

Enzo Bonaventura and psychoanalysis*
Interview with David Meghnagi by Rita Corsa*****

Abstract. Enzo Joseph Bonaventura (Pisa, 1891 - Jerusalem, 1948) was one of the most authoritative figures of experimental psychology in Italy between the two World Wars. Bonaventura was also a pioneer of the Italian Psychoanalysis. Born in Pisa to a Jewish family in Pisa, in 1913, Bonaventura graduated from Florence University with a degree in philosophy, with Francesco De Sarlo, who had him hired as an assistant in the University Laboratory of Psychology. Bonaventura was a poliedric figure with interests spanning a variety of fields, such as philosophy, theology, developmental psychology, psychology of motivation and education . Expelled from the University of Florence because of the Italian “Racial Laws”, he moved to Jerusalem where he played an important role in the development of academic psychology research in Israel. Before the expulsion from the University, Bonaventura wrote a summary of Freudian ideas (*La psicoanalisi*. Milan: Mondadori, 1938), which can be considered a classic, and which is revisited in this paper also in order to reconstruct a painful historical period that has been partly forgotten.

Keywords: Anti-Semitism; Hebrew University of Jerusalem; Father Agostino Gemelli; Silvano Arieti; Francesco De Sarlo

Rita Corsa (RC): Christopher Bollas, in his 2015 essay “Psychoanalysis in the Age of Bewilderment”, strongly urged psychoanalysis to recover the function of history, which has been tragically lost by contemporary life. Your entire work, David, as the greatest Italian scholar of relations between Judaism and psychoanalysis, seems to head precisely in this direction. A solitary, almost unique, model in the international psychoanalytic panorama. In this memoryless age, your latest book, *Enzo Bonaventura. La psicoanalisi* (2017), is a rare, very accurate example of reconstruction-transformation of internal events and restoration of past events, which have been willfully pushed into oblivion.

In my opinion, the volume has two fundamental qualities: the first is undoubtedly that of focusing new light on a completely forgotten pioneer, the great experimental psychologist Enzo Joseph Bonaventura; the second is that of trying to reconnect the ranks of the original and close relationships between psychoanalysis and experimental psychology.

But let’s start at the beginning. Tell us about this remarkable figure of the twentieth century.

David Meghnagi (DM): Bonaventura was also a pioneer of the Italian psychoanalysis. Born in 1891 to a Jewish family in Pisa, in 1913, Bonaventura graduated from Florence University with a degree in philosophy, with Francesco De Sarlo, who had him hired as an assistant in the University Laboratory of Psychology, of which he was to become director in 1924. Expelled from the university following the application of the “Racial Laws” of 1938, he moved to Jerusalem, where he laid the foundations of Israeli academic psychology, teaching at the Hebrew University. He died tragically on the 13th of April, in an ambush on the convoy of medical staff from the Hadassah Medical Centre. 78 other people died with him, including the wife of the Chief Rabbi of Florence, who had escaped from Auschwitz. Bonaventura was a charismatic figure in the Italian Zionist

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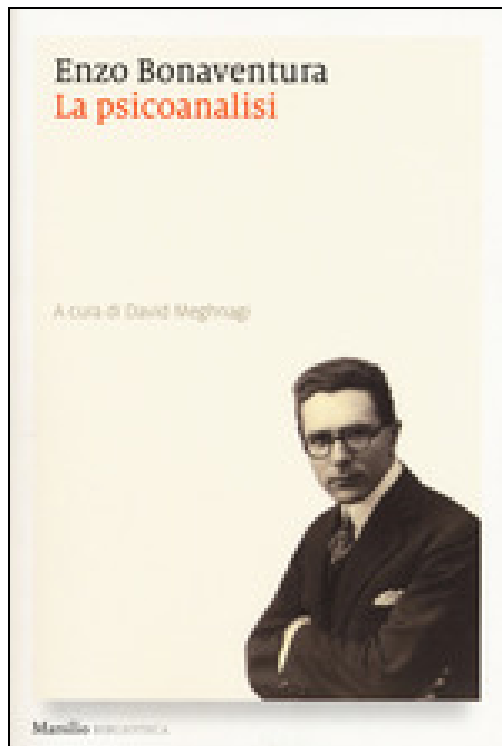
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movement, with interests spanning a variety of fields, such as philosophy, theology, developmental psychology, etc. He was one of the pioneers of academic psychology and psychoanalysis, to which he dedicated the most complete manual published before the war, *La psicoanalisi* (1938). In actual fact, my book is a complete reprint of the work courageously published by the Tuscan psychologist for Mondadori in 1938, just a few months before the issue of the laws on “race”, accompanied by my introductory essay, where I try to find a reason for the historical and psychological removal encountered by his work, both in academia and in psychological and psychoanalytical spheres.



