

# Faur (almost) in the Nude<sup>1</sup>

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*The slightest alteration in the relation between man and the signifier, in this case in the procedure of exegesis, changes the whole course of history by modifying the lines which anchor his being.*

Jacques Lacan

Western consciousness has been the playing ground for Postmodernist philosophers in the late twentieth century, readdressing modes of thinking and perception held sacred by scholars, both religious and secular. The edifice of Neo-Platonic thinking – considered the basis of Western mentality and rationalization for over two millennia – came under intense scrutiny by a new wave of German and French “rebels,” amidst the destruction caused by two devastating wars in Europe. Postulating that reality is basically linguistic and that language determines the perceptive reality of any given cultural group – and henceforth the way each one unfolds historically – Wittgenstein, Heidegger, Foucault, Derrida, Levinas, to name but a few – turned the entire tradition of Western Metaphysics upside down, and sent shockwaves through the world of Academia, unsettling tremors of which we feel to this very day.

## Universality was dead; Difference is in.

In the same venue, Susan Handelman’s *The Slayers of Moses* (1982) sought to review Rabbinic Tradition within the scope of Postmodern and post-Structural theories, only to show that ancient rabbinic hermeneutics were already “Postmodern.”

A few years later Rabbi and Professor José Faur was to publish his *Golden Doves with Silver Dots* (1986), which became the only and most competent explanation to-date of Rabbinic hermeneutics as viewed through the lenses of the Postmodern literary theory, feat only comparable to Rabbi Moses Maimonides’ “Guide of the Perplexed” within the frame of medieval Aristotelians. In this way, Faur opened the door to understanding Rabbinic – and therefore Jewish – tradition to our contemporary mindset.

Rabbi Faur has dedicated his life to recovering Jewish tradition from the noise and muddiness that it has become since the rise of the Kabbalah, and more acutely, the Haskaláh. In other words, to resetting Judaism back to its original factory specifications.

Faurian scholarship rests on four pillars: Legal, Literary-Interpretative, Historical Causality and Metaphysical. His four major works reflect this, both in theme and order,

1. His less-known “Studies of Rambám’s Mishnéh Toráh” (Heb. *Tyuním beMishnéh Toráh LehaRambám*, 1978).
2. *Golden Doves with Silver Dots*. (1986).
3. *In the Shadow of History* (1992).
4. *Homo Mysticus* (1999).

Each one of these seminal books, accompanied with a host of articles published before and after each one, attempts to explain four things: (1) To clear Maimonides’ name from his most vilified and least understood tome of the *Mishnéh Toráh* (The Book of Knowledge), which rests at the root of the Rabbinic system and primer to the following 13 tomes; (2) the centrality of the relationship sign-signifier and text-reader-writer in the Rabbinic hermeneutics; (3) the paradigm shift that occurred to Medieval Sephardic Jewry, which led to its downfall, and a towering explanation of “persecuted” and the “persecutor” in Christian-Western and Jewish traditions; (4) and Faur’s own readers’ guide to Maimonides’ “Guide of the Perplexed,” whose basic message is that Jewish mysticism is actually a means to apprehend God *intellectually*, attained after the mastery of reason and the imagination, thus creating a human being that he calls “the post-rational individual,” the source of prophesy and the ultimate realization of a human being within creation.

Faur's following work, *The Horizontal Society* (2008), puts key elements of all his preceding studies into a cohesive whole, and finally unfolds the underlying reason of his entire life opus: Whereas Pagan societies are hierachal – set in a vertical axis and *violence* the only means to keep “law,” order and power – the People of Israel is the only society in the history of mankind ordered along a horizontal axis, founded on the principle of freedom under the Law and binding all constituents on this flat plane, where not even God can abrogate the terms of the contract-*berit* revealed at Mt. Sinai, mutually and freely accorded by the contractor (God) and contractee (the People of Israel) with full knowledge of its terms.

Now comes *The Naked Crowd: The Jewish Alternative to Cunning Humanity* (2009), the point of this review, which is by all means a summary and accessible version of *The Horizontal Society*, weighted on the linguistic concern of how “truth” and “wisdom” have been manipulated by hierarchical societies, ideological tyrants and divines, and their internal and external consequences ripped through Jewish society, past and present.

*The Naked Crowd* is divided in five interrelated sections: (1) Of Analphabetic Rabbis and Conceited Scholars; (2) Cunning Humanity; (3) The Naked Crowd; (4) The Covenant; (5) Oedipal Paul.

From the outset Faur bares the tone of this book:

For the first time in two thousand years, Jews can speak without restrain about the Tora and Judaism. . . *We have to use this opportunity, or lose it.*” (my emphasis)

And boy! Does he ever!

