his own brother, is cruelly projected onto the entire Jewish people, condemned to wander until the second coming of the Christian Messiah, because of their supposed criminal past. This convenient projection, the product of a clearly anti-Jewish literary imagination, has inspired modern and contemporary authors to produce novels and descriptions that are significantly different from their anti-Semitic matrix.

The expiation of a collective sin was interiorised by Judaism as well. In both the Middle Ages and the modern period, Judaism paradoxically interprets catastrophes and persecutions caused by the Christian majority as divine punishment. Chronicles and funeral lamentations focus on nefarious events and regularly open with a refrain with which historians of Jewish thought and culture are very familiar: “Because of our sins…” However, the current of Jewish thought which developed in the seventeenth century proposing different paradigms for participation in the debate on mass punishments is much less known, despite its antique and medieval literary origins. When speaking of mass punishments, I refer not only to the expulsion of Jews from territories under Spanish rule, but also to other mass “punishments” such as the elimination of entire cultures considered as “sinning cultures.”

The court chronologist Gonzalo Fernandez de Oviedo (1475–1557) in his Historia general y natural de las Indias (1535) reports a number of sins against nature committed by Amerindians. In his opinion, those sins justify the mass extermination of this population based on 1 Kings 14:24, where the Canaanites are exterminated be-

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7 I am thinking of the fictional work by Carlo Fruttero and Franco Lucentini, L’amante senza fissa dimora (Milan: Mondadori, 1986).

8 See the second chapter of Dean P. Bell, Jewish Identity in Early Modern Germany: Memory, Power and Community (Farnham: Ashgate, 2007), 20–27.
cause of their sins against nature. It is not a question of individual sins or collective punishment, but rather of the extermination of lineages and nations based on Christian morality. Collective responsibility is therefore conceived and interpreted in a Christian sense. In his De Indis recente inventis et de iure belli hispanorum in barbaros (1539/40, published in 1557), one of Oviedo’s colleagues, the Dominican theologian Francisco de Vitoria, rejects the above Christian moral thesis as a justification for the destruction of a population.

De Vitoria refers to the theme of this introductory essay: the individual responsibility, especially the political responsibility, of minorities. He argues that the crime of theft committed by a Jew or a Saracen must be considered equal to the same crime committed by a Christian. The fact that these individuals are not believers, that is to say, not Christians, should not carry any weight on the scale of justice.

It is precisely because of an uproarious theft that the activity of the Venetian rabbi Simone Luzzatto began. He is the author of a treatise published in 1638 on the condition of the Jews in the city of Venice. To continue our reflection on the theme of crime and punishment, object of this introductory essay, I think it would be worthwhile to examine the life and work of Rabbi Luzzatto a little closer, being also the main subject of this book.

1 Life

According to a tradition transmitted by Shmuel David Luzzatto, the whole Luzzatto family stems from Lausitz (in Latin: Lusatia) in north-eastern Germany, a territory nowadays situated within Brandenburg and Saxony. The “German Nation” is actually the first historically documented group of Jews that laid the foundation of the ghetto in 1516. It is not precisely clear when Simone’s ancestors moved to Venice. In the dedication of his philosophical book Socrates (1651) to the Doge, Luzzatto writes that his ancestors had been living in the city of Venice for more than two hundred years. This information would date their move to the middle of the fifteenth century. The Luzzatto family was deeply involved in one of the most productive activities of the German nation, namely the loan banks, and at the end of the sixteenth century, they became merchants of second-hand items.

11 Socrates, s.p.: “Therefore, I, their must humble subject and servant, born under this most happy sky and most noble dominion, as were my ancestors for more than two hundred years.”
Included among the modern spirits of the Venetian rabbinate, Simone (Simḥa) Luzzatto was possibly born before 1583. This date remains, however, under discussion. When his responsus Mish’an mayim (The Support of the Waters) was published in 1606, he was listed among the rabbis of Venice. In his biography Medabber tahpukhot (The Man Who Speaks Wickedly), Leone Modena’s nephew Rabbi Isaac Levita states that when he was ordained, Rabbi Luzzatto was twenty-four years old. Therefore, the birth date should be situated earlier than 1583. Leone Luzzatto came to the same conclusion, however he fixed the date to 1583 without further explanation.

Simone Luzzatto’s recently discovered testament, dating back to 20 June 1662, does not give further information about his birth date, but it does supply information about his biography and family. His wife Uzelina/Uselina or Teghele gave him a son, Isach, who died young, and two daughters, Gloria or Ghele, and Diamante or Lipet. He left everything to his nephew, Isach’s son, Rabbi Moisè Luzzatto.

Luzzatto spent most of his long life in Venice studying mathematics, literature, and philosophy and fulfilling his role as the rabbi of the Scola Tedesca until at least 1661, as well as being the director of the Talmudic academy (rosh yeshivah). The recently discovered documents from the Archivio di Stato di Venezia provide scholars with better information about his connections, interests, and involvement in the family’s businesses. We now know that Luzzatto’s cousin Nehemiah had left the money that had allowed the establishment of the Scola Luzzatto. Furthermore, the family had pursued a marriage strategy to promote strategic alliances with other important families in several Jewish communities. Luzzatto himself had a share in an insurance company for mercantile ships. He died in 1663.

13 See Shulvass, Ma’amor, 9, and the annexed sources.
14 Shmuel David Luzzatto, Autobiografia di S. D. Luzzatto preceduta da alcune notizie storico-letterarie sulla famiglia Luzzato a datare dal secolo decimosesto. Mosè, Antologia Israelitica di Corfù, 1878; Padova: Crescini, 1878, appendix 2, 33. Simone Luzzatto was born in 1583 and died on 6 January 1663.
16 In the introduction to his autobiography, ShaDaL (Shmuel David Luzzatto) describes his ancestor as follows: “Simeone (Simha) Luzzatto, rabbi di Venezia, meno conosciuto forse di quanto meritasse, accoppiava a grande dottrina rabbinica molta classica erudizione ed un profondo sapere in politica e in filosofia.” Autobiografia, 13–14. A witness by Abraham Porto testifies that Luzzatto was the Rabbi of the Scola Tedesca. See Giuseppe Veltri, “Saggio Introduttivo,” XXII. He recalls that “Simone Luzato” and Moshe Treves (Moisè Treves) were the rabbis of the “sinagoga de Todeschi” at the beginning of 1661.
17 Moshe Shulvass, in his introduction to Lattes (Ma’amor, 9–26), writes that Luzzatto had been rabbi from 1606 and rosh yeshivah since the death of Leone Modena in 1648.
By contrast, this same archival research has revealed nothing about Luzzatto’s personal library. The amount and extent of his culture is therefore left to scholars to determine by means of an in-depth analysis of his Hebrew and Italian works. Until now, these works have remained the sole expression of the richness of his thought, which stemmed not only from his juridical and religious commitments, but also and mainly from his engagement with classical and modern philosophy and political thought.

Luzzatto authored two works in Italian – the political treatise entitled *Discourse on the State of the Jews* (Venice, 1638) and a philosophical dialogue entitled *Socrates or on Human Knowledge* (Venice, 1651) – and several shorter works in Hebrew. The Italian works in particular have enabled readers to appreciate the results of his studies which involved both classical and secular knowledge and have become the subject of both praise and study.

2 Hebrew Works

With a few exceptions, Luzzatto’s Hebrew works are not as well known as his Italian works. Furthermore, it may seem somewhat paradoxical, but the most quoted responsum by Luzzatto is the halakhic discussion of travelling by gondola on Shabbat, the text of which has never been retrieved but is only quoted by Lampronti in his *Paḥad Yiṣḥaq* (*The Fear of Isaac*, 1750) in the entry for “sfinah” (“ship”). Further details are not known. Lampronti only informs his readers that the council of rabbis rejected his responsum.

Beyond the discussion of his published and unpublished Hebrew works, it is also important to recall that Luzzatto played the roles of poseq (a halakhic scholar who has the power to decide on issues of rabbinic law) and maskim (a scholar who has the power to give the nihil obstat). He signed many ketubbot (nuptial agreements) and he also gave his approbation to the publication of Joseph Solomon Delmedigo’s *Sefer Elim* (Amsterdam, 1629).

Luzzatto’s unpublished Hebrew works have been traced by Giuseppe Veltri and his team. Among them, there are some responsa, preserved together with texts by

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19 See next section.
21 I am especially thankful to Dr. Lennart Lehmhaus, who worked on the Hebrew works of Luzzatto as part of the former DFG Luzzatto project at the Martin Luther Universität Halle-Wittenberg.
22 Lampronti, *Paḥad Yiṣḥaq*, volume 7, 57a–59b; Luzzatto’s responsum is quoted on page 58b. See Veltri and Lissa, “Come attraversar il canale.”
Leone Modena. These works, however, still await and deserve further in-depth analysis.

### 2.1 Published Hebrew Works

Luzzatto’s published Hebrew works are as follows: the *Mish’an Mayyim* (*The Support of the Waters*), included in the collective volume *Mashbit Milhamot* (*The End of the Wars*, Venice 1606, reprinted in 1981 in Jerusalem); some letters published in Jacob ben Elchanan Heilbronn’s volume *Naḥalat Ya’aqov* (*Ya’aqov’s Inheritance*, Padova, 1623); and an introduction to Ecclesiastes published in Shmuel Ha-Cohen di Pisa Lusitano *Ṣafnat Pa’neḥ* (*The Enigma Solver*, Venice, 1656).

