

The Fragility of Progress: An Interpretation of the Turn Toward Meaning in Eisenstadt's Later Work¹

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In its earlier phases, S. N. Eisenstadt's work revised functionalist theory by focusing on institutions and group interests and on the contingent nature of historical change. In the last decade, as his work has moved from social system to civilizational analysis, Eisenstadt has focused increasingly on the independent role of cultural codes and intellectual carrier groups as instigators of broad social change. In place of institutional strains it is now tensions internal to the cultural maps of diverse civilizations that initially instigate resistance and social movements. There has been a corresponding shift in Eisenstadt's view of modernity, which he now describes as an inherently fragile social order whose very premises stipulate explosive and endemic efforts to supersede the institutional and cultural frameworks of contemporary social life.

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In his ground-breaking 1982 essay on the 'Axial Age', Shmuel Eisenstadt suggested that in the first millennium B.C.E. there opened up a virtual 'chasm' between visions of transcendence and mundane life. Henceforth, at least within the Great Civilizations, any working social order would have to find a way to bridge this chasm. Bridges there can be, and some may be stronger and more secure than others. By their very definition, however, chasms can never be overcome. Bridges eventually collapse, and when one walks over even the best of them the chasm below is never out of sight.

The view of the chasm created by the Axial Age can be quite an unnerving sight. In *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre likened existence to walking along a steep mountain precipice. Vertigo and anguish threaten to overwhelm the lone hiker. To save oneself from falling into the chasm, Sartre insisted, one must face nothingness. Nothing is given and determined; we are the only creators of our fates. Eisenstadt employs the terminology of sociological theory, and his

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object is the historical conditioning of existence. Yet, his message is the same. After the emergence of Axial Civilizations, 'the construction of a new level of integration was necessarily difficult, fragile, and fraught with "contradictions"' (1982:307).^{*} Once the chasm has been opened up, the paradoxical nature of modern life, its peculiar combination of utopian exaltation and ruinous tragedy, necessarily follows.

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Can this be a man of the functionalist tradition? Talcott Parsons, functionalism's contemporary creator, premised his sociology on a *solution* to the problem of order (Parsons 1937). He was concerned with institutionalization and stability; he believed deeply that short- and long-term equilibrium were empirical possibilities.

While Parsons may have been Eisenstadt's intellectual father, it was Edward

^{*} All subsequent bibliography page attributions are to Eisenstadt, unless otherwise indicated.

Shils who was his intellectual Godfather and patron. Certainly, Shils's (1975) more mystical, febrile functionalism is closer to Eisenstadt's perspective. Shils put charisma at the center of the social system, and charisma is a notoriously unstable substance upon which to rely. Yet Shils remains a medieval thinker at heart. His yearning for a center is revealed by his belief that most societies still have one.

Parsons was an upper-class, Protestant American, possessing an ontological security that made him relatively insensible to the anguish of being. Shils is a second-generation American Jew who became an assimilated, influential intellectual during the most powerful and self-confident period of American history. Eisenstadt is a displaced European Jew. Born in Warsaw, Poland, in 1935, Eisenstadt made the pilgrimage to Palestine only years before Nazism made virtually every European Jew a Zionist. He came to maturity in an aspiring nation that was itself buffeted by eschatological expectations and secular agonies and by the grinding experiences of war.

These considerations bring us, of course, to Max Weber. Neither father nor Godfather, Weber is closer to the spiritual core of Eisenstadt's later work than anyone else. Indeed, he might be thought of as the 'rabbi' of civilizational sociology. Weber (1946) anticipated the tragedy of German history; Eisenstadt experienced its effects. Weber, however, was pessimistic and visionary; he was repulsed by his own culture and identified with a political tradition that was not his own. Eisenstadt identifies with his own tradition and he remains hopeful, if not optimistic, about the future of modern life.²

2.

