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## THE RELIGIOUS PHILOSOPHY OF RABBI JOSEPH SOLOVEITCHIK

### INTRODUCTION

The almost total absence of any serious critical discussion of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik's religious thought has often been lamented. Various reasons have been offered, in particular, the fact that he has published so little.<sup>1</sup> Rather than take up the lament yet once again, I would like to make a modest effort to partially fill this scholarly gap.

This essay attempts to present a rounded picture of Rabbi Soloveitchik's religious philosophy, using as a framework the typology developed in his article *The Lonely Man of Faith* and filling in the framework by drawing upon his other essays, in particular his classic essay *Ish ha-Halakhah*<sup>2</sup> and various of his unpublished addresses. More specifically, it intends to show how the halakhic personality, the "man of halakhah," as Rabbi Soloveitchik has portrayed him, both as a *lomed Torah*, an halakhic scholar, and as a *shomer mitzvot*, an observer of the commandments, fits into the typology developed in *The Lonely Man of Faith*.

"The Lonely Man of Faith,"<sup>3</sup> develops a typology of the religious personality based on the two creation stories in Genesis. Rejecting the documentary hypothesis which attributes the two creation stories to two different sources, Rabbi Soloveitchik sees in them the creation of two different basic human types, Adam the first and Adam the second.<sup>4</sup>

Adam the first is majestic man. Through his "majestic posture *vis-à-vis* his environment," through his domination and conquest of the world about him (*ve-kivshuhah*) he achieves dig-

nity and glory and becomes responsible for his own fate and destiny. The term "image of God" (*tzelem E-lohim*) in the first creation story refers to man's "inner charismatic endowment as a creative being."<sup>5</sup> The mathematical physicist who constructs an abstract formal world of mathematical equations parallel to the qualitative world that our senses encounter is the exemplar, *par excellence*, of Adam the first. He is a creator on two levels. First, he has created his own formal-mathematical world and second, through creating and manipulating that world which duplicates the natural world, he is able to control, fashion, and shape nature for his own purposes.<sup>6</sup>

In order to achieve a dignified existence, Adam the first creates not only scientific systems but norms, laws, religious values and concepts, and works of beauty. Indeed, even in his theoretical, ethical, and religious creations, Adam the first is primarily a creative esthete, since he is motivated, in all of his creations, by the idea of the pleasant.

This emphasis on creativity as the key characteristic of Adam the first would appear to stem from the influence of Hermann Cohen and the Neo-Kantians on Rabbi Soloveitchik. In Cohen's philosophy it is man who is the creator of the worlds in which he lives. The world of science is a product of man's thought; the world of ethics, including religion, is a product of man's will; and the world of aesthetics is a product of man's feelings.<sup>8</sup>

For Rabbi Soloveitchik, Adam the first's existence is a surface one. He possesses no in-depth awareness of uniqueness of self. His existence is directed toward the mastery of his surroundings. The society in which he lives is functional and utilitarian in nature. It is formed by the cooperation of the many for the conquest of nature. There is no real communication between the persons in this community, only joint and concerted action.<sup>9</sup>

Despite the surface quality of Adam the first's existence Rabbi Soloveitchik grants religious value and significance to him, to this man come of age, man in control of his own environment, and, consequently, his own destiny. For Adam the first in mastering his environment both realizes his humanity, his "image of God," as well as fulfills the Divine mandate to subdue the world.<sup>9a</sup>

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If the portrait of Adam the first reflects the influence of Hermann Cohen, the portrait of Adam the second is painted in heavily existentialist brush strokes.

Adam the second is aware of his own existence as a unique in-depth experience. For him "to be" means "to be the only one, singular, and different and, consequently, lonely."<sup>10</sup> Adam the second's loneliness, thus, results from his awareness of his uniqueness and exclusiveness.