Cover of the book by Enzo Bonaventura *La psicoanalisi*. Milan: Mondadori, 1938



Cover of the new edition of the 1938 book by Enzo Bonaventura *La psicoanalisi*. Venice: Marsilio, 2016

R.C.: A “giant”, as you like to define him.

DM: Yes, he was indeed a giant, at a time when Italian experimental psychology was taking its first steps, following in the footsteps of Wilhelm Wundt and Franz Brentano – who’s students included Edmund Husserl, the founder of phenomenological philosophy, and Sigmund Freud. Bonaventura’s mentor, Francesco De Sarlo, was in close contact with the neo-Kantians, who favoured the empirical dimension, and with Franz Brentano in person. Bonaventura’s scientific research focused particularly on phenomena linked to the perception and illusion of introspection (1915a, 1915b), and on the experience of space and time to which he devoted his most well-known experimental work, *Il problema psicologico del tempo* (1929) [The Psychological Problem of Time]. Various studies carried out at the Florentine Laboratory were also shared with Renata Calabresi, a brilliant young student who had graduated with him and then moved to Rome, where she worked as assistant to Ponzo. Renata was expelled from the University following the application of the laws of 1938 and moved to the United States. The philosophical imprint inherited from Francesco De Sarlo enabled Bonaventura to look beyond Gestalt psychology, opening up to social psychology, inspired by the phenomenological current which was also influencing Kurt Lewin’s field theory.



Cover of the book by Enzo Bonaventura *Il problema psicologico dello spazio* [The Psychological Problem of Space]. Florence: Le Monnier, 1961

R.C.: This openness of psychology to social reality appears to be remarkably modern.

DM: Bonaventura was a forerunner in this sense. Personally, I believe that his non-medical training favoured him in these new explorations of the young psychological discipline. His scientific contribution has not remained confined to the perceptive area of consciousness or to the intrapsychic sphere. It has developed in many other areas. An important role is played by its contribution to developmental psychology. At a time when texts were full of terminology that we would now quite rightly consider offensive and damaging to personal dignity, Bonaventura

expressed himself in a different language, empathizing with children with disabilities. He displayed a lifelong interest in encouraging the growth of young minds. At the Hebrew University, where he taught until his tragic death in April 1948, attention to pedagogical and educational aspects was constant.