**The Support of the Waters** is the longest and most well-known Hebrew work by Luzzatto. The circumstances that brought him to write and publish the work are connected to a discussion that soon turned into a quarrel about the purity of the *miqweh* (ritual bath for women) in Rovigo. The quarrel was essentially a power struggle in the local Jewish community. Rav Avtalyon had been the rabbi for ten years and he was also responsible for the purity of the *miqweh* in the house of his brother, Rav Yequtiel. When he happened to visit his brother’s house, Rav Avtalyon noticed that he had made some renovations which infringed on the ritual purity of the bathwater. Therefore, every woman who used this bath would be declared *niddah* (ritually impure). He also ordered the building of another bath. There arose a harsh polemic, whose stages can be retraced from the rabbinic *responsa* issued in the *Milḥamot ha-Shem* (*The Wars of the Lord*, 1605).

As for Rav Yequtiel, he reacted by asking for the help and advice of several renowned rabbis, who confirmed the ritual compliance of his bath. Their *responsa* were published in *The Support of the Waters*, where Luzzatto’s *responsum* is also included. Rav Avtalyon retorted with a booklet entitled *Miqweh Yisrael* (*The Ritual Bath of Israel*, 1606) and in 1607 he also issued a *responsum* whose title is *Palge Mayyim* (*The Stream of Water*).

Luzzatto’s *responsum* is the last of the seven *responsa* published in *The Support of the Waters*. His text is well organised. At the beginning, he introduces an index of the arguments he will use to support his reasoning. The discussion is divided into three parts: in the first, he discusses why the water system and supplies conform to the halakhic precepts. In the second part, he refutes the *responsa* of the rabbis who were opposed to Rav Yequtiel. Finally, he responds to Rav Avtalyon, who had argued that since he was the local rabbinic authority, nobody had the right to contest his decisions.

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23 Jerusalem, The Jewish National and University Library, Ms. Heb. 8⁰ 2001, fols. 521–25; New York, Jewish Theological Seminary, Ms. 1343, fols. 16a–20a; Oxford, Bodleian Library, Ms. Mich. 196, fols. 60a–75b; Mantova, Comunità Israelitica, Ms. ebr. 88, fols. 12a–13a; 14b–16b; 99a–102a; 148a–150a; Amsterdam, Universitätsbibliothek, Ms. Rosenthal 281; Cincinnati, Hebrew Union College 164.
The five letters addressed to his master Jacob ben Elchanan Heilbronn and published in the book *Ya'akov's Inheritance* are much shorter than *The Support of the Waters*, but there Luzzatto also gives his opinion about halakhic issues such as the transportation of a corpse on Shabbat; the prohibition on a couple living together before the nuptial ceremony; a discussion about loan and usury; a controversy between his masters and other rabbis who accused him of dealing with the Kabbalah; and a dispute about monetary issues between two brothers.

The introduction to *The Enigma Solver* is a much later text published in 1656, after Luzzatto had already published the *Socrates*. However, this remains a very interesting text, since it allows us to test his philosophical knowledge and his sceptical method in a Hebrew text meant for his colleagues, the rabbis, and his coreligionists. Formally, it has the style of a biblical commentary dealing with the pivotal issue of whether Job denied the resurrection of the dead or not. By using a mix of Talmudic dialectic and a fictional process, Luzzatto demonstrates that Job did not deny the resurrection of the dead.

### 3 The *Discourse on the State of the Jews* (1638)

During his long life, Luzzatto wrote two Italian works, the *Discourse* and the *Socrates or on Human Knowledge*, a translation of which is published alongside the present volume. The shared features between the two works as well as the coherent development of Luzzatto’s philosophical and political thought is to be found in the sceptical method he uses in both his investigations: the sceptical political investigation in defence of the Jewish people in the *Discourse*, and the sceptical philosophical investigation in the *Socrates*.

I will introduce the *Discourse* here with a history of the printing of the work, a summary of the main themes discussed in it, and a discussion of its reception.

#### 3.1 The Historical Context and the Printing History of the Work

Recent archival research has demonstrated that the text of the *Discourse* published in Venice by Gioanne Calleoni in 1638 may have gone through different stages of composition. In 2010, Guido Bartolucci traced the first and to this day only known manuscript of the work, copied in a collection of several different fragments of political works dating back to the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, preserved in the Contarini family archive. This manuscript differs from the printed version in several ways. First of all, it includes only one introduction, entitled “Introduction to the Whole Work,” followed by considerations I to III. Furthermore, there are no Latin quotes, as there are in the printed version. It still remains unclear whether this is a first basic version of the *Discourse*, later expanded and turned into the one
with which we are familiar today, or whether it is an abridged version based on the printed text.24

The *Discourse* has generally been considered an apology for the Jewish community of Venice. Some scholars claim that the immediate cause, the stimulus that moved Luzzatto to compose a plea for recognition of the status of the Jews of Venice, was a recent and unexpected event. In 1636, a quantity of merchandise was stolen from the main shopping thoroughfare of Venice, the Merceria.25

Nevertheless, the significance of the *Discourse* goes beyond the contingent problem of a single episode and a rhetorical plea for grace. As a tract in defence of a minority, the author’s attitude is surprisingly modern: he does not presents the Jews as supplicants begging for the authority’s good favour; rather, they request only to be respected for their capabilities; that is, for their political and economic usefulness to their society.

### 3.2 The Structure of the Discourse: The Main Content and Purpose

The *Discourse* appears at first glance to be little more than a modest and uncomplicated tractate, true to its ostensible purpose of introducing the Jews and Judaism (of Venice) to the Venetian “lovers of truth” – hence the title of the introduction. Yet concealed within it are a multiplicity of topics, themes, and concise observations, which, taken together, make it a highly complex composition presumably intended to respond to diverse circumstances. It consists of eighteen considerations introduced by a “Dedication,” a “Preface to the Entire Work,” and an “Introduction to This Treatise.” The presence of two introductions could be seen as the remnants of an original plan by the author to publish a more extensive essay. Of such a plan there is, however, no other trace, either in the book itself or in Luzzatto’s other extant publications. I would suggest that they rather reflect the structure of *Discourse* as it has come down to us. It is made up of two parts, the first concentrating more on the particular situation of the Jews of Venice (considerations I to X), the second focused on the more substantial questions of the status of the Jews in Europe and the world at that time. Consideration XI begins, indeed, with the topic dealt with in the preface to the work as a whole, namely that of the difficulty in formulating a universal definition of Jewish customs, and “that their [of the Jews] misdemeanours could easily be prevented.” The second introduction is concerned primarily with the subject dealt with in the first part of the book, that of the condition of the Jews in Venice and their “usefulness.”

24 See Veltri, Miletto, and Bartolucci, “The Last Will.”
The Discourse opens with a dedication (3r–v) to the Doge of Venice (Francesco Erizzo, Doge from 1631 to 1646) and his council, who are deemed “lovers of truth,” recalling the political vision found in Polybius, which speaks of rulers as princes not only because of their noble origins, but also as an expression of their virtue. The dedication contains some important statements:

1. The “Jewish nation” can be compared to an artistic object. This first sentence serves as both a captatio benevolentiae and as a (bitter) prediction that Luzzatto’s “discourse” cannot hope for a more favourable destiny than that of the Jewish people in their history.

2. The Jewish nation is itinerant and dispersed (“vaga e dispersa”), deprived of a protector. It is Luzzatto’s hope that this same destiny will not be shared by the little book offered to the public. This characterisation of Jewish destiny should not obscure the fact that he will actually be portraying the positive nature of Jewish existence. Indeed, he compares his book to the infant Moses, “the celebrated legislator,” who was rescued from the waters, as it were, by the enemy, the Pharaoh’s own daughter. Luzzatto is here employing a known topos of Jewish historiography, with a positive twist: the ruling political power can, at times, be helpful in raising the Jews up from their current (slavish) status.

3. The purpose of his book is to cause the Jewish nation to be “advocated,” or at least “excused.” The plain meaning is obvious: Luzzatto wishes his people to be exonerated of all guilt attached to their being Jews.

4. Luzzatto’s hope is for the Jews to become a positive, integrated element of Venetian society.

In the “Preface to the Entire Work” (5r–6v), Luzzatto repeats that he intends to show that “if [the Jewish people] is not advocated, at least let it be excused.” To this end, he provides a brief overview, touching on the subject and origins of his tractate, his commitment as an author, the readers he wants to address, and concluding with a peroratio on Judaism as a fragment of past beauty. Luzzatto’s own description of the tractate leaves the impression that it is nothing but a compendium of the rites and opinions of the Jews. In fact, however, his main point will focus on the practical attitude of the Jews in their day-to-day lives and in their commercial and social dealings. Especially intriguing is Luzzatto’s comparison of Jewish history and tradition with the sculpture of Phidias and Lysippus in its Renaissance reception: in the

26 The word “nation” in Luzzatto should be interpreted as “gens” or “genus” (“ethnical and cultural entity” or “progeny”), here usually translated as “people.”

27 Discourse, 3r.

28 Discourse, 5r: “I brought myself to compose a concise but truthful account of this Nation’s principal rites and most commonly shared opinions, which are not in conflict with those that are universal.” This assertion proves that the Discourse is not an “an appendix to the treatise about the opinions and dogmas of the Jews,” as the subtitle of the books reads.
preface, he describes the Jewish people as a “relic of the Ancient Jewish People.” They are portrayed as a “deteriorated fragment of an aged statue.”