Section 1, *Of Analphabetic Rabbis and Conceited Scholars*, speaks of the demise of Sephardic and Ashkenazi Jewries, their ensuing assimilation and catastrophes that followed respectively (the Spanish Inquisition and the Holocaust), rooted in the paradigm shift launched by the Anti-Maimonideans, a specific group of rabbis in both Germany and Spain who were opposed to the traditions of Andalusian Jewry, heart and heir to Rabbinic tradition.

The mere utilization of the word “Analphabetic” (in deference to “illiteracy”) stamped on the Anti-Maimonideans signifies that this group of rabbis were no longer conversant with the tradition of the Jewish Sages down to the very units of the Hebrew language. By not understanding the Hebrew language (and parallel to this, Aramaic), Jewish texts become a hodgepodge to the ignorant, and playing ground for self-righteous bullies

who possess them. Their methodology, which became widespread through Spanish *Yeshivot* during the period of *Reconquista* (11<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> c.), rendered Spanish Jewry defenseless before the rhetorical attacks of Christians, and as a result the mass conversions followed. Likewise, Faur parallels this experience with the one lived by Ashkenazi Jewry at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, who also being the product of Anti-Maimonidean training, were unable to meet the challenges of a modernizing Europe. Whereas for Spanish Jews there was *conversion* to the Church, for Franco-German Jews there was *conversion* to secular-Europe, and sometimes even to Christianity. After the walls of the ghetto came down, mass defection also ensued.

In Section 2, *Cunning Humanity*, Faur shalshing through Greek Rational tradition (particularly Socrates), which in his eyes is nothing more than the refinement of Pagan thinking, disingenuously passing as learned, but in the end having nothing to say. This too becomes the playground of self-righteous bullies at the top, manipulating those below, and thus “Cunning.” In contrast, the alternative is the antidote to the cunning snake developed by Jewish tradition, resting on four pillars: “The Alphabet, the Book, the Law, and a community committed to the transmission and implementation of the system.” The God of the Hebrews can read and write, and so do His people! (Otherwise, how could one ever *sign* an agreement-covenant that one never understands?!)

Necessary to this system is a methodology of critical thinking, which in the lingo of Syrian Sephardim is called *A sacar! A juntar!* (to *break up* and *link together*).

There is something exceptional about the Hebrew Alphabet. Like all Semitic languages, it consists of consonants alone, with one unique feature: vowels are formally excluded. . . Consonantal reading requires a special type of reading: ‘*a sacar!* . . . and ‘*a juntar!* . . .

These two movements parallel the two basic movements of Hebrew intelligence. *Bina*, ‘discernment’ (= ‘analysis’) refers to the faculty not only to ‘separate,’ but also to reduce a concept or a thing to its basic elements (analysis=left brain). *Hokhma* ‘wisdom’ (‘synthesis’ = right brain) is the faculty to bring together various elements in such a way that the total is larger than the parts.

*Hebrew intelligence is the product of a ‘Book’ written in a script demanding the reader to be the writer.*

In Section 3, *The Naked Crowd*, Faur presents the People of Israel attempting to free itself from the snaring venom of the serpent (a.k.a ‘Cunning’), process first begun by escaping Egypt, and throwing themselves into the Desert. It was in the bareness of the wilderness where the Israelites were able to recover “the memory of a paradisiacal environment, where each and everyone could be what he/she really is without having to fear the ‘other’ . . .”

Faur describes this as a process of detoxification, because once being away from Pagan society, the People of Israel “had to look inwardly. In the process, they discovered the image of God within and learned how to live in harmony with each other and with their Maker.”

In Section 4, *The Covenant*, Faur takes us into the bearings of the bilateral covenant, or *berit*, which is nothing else but the set of responsibilities in how to live in harmony as a society. In this chapter too, Faur explains how the *Toráh* system differs from the concepts of *natural rights* (where laws are inherent in nature, and therefore “Universal” and inalterable), and *positivist legal theories* (where laws are purely arbitrary, pending on a cultural subset, but needed of an authority to sanction and enforce them). While *natural rights* deny plurality of views, *positivists legal theories* render any given value system neither *better* nor *worst* than the other.

In the *Toráh* system two main principles are central. Number one, God and creation (and hence mankind) are categorically dissimilar. The consequence of this is that there cannot be an ontological connection (*religatio*) between man and God. Therefore, the laws He gives to Israel are not ‘natural’ or ‘universal,’ i.e. not binding on the rest of humanity. Second, Jewish thought posits man being created “in the image of God,” in other words, having perfect freedom of choice. Man can obey or disobey God at will, i.e. God cannot (and does not) coerce man to act one way or the other. Even the wisest, most pious and admired figures in Israel (Moses, David and Solomon) were sinners, i.e. they were *free* to act according to their own will.