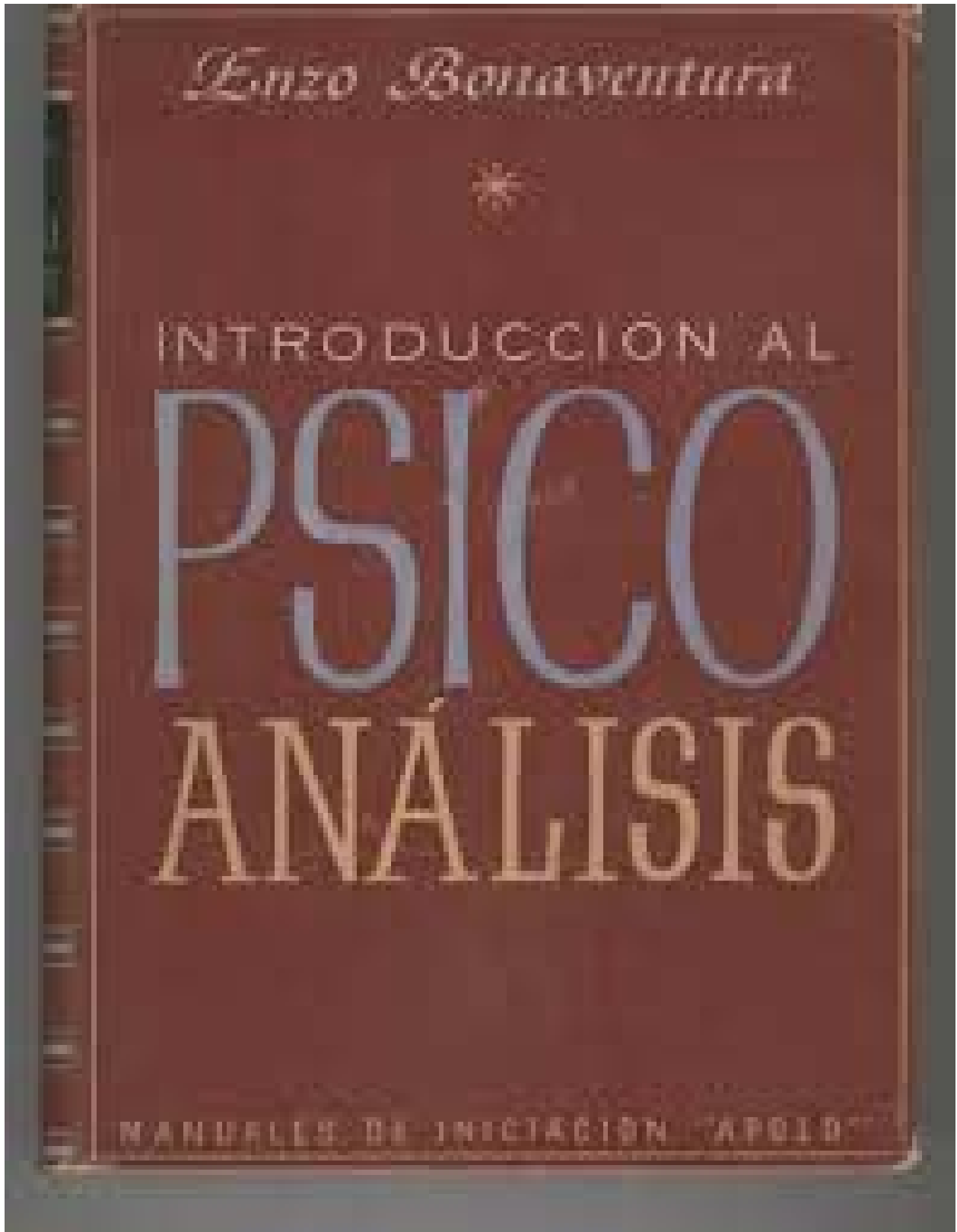
Cover of the book by Enzo Bonaventura *L'educazione della volontà* [Education of Will].
Milan: Agnelli, 1927

R.C.: His academic career was marked by “a series of cumulative impossibilities”, as you say in the prologue.

DM: Bonaventura’s university career was particularly troubled for several reasons and this has caused much of it to be forgotten over time. Hostile to psychology, Giovanni Gentile did everything he could to make sure that the Laboratory of Psychology was stripped of every strategic function. Consequently, although he later took over its direction, and despite being runner-up in the assignment of the chair of psychology in Rome in 1930 (which, according to the law of the time, gave him priority for any possible assignment in the field), he was never called by his university to occupy this position. For his part, Father Agostino Gemelli, the only person who could have done something to help him (but who was notoriously anti-Semitic, to the point of hoping, in 1924, that all Jews would emulate the behavior of Felice Momigliano, who committed suicide, having the foresight to convert before killing themselves!), did nothing to support him, yet spread tales after the war of his having actively supported Bonaventura in his attainment of the chair in Jerusalem. To put it bluntly, not even Musatti escapes, in his memories, an attitude of unresolved ambivalence, as a result of the competition of 1930, held following the retirement of Sante De Sanctis. Historian Patrizia Guarnieri (2012) has reconstructed a detailed account of the events that took place on that occasion. The Tuscan psychologist, who has published over forty articles and monographs, had every qualification to come out the winner. The competition, however, was not for him, but for De Sanctis’ oldest assistant, Mario Ponso. Bonaventura came second; Cesare Musatti was third. Bonaventura was not called by his university and this had consequences for Musatti too, who found himself prevented from taking up the assignment at his university. Hopes of better times quickly faded.