30 Seen as a surviving fragment from the works of an artist comparable to the most famous Greek sculptors, the Jews become an object that could be of great value in the eyes of a “curious antique dealer.” The Jews, he points out, are an ancient people. Although they have been “deformed” by their troubles and “disfigured” through their long years of captivity, they received the rules that govern their society and the institutions by which they live from the divine Creator, as is generally recognised. It is not by chance that Luzzatto draws the comparison to Phidias and Lysippus: when Istanbul was plundered during the Fourth Crusade in 1204, the Venetians seized four gold-plated bronze horses, thought to be the work of the sculptor Lysippus, and carried them away. They were placed on top of the facade of the Basilica of San Marco, and this Quadriga came to be seen as the symbol of Venetian power. This power was now in danger of being geographically fragmented and economically crushed by the growing might of the Ottoman Empire.

Luzzatto prefaces his treatise with an introduction (7r–8r), ostensibly intended to provide a theoretical outline of the political and economic aspects of his subject, a reflection also of his vision of the customs and ways of life followed by the Jews of the Diaspora. In this introduction to the “entire” tractate, he deals, in fact, with only one issue: the status of the Jews of Venice and their economic situation, which is, in turn, the topic to which the entire first part of the Discourse is devoted. Luzzatto clearly states his central thesis right from the outset: the ancient Jewish people, today present in the illustrious city of Venice, is, in its constitution and way of life, a “fragment” of God’s original creation.

32 Nobody, he claims, can contest the proposition that the Venetian Jews are a “reward” (“emolumento”) for the city of Venice and that they constitute an integral part of the common population.

Luzzatto once again avails himself of the metaphor of the fragment, this time in a variant form: the Jewish community of Venice is like a Democritean atom in the Milky Way of the Venetian res publica. Although he has serious doubts as to the cosmological value of Democritus’s philosophy, he seems to accept its usefulness as a source of metaphor: “This opinion was condemned, but because the two philosophers asserted the casual coupling of small bodies, not because of the absurdity of the conception.”

29 Discourse, 6v.
30 For Machiavelli’s Discourses as a source for this passage, see Discourse, 6v n. 8.
31 On this aspect, see Patricia Fortini Brown, Art and Life in Renaissance Venice (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1997).
32 Discourse, 6v: “Moreover, it is common consensus among men that this People once took [its] form of government and institution of life from the Highest Opifex.”
33 Discourse, 7v.
34 Ibid., 7r.
The purpose of Luzzatto’s treatise is not to celebrate the antiquity of the Jews, but rather to present some of the advantages they bring to the State. He considers the Jewish people an integral part of the city of Venice or, better, of the entire world. The function of the Jews, he claims, is similar to that of the atoms of Democritus that populate the “Lower World,” which, in turn, feeds the sun, the moon, and the other stars with its vapour – a Stoic idea. In this sense, every kingdom on earth is comparable to the galaxy.35

The metaphors Luzzatto uses to describe the composition of society serve to draw attention to a specific point: that every element of a society, in particular that of Venice, should be fully integrated, as a prerequisite to their contribution to the welfare of the whole. This is also the logic of the human body, as Luzzatto expressly indicates, indirectly citing the fable of Menenius Agrippa:36

So too, when our stomach suffers from lack of food, it subsists on humours from our other limbs, with their subsequent pains and ailments. [But when the opposite occurs, and there is] an abundance of nourishment, not only does our stomach stop the plundering, it also allows its own nourishment to circulate to other parts of the body. Similarly, the preponderance of duties and the taxation of pack animals not only releases the people from the burden of high taxes and contributions – which they would be obliged to pay for the needs and requirements of the prince – [but it also implies that] they [the very same people] profit from an abundance of public money.37

In the sixteenth century, the metaphor of the stomach becomes more specific: in 1612, Francis Bacon writes in his “Of Empire,” 11:

For their Merchants; They are Vena porta; And if they flourish not, a Kingdom may have good Limmes, but will have empty Veines, and nourish little. Taxes, and Imposts upon them, doe seldom good to the Kings Revenew; For that that he winnes in the Hundred, he leeseth in the Shire; The particular Rates being increased, but the total Bulke of Trading rather decreased.38

Luzzatto substantially agrees with Bacon. Taxes on imports and exports are lethal for an economy because they lead to a decrease in trade volume. In the end, the state treasury will end up with little more than usual. In addition, there is also a moral aspect that should be taken into consideration: the state should avoid imitating the ancient Romans who “ultimately imposed taxes on human excrement [...]. Even disgraceful and obscene proceedings [such as these] contributed to enriching

35 See Bacon, Essayes XIX, “Of Empire,” 63: “Princes are like to Heavenly Bodies, which cause good or evil times; And which have much Veneration, but no Rest. All precepts concerning Kings, are in effect comprehended, in those two Remembrances: Memento quod es Homo; And Memento quod es Deus, or Vice Dei: The one bridleth their Power, and the other their Will.” On the classical origin of the idea, see Albert I. Ellis, “Some Notes,” The Classical Review 23 (1909): 246–47.
36 Livy, From the Founding of the City II:32.
37 Discourse, 7v.
the treasury.” In contrast to this moral depravity on the part of the ruling power, the Republic of Venice “has the custom of imposing taxes only on the industry of men, and not on their lives; of punishing their vices and not profiting from them.” Here there are the principal ingredients of Luzzatto’s political theory: 1) the Jews of Venice are an integral part of the Republic; 2) their function in commerce is vital, and can be of true benefit only if the taxes imposed remain limited, since the taxes on imports and exports have a lethal effect on the general economy; 3) the Republic of Venice is founded on morality and not on profit.

Having looked more closely at the themes introduced in the prefatory considerations, I would like now to sketch the outlines of the main subjects Luzzatto deals with in each and every consideration. Consideration I deals with the benefits of trade for the city of Venice and the industriousness of the Jews. Luzzatto’s treatise, he explains, is a response to the accusation that the Jews had usurped their current commercial role. In consideration II, three points are examined: Venice in the history of commerce and its expansion and retreat from active trading; the areas of commercial influence surrendered to foreigners; and lastly, the causes of Venice’s retreat from active commerce. In consideration III, Luzzatto deals with the causes of stagnation in the increase of economic wealth, a natural process comparable to the development of the human body. For cities, the “natural” process of stagnation first begins when the city has reached sufficient wealth, in terms of both population and economic prosperity. Luzzatto introduces here a discussion of commerce handled by so-called foreigners (i.e. non-Venetians). The “foreigners,” he argues, take the place of the inhabitants in the economic functions of the city, thereby increasing their own wealth. Foreigners do not only not increase a city’s wealth, but they also diminish it, because their profit returns with them to their places of origin. There are two possible reactions to the “foreign” interference in and control of economic trade. The first is to place a ban on their merchandise, which can be a total ban on all trading activities by foreigners, a partial ban touching only certain goods, or an increase in duties. The second alternative is to incorporate the “foreigners” into the city by making them citizens. The first option was chosen in England under Queen Mary and Queen Elizabeth. This same path was not open to Italy, however, due both to the fragmentation of rule over different territories and to the absence of sufficient ships to replace those of the foreigners – in whose absence trade would then have ceased entirely. At the same time, Luzzatto argues, the integration of foreigners into Venetian society is, for a variety of reasons, problematic. On the one hand, there is the natural, instinctive attachment of the foreigner to his home country and the social position he holds there. On the other hand, the scarcity of lands in and around Venice also has to be considered. Finally, it will be necessary to contend

39 *Discourse*, 8r.
40 *Discourse*, 12v–18r.
with the integrated foreigners’ desire to gain extraordinary honours and titles and to make themselves illustrious. The only remaining solution for the revival of commerce and trade is, accordingly, to commission the Jews to conduct international trade, for the Jews have no homeland and do not aspire to dignities, titles, or honours. For the Jews as well, the city-state of Venice is the best place in which to live in all the world. In his own words:

Moreover, there is no doubt that among all the states and places of the world, the Jewish Nation feels comfortable with this most pleasant government of the Most Serene Republic, because the form of its stable rule does not change according to the mutability of the thoughts of one ruler or depending on the instigation of counsellors. Furthermore, the Republic, through its special instinct, is a lover of peace with its neighbours, for the Jewish Nation know very well that in times of war they are the first to be exposed to the extortion of allied soldiers, to the enemy’s pillaging, and to the impositions and levies of the rulers.41

In the following two considerations, Luzzatto expands on his arguments for the presence and activity of the Jews as a preferable alternative to the “foreigners” because of their expertise in trade (consideration IV) and their lack of a homeland and “promptness in obeying” (consideration V).

Consideration VI opens with some general considerations of sociological interest. It presents the theory that the mercantile profession should be distinct from all others, in order to guarantee social peace and harmony and to prevent disobedience and seditious conspiracies (social and economic pragmatism). Further, limits should be placed on the accumulation of capital, in order to avoid social imbalances (consideration VII).

The best, most cautious politician has the duty of ensuring that the wealth and resources of the city are divided and distributed among the citizens into suitable mathematical proportions according to the rules dictated by distributive justice. This must be done in such a way that even when some members of the city acquire the greater part of the profits, the others are not subject to deprivation and poverty.42

Luzzatto employs terminology in his discussion of the “fluidity” of cash that calls to mind the economic theories of Antonio Serra,43 who some years earlier had recommended the accumulation of cash rather than of buildings and land as a means of ensuring the solidity of state finances.