The fragility of stability has haunted and inspired Eisenstadt's work from the beginning, even while his understanding of its source has dramatically changed in the movement from his earlier to his later writings.³ Throughout both phases of his work, however, Eisenstadt has employed the same term, institutionalization, to identify stability's fragile source. Can there be a more demonstrable sign of the ironic

distance that separates this great Israeli thinker from his functionalist forebears?

In what might be called the middle phase of Eisenstadt's writing, he understood institutionalization in a structural way, introducing a critical variation on Parsons's differentiation theory of social change. According to Parsons, structural differentiation was an adaptive response by the social system to strains. More specialized organizations were more competitive in an ecological and evolutionary sense. Absent social or cultural rigidities, these structures would emerge and restore equilibrium. Eisenstadt (1964a) revised Parsons by suggesting that the emergence of new, more differentiated institutions was less a systemic response than a contingent one, the self-interested activity of strategic elites, who move to end tension and conflict because doing so presents an opportunity for new status and control. While altered versions of resource distribution do emerge with differentiation, Eisenstadt insisted, the status of these new elites creates new conflicts over scarcity; with each new phase of differentiation, in other words, new conflicts emerge.

This revisionist period of Eisenstadt's work, which emerged in the early 1960s and extended well into the mid-1970s, represented a fundamental breakthrough for functionalism (Alexander and Colomy 1988; Colomy 1990), creating new linkages to competing, antifunctionalist theories. From the present perspective, however, one can see that this early reconstruction of functionalism possessed two fundamental flaws. In the first place, its significant innovations were limited by their very renewal of structuralist and material concerns. Eisenstadt had changed functionalism by emphasizing the agency of institutional actors and their competent control of resources, and by recovering the instrumental motives of action in processes of social exchange. In the second place, this early neofunctionalism was decidedly Western-centric. Even while he revolutionized evolutionary theory, Eisenstadt (1964b) remained committed to notions of adaptiveness, flexibility, and productive capacity. In his work on culture, for example, he generalized the 'Protestant ethic' by speak-

ing about the contribution of homologous cultural innovations to a society's 'transformative capacity' (1968; cf., 1978:62).

In the course of the middle 1970s, all of this changed. The structural and Western hue of Eisenstadt's writing gradually disappeared. It was transformed by what can only be called a fundamental shift in sensibility, one that revealed a new, more inner-directed sensitivity to spiritual, moral, and symbolic concerns.⁴ Reflected in this development is the loss of faith in modernization that shook and eventually transformed contemporary intellectual life. One sees a relativization of rationality (1991), a response to the rebirth of religious consciousness (1983), and a new orientation to emerging Asian society (Eisenstadt and Ben-Ari 1990). The domain assumptions (Gouldner 1970) of Eisenstadt's work shift in a corresponding way, from an emphasis on the 'challenges' of social change and modernity to the 'dilemmas' they pose, from a focus on the central role of 'organization' to the energizing force of 'ideas', from the role of 'entrepreneurs' as key agents to the critical position of 'intellectuals', from 'system' as the primary social referent to 'civilization'.

For the later Eisenstadt, institutionalization is no longer the resolution of conflict through organizational means, but the attempt to make earthly a transcendental ideal. This, of course, was Parsons' idea too, and in this weird sense Eisenstadt becomes even more Parsonian when he thought he was becoming even less. For as he moved beyond his argument with Parsons' differentiation theory, he moved away from materialism and came closer to Parsons' core concern with value institutionalization. It was, after all, 'the theorem of institutionalization' that Parsons (1951) considered the key to his social system work, a theorem that demarcated the delicate intersection of culture, personality, and society.

In his later work, however, Eisenstadt conceives of value institutionalization in a fundamentally different way. Rather than solving the problem of instability, he actually employs it to recreate instability in its modern guise. Indeed, equilibrium and

conflict-resolution become relatively peripheral issues in Eisenstadt's later work.