R.C.: In the second half of the 1930s, the regime's hostility towards the Jews, including the most prominent intellectuals, became more and more evident, without sparing those who had more or less instrumentally demonstrated formal adherence to Fascism. The documents examined by Guarnieri reveal that, on the 30th of November 1931, Bonaventura swore his loyalty to the "Fascist Regime" before the rector, which was compulsory in order to maintain his academic position, and the following year he signed up as a member of the PNF (National Fascist Party). Professor Cesare Musatti also had to enroll in the PNF on the 31st of July 1933. The fate of these two Jews was, however, quite different.

DM: Completely different! Bonaventura was expelled from university following the application of "Racial Laws" in 1938, and then moved to Jerusalem with his family. Musatti, who only had a Jewish father, obtained a false baptism certificate and was classified as "Aryan". In 1938, the University of Padua did not renew his contract. The official motivation was not linked to his "racial" origin as many people mistakenly think. Which does not mean that he too did not suffer due to the atrocious situation in which the Jews found themselves from one day to the next. Once removed from the university, Musatti had the opportunity to teach in a high school and was called up for a short period of service in the army during the war. In 1943, he wrote some entries ("Psychology", "Psychoanalysis", "Hypnosis and Suggestion" and "Homosexuality") for the Dictionary of Criminology, edited by Nicola Pende, among others. Pende was one of the signatories of the "*Manifesto for the Defence of Race*". Bonaventura reacted to the persecutions, taking up old projects which never abandoned him. In 1924, he and his wife went to visit the *Land of the Fathers*, where he hoped he would see the accomplishment of the plans that his country of origin had denied him. In 1925, the Jewish University opened in Jerusalem. Perhaps one day he would be able to teach there. Among the mentors at the University were high-ranking scientific personalities of the stature of Einstein and Freud. Thanks to his contacts and the esteem he enjoyed, Bonaventura obtained the position. At that time, Jerusalem was in absolute turmoil. Thousands of German Jews, fleeing Nazism, found refuge in the country. The immigrants were highly educated, with many academics and scholars, including numerous exponents of the psychoanalytic movement in Germany and Austria, who transformed the city into one of the great centers of the psychoanalytic movement. The immigrants included Max Eitingon, a key figure of the psychoanalytic movement in Germany and one of Freud's closest collaborators. In September 1933, the *Chevrà Psychoanalytit Be'Israel* (literally "The Psychoanalytic Society in the Land of Israel") was born, officially instituted and recognized by the I.P.A. in 1934: with two cities divided by tension, Jerusalem and Tel Aviv. Those were years in which everything Freud said or wrote was the subject of great attention, not only scientific, but also cultural and ideological. For some people, Freud and his scientific creature were the very essence of the Jewish spirit, from which some important educational experiences drew inspiration; for others, Freud was not entirely consequential in his choices, preserving a "diasporic" spirit, detached from the ethos of the Jewish national rebirth movement. Freud was one of the first authors to be translated into Hebrew and the one about which most has been written. The rector of the Hebrew University, who found himself in conflict with Freud, due to his having opted to teaching psychology (a post which should have gone to Kurt Levin), before creating a teaching post for psychoanalysis, had a picture of Freud in his study. The translations of Freud's writings from German into Hebrew enriched the lexicon of a language that had not been used on a daily basis for centuries. Bonaventura's work at that time were focused on the processes of socialization, education and identity development. The aim, or perhaps it would be better to call it the mission, was to investigate the extreme complexity of the construction of the identity of youth in a place full of immigrants, characterized by different and potentially conflicting traditions and cultures. With his pioneering studies on the relationships between psychology and teaching, Bonaventura laid the foundations of the psycho educational current, which became established with authority in the Fifties thanks to some of his students. Bonaventura was a generous man who, in Florence, supported refugees passing through the city, and who knew how to grow his disciples. Unfortunately, his original and far-sighted work came to a premature and violent end.



Cover of the Spanish edition of the book by Enzo Bonaventura *La psicoanalisi* (Milan: Mondadori, 1938):
Introducción al Psicoanálisis. Barcelona: Apolo, 1947



Wedding of Enzo Bonaventura and Matilde Passigli.