Consideration VIII is the core of the first part of the Discourse. In it, Luzzatto enumerates the “profits” that the Jewish people bring, both in commerce and in the

41 Discourse, 15v–16r. For a comment on this passage, see Ravid, Economics, 63–64 n. 60.
42 Discourse, 25r.
payment of taxes, without imposing on the state for intervention in the community. As a specific example, he mentions the defence of the community, which is incumbent upon the Jews themselves. On the matter of the “profits” brought in by the Jews, consideration IX is of particular importance: here, Luzzatto deals with the issues of usury and the charging of interest in relation to the advantages and profits the Jewish people bring to Venice. Luzzatto concludes the first part of the treatise with the claim, in consideration X, that the protection accorded to the Jews by the government does honour to that government.

From these remarks, it can be concluded that it is no less honourable for the Venetian prince to exercise protection towards the Jewish Nation than it is profitable, because of the aforementioned gains resulting from the entrance fees. These profits not only help to increase the treasury he must share with private citizens, but [his engagement in protecting the Jews is especially honourable] for bringing glory, which is the personal attribute of princes and great monarchs.44

A short remark is in order here concerning the concept of usury, on which there is a convergence of opinion between Luzzatto and Francis Bacon. Bacon is, admittedly, opposed to usury – whereby the term “usury” in Luzzatto and Bacon refers not to the practice of lending money at exorbitant rates of interest, but simply the lending of money at interest, regardless of the rate45 – but is also aware of the advantages of this activity. In his essay on usury, he enumerates the advantages and disadvantages of lending on interest, and draws attention, among other things, to the dangers of capitalisation:

The Fourth, that it bringeth the Treasure of a Realme or State, into a few Hands. For the Usurer being at Certainties, and others at Uncertainties, at the end of the Game; Most of the Money will be in the Boxe; And ever a State flourisheth, when Wealth is more equally spread.46

Luzzatto, too, refers to the ideal of greater equality in the distribution of wealth, always desired but never achieved. He states:

However, the aspiration to a rigorous reduction of one’s possessions to a moderate size has been considered a desirable undertaking to this day, but it is hardly ever practised, especially with regard to the equal distribution of moveable assets and cash. Whenever this was attempted with real estate, the result was, for the most part, unsuccessful.47

Bacon takes a very pragmatic stand in that whoever thinks it possible for money to be lent without profit enters ipso dicto into the realm of utopia:

44 Discourse, 35v.
45 For Luzzatto, see Ravid, “Moneylending,” 262.
47 Discourse, 25v.
That it is a Vanitie to conceive, that there would be Ordinary Borrowing without Profit; And it is impossible to conceive, the Number of Inconveniences, that will ensue, if Borrowing be Cramped. Therefore, to speake of the Abolishing of Usury is Idle. All States have ever had it, in one Kinde or Rate, or other. So as that Opinion must be sent to Utopia.48

In his response to certain criticisms of usury, voiced by both philosophers and statesmen, Luzzatto uses the same argument, focusing on the stimuli that give rise to the ubiquitous phenomenon of moneylending:

Usury should be judged in the same way, as a sin continuously damned, but practised in every time and place. Two great incentives contribute to its increase: the need of the borrower, [42v] who has to pay the amount of usury, and the insatiable greed of the lender who receives it. Both incentives actually stem from our human fragility. If such a transgression were not committed by a Jew, there would be no lack of others who would practise such a contemptible profession through greater extortion of the poor and needy, thereby reducing the number of [Jewish] usurers.49

Bacon sums up his opinion on the integration of usury into the economic system: usury should be reserved for a small group under the control of the authorities, for “it is better to mitigate usury, by declaration, than to suffer it to rage, by connivance.”50

Consideration X closes the first part of the Discourse with the claim that the protection of the Jews is a magnanimous yet profitable act for the Doge and his government, drawing a comparison between the relationship between Joseph and the Pharaoh as recounted in Genesis.

The first ten considerations present a logical argument, concluding with the affirmation of the economic, social, and political suitability of the Jews for the conduct of commerce and of their trustworthiness towards the city of Venice. There is nobody else who can perform the task. The rhetorical style is far removed from a peroratio, or a petitio. There is some pride in the achievement of the Jews and even some criticism concerning the high interest rates they are compelled to demand. The text is, of course, an apology for Judaism and the Jewish presence in Venice, but it also serves as a caveat against their expulsion from the city.

Consideration XI marks the beginning of part 2 of the Discourse. Luzzatto begins by observing, with Socrates, that a human being is nothing but “a multiplicity of different animals, wrapped around each other and entangled with themselves.”51 If the condition of a single man in all his multiplicity is to be considered a “a very arduous and difficult endeavour,”52 he argues, then arriving at a judgment on an

49 Discourse, 42r–v.
50 See below, 292.
51 Discourse, 35v.
52 Ibid., 37r.
entire group of people, such as the Jews, for example, must *a maiori* be all the more complicated. Their only common, and essential, characteristic is “a firmness and inexpressible tenacity in the observance of their faith and a uniformity of dogma regarding their beliefs during the course of 1,550 years of dispersion in the world.”53

Although dispersed throughout the world, the Jews are united by sharing the same religion and common roots, which comes to expression in mutual acts of human charity and hospitality among them. Having offered his praise of Jewish solidarity and unity, Luzzatto can introduce the main point, which is at the heart of his interest: Jewish criminality and its punishment. Two classes of crime are considered here. The first is criminal activity that can be “cured,” that is, “overcome by the doctor alone with ordinary purges and draining.”54 The second class is of a more perilous nature: it encompasses criminal activity that is communicable and must be treated with harsh punishment. Luzzatto lists here “treason of a population (against the state), a deviation from the former religion, the invasion of a city, or an uprising against order and the civil State” as crimes that should be punished by “exile, prison, galleys, mutilation of limbs, and death sentences, which suffices to eradicate such crimes.”55

When punishment is required, the judge should punish only the individual and not the group or “nation” to which the individual belongs. In the case of the adoration of the Golden Calf and the mutiny of Korah, the punishment concerned the entire population only because the inclination to the crime was shared by each individual. In such cases, “it is thus sometimes necessary for the supreme prince to intervene with the legitimate power of his title and his supreme authority.”56 Nevertheless, since that time, “The criminal acts of the Jews were never of such a harmful nature – neither in the city of Venice nor in other places throughout the course of approximately 1,550 years.”57 And further:

Nowadays it would be an unpersuasive [argument] for the king of Spain to decide to rigorously expel all Granadans, a people so numerous and full of farmers and other artisans, because of some act of larceny, assassination, or any other offence committed by 15 or 20 of these people. It is unlikely that he would follow that resolution so detrimental to his kingdom and so surprising for the whole world as a response to such trifling crimes. Yet the secret reasons for such a severe decree were surely justified because he uncovered a secret conspiracy that was about to pervade the entire Granadan Nation. Therefore, it might well deserve slaughter instead of exile. There is no doubt that condemning the many for the crime of the one is against natural law and the teaching of divine law.58

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53 Ibid., 38r.
54 Ibid., 38v.
55 Ibid., 38v–39r.
56 Ibid., 39v.
57 Ibid.
58 Ibid., 40r.
The logic of Luzzatto’s argument is perfectly clear: the criminal acts of an individual, such as the abandonment of his own religion, fall under the responsibility of the individual involved. To this principle, Luzzatto contrasts the procedure, which was unfortunately quite common, of expelling the entire community in punishment for the criminal acts of individuals.

Consideration XII addresses the criticism of the Jewish presence as voiced by three different groups: religious zealots, politicians and statesmen, and the common people. The religious zealots claim that toleration of a religion that differs from the official faith is contemptuous. Politicians argue that it is not desirable to tolerate a diversity of religions in the same city, both because of the possibility of sacrilege being committed and because of the bad example that one group may provide to another. The common people simply believe and repeat any calumny and false slander invented out of hatred for the Jewish nation. In response to the religious zealots, Luzzatto notes that the pope himself admits Jews into the city of his own residence and that they have been living there for over 800 years. To the politicians, he offers a very detailed response, stressing the physical separation between Jews and Christians, which is reinforced by Jewish law, according to which ritual contact and sexual relations with non-Jews are prohibited, as is proselytism. As for the crime of usury practised by the Jews, he adds that it is only tolerated by their laws rather than expressly permitted and, referring indirectly to Francis Bacon (see above), he states:

If such a transgression were not committed by a Jew, there would be no lack of others who would practise such a contemptible profession through greater extortion of the poor and needy, thereby reducing the number of [Jewish] usurers [...]. I do not say this to defend such actions, but merely to demonstrate that such an enormous transgression, like some others, is not an essential prerogative of the Jews, as many presume to assert, but rather an accidental result of the strictness of the life and conditions of the time.59

As for the denunciations of the common people, Luzzatto responds:

Truth alone is harsh, and not very pleasing, whereas falsity is admirable and delightful. The former is subject to the occurrence of events; the latter free and wanton. The former is produced by the action of the object that impresses truth in our mind, while the latter depends upon human judgment, and as if it were our offspring, we harbour loving affection for it.60

He then deals more specifically with the calumny of accusing the Jews of being unfaithful and with their purported friendship with pirates. Contrary to what his opponents maintain, Luzzatto describes the Jews as a harmonious part of society, living in reciprocal sympathy with their neighbours, in keeping with the will of God, who “decreed that all humankind should live together in mutual friendship. Every