Adam the second seeks a redeemed existence, that is life within that type of a community that will enable him to overcome his existential loneliness and communicate with others. Such a community is the covenantal faith community—composed of an "I," a "thou," and a "He," God, Himself.<sup>11</sup> Man's posture in this community is characterized by submission and retreat, in contradistinction to man's majestic, conquering posture in the functional-utilitarian work community. What is required of Adam the second as a member of the covenantal-faith community, if he is to be redeemed from his solitude, is the redemptive, sacrificial act.<sup>12</sup>

The covenantal community is established through the mediums of prophecy and prayer. A confrontation between God and man takes place, with God confronting man as "Thou" as "Father, Brother, and Friend." There is unity among the members of this community, the prophet being the spokesman of the many anonymous "they" for whom the message is intended and prayer being founded in human solidarity and sympathy. The confrontation with God is crystallized and objectified in a normative ethico-moral message which addresses itself to the entire community. This message demands total sacrificial commitment of man to God and to fellow man.<sup>13</sup>

It is at this point that communication between man and man can take place. In the majestic community all that man has at his disposal for communicating to his fellow is words. But, for Rabbi Soloveitchik, words "reflect not the unique and the intimate but the universal and public in man."<sup>14</sup> Only within the covenantal faith community,

only when God emerged from the transcendent darkness of He—

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anonymity into the illumined spaces of community knowability and charged man with an ethico-moral mission did Adam *absconditus* and Eve *abscondita* while revealing themselves to God in prayer and unqualified commitment—also reveal themselves to each other in sympathy and love on the one hand and common action on the other . . . The community of the committed became a community of friends.<sup>15</sup>

In a recent address,<sup>16</sup> Rabbi Soloveitchik has added one new feature to his Adamic typology. The relationship of Adam the first to God is that of a son to a father. The father raises his son to become independent of him. Similarly just as God is creator so he desires man to be creator. God as father wants Adam the first to emerge from his childhood and become independent, responsible for his own destiny. The relationship of Adam the second to God is that of a child to his mother. The mother, in Rabbi Soloveitchik's view, can never forget that the child was once part of her and, thus, always sees him as a little child. The child-mother relationship is an intimate, emotional, direct one. It is a relationship of dependence. Similarly, the relationship between God and Adam the second is direct, personal, intimate, with Adam the second adopting a posture of dependence *vis-à-vis* God. We must, therefore, slightly revise one of Rabbi Soloveitchik's statements in "The Lonely Man of Faith." Adam the second meets God not as "father, brother and friend" but rather as mother. This father-mother dualism, as we shall see, reappears when Rabbi Soloveitchik deals with the various stages of Torah study.

No doubt, in the light of Rabbi Soloveitchik's portrait of Adam the second, Adam the first assumes a secular appearance indeed. And, yet, Rabbi Soloveitchik, with his acute ability to perceive religious significance in ostensibly secular categories, insists that both Adams, Adam the first as well as Adam the second, are *religious* personality types. Therefore, the man of faith must "oscillate between majesty and covenant" and this oscillation "is not a dialectical but rather a complementary movement."<sup>17</sup> Indeed, though these two communities are so typologically distinct and disparate they are united in one aspect, the ethico-moral norm.

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The norm which originates in the covenantal community addresses itself almost exclusively to the majestic community where its realization takes place.<sup>18</sup>

Paradoxically, however, it is precisely his demand that the man of faith oscillate between majesty and covenant that, in the final turn of the argument, places Rabbi Soloveitchik in the existentialist camp after all. Here I believe we come to the central, most novel and incisive point of the essay. For in Rabbi Soloveitchik's view it is this oscillation which prevents man from achieving full redemption from his ontological loneliness.

Had God placed Adam in the majestic community only, then Adam would . . . never be aware of existential loneliness. The sole problem would be that of aloneness-one that majestic Adam could resolve. Had God, *visa versa*, thrust Adam into the covenantal community exclusively, then he would be beset by the passional experience of existential loneliness and also provided with the means of finding redemption from this experience through his covenantal relation to God and to his fellow man. However, God, in His inscrutable wisdom, has decreed differently. Man discovers his loneliness in the covenantal community and before he is given a chance to climb up to the high level of a complete, covenantal revealed existence dedicated in faith to God and in sympathy to man, man of faith is pushed into a new community where he is told to lead an expanded surface existence rather than a covenantal, concentrated in-depth-existence. Because of this onward movement from center to center, man does not feel at home in any community. He is commanded to move on before he . . . strikes roots in either of these communities. And so the ontological loneliness of the man of faith persists.<sup>19</sup>