Enzo Bonaventura and his wife Matilde Passigli (1941)

R.C.: Let's now move on to take a closer look at Bonaventura's book, *La psicoanalisi*, the reprint of which you have presented. Before examining the book's contents, I would like to dwell on the relationship between psychoanalysis and experimental psychology, which your editorial operation has duly recovered. This is a matter of great importance, not only at historical but also epistemological level, analyzed quite deeply by Michel David in the Sixties and in an essay that appeared in the *Rivista di Psicoanalisi* by Anna Maria Accerboni in the Eighties. Subsequently it was completely denied, in favour of a narrative that claimed the roots of local psychoanalysis to be implanted in positivist psychiatric medicine, from which it struggled to break free.

DM: This denial caused a sort of hole, almost a historical chasm, in Italian psychoanalysis. The school of experimental psychology in Florence, directed by Francesco De Sarlo, was a great forge of thinkers, who formed close and very fertile relationships with psychoanalysis. The Florence of the first two decades of the century, with its many literary and philosophical journals, was an

endless source of a culture that showed sincere and deep curiosity for Freud's "new science". I would particularly like to mention the weekly magazine *La Voce*, founded in 1908 by Giuseppe Prezzolini and Giovanni Papini, which was printed until 1916 and which dedicated an entire issue in 1910 to the "sexual question", investigated from the psychoanalytic point of view. It is also worth mentioning the journal *Psiche*, created in 1912 by psychologist Roberto Marco Greco Assagioli. The latter, having trained at the psychoanalytic school of Zurich, was the first Italian to be officially part of a psychoanalytic society, back in 1910; Assagioli was the first to translate Freud into Italian, having published his version of *The Freudian psychoanalytic method* (1903) in *Psiche* in 1912. For the three years during which the magazine was published, he gave extensive space to articles on psychoanalytic subjects, with contributions by Morselli, Assagioli and Freud himself. This was a pioneering experience in the Italian publishing industry, of which Assagioli was one of the main references. Assagioli then detached himself from the central section of the psychoanalytic movement, creating his own school ("psychosynthesis"). Another important figure was Marco Levi Bianchini, who was not only one of the founders of the first S.P.I., but also coined several terms, which became part of psychoanalytic jargon and literature, well before Boringhieri essential translation work gave birth to an "Italian lexicon" of psychoanalytic terms.

R.C.: I fully endorse your invitation - which should be seen almost as a moral obligation - to recover these old characters, who made the history of our discipline. On its ninetieth anniversary of its foundation (2015), the S.P.I. did its best to celebrate Marco Levi Bianchini, a "Don Quixote" of psychoanalysis, as he was called by Musatti. A conference was dedicated to him in Teramo and a series of articles appeared on www.spiweb.it, in the *Rivista di Psicoanalisi* and in the *Italian Psychoanalytic Annual*. Now we have to pick up the original figure of Assagioli. But, in line with your work to restore the links between experimental psychology and psychoanalysis, we should also analyze the contributions to our subject from other prestigious early Twentieth century schools of psychology: the Padua school, directed by Vittorio Benussi, the brilliant psychologist from Trieste, who studied at the Meinong school in Graz, and had Cesare Musatti as his favorite pupil, and the experimental school in Rome, governed by the powerful academic Sante De Sanctis and his disciple Ferruccio Banisconi, who played an important, albeit ambivalent, political role in the institution of the Italian psychoanalytic movement. De Sanctis' works were repeatedly mentioned by Bonaventura in his manual.

DM: I agree. Especially with the reference you make to Benussi, a powerful figure with whom De Sarlo and Bonaventura often met and who made the Institutes of Padua and Florence two great poles of experimental research, in which psychoanalysis plays an important role. As for De Sanctis, whom Bonaventura mentions extensively, he is an author who has a recognised place in the *Traumdeutung*. Bonaventura's aim was to place psychoanalysis in the mainstream of general psychology. "Most expositions of psychoanalysis in the various languages – as stated in the *Preface* - were written by psychoanalysts who, while knowing their discipline perfectly (...) are not equally up to date with the progress made by general psychology in a century of passionate and fruitful scientific work; their exclusively medical preparation does not encourage them to see psychoanalysis in the complex of psychological science, of which it is a branch and a particular method". It must be said that a considerable and significant number of experimental psychologists came from a medical background (De Sanctis, Banisconi, Father Gemelli, and others), while Italian psychology had just recently been born as an independent discipline, which struggled to distance itself from philosophy, of which it was a specialized branch, strongly opposed by Benedetto Croce's idealism and Giovanni Gentile's actualism. Bonaventura points out that the medical matrix of many psychologists gave birth to "sometimes curious errors of assessment: because they do not have a thorough knowledge of the history of psychology, they are induced to celebrate certain ideas that are already long in the tooth as innovative, and to accept the "discovery" of facts long since acquired by science. And, anticipating the destiny that currently claims psychoanalysis to be more