59 Ibid., 42v.
60 Ibid., 43v.
human being should regard himself or herself as a citizen of one republic.”61 Religious differences, as he points out in consideration XIV, are by no means a good reason for war.62

Consideration XV is the longest in the Discourse. There, Luzzatto is ostensibly addressing the criticism launched against Judaism by Tacitus. As has already been demonstrated in great detail, however, the true focus of his attention is the criticism voiced by Machiavelli.63

Considerations XI to XV are, in essence, apologetic, an attempt to counter current opinions concerning the Jews. The considerations that follow are a characterisation of the Jewish “nation.” In consideration XVI, there is also a change of rhetorical genre. Here, Luzzatto discusses Judaism in a descriptive manner, portraying the Jews as a group and focusing particularly on their attachment to study. In this context, he also discusses the distinction between various classes of sages. In this frequently translated and quoted consideration, he distinguishes between rabbis, philosophers, and kabbalists:

According to the Jews, the rabbis are those who claim to possess knowledge of traditions about the observance and performance of the rites contained in the Law. These [traditions] were preserved orally for a great number of years, from the time of the legislation [at Sinai] until the period of the Emperor Antoninus. Then Rabbi Yehudah, a most famous man of those times, arranged and put them into writing in aphorisms and tractates.64

These are those who, by joining human reason with the authority of the divine word, have endeavoured to expound upon Scripture with a harmonious application of both. Among them, we can include two exceedingly famous men who flourished at a time when the Nation still retained some form of liberty.65

The third order of Jewish sages is the Kabbalists. The Jews are not obliged to accept their doctrine, although it is received with approval by some members of the Nation, especially in the Levant and Poland.66

Consideration XVII is concerned with the question of “The Causes of the Various Permissions granted to the Jews, also mentioning Several Expulsions that befell the Jewish Nation.” Luzzatto puts forth the (very credible) thesis:

I believe that someone who is unable to confront the above-mentioned matters will attempt to argue using the weapons of example and authority. They [will] argue that if the Jews brought

61 Ibid., 46v.
62 Ibid., 51v. But see Isaac Abravanel, Perush ‘al nevi’im aḥaronim (Commentary on the Latter Prophets) (Tel Aviv, s.d. in Hebrew), 91; Johann Maier, Kriegsrecht und Friedensordnung in jüdischer Tradition (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2000), 403.
64 Discourse, 75v.
65 Ibid., 77v.
66 Ibid., 80r–v.
so many benefits, why did the most prudent princes and most sagacious republics exclude them from their states, as Spain, France, and England did, and as many cities in Germany as well as not a few in Italy have also done?67

The reasons for expulsion, he suggests, can be multiple, including the practice of “usury” and the possession of extensive real estate, but also simply hatred and disdain for the Jewish nation. As a counterbalance to these observations, Luzzatto concludes the Discourse, in consideration XVIII, with an overview of the Jewish presence in Europe. The Jews have succeeded in keeping their own essential identity largely intact,68 because their existence is a manifestation of divine will. Dispersion has made them obedient, and immune to all innovations in rites or dogma:

And although captivity and dispersion are the greatest calamities that can occur to a people and a nation, rendering it vile and abject and exposing it to the contempt and scorn of peoples, it is a most efficacious promoter of endurance and preservation; it removes jealousy and suspicion from the ruling princes and pride and boastfulness from the dispersed people, who consequently become humble and docile.69

Luzzatto argues that the total number of Jews in the world is unknown. He names the countries in which Jewish communities exist, particularly praising Turkey for the freedom it allows them in owning land; also mentioned are the Holy Land, Germany, Poland, Lithuania, and the Pontifical State. In conclusion, he states:

This is what it has occurred to me to report in connection with that Nation with regard to the interests of princes and peoples who admit them, and in particular of the Most Serene Republic of Venice, which receives them into its state with such benevolence and protects them with its usual justice and clemency.70

The second part of the Discourse is, of course, also an apology for Judaism, but of a different character. Whereas the first part was a direct defence against attacks aimed at Judaism – accusations of usury, disruption of social cohesion, or connivance with pirates, etc. – the second takes a more positive stance, focusing on Jewish intellectual history and the benefits the presence of Jews brings to their social surroundings.

4 Human Beings and Their “Character”

The literary and supportive strategy of the Discourse causes its author to deal, in different instances, with the theme that he cares about the most: the subject of “crime.” Its anthropological implications are described at the beginning of consid-

67 Ibid., 86r.
68 Ibid., 89r.
69 Ibid., 89r.
70 Ibid., 91v.
eration XI, “Referring to the Difficulties in Describing the Customs of the Jews in general, and that their Misdemeanours could easily be Prevented,” where he discusses character:

They say that the great master of civil life, Socrates, brought philosophy, which was wandering high up in the heavens, back into human society and that he opened the cities’ gates to it. After having thoroughly investigated himself and penetrating the most hidden recesses and obscure corners of his soul, he announced that he did not know whether there was but one animal dwelling in his soul or a multiplicity of different animals, wrapped around each other and entangled with themselves. Indeed, he found in himself the virtues, vices, excesses, and moderation – traits that the Stoic doctrine called animals – entwined with one another.71

Luzzatto refers to letter CXIII by Seneca ad Lucilium, in which he purposely mentions the Stoic doctrine of the multiple or animal soul in human beings, because virtues can only be animal in nature: “virtutes esse animalia.”72 The statement “virtutes esse animalia” probably goes back, according to the Stoic fragments, to Chrysippus.73 Luzzatto wishes to find a philosophical connection to affirm that the human soul is a mixture. He indirectly cites Anaxagoras’s theory of homoiomerai (όμοιομέρειαι), that is to say of the principles or roots of cosmological anthropological compositions forming a mixture in the body:

It was Anaxagoras who denied the generation of natural things, and he assumed that the world was made out of a jumbled mass that was composed of all things. Thus, he believed that everything was connected and joined to everything. This opinion was deemed absurd. Had he ever suggested something similar of the human soul, his opinion might have been met with greater applause by the sages. For if one were to carefully consider the impulses of the soul, one would witness the appearance of a universal mixture of infinite things.74

71 Ibid., 35v–36r.
72 Seneca, Epistles XIX:113,3: “The soul, men are agreed, is a living thing, because of itself it can make us living things, and because ‘living things’ have derived their name therefrom. But virtue is nothing else than a soul in a certain condition; therefore it is a living thing. Again, virtue is active, and no action can take place without impulse. And if a thing has impulse, it must be a living thing; for none except a living thing possesses impulse. A reply to this is: ‘If virtue is a living thing, then virtue itself possesses virtue.’ Of course it possesses its own self! Just as the wise man does everything by reason of virtue, so virtue accomplishes everything by reason of itself. ‘In that case,’ say they, ‘all the arts also are living things, and all our thoughts and all that the mind comprehends. It therefore follows that many thousands of living things dwell in man’s tiny heart, and that each individual among us consists of, or at least contains, many living beings.’ Are you gravelled for an answer to this remark? Each of these will be a living thing; but they will not be many separate living things. And why? I shall explain, if you will apply your subtility and your concentration to my words. Each living thing must have a separate substance; but since all the things mentioned above have a single soul, consequently they can be separate living things but without plurality.”
74 Discourse, 36r.
Luzzatto’s main objective is not so much talking about the composition of the human personality, but rather to discuss the theme of virtue and vice in human beings. What follows is in fact a long passage on virtues and their contraries as individual characteristics, in different moments and different locations:

The courage to risk one’s life often arises from the fear produced by vulgar whispers and murmurs. Fabius could be mentioned as an example of the opposite tendency, for he was half-hearted when attacking Hannibal but brave in scorning the plebs who spat at him. Hence, the covetous desire to prolong life and to enjoy its pleasures by placing weak but durable satisfactions before vehement and brief ones makes us temperate and moderate. Thus Socrates, in Plato’s *Phaedo*, unravels the great secret of morality by arguing of the moderates that “it is a kind of licentiousness that has made them moderate,” and thus they are “brave through fear and cowardice”; similarly, Solomon in Ecclesiastes states in accordance with the Hebrew: “Again, I considered all labour and all excelling in work, that it is a man’s rivalry with his neighbour.” This means that the vulgar virtues are jealousy, competition, and emulation, which men have towards their neighbours, which leads to a confusion of virtues with vices.

[36v] Pleasure, the main target that is so appealing to our soul, is always mixed with its opposite, pain, as Plato demonstrates in his *Philebus*. Thirst and hunger are the greatest stimuli for our taste. Tragic plays disturb us and lead to our indignation against the tyrants. Nonetheless, we feel a secret itching and hankering for pleasure that greatly tempts and enraptures us. The Jews translate pleasure with the term גונעת, stemming from the verb הנע which means “distressing pain,” to denote the aforementioned combination.