What of his earlier writing on institutional entrepreneurs? The later Eisenstadt indicts these actors for false consciousness. They think they are acting in response to material interests and organizational opportunities. Yet, in initiating social reforms or committing revolutions these actors actually seek to resolve a spiritual tension that gnaws at their souls. They are trying to bridge the chasm between the sacred and the profane, trying to bring the ideals of transcendent justice and perfect harmony down to earth.

Institutionalization, then, is not an organizational response to strain, much less a symbiotic process of internalization and socialization (Parsons and Shils 1951) that sets narrow limits on the imagination of possibilities. It is the putting into place and the spreading throughout society of the perception of an irremediable tension between the sacred and profane and of the need, indeed the responsibility, to overcome it. The 'roots of *modern tensions*' Eisenstadt (1982:305, italics added) suggests, lie 'in the very institutionalization of the *perception* of the tension . . . and of the quest to overcome it'.

What is institutionalized in Axial and post-Axial civilizations, then, is not in the first instance a substantive vision or ethos. It is rather a structural or semiotic form, a dramatic contrast and tension, a narrative of apocalyptic self-renewal and faith. Any particular substantive vision – of a perfectly good society, state, religion, or love – is a response to the basic tension that marks the anguished ontology of modern life. They are versions of the meta Axial-tension in particular, historical forms.

There can, in other words, be no surcease from the fundamental tension that makes modern life so disquieting. There can only be claims for resolution, never resolution itself. The more strongly the overarching code is institutionalized, in fact, the more profound the sense of dissatisfaction is likely to be. No wonder Eisenstadt (1982:305) speaks of the 'continuous reordering of societies and entire civilizations' that the Axial Age introduced. No wonder that he insists (*ibid.*) that, subsequent to

this Axial Age, 'any definition and resolution of these tensions became in itself very problematic'.

3.

This reconstructed theorem of institutionalization represents a new level of reflexivity in sociological theory. It brings us a deeper theoretical self-understanding of modern life.

With this new understanding Eisenstadt has illuminated the fundamentally anomic character of modern consciousness. For actors in this society, the effort to resolve social tension occludes their possibility of perceiving its existence. It is not the ontological tension between real and ideal that actors recognize; rather, they are encapsulated by the results of it. Actors have a sense of the profound imperfection of their worlds, but they see this imperfection as caused by the actual state of the real world rather than by its spiritual premises. Reconstructive efforts – reforms, revivals, conversions, revolutions – do not problematize the sources of the tension that actors feel; rather, such efforts respond to the results of this tension, mistaking them for the cause. Actors are misled. They believe that it is the structure of the world, not its basic premises, that causes imperfection and the insecurity that results. In fact, however, the more successfully the Axial vision is institutionalized – the more open, flexible, and just the society – the greater the sense of its imperfections and the more intense, radical, and unforgiving the movements for social change that result.⁵

This central paradox of modern consciousness has produced unhappy effects. Radical social movements promise an endpoint to social tension via equality and redistribution (Eisenstadt 1985, 1989c). They identify particular groups as carriers of the transcendent and ideologize history in terms of their salvation. Then, when no endpoint appears, when the carrier groups become mundane and tensions continue in an often magnified form, these movements are discredited. For their part, conservative movements promise order and stability through renunciation of some kind, through civility, restraint, and often repression.

They sacralize primordality and ideologize history in an often reactionary way. Yet, fascist revolutions and conservative movements have been no more successful in delivering on their promises of salvation.

Liberalism has been undermined by this same false consciousness (cf. 1987a). From Adam Smith to Durkheim and Parsons it has been premised on a natural identity of interests. Its promise has been that, if a substantive institutional form were realized – capitalism, fairness, individualism, social welfare or social differentiation – conflict and disorder would disappear. Yet where liberal reforms have been realized, tumultuous social conflict has not ceased. Liberalism is flawed by its status as a response to social tension that can offer no coherent account of its origins. Pluralism and social differentiation make possible democracy and individual recognition; in so doing, however, they make that much more visible the gnawing dissatisfaction that lies at the center of modern life.

