ONE-DIMENSIONAL JEW, ZERO-DIMENSIONAL JUDAISM

José Faur
(Bar-Ilan University and Law School, Netanya Academic College)

That is why I am opposed to the ideal of a philosopher-king, which seems to me as passé as the ideal of a king who would impose his religion on all of his subjects, because there is no philosophy without freedom of thought, opposed to all forms of constraint.

Chaim Perelman

The principal thesis of this paper is that whereas pagan society is vertically organized along hierarchical structures, Judaism alone, by virtue of the berit (covenant) contracted by the Jewish people and God at the foot of Mt. Sinai, is horizontally structured. Hierarchical societies are, necessarily, one-dimensional. Conversely, multi-dimensional systems require horizontal organization. Intimately connected with these two types of organizations is the question might/right. A subsidiary thesis is that the anti-Maimonidean movement (1180-1240), which continues to unfold through modern times, is the effect of assimilation to Christian patterns of thought and feeling and constitutes an attempt to reduce Judaism to a one-dimensional system. Both “religious” and “secular” one-dimensionality that dominate

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1 To Shifra: Paradigm of holiness and fortitude until her last breath of life. It was so beautiful to have known you! It was so brief....
3 A shorter version of the present article was published in French.
5 Here “dimension” is used in the Talmudic sense of midda, a “measure” or autonomous value-system independent of other structures or value-systems. This is as at B. B.M. 33a, which describes Scripture as a midda she'ena midda, “a dimension that is not a dimension,” i.e., not autonomous, in contradistinction to “Talmud”—representing the entire apparatus of the Oral Law—that en lekha midda gedola mi-zo, “you have no dimension higher than that.” The reason is that in Rabbinic literature, “Talmud” stands for the interpreter system whereas “Scripture” is the interpreted system. On this fundamental point, see José Faur, Golden Doves with Silver Dots: Semiotics and Textuality in Rabbinic Tradition (Bloomington, 1986), pp. 111-112. In its connotation it parallels, somehow, Herbert Marcuse, One-Dimensional Man (Boston, 1964).
Jewish praxis and discourse are grounded on hierarchical considerations; they are mutually exclusive and, depending on their specific position within hierarchical Israel, oscillate on the basic question might/right.

Polytheistic systems postulate an essential conflict between independent forces. The prevailing order in the world is the result of one or more forces overpowering other forces. Cosmogony celebrates the birth and battles of the forces dominating the world. "Victory" announces the formal installation and monopoly of violence by the triumphant party. Implicit in this model is the ideal of one-dimensionality and the need to monopolize power. A sine qua non common to all hierarchical systems is the belief that might constitutes right: without violence and the monopoly of violence, hierarchical structures collapse. This affected our concepts of law and justice. "A trial is in its substance a struggle, a battle in a closed arena...a shock of contending forces." A trial in Imperial Rome is described "just a duel fought out between them [the parties] in the full light of day under certain rules, which the umpire is present to enforce."6 At the political level, "legitimacy" is established by an initial act of violence, simultaneously determining the rules of normalcy and excluding others from the use of violence.7 Other areas of power may be tolerated only when occupying a subordinate position, "inferior" to the dominant power. In the mental apparatus of hierarchical cultures, the status of an area of power is determined by the ability to dominate other areas to a subordinate position. No true division of power does in fact exist: sovereignty is unlimited and indivisible. The pagan Rex is an absolute monarch. As such, "he creates law for others and so imposes legal duties or 'limitations' upon them whereas he is said himself to be legally unlimited and illimitable."8 The different areas constituting power and authority are structured as a pyramid, converging onto a single focal point of absolute sovereignty.9 A corollary of pyramidal

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9 The difference between more or less advanced societies is not structural—they all are constituted along pyramidal lines—but in the institutions designed to regulate the hierarchical position of the conflicting areas of interest. In advance modern societies, such as the U.S.A., it had become the role of the judiciary to arbitrate between the conflicting areas of interest, e.g., the religious and scientific communities.