Homer praised the impetuous agitation of ire as being full of joy and sweetness. In the same way, jealousy was born from the fervour of love, and from thence hatred. As Tacitus said of Mount Lebanon: “[it] is in fact a marvel, for in the midst of the excessive heat its summit is shaded by trees and covered with snow.” Alexander, famed both for his victories and for the virtues of his soul, was so full of pity for Darius and his women, and yet he was so relentless towards Parmenion and Cleitus, who placed the rule of the world in his hands, and so cruel towards Callisthenes, his teacher. Julius Caesar, ferocious and inhuman in Pharsalia, was in contrast merciful towards Marcellus and indulgent towards Brutus, his murderer. Nero, a monster of humanity, at times regretted knowing how to write when he had to write death decrees for delinquents. And yet he did not mind exercising it [i.e. this prerogative] against his mother, and his teacher Seneca. He was a friend of virtue and learning, but he hated these attributes in others. For this reason, Lucan, the wittiest poet that ever lived, lost his life. During the time of the cruel proscription ordered by the Triumvirate, faith, charity, and gratitude took leave of the most eminent and well-composed minds of the Republic, and were to be found in neither fathers nor sons, nor brothers. Then these virtues took refuge in the debasement of slaves and the obscenities of prostitutes. One of these prostitutes suffered the severest tortures, for she did not want to betray her mischievous friends. Socrates found ignorance precisely when his wisdom had reached its peak. Thus, the Oracle acknowledged him to be the wisest man. Gentleness, when a little irritated, becomes indomitable pride, and this, managed with dexterity, changes into gentle and pliable affability.75

The careful reader has probably recognised part of the catalogue of the second book of Aristotle’s *Rhetoric*: pleasure-pain, rage-meekness, friendship-hatred, fear-courage, shame-shamelessness, compassion-disdain, envy-emulation. This list has a

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75 Ibid., 36r–37r.
particular purpose: to reveal the multifaceted dimensions of the human soul. In the words of Luzzatto:

The internal image of our soul is composed of a mosaic that appears to form a single idea. Upon approaching it, however, one sees that it is made up of various fragments of cheap and precious stones put together. In the same way our soul is, for the most part, composed of different and discrepant pieces, each of which on various occasions takes a distinct appearance. Thus, the description of a single man’s nature and condition is a very arduous and difficult endeavour. It is even more difficult and arduous to relate all of his actions to a single rule and idea.

Hence, many authors happened to have written about the nature of dogs, horses, and falcons and have discussed their customs and conditions with great exactness. But very few have dealt with man, and when they have, they have done so only fleetingly. The one who has done so better than anyone else is Theophrastus, Aristotle’s disciple. He set this undertaking aside for the last years of his life, when he was an octogenarian. He then compiled a historical treatise in which he wrote down his observations regarding aspects of the human soul. Only a fragment of the work exists, the rest having been destroyed by the injuries of time.76

Luzzatto is here referring to Theophrastus of Eresos (371–287 BCE), the author of Characters, a series of characterisations of the human soul, of which Angelo Ambrogini, nicknamed Poliziano, translated the first fifteen characters into Latin. These characterisations were published in Basel in 1532 by Andreas Cratander without naming Poliziano as a translator,77 and then published once again, this time with Poliziano’s name, in Paris by Frédéric Morel in 1583. Already by 1552, an edition of these works by Aldo Manuzio, with eight further characters added, had appeared thanks to the efforts Giovanni Battista Camozza. In 1599, a second edition of the Caratteri was published in Leiden, including five more characters (21–28) discovered by Isaac Casaubon and then copied once more by Marquard Freher. In 1620, Ansaldo Cebà78 published an Italian version of the first fifteen characters, probably without taking Manuzio’s edition into consideration, possibly because, as Romizi believes, he was too young to be aware of it. In any case, he did not utilise the 1552 edition. Cebà’s book was however available in Venice, as the old catalogue of the Marciana Library reveals. This publication most likely even circulated in the Venetian ghetto because at that same time, Cebà, a priest, was having an epistolary love affair with the famous Jewish poetess Sara Copio Sullam.79

It is now evident that Luzzatto’s objective was not to refer to Aristotelian rhetoric or to Theophrastus’s composition, but to put the accent on a very popular rhetorical device of that time: the use of typical characters of seventeenth-century thea-

76 Ibid., 37r–v.
77 I refer the reader to my source for this paragraph, Augusto Romiti, ed., I caratteri Morali di Teofrasto (Florence: Sansoni, 1899).
78 Ansaldo Cebà, I Charatteri morali di Theofrasto interpretati per Ansaldo Cebà. Al Cardinale Federigo Borromeo (Genoa: Pavoni, 1620).
79 See Veltri, Renaissance Philosophy, 226–47.
The representation of the affections of the human soul and of its different characters was a sign of distinction in a century of comedies and tragedies, put on the stage and even sung. In fact, the above-mentioned Cebà published a detailed commentary to accompany Theophrastus’s text. An attentive reader will note that emphasising the theatrical character of the human soul also means negating objective responsibility: everyone is an actor on the *theatrum mundi*’s stage and every time he performs a passion or its contrary. How then can one speak of an immutable essence of the human being? Even more so, how can one discuss the essence of an entire ethno-religious community?

## 5 Is It Possible to Characterise a Nation?

The problem of characterising an ethnic group based on secondary characteristics such as skin colour, language, or customs was not born in the nineteenth century with the racist theories of Max Müller and Edward A. Freeman, nor with (pseudo)scientific institutions, such as the Société Ethnologique of Paris, which in 1839 proclaimed the existence of distinctive races to be classified according to their “physical organisation, moral and intellectual character, and historical traditions.” The theme of the moral characterisation of an entire nation had already been discussed in the seventeenth century, as one can infer from Luzzatto’s text, in which the character of the Jews is considered in relation to their geographical location. In antiquity, this thesis was put forward by Aristotle and became a commonplace in successive periods:

> And if it is so difficult to define the interior habits of but one man, how can one proceed when one wishes to determine those of an entire nation? This is especially true for the Jewish Nation, dispersed as it is throughout the world, so that it is impossible to say anything certain and reliable about it. For the Jews are scattered around the whole world like a river running through a long stretch of countryside, whose waters receive an impression from the quality of the various lands through which they pass. This is how the Jews acquire different ways from the nations in which they settle. Therefore, the manners of the Venetian Jews differ substantially from those of Jews in Constantinople, Damascus, and Cagliari, and all of these are different from the Jews of Germany and Poland.

The first argument is clear: the Jewish dispersion in the world caused as a historical consequence the integration of entirely different and anthropologically dissonant

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81 Here I am following the article on “racism” by George L. Mosse in *Enciclopedia del Novecento*, Treccani: available online at http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/razzismo_%28Enciclopedia-Novecento%29/ (last accessed October 2011).
82 *Discourse*, 37v.
elements, so that a generalising and, as we would say today, globalising conclusion is impossible. On the contrary, our author comments:

Nonetheless, should someone still wish to investigate the universal habits [they share], one could say that they are a Nation of a fainthearted, cowardly, and half-hearted spirit, incapable in their present situation of any political government, preoccupied with their particular interests, quite – if not completely – unaware of their universal ones.83

This is a fundamental element, as here Luzzatto is utilising a classical argument in Judaism: the lack of political strength. Luzzatto is indirectly referring to Nicholas of Cusa, who in his De Pace Fidei wrote: “The resistance of the Jews does not nevertheless prevent harmony, because they exist in such a small number and would not be capable of perturbing the entire world only because of military might.”84 Before Luzzatto, Shlomo Ibn Verga expressed a similar view in his Shevet Yehudah, the Scepter of Judah, printed in Adrianople (Edirne), Turkey in 1550. A fundamental theme of Ibn Verga’s work is the expulsion of the Jews from the Spanish kingdoms. The logic of the work is similar to that of the works on the birth and fall of empires by Polybius and Machiavelli; this would seem even more disconcerting in the case of the Jews because their fall was precipitated by internal conflicts, as the historian of antiquity Josephus affirmed. The trust that the Jews put in God brought them to neglect the art of war, and the fall caused by their sins rendered them helpless and vulnerable; it made them “naked twice” (in the words of Yitzhak Baer), without God’s help because they sinned against him, and without weapons because they were incapable of bearing arms. In this way, Ibn Verga brings us back to the Jewish people’s inability to defend themselves, which Judaism interpreted as the myopic choice of betting everything on faith rather than also considering military power. The fall caused by sin could not be counterbalanced by mastering the art of war. We are dealing here with the Machiavellian argument which gave “the naked prophet” a body:

It is necessary, then, in order to give a good account of this matter, to investigate whether these innovators stand by their own strength or whether they depend on others, that is, if in carrying on their work they need to entreat or if they are strong enough to compel. In the first case, they always have a hard time and accomplish nothing, but when they depend on their own resources and are strong enough to compel, then they are seldom in danger. This is the reason why all armed prophets win, and unarmed ones fall. Because, in addition to what has been said, the people are by nature variable; to convince them of a thing is easy; to hold them to that conviction is hard. Therefore a prophet must be ready, when they no longer believe, to

83 Ibid., 37v–38r.
make them believe by force. Moses, Cyrus, Theseus, and Romulus could not have gained long continued observance for their constitutions if they had been unarmed. In our times Fra Girolamo Savonarola was unarmed; hence he was destroyed amid his institutions when they were still new, as soon as the multitude ceased to believe him, because he had no way to keep firm those who had once believed or to make the unbelieving believe.

Therefore such able men as I have mentioned have great difficulty as they go forward, for all their dangers are along the road and by their own might they must overcome them. But after they have overcome them and when they are revered, having wiped out those who envy them their lofty position, they are powerful, firm, honored, prosperous.85

Even though one cannot twist the sense of Luzzatto’s treatise, it is nevertheless clear how Machiavelli’s theory is used in a negative sense: the unarmed prophet remains the same and does not create obstacles to the prince’s policy, because the Jewish people are entirely devoted to him. This attitude is in fact considered emblematic of the Venetian Diaspora when Luzzatto states:

The Jews, however, were always willing to obey public commands with swift compliance, for they are dispersed and scattered all over the world and deprived of any source of protection, so that when particular taxes were imposed on them, they never dared to utter or formulate so much as a simple complaint.86

In this argument, the Venetian rabbi is probably following Jean Bodin, who in his République (1576) saw the foundation of the principle of sovereignty in a citizen’s unconditional obedience.