4.

In earlier, pre-Axial civilizations, there existed what Eisenstadt (1982) calls homologous relations between the divine and the mundane. Gods were humanized and humans divinized in turn. Individuals, institutions, or societies did not embody either good or evil. Neither total purification nor total annihilation were conceived of as possibilities, or necessities.

Even in Axial civilizations, of course, the spiritual virtuosi are sensible to the interplay between good and evil within every society and soul. They encourage forgiveness and reconciliation. No human being or institution is fundamentally different or better, any less worthy of being saved. This is the message of Jesus's cosmic love, of the Talmudic rabbis' even-handed resolution of disputes, of Buddha's playful generosity, Krishna's dexterous omniscience, Confucius' wisdom and understanding.

But another, more fateful direction has been taken for the everyday journeymen of post-Axial life. They, their institutions, and their societies are convicted of a profound dualism, a wrenching split between the sac-

red and profane. Psychologically, this has entailed not only increased self-mastery but self-hatred and the continuous effort to reconstruct the personality, from Puritan introspection to the 'psychological man' of the present day.⁶ In psychoanalytic terms, this has entailed splitting, projection, and denial, processes through which the 'other' can be convicted of pollution and our own guilt denied. Neurosis is not only the product of civilization, it is the premise of civilization in the Axial age.

The institutionalization of such dualism has been more psychologically and socially pronounced in European civilization. In Hinduism there remains the possibilities of pushing pollution into the other world or onto a particular caste (1987b:25–28). In Confucian civilization (Eisenstadt 1985b) the responsibility for resolving earthly tension can be pushed off onto the all-powerful state. In European civilization, however (1987d), society itself is divided into the sacred and profane, and in order to gain social and personal salvation every actor is remanded to engage in a purging and reconstructive task.

In European civilization, it is the social world, not the gods or the state, that becomes the battleground for the struggle between the sacred and profane. There is a sense of irreversible distance not between center and periphery or heaven and earth, but between those who are members of 'society' and those who are not.

5.

In this penultimate section, I discuss the implications of Eisenstadt's later sociology for one of the most pressing contemporary debates – the emerging discussion of civil society.

Eisenstadt points out (1990) that civil society is a uniquely European idea. Drawing primarily upon my own work in this area (Alexander 1990 and forthcoming, and Alexander and Smith, forthcoming) I suggest that Eisenstadt is more right than even he knows. Civil society can, indeed, be understood as the most profound and complete embodiment – the most perfect institutionalization – of the tension that has marked the post-Axial Age.

In every great civilization society, Eisenstadt (1990:5) tells us, 'the given, mundane order was perceived . . . as incomplete, inferior, often at least in part as evil or polluted – and as in need of being reconstructed'. Such reconstruction, he suggests, should be seen as a 'bridging of the tension between the transcendental and the mundane orders', a process Weber called salvation (1987b:13).

Civil society is both a philosophical concept and a real empirical dimension of modern life. In either manifestation, I suggest, it can be understood, in Eisenstadt's civilizational terms, as the sphere of social salvation. Whether in Locke's transformation of the state of nature, Hegel's mediation of the family and state, or Marshall's welfare society, civil society is ethically and morally defined, a sphere entirely devoid of primordial form. This impersonal community is ascriptive in the sense of being accessible to citizens by virtue of their birth; at the same time, what is so accessible are the universalistic attributes of rationality that identify human kind. Civil society thus defines 'society' in an historically unprecedented way; it provides an institutionally and symbolically differentiated center for society that is neither religion, state, or territory but a sphere that is possessed of a generalizable property that can potentially define and control each of the others in turn. To historicize Castoriadis (1987), civil society is 'imagined'; it is a society whose basis lies unequivocally in the ideological and transcendent imagination of human beings (cf. 1981:73).