in line with psychology and less of an isolated region, demarcated by ancient medical boundaries, by almost a century: “It seemed to us that, in order to make a fairer assessment of what is original and deep in psychoanalysis, it would be best to bring it back to its own ground and, instead of presenting it as a doctrine detached and closed within itself, include it in the vast framework of normal and pathological, pure and applied contemporary psychology”. Equally current is the demand to make psychoanalysis a discipline connected with other psychological doctrines, including those of an experimental nature: “However those psychoanalysts who affect haughty contempt of experimental psychology want to think, we are convinced that psychoanalysis has everything to gain by measuring itself up against the results achieved by psychology with other methods and following different directions. Not one-sidedness and exclusivism, but mutual understanding and a healthy balance of thought can seriously benefit the progress of science”. What else can we add to these words that seem almost a prediction?

R.C.: It occurs to me that, in 1926, even the doctor and psychiatrist Edoardo Weiss warned the tiny handpiece of the first members of the SPI, all doctors, to extend the Freudian discipline “to the non-medical”, in order to avoid incurring in the serious error of “considering psychoanalysis only as a chapter of medicine or particularly of neuropsychiatry”. The exclusion of those who are not doctors would have deprived the Society of “invaluable collaborators who can (...) determine a favourable development of society”.

DM: Edoardo Weiss and Enzo Bonaventura were both, each in their own different way, “giants” of Italian psychological and psychoanalytic thought. Weiss’s role in the history of the psychoanalytic movement is still to be examined and analyzed, not only in relation to the Italian, but also to the American period. In the case of Bonaventura, we are faced with a removal, which involves the psychoanalytic movement from within. Like a karst river, his lesson has continued to operate although it receives no recognition. Some of Bonaventura’s insights were ideally collected and originally developed by Silvano Arieti, one of the most important figures in American psychiatry. Arieti met Bonaventura several times in the Jewish circles of Pisa and appreciated his manual to such an extent that he took it to America as if it were a “transitional object”, to make his departure and exile in America less painful. He had received the book on loan from Giuseppe Pardo Roques, the *Parnàs* (leader) of the Jewish community of Pisa, which gave asylum and protection to many young Jewish refugees, and, on Fridays, offered vouchers for meals to be eaten in a city restaurant to anyone in need, without religious distinction. The *Parnàs* was fiercely murdered on the eve of Liberation. Arieti was captured by Bonaventura’s ideas, within the walls of *Parnàs*’ home. The latter was a munificent and bold entrepreneur, who had performed important functions in the municipality of Pisa, despite suffering from a serious form of agoraphobia, which sometimes forced him to live locked up in the house for weeks. He was afraid of being attacked and torn to pieces by wild animals and, since he lived in the city, he had transferred this fear to cats and dogs, so whenever he went out he carried a stick with which he tapped the ground. The figure, the ghost of the *Parnàs*, disturbed the thoughts of Arieti for forty years, so much so that he turned them into what has become a cult book (1979). Arieti used this man’s illness as a paradigm of a reading of mental illness incorporating Freudian discoveries on the primary mechanisms of the unconscious with an approach that takes into consideration even the most complex and superior functions of the psyche. This text represents a key element of connection between Bonaventura’s studies, which were interrupted and have been largely ignored, and Arieti’s subsequent studies in America, which are the result of memories and the teachings received.

R.C.: So, as you say, Arieti’s work would have made the connection between the unconscious universe and the reality of conscious functions. In Bonaventura’s words, “psychoanalysis has filled the gaps” in experimental psychology, which “often remained on the surface and could not grasp the causal connection of phenomena” and psychic functions.