Therefore, if conspiracy could be considered an ordinary crime, it still remains non-existent because the Jewish people are inclined to obedience. As a consequence, it is only possible to talk about the individual responsibility of one or more individuals. Luzzatto emphasises this point probably because these individuals belong to the body of society, a essentially healthy body.

6 Individual Responsibility and Collective Punishment

This is the focal point of Luzzatto’s argument: if a crime has been committed, a remedy is necessary, as it would be in the case of the human body. The prince must act to try and cure it of its illnesses. However, some illnesses can be cured, while others are contagious and demand that the ill person be separated from the rest of the community:

85 Machiavelli, The Prince, 26–27.
86 Discourse, 22r.
The vices of the soul are similar to the infirmity of our body, which can be divided into two types. Some of them, despite being extremely serious and pernicious, can be overcome by the doctor alone with ordinary purges and draining; others are of a more vicious quality, and are contagious and communicative in nature. In such cases, it behoves the prince to sanction them with arrest and expulsion from the state, to which he can also add the terror of torture to death.87

And on the theft discussed above, our author continues: “Of this nature were the majority of the crimes committed by some members of the Nation, as they were always motivated by greed or lucre, or similar wickedness.”88

A collective punishment, continues Luzzatto, would be justified in the case of people who have organised a conspiracy together or in the case of treason by an entire population, for example by changing religion, invading cities, or preparing a revolution. He cites the biblical examples of the adoration of the golden calf and the mutiny of Korah, when the entire population had to suffer penance.

Be it in the case of the worship of the calf or that of Korah’s mutiny against Moses, these are examples in which God wished to punish the entire nation although not every person had actually committed the offence. He desired to do so because of the disposition of the people, who were all inclined towards such excesses and prone to being carried away by them. Such tendencies had never occurred with other sins, where God distinguished among the delinquencies and errors that befell some individuals of the population. In the aforementioned cases, the ordinary remedies that subordinate magistrates administered were not sufficient; it is thus sometimes necessary for the supreme prince to intervene with the legitimate power of his title and his supreme authority. He must procure the extermination of the evil with multiple executions, or at least with collective exile.89

From a historical point of view, Luzzatto’s argumentation does not contain any case justifying total destruction, even in the case of the famous expulsion from the kingdoms of the Spanish crown:

Nowadays it would be an unpersuasive [argument] for the king of Spain to decide to rigorously expel all Granadans, a people so numerous and full of farmers and other artisans, because of some act of larceny, assassination, or any other offence committed by 15 or 20 of these people. It is unlikely that he would follow that resolution so detrimental to his kingdom and so surprising for the whole world as a response to such trifling crimes. Yet the secret reasons for such a severe decree were surely justified because he uncovered a secret conspiracy that was about to pervade the entire Granadan Nation. Therefore, it might well deserve slaughter instead of exile. There is no doubt that condemning the many for the crime of the one is against natural law and the teaching of divine law.90

And he continues:

87 Ibid., 38v.
88 Ibid., 39r.
89 Ibid., 39r–v.
90 Discourse, 39v–40r.
One finds nothing in this world of such great perfection that some evil is not attached or added to it by malicious abuse. Iron, such a necessary [material], used to make a great variety of instruments essential to human life, is very often the means of murders and destruction. Speech, which lends so much nobility to our species, is often the cause of misfortune and ruin. Despite this, there has never been a legislator so scrupulous that he prohibited the excavation and extraction of iron from the mines, or forbade men to speak. In the documents of the Holy Scripture, we find that when the crimes committed by the inhabitants of Pentapolis had reached the highest point of viciousness and magnitude, it pleased God that the innocence of ten men was able to make up for the punishments that so great a number of the people deserved. In conclusion, there is but a small chance that a few delinquents of a nation are sufficient to provoke public indignation against the whole nation.\footnote{Ibid., 40r.}

The text is easy to understand even for a modern reader. Even though iron produces death and massacres, and words cause misfortunes and ruin, good governments do not prohibit either one of them. It is not a coincidence that Luzzatto associates words with swords; he is indirectly referring to the biblical description of the sharp cutting nature of the tongue, which can wound even more than iron. At this point, the author's apologetic intention about himself becomes apparent. By being indirectly critical of the authorities, Luzzatto recognises that they do not forbid “reasoning” and therefore praises their tolerance.

7 The Fortune of the Discourse

The Discourse enjoyed a remarkable success only a few years after its publication and was partially or completely translated into several languages such as Latin, French,\footnote{A first Latin translation of excerpts from the Discourse was made by Joannes Christophorus Wolfius in his renowned Bibliotheca (1727). Jacques Basnage translated excerpts from consideration XVIII into French. Consideration XIII was partially translated into Hebrew by Isaac Reggio in 1834 (see bibliography).} English, and Hebrew. Sometimes, it was also used as a source for biographical and bibliographical data about some Jewish philosophers.\footnote{Namely for Gersonides and Crescas, by the Orientalist Giovanni Bernardo De Rossi (1742–1831). See Giovanni Bernardo De Rossi, Dizionario storico degli autori ebrei e delle loro opera (Parma: Dalla Reale Stamperia, 1802), 1:127, where he also remarks that the book was very rare, and says that in his Discourse Luzzatto refuted Farissol’s theories about the ten tribes and the river Sambatyon (ibid., 117).}

Only three years after the publication of the Discourse, Melchiorre Palontrotti directly responded to it with a pamphlet entitled “A Brief Answer to Simone Luzzatto.”\footnote{Melchiorre Palontrotti, Breve Risposta a Simone Luzzatto (Rome: s.l., 1641). On Luzzatto and Palontrotti, see Ravid, “Contra Judaeos.”} In Venice, the Discourse was almost immediately acknowledged as a modern text with relevant political implications. In fact, its first political usage dates back
to approximately 1659/60, when a member of the Venetian Loredan family whose Christian name remains unknown used the Discourse to write his own apology for the Venetian Jewish community in order to protect it from the risk of expulsion in those very same years. His speech was very recently retrieved from the Venetian archives and provides proof that Luzzatto’s relevance as a political thinker was acknowledged very early.95

Luzzatto’s ideas and arguments continued to influence both Jewish and Christian authors. Menasseh ben Israel tacitly adopted Luzzatto’s arguments in his De fidelitate et utilitate Judaicae gentis libellus anglicus. The deist John Toland read the book, and, impressed, planned a translation of it into English. Most probably through the intermediary of Toland’s works, and through Menasseh’s unattributed citations,96 the indirect influence of the Discourse can be recognised in Moses Mendelssohn’s Jerusalem.97 It is directly referenced by Johann Friedrich Herder in his Adrastea.98

Many of the ideas expressed by Luzzatto reappear somewhat later, in another context and discussion:99 the place of the Jews in economic history, as seen by German scholars in the twentieth century.100 As Toni Oelsner puts it:

The idea that the Jews are the commercial people par excellence, that they fulfilled a particular function in the economic development of the Western world, has its long history, and it is by no means of German origin. But it was left to three German economists, Wilhelm Roscher (1817–1894), Werner Sombart (1863–1941), and Max Weber (1864–1920), to raise this idea, intertwined with legends and stereotypes, to the level of a scientific theory.101

99 On this aspect, see Karp, Politics.
100 This is also the subject dealt with by Toni Oelsner, “The Place of the Jews in Economic History as Viewed by German Scholars,” The Leo Baeck Institute Year Book 7 (1962): 183–212.
101 Ibid., 183.
Werner Sombart maintained that “the Jew was naturally gifted for trade. Thus from a mercantilistic point of view it was concluded that the Jew’s respected position in society is assured when and wherever commercial enterprise gains prestige (Sombart) or when his services are needed (Roscher).”

Before World War II, the Discourse was analysed by the historian Yitzhak Baer (1888–1980) in his book Galut, published by Schocken in Berlin in 1936. There, he discusses the topics of the Diaspora and the Land of Israel from the historical point of view of life in the Diaspora from antiquity up to the emergence of the purported Messiah Shabtai Zvi. As Baer notes, the study of the condition of Judaism would be relegated to Christian treatises from the seventeenth century on with only two exceptions: the above-mentioned The Sceptre of Judah and the Discourse. In Baer’s book, Luzzatto’s thought acquires a relevant role in explaining and interpreting the Diaspora as a conception of exile in a political and economic frame of reference. Baer gives him the credit for having dealt with the Diaspora in connection with economic models going beyond Abrabanel’s fragmented remarks. He notes that Luzzatto conceived theories which could still be held valid in his own time, even though, he admits, the components which gave a unique meaning to his ideas are neglected. He emphasises the innovative features of the theory of the usefulness of the Jews as a tool to implement the market economy. The lack of any territorial possession and of a political haven where they could safely take their earnings are essential components of his political innovations. Baer vigorously stresses Luzzatto’s idea that specific Jewish know-how in mercantile and commercial affairs is the result of their own history: “The Galut made the Jews a commercial people.”