Civil societies present the paradigmatic case of collectivities regulated by independent rules under the control of functionally specific elites, which Eisenstadt has described as the principal normative and stratificational innovations of the axial age (1987c:22–23; cf., Etzioni-Halévy 1989). In this case, the rules refer to the norms of citizenship, promulgated by intellectuals as legal codes and, in principle, interpreted by this and other elites independently of economic wealth, political power, religious faith, ethnicity, or race. Membership in this civil community is most completely achieved as 'full citizenship', that ambiguous and inherently unfulfillable status that

has defined one of the most remarkable reform projects in world history.

Because there is this haltingly differentiated civil sphere, it has become possible, for the first time in history, to envisage the abolition of the very distinction between center and periphery, in Eisenstadt's words (1990:48) 'making membership in the collectivity tantamount to participation in the center'. It is the civil society that makes political authority accountable, not just in general but to the actual members of real existing society (1981:171 ff.; cf. 1987:12-13). It is civil society that allows individualizing and competitive markets to develop for status, money, power, and indeed for religious faith (cf. 1987d:49-52 and 1987c:27). The project of creating and sustaining civil society, moreover, has depended upon the linkages between secondary elites and mass that have marked the revolutionary efforts at social justice which distinguish European civilization from others in the other post-Axial age.

Yet, if we take seriously the notions of tension and this-worldly division at the center of Eisenstadt's later work, we must go beyond the positive paeans to civil society that have marked the liberal tradition in which Eisenstadt himself has worked. We must recognize that civil society is not simply a welcoming home but, at the same time, a very inhospitable place. The reason is simple, and it follows from the entire thrust of Eisenstadt's later work: it is the whole Axial code that has become institutionalized in civil society – the tension itself, not some particular resolution of it.

In some recent work on civil society (Alexander; Alexander and Smith forthcoming), I have suggested that civil society is informed by a dualistic symbolic code, a code that divides its inhabitants into those who 'deserve' to be saved and included from those who 'must' be excluded and damned. The 'people' are constructed as members of the first category on the basis of what I call the discourse of liberty. Fundamentally good, they are held to embody reason and self-control. They are spontaneously cooperative, the stuff of which voluntaristic, democratic societies can be made. In every civil society, however, the

code stipulates that enemies of these good citizens are everywhere to be found. They are constructed as emotional and irrational, secretive and conspiratorial. Unable to exercise self-control, they are believed to engage in coercion and to depend upon authority in turn. They cannot be allowed to participate in civil society, for their own good and for others. They must be excluded and, often, repressed.

Civil society, therefore, articulates the chasm that characterizes life in the post-Axial age by marking it with detailed sets of linguistic signs. The very existence of this discourse indicts society, and the selves that create it, of fundamental imperfection. Pollution and exclusion become inevitable, ritual purification the continuous result.⁷ No matter what particular solution civil society allows or embodies – free markets, mixed regimes, 'people's democracies' – the tension itself will remain. There is the irony at the heart of the discourse of civil society. It establishes the tragedy, and the promise, of modern life.

6.

In his later sociology, Shmuel Eisenstadt tried to construct a new understanding of modern life upon one strand of the Jewish historical tradition. Like Weber, Eisenstadt (1989d, 1992) identified himself and his work with the message of the prophets, which had for the first time in history allowed impersonal standards of judgment and evaluation systematically to intrude upon the particularistic and primordial powers of the status quo.

Eisenstadt staked his later, 'civilizational sociology' on the bet that this ancient Hebraic experience could become the prototype for future systems of accountability, that the prophetic model could become secularized and civilized, that it could form a basis for the routine functioning of a wide range of social institutions.⁸

Yet, Eisenstadt de-provincialized his sociology by breaking decisively with Weber's preference for an exclusively prophetic mode and with his Hebraic-centered perspective more generally. Eisenstadt points out that this is not the only model for regulating power, though it has certainly

been the most radical one. Because other great traditions were also Axial, they can, in principle, also provide compelling grounds for productive, dynamic, and even democratic social systems.