DM: Yes, that's right. But it's much more, because, continuing to use the words of Bonaventura, psychoanalysis "also teaches us not to artificially isolate the individual from the human environment in which he has lived and lives", encouraging "that unitary understanding of the human soul that is also the ultimate goal that psychology must aim for. This is a viaticum full of hope for our discipline. The legacy that Enzo Bonaventura left us opens up to the future, tracing the paths of collaboration between related doctrines, which have the shared aim of placing themselves at the disposal of the individual and of the social community, in order to alleviate the pain of living.

R.C.: Before saying goodbye, I would like to touch on some critical points regarding Bonaventura and his relationship with the psychoanalysis of time. As we have repeatedly said, the officially recognised fathers left him on the side-lines and his book was discredited by some of them, who considered the manual too popular and spoiled by various theoretical errors. In Weiss's review for the *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis* in 1939, the work was judged in light/shade and its author was placed "outside the sphere of psycho-analysts". Nicola Perrotti was much more severe when, in his commentary on *Psiche*, Musatti's 1949 textbook of psychoanalysis, he grasped the opportunity to label Bonaventura's previous manual as highly imprecise and superficial. Only Emilio Servadio was a little kinder, when he cited in the 1974 article, *Funzione dei conflitti preedipici*, a work by Bonaventura on the psychology of infants written way back in the 1930s.

DM: Weiss's review for *International* was ungenerous, not up to the standard of the scientific stature of its author. Perhaps also as a consequence of the rigidity with which Freud's work was approached in those years by the psychoanalytic movement, as if it were a sacred text and not a construction, full of contradictions and unresolved tensions, which are a strength and not a weakness of his thought. Weiss's review had an impact due to the contrast between the very positive abstract and initial observations, and the subsequent arguments aimed at diminishing the author and his authority. Weiss acknowledges that, for the first time a good compendium of psychoanalysis had been penned by a psychologist. According to Weiss, although the author had made some small slip-ups, the value of the book remained unchanged. It is by no mere chance that the criticism focuses on some clinical passages which, according to the author, were described far too simply, identifying conceptual inaccuracies such as the confusion of the Freudian Id with the unconscious, and in the definition of the principle of pleasure and, in general, in drive theory. These are terminological findings that dispute the passage from the first to the second Freudian theme, with the development of structural theory. But the aspect of Bonaventura's text that Weiss found hardest to digest on a metapsychological level, but which actually represents its strength and modernity, is that inherent in the meaning attributed to religion and culture. Bonaventura sincerely declares that "where [he feels] not to follow Freud, [is] in his hypotheses on the origin of the Superego of moral feelings and religion". He considers the Freudian ideas expressed in *Totem and Taboo* to be absolutely "daring", and sees them as "the author's weakest". Weiss interprets such a position as a concession to Jungian thought, with a consequent loss of rigor. It is not necessary to disturb Levi Strauss to see who was right on this point. To believe that Bonaventura was unaware of the fact that the Unconscious and ES are not synonyms, because, even the Ego contains an unconscious part (not to mention the other findings justly raised), causes the risk of losing what is essential. It is no coincidence that Emilio Servadio, who had the courage to sit next to Wilhelm Reich at the congress in which he was expelled from the psychoanalytic movement, the recognition of Bonaventura's role seems more explicit and less bound by the correct use of terms.

It must be said, however, that Weiss and Bonaventura knew each other and had respect for each other. This is also testified by a brief correspondence, of which we have the famous letter in which

the psychoanalyst from Trieste discusses the agoraphobic problem with his Florentine colleague, suggesting that he read some articles on the subject. In the post-scriptum of the same letter, dated 12 April 1932, Weiss persuades himself to announce to the Tuscan psychologist the publication of the first issue of the *Rivista Italiana di Psicoanalisi*.

R.C.: When this letter was published in its entirety in the *Rivista di Psicoanalisi* at the end of the Eighties, the editorial staff finally gave Bonaventura the recognition he deserved. Here are a few passages: “His volume on psychoanalysis is distinguished (...) by the knowledge of Freud’s thought (...). Bonaventura carefully studies the interweaving of psychology and psychoanalysis and proposes a fruitful integration, both in affirming psychoanalysis as a branch of psychology, and presenting it as its precursor and anticipator. This position of Bonaventura makes him a rare and important case in the Italian cultural panorama of the 1930s”.