A further component that Baer expressly emphasises is the separation of political and religious life. In his interpretation, Luzzatto would have followed Ibn Verga’s example by highlighting the main national features of the Jews and therefore becoming a prototypical paradigm of Zionism, since after him a national description of the Jews can only be found in contemporary Russian literature. Perhaps this interpretation is one of the reasons why the real interest in the book came about after the war, in 1947, when Baer’s book was published in English translation and in the

105 For an extended comparison of the two works, see Veltri, “Identity of Essentiality,” 5–7.
106 Baer, Galut, 83–92.
107 Ibid., 84.
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wake of a revival of Jewish interest in Luzzatto’s political and economic ideas. In that year, the Italian economist Riccardo Bachi published an article giving a comparison between the doctrine of the city in Giovanni Botero and Simone Luzzatto. Yet the real revival took place in the USA, and the fact that it followed the decimation of Jewish life in Europe and the simultaneous attempts to establish an independent (Jewish) state in Palestine is not a coincidence. Confronted with the question of Jewish survivors of the Holocaust, American Jewry reacted with a memorandum to President Truman in which they proposed the establishment of a secular democratic state in Palestine to which immigration would be numerically limited, but open to all, with no preference given on the basis of religion. It was Luzzatto who provided the clearest arguments for a Jewish political existence not based on religious beliefs, both in the Diaspora and in a “neutral” state of Palestine where Jews would have the same rights as in the Diaspora.

Also in 1947, the Jewish magazine Commentary decided to publish excerpts from the work of “A Jewish Apologist of 17th Century Venice,” translated by Felix Giovanelli. In the introductory remarks to these excerpts, it is noted that Luzzatto’s work “represents one of the first attempts, if not the very first, to frame Jewish apologetics in other than theological dimensions.” The editors understood the true novelty of Luzzatto’s approach, characterising him as “the first, Jew or Gentile, to take a cool and sober look at the position of the Jews in Europe and draw up a balance sheet of assets and liabilities in social, economic, and political terms.” The enthusiasm of the editors is unmistakable: “Luzzatto’s rationalism in that early day,” they point out, “emboldened him to arguments whose unabashed ‘materialism’ would shock present-day rabbis.” The decision to translate Luzzatto into English followed an assessment of his role in Jewish political thought as discussed in Baer’s Galut. Also in 1947, at the Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati, Lester Walter Roubey submitted an English translation of the tractate (excluding consideration XV) as his rabbinical thesis.

108 Riccardo Bachi, “La dottrina sulla dinamica.”
111 Irving Kristol was managing editor of the magazine from 1947 to 1952.
112 Giovanelli, “The Situation of the Hebrews.”
113 Ibid.
114 In the same year, he was appointed rabbi of the congregation of Sha’are shomayim in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, where he served from 1947 to 1952.
Finally, in 1950–51, a complete Hebrew translation was produced by Dante Lattes with an introduction by Moshe A. Shulvass and an essay by Riccardo Bachi, who dealt more extensively with Luzzatto in his book *Israele disperso e ricostruito. Pagine di storia e di economia*, published in 1952. The book was written with the clear purpose of demonstrating his interest in Jewish tradition and economy and its author almost passionately commits himself to an in-depth analysis of Luzzatto’s treatise.

Leaving aside an in-depth examination of Bachi’s treatment of Luzzatto, which I have already discussed elsewhere, I will point out that it is in the last chapter of his book that Bachi displays all his talent as an economist and as a historian of economy. In not less than fifteen pages, he explains the principles of the Jewish economy according to Luzzatto’s *Discourse*, whose new topic is the economic dimension of the Diaspora. Bachi highlights Luzzatto’s innovations in pointing out the Jewish skill in trade, stemming from necessity, i.e. from the lack of any other chance in the Diaspora. The Jews, although divided into thousands of communities, do possess elements of cohesion. Since they cannot have stable reference points, they live at their own risk, without their own homeland and without work, giving the impression, as Bachi puts it, of having an “inclination towards liquid assets,” a phrase borrowed from John Maynard Keynes. What makes Luzzatto’s analysis of commerce and the Jewish input in the Venetian economy admirable, Bachi states, is the fact that Luzzatto did not assume certain economic theories or generalised analyses as a starting point. On the contrary, with a more correct and ground-breaking methodology, he depended on numerical data.

Indeed, Luzzatto is among the first to use statistics in order to appraise the phenomenon of the taxation that Jews, citizens, and foreigners were required to pay. However, Bachi remarks that the *Discourse* does not outline a “real description of the financial relationships of Jewish population with the Venetian state, and does not assume that a financial survey of the Venetian Jewish community could be of any interest at all.”

Though both Zionists, Yitzhak Baer and Riccardo Bachi gave different interpretations of Jewish history and identity, although they both took the potential as a starting point and not the messianic suffering. In Baer’s opinion, Luzzatto merits some attention because he shifts the perspective onto the economic life of the Jews. Bachi has a different standpoint, appealing to the force of economy, of the Jewish contribution to history, and to statistics and sociology. Bachi is much more focused on the consciousness of the modern Diaspora, which, although it considers the issue of territory and the Land of Israel a central point, it is also able to foresee the

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115 Lattes, *Ma’amur*.
119 Ibid., 125.
possibility of a vindication of the contemporary Diaspora. This is not true for Baer, since he sees the meaning of the Diaspora in resistance, at least until the coming of the Messiah.

8 A Status Quaestionis of the Research on the Discourse

The above-mentioned interest notwithstanding, Luzzatto’s scepticism has remained unnoticed by readers and modern scholarship for some time. It was brought to light again by some scholars in the nineteenth century, allegedly by Heinrich Graetz and apologetically by Shmuel David Luzzatto, who attempted to justify it somewhat, since he considered it a weak spot. In any case, it is important to point out that the discussions and evaluations of Luzzatto’s scepticism focus mainly on the Socrates. Giuseppe Veltri has stated without further discussion that the Discourse is replete with sceptical ideas. Yet immediately afterwards, he pointed out that the Socrates is the best display of Luzzatto’s scepticism.

120 Who was in possession of both works. See Joseph Luzzatto, Catalogue de la Bibliothèque de la Littérature Hebraïque et Orientale de feu Mr. Samuel David Luzzatto de Trieste Professeur au Collège Rabbinique de Padoue (Padua, 1868), 6:55–56.


Traditionally, the evaluation of Luzzatto has essentially been based on the *Discourse*.\(^{126}\) He was labelled a “sottile illustratore delle vicende economiche del ghetto veneziano”\(^{125}\) by Attilio Milano and as a defence attorney for the Venetian Jews by Benjamin Ravid.\(^{126}\) The latter’s suggestion has been widely followed and the *Discourse* has been considered as belonging to the apologetic genre so recurrent at that time.\(^{127}\) This approach has somehow undermined its political and philosophical evaluation to such an extent that Luzzatto’s plea for tolerance has several times been considered as conservative with an acquiescent side, seeking no innovation or improvement in the status of the Jews.\(^{128}\) Recently, the *Socrates* has been also read as a conservative work.\(^{129}\)

However, the *Discourse* has also been evaluated from the point of view of the history of Jewish economy, and it has been considered the first specimen of a theoretical literature on Jewish political economy.\(^{130}\) Finally, the latest approaches to the text have enhanced its interpretation from the point of view of the history of ideas in order to retrace its ancient and modern sources and Luzzatto’s idea of the Jewish people.\(^{131}\)

\(^{124}\) Although it is worth noting that Heinrich Graetz began his discussion about Luzzatto with the *Socrates* and not with the *Discourse*, and his positive evaluation of Luzzatto’s sound knowledge first stems from a survey of the *Socrates*. See Graetz, *Geschichte der Juden*, 10:149–54.


\(^{127}\) See ibid., 25–38. Ravid focused on Luzzatto’s defense of the Jewish commerce in the first ten considerations he analysed in the light of the history of the merchants and the charter system.

\(^{128}\) According to Barzilay, Luzzatto shrewdly used the argument of Jewish economic usefulness as well as that of their political passiveness and acquiescent acceptance of their role as merchants and eventually usurers (Isaac Barzilay, “The Italian and Berlin Haskalah,” 36–37). Ravid’s judgments are in the same vein (“the *Discorso* was basically a conservative work. Luzzatto sought no innovation,” Ravid, *Economics*, 98), as are those of Jonathan Karp, *Politics*, 26.


\(^{130}\) Karp, *Politics*, 21.

\(^{131}\) Veltri’s essays about Luzzatto have recently been collected in Veltri, *Filosofo e rabbino*. However, see also Veltri, *Renaissance Philosophy*, chapter 9, “The City and the Ghetto: Simone Luzzatto and the Development of Jewish Political Thought,” 195–225; id., “Vom Nutzen und Nachteil der jüdischen Existenz in der Diaspora: Streiflichter auf Simone Luzzatto und den Mythos von Vene-
The contribution of the editors of this volume will essentially aim at refreshing the approach to the *Discourse* by highlighting and analysing its sceptical background and implications, especially as far as it involves the realm of politics and fashions a sceptical political appraisal of the Jewish people.

## 9 Conclusion

While bringing this introduction to an end, it will perhaps be worthwhile to explain why Luzzatto’s thought and works are so relevant in the context of the Jewish culture of seventeenth-century Italy.

It is precisely his philosophical and political scepticism that makes Luzzatto’s texts so unique. This edition aims to grant access to his works and thought to English-speaking readers and scholars. By approaching his texts from this point of view, I hope to open a new path in research into Jewish culture and philosophy that will enable other scholars to develop new directions and new perspectives, stressing the interpenetration between Jews and the surrounding Christian and secular cultures.

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