True, none of these traditions has been able to do so without the fundamental interventions of Western powers. Yet this Western tradition itself, while rooted in Judaism, superseded the Hebraic model in fundamental ways. It was 'European civilization' that articulated the model of the good society to which not only Western nations but virtually every people on earth adheres today (1987e, g, h). Eisenstadt insists that European civilization is distinct from its specifically Jewish or Christian forms, for it is also the product of Europe's early tribal democracies, of its pluralistic and competitive system of early modern states, of its contractual version of feudalism, of its Reformation, Enlightenment, and Renaissance.

In *The Visible Hand*, the great economic historian, Alfred Chandler (1978), demonstrated that it was the 'internalization of the market' that created the basis for the industrial corporation of the nineteenth century, a new form of social organization that allowed enormous economies of scale, returns on investment, and general economic productivity. What he did not add was that this new form produced at the same time unprecedented alienation and economic inequality on an unprecedented scale.

It might be said that European civilization is based on 'the internalization of the sacred', a development which has allowed unprecedented social inclusion, social dynamism, and flexible social control. Yet, far from solving the tension between the sacred and profane, this metaphysical internalization has translated it into a potentially explosive division within society itself. In setting out the model for a productive, flexible, and democratic society, European civilization has also created fanaticism and revolutionary violence, encouraging fantasies about final solutions to tensions that even the most effective social organization can never dispel.

The millennia-long struggle for transcendental inclusion – for the incorporation into the morally sacred of the socially mun-

dane – is far from over. It has been the great and unprecedented merit of Shmuel Eisenstadt's later work to outline the distinctive framework within which this struggle takes place. In doing so, he has given us a new place to think about, and to think within.

Received November 1991

Final version accepted March 1992

Notes

¹ An earlier version of this paper was presented on the occasion of S. N. Eisenstadt's retirement from the Hebrew University, Jerusalem on 8 January 1991. Thanks to Ron Eyer- man for a critical reading.

² These attributions of intellectual parentage – like most of the other arguments in this essay – are interpretations based upon clues I have gleaned from Eisenstadt's writings rather than upon interpretations which have been offered by Eisenstadt himself. In the matter of intellectual parentage, for example, Eisenstadt himself recounts the personal importance of Martin Buber, who introduced him to social science at the Hebrew University in the 1940s, where he was first an undergraduate, then a graduate student, and eventually the *Assistant* to Buber himself.

As Buber's students we had a feeling that we were being privileged to be exposed to a unique vision – yet closely bearing on central problems of sociological analysis. This feeling was bound up not only with the power of his charismatic personality working within the framework of the university, but in the fact that this power was directed to large extent questions, which were and still are the focal point of . . . modern social thought (Eisenstadt 1989a:352).

It was Buber who introduced his protégé to the importance of thinking in terms of ancient civilizations, a reference that arose naturally from Buber's focus on comparative religion and philosophy in the tradition of German historicism.

³ In Eisenstadt's earliest theoretically ambitious and internationally known works, he combined social anthropology and Parsonian functionalism to develop an increasingly innovative, revisionist theory of comparative social change. This 'early' phase extends very roughly between *From Generation to Generation* (1956) and *Modernization, Protest and Change* (1966), via *The Political System of Empires* (1963) and including the essays collected in *Essays in Comparative Institutions* (1965). This early movement reached its highest theoretical point in the 1964a

and 1964b essays (see Bibliography), which point toward a fundamental reconceptualization of the key functionalist questions and toward neofunctionalism itself. The 'middle' period of Eisenstadt's work is triggered by his response to new developments in the theory of Edward Shils and is marked by a new sensitivity to charismatic centers and the role they play in social differentiation. This phase might be said to begin with the edited collection, *Max Weber on Charisma and Institution Building* (1968); it is elaborated in the massive edited compendium, *Political Sociology* (1971), in the essays collected in *Tradition, Change, and Modernity* (1973), in *The Form of Sociology* (with Curelaru, 1976), and in such collections as *Socialism and Tradition* (with Azmon 1975). The shift toward Eisenstadt's later, civilizational sociology, which is the work I am discussing in the present essay, begins in the middle and late 1970s, but is reflected in published work only in the 1980s and beyond. Paul Colomy and I analyzed the early and middle phases of Eisenstadt's work in an earlier essay (Alexander and Colomy 1988: see Bibliography).