Therefore, Jewish law being not a product of ‘nature,’ it cannot be binding on all humanity. Being that human kind has absolute *freedom* of choice, the Laws of Israel are the result of *election* to the covenant-*berit*, pact made between God and the People Israel; and not *emanating* from a cultural subset and enforced by a sovereign, thus binding all underlings without full-disclosure, their understanding and consent.

Section 5, *Oedipal Paul*, is perhaps Faur’s most open and strident part of the entire book. Having surfaced all the above, he funnels all the foregoing into the darkest aspects of Western Christianity (and thereby its civilization) and the root-source of anti-Semitism, whether secular or religious. The figure and work of Paul stand central to both.

Faur says nothing new beyond what the critics of Christianity have already said, but he takes it a step further. What is new here is that Faur explores the psychology of Paul within his own historical frame (rooted in Greek rationality), and the reasons for his own anti-Judaic attitudes as a result. He suggests that Paul was a son of proselytes to Judaism, whose parents were marginally knowledgeable of Jewish law, and as a result Paul was also. Because of this, too, Paul himself remained uncircumcised all his life. His unease of being an uncircumcised Jew wrecked havoc in Paul’s psychological make-up in terms of his own self-acceptance, and in relation to *being accepted* in the Roman and Jewish worlds.

From that point on, Faur unfolds a series of explanations in regards to Paul’s rationalization, which was not only anti-Book and anti-Nomistic but also patricidal, and hence Oedipal. In order to justify *his* religion, Paul created the ideological infrastructure to “kill” God-the-father and replace Him with god-the-son, which in the end also gets killed together with God’s law, the *Toráh*. The goal of all this is to render Israel neutral and eliminate it from existence. Once Paul’s version of Christianity married Imperial Rome, the Western world became a hybrid byproduct of Rome’s Hierarchy and Pauline *metis*, thus being a perfect antithesis to everything that Israel stands for. Therefore, anti-Semitism is not the result of pure irrational hatred, but the product of the pagan political structure plus linguistic-ideological manipulation in the never-ending cosmic struggle to crush and destroy the “other” *different* from you.

Faur’s *The Naked Crowd* is a first all-concise summary of Faurian scholarship, vastly unapologetic, straightforward and frank attempt to give body and voice to a nagging question held unsolved for two thousand years. Faur takes no prisoners, blasting against both Jewish haters and self-hating Jews with the arsenal of history and the history of human thought. Faur takes great care not to make his words *his* mere opinion, but he sustains and supports every explanation with a range of Renaissance to Postmodern non-Jewish and Jewish thinkers who have the same basic

problems with Western civilization, all masterfully put together for us to further explore and inquire.

For first-time readers of Faur, many of this book's themes and features will probably prove shocking, perhaps a little bit too much: Truth or Dare to handle for the all-hugging and all-embracing Universalists. For those able to survive it, this new book is a great introduction to everything he has ever talked about.

For the Western self-righteous bullies, however, Faur's books are definitely another example of "Jewish stubbornness." As for Jewish self-righteous bullies, *The Naked Crowd* is an example of Faur's unrelenting secular and Sephardi "heresy." If you belong to either private club, you will certainly not like it, and view it with utter contempt.

For those already familiar with Faur's *opus*, this book probably will say nothing new. Personally, I think the section of *Oedipal Paul* is a bit of an overkill, but perhaps necessary to drive a point acutely to an unaware and mentally-sedentary audience. Having being a translator for Faur's Spanish and English work, and thus intimately familiar with his *language*, I feel this book lacks the typical Andalusian-Sephardi witty and clever style common in most of his books and articles: It hides no surprises, it provokes none of the 'Eureka' fun-loving suddenLaughs at his irony and genius.

Another thing though, I found extremely intriguing the inclusion and order of the sections. On the surface, it seems the section "Of Analphabetic Rabbis and Conceited Scholars" has really nothing to do with the nicely put progression of the rest.

- In fact, *what* is its relation with the rest?
- Furthermore, why put the former in the beginning, and the latter *Oedipal Paul* at the end?
- Or why include it at all?
- *What* is Faur trying to point to?
- Are they both two and the same?
- Is this really an outright and ripping criticism to Western civilization, or else?
- I guess we all have to make our own process of *a sacar! a juntar!* after all.
- You be the judge!

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### Notes

1. A Review of José Faur, *The Naked Crowd* (Fort Lee, NJ: Derusha Publishing, 2009) 231 pp.