DM: It is no coincidence that this happened towards the end of the 1980s, and not before. In addition to this important episode, I would like to draw attention to the fact that the exhibition held in 1989 in Rome at Castel Sant’Angelo, during the *International Psychoanalytic Association (IPA)* Congress, included, in the section dedicated to Judaism, a panel chaired by me, in which, alongside the great fathers of Italian psychoanalysis, explicit reference is made to the work of Bonaventura. This was right at the end of the 1980s. In the post-war years, the historical reconstruction of Italian psychoanalysis was based instead on a self-referential narrative, centered on the three great figures of Emilio Servadio, Nicola Perrotti and Cesare Musatti. Edoardo Weiss had been living in Chicago, where he had settled with his family, for years, and was now alien to the dynamics that had led to the resumption of S.P.I. in the Fifties. In the new narration of his origins, Bonaventura no longer had a place either in the psychoanalytic community or at the University. Returning to Italy in 1947 for a year’s sabbatical, he resumed contact with his old colleagues, who gave him a kind welcome. However, no one mentioned his possible return, as Guarnieri points out (2016), because giving him back his post would have been a “problem” for both those who took his place and those who aspired to take the chair. Bonaventura solved the problem by returning to the Hebrew University. In Jerusalem, meanwhile, Ben Gurion was preparing, after two thousand years, to proclaim the rebirth of an independent Jewish nation. The Arab League opposed the division of the country into two friendly, neighboring states. Everything was threatened by a war of destruction. Mount Scopus (*Har Ha-Zofim*), where the university was located, was in an isolated area and, in order to reach it, you had to pass through the Arab quarters, running serious risks. On the 13th of April 1948, a month before the declaration of independence, the Hadassah convoy fell into the deadly ambush that also cost Enzo Joseph Bonaventura his life. During the devastating war unleashed by the Arab League, the new State of Israel lost one percent of its population, decimating the cream of the kibbutz and three generations of a recently born university. Ten years went by before the Department of Psychology reopened its doors. But that’s another story. Bonaventura is remembered on the commemorative stele of the victims of the ambush of April 1948. His Florentine colleagues were upset by his death and promoted a celebratory conference. In the Nineties, the University of Florence, inspired by the commitment of Simonetta Gori-Savellini, organised another day in his honour, held in a room of the *Cabinet Viesseux*. On the 1st of June 2016, by initiative of the International Master’s Degree in Teachings on the Shoah at *Roma Tre University*, a conference in memory of Enzo Bonaventura was held at the School of Psychological Science of Tel Aviv University, under the patronage of the Italian Embassy, in collaboration with the School of Psychology of Tel Aviv University, the Freud Center for Psychoanalytic Research of The Hebrew University and the *Europa Ricerca* Foundation (Onlus).



University of Tel Aviv: June 1, 2016: Prof. Abraham Yehoshua and Prof. David Meghnagi.
The meeting was organized by Prof. David Meghnagi and Dr Miriam Meghnagi
under the auspices of the Italian Embassy in Israel.

It was promoted by the International Master for Holocaust Studies of *Roma Tre University*
in cooperation with the School of Psychological Sciences of Tel Aviv University,
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and the journal *Trauma and Memory. European Review of Psychoanalysis and Social Science*



University of Tel Aviv: June 1, 2016. From left to right: Prof. David Meghnagi, Dr Helly Asheri Bonaventura, Prof. Daniel Asheri Bonaventura, Dr Miriam Meghnagi, Lady Aviva Asheri Bonaventura, Lady Gila Caspi, Dr Joseph Levi.

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R.C.: And now we have this important book in his honor.

DM: I had been thinking about writing a book on Bonaventura for years. Writing a book on Bonaventura took me on a journey through time and space, a bit like retracing my childhood with the forced separations I soon had to become familiar with. The thing that struck me most about his story and which I then found again in his son Daniel, with whom I later became a friend, is the ability to live without cultivating resentment. Despite the cumulative difficulties he faced, Bonaventura continued studying and writing as though the world he lived in were “normal”, taking care not to poison his mind, and this is perhaps the greatest lesson he taught.

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the Union of the Italian Jewish Communities
and the Italian Embassy in Israel