⁴ In his important review of new directions in macrosociological accounts of Western development, Eisenstadt (1986b) makes a remark about the implications of some of this recent work that actually reveals the shift that has taken place in his own. He speaks of the 'new approach to the relationship between culture and social structure and their implications for comparative macrosocietal analysis'. He describes this new approach as going 'beyond the definition of culture and social structure as distinct ontological entities and beyond mutually exclusive deterministic and reductionist "materialist" or "idealist" modes of explanation of sociological phenomena'. The alternative to this old approach, Eisenstadt writes, is to specify 'the analytical dimensions of beliefs or cultural visions that are constitutive elements of the construction of social order and institutional dynamics'. What Eisenstadt has done in this essay on the work of others is to define the turn toward meaning that marks his own later work.

⁵ 'The very attempt at such reconstruction was always torn by many internal tensions – given in the very nature of the basic ideological or symbolic premises of such conceptions; in the awareness of a greater range of possibilities of visions of the proper mode of the resolution of the tension between transcendental and the mundane order and of the partiality or incompleteness of any given institutionalization of such vision. It is these tensions . . . and their institutional repercussions that ushered in a new type of social and civilizational dynamics in the history of mankind' (1988:98–99).

⁶ 'The interpersonal virtues such as solidarity, mutual help, or the like have been taken out of their primordial framework and became combined, in different dialectical modes, with the attributes of resolution of the tension between the transcendental and the mundane orders. In this way they generate a new level of internal tensions in the structuring of personality, and it is through the appropriate reconstruction of personality that the bridging of the tension between the transcendental and the mundane order . . . i.e., salvation, can be achieved' (Eisenstadt 1987b:13).

⁷ 'The attempts to construct . . . a social and cultural order [are] manifest in all societies and cultures in the symbolic boundaries of personal and collective identity [and in the distinction that is made] between the profane and the sacred. . . . The very construction of such boundaries and of their institutional derivatives and consequences . . . exacerbates . . . uncertainties [and] generates a basic ambivalence to social order . . . Myths [and] tales about worlds and creatures beyond the boundaries of the given order . . . depict the combination of attraction and anxiety [about] step[ping] out of such boundaries, the stress on the purity of the world inside and the danger of the world outside' (1985:317).

⁸ 'The Jewish religion as distinct from Catholicism and to some degree Eastern Christianity – but much less from Protestant Christianity, and especially from Calvinism – has not recognized the monopoly of any group on mediation of the access to the sacred. Especially in the period of the Second Commonwealth, even the Priests – however high their standing – had only [a] monopoly on rituals but not on the exegesis of law or on prayer, which spread more and more as major modes of religious experience, of access to the realm of the sacred. All of the members of the 'sacred community' which was created by the Covenant of God with the people of Israel had access to this realm in principle, with the partial exception of access to the ritual of the Temple. Hence, all could claim to be equal in a basic way. There was no Pope or Church in Israel. . . . In distinction from Islam in which, at least in principle, there are also no mediators, the emphasis in the Jewish faith on the Covenant between God and the people of Israel means a different relation to God than total submission (as the very name of Islam connotes). As against such total submission, the Covenant indeed implied some sort of partnership – albeit between obviously unequal partners. Jewish folklore, from the midrashim down to Levi Itzhak of Berditshev, is full of stories in which God is seemingly called to some sort of account' (1992: 12–13).

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