In these few, brief, highly concentrated lines, Rabbi Soloveitchik, because he gives majestic man his due, arrives at a truly tragic existentialist position. For if the man of faith were merely modelled along existentialist lines (*à la* Kierkegaard who, in his either-or philosophy, built faith on the ruins of majesty),<sup>20</sup> then he could be redeemed from his existential loneliness. It is because the man of faith must perform the majestic gesture as well as the sacrificial gesture that he is fated to endure that loneliness. Only the patriarchs and Moses achieved full redemption since they were *simultaneously* involved in both communities, majestic and covenantal.<sup>21</sup> Full redemption for all mankind will

only come in the end of days when there will be established "a united majestic-covenantal community in which all opposites will be reconciled and absolute harmony will prevail."<sup>22</sup>

## II

In the article "Ish Ha-halakhah," the halakhic personality—both as halakhic scholar and as observer of the commandments—is an Adam the first religious-personality type. The halakhic personality on all levels is a creator, a *yotzer*.

First let us examine the halakhic personality as a scholar. Rabbi Soloveitchik, in one of his most brilliant insights, demonstrates that a basic similarity exists between the halakhist and the mathematical physicist with respect to their system-building and modes of perceiving the natural-sense world. The mathematical physicist in order to understand the world of sense

builds an idealistic world, ordered and fixed . . . creates for himself an idealistic *à priori* creation . . . And when he wishes to approach reality and use his *à priori* idealistic system within the boundaries of physical reality, he approaches it with the *à priori* system already at hand . . .<sup>23</sup>

Similarly, the halakhist in approaching and understanding the world also approaches it with an *à priori* system.

The essence of the Halakhah . . . is the creation of an ideal world and the perception of the relationship that exists between it and reality in all of its manifestations . . . There is no phenomenon, event, creature for which the *à prioristic* Halakhah does not have an idealistic standard of judgment.<sup>24</sup>

The Halakhah, in this view, is not merely a set of norms, rules of conduct but also a logical, conceptual structure possessing cognitive significance. Laws are converted into general epistemological and ontological principles. The Halakhah, then, is not only normative in nature but speculative as well. It speaks to our understanding as well as our will. The various halakhic spatial categories, for example, such as four cubits, *ten tefakhim*, *three tefakhim*, the bent wall, the imaginary vertical extension

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of the edge of the roof, etc. are not merely categories which are to be used in building a *sukkah* or an *erub* on *Shabbat* but, also, are modes of perceiving and organizing space, similar to the various principles of Euclidean or Non-Euclidean geometry.<sup>25</sup> The sunset on the Day of Atonement is objectively (if non-naturally) different from other sunsets, since that sunset grants us atonement for our sins ("The end of the day atones").<sup>26</sup> Atonement, holiness, and all other halakhic categories are rooted in the natural-sense world.<sup>27</sup> And the natural-sense world is only of interest to the halakhist insofar as it is possible to apply halakhic categories to it<sup>28</sup> just as the natural-sense world is only of interest to the scientist insofar as it is possible to apply scientific categories to it.<sup>29</sup> But just as the scientist attempts to embrace all natural phenomena within his *a priori* system so too does the halakhist.<sup>30</sup> Both seek to understand, though, to be sure, we should not forget that the halakhist's categories are normative as well as speculative.<sup>31</sup>

At this point, we may question Rabbi Soloveitchik's equation. The system of abstract mathematical relations of the scientist is a system that he has created by himself. The halakhic system, however, according to tradition, was revealed by God to the Jewish people. How, then, can Rabbi Soloveitchik assert that the halakhist creates his own ideal *a priori* world?

But we may ask further. Is it true that the scientist creates his own world? An empiricist description of the scientific enterprise would, surely, deny such a contention.

Rabbi Soloveitchik's position on this entire question can only be understood, I believe, in the light of Hermann Cohen's philosophy of science.

For Cohen, thought produces everything out of itself . . . According to Cohen sensation merely describes the problem posed to thought. Sensation demands something, it signifies a claim but it cannot satisfy this claim from its own resources. Pure thought must come to its aid.

"Sensations stammers; thought must first supply the word; sensation evokes the dark impulse; but only thought can illuminate its direction."

Thus thought "constructs" the world of objects. The objects of

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thought, of course, are not identical with things in everyday life. The scientific object, the electron, for example, is constituted by the network of laws and internal-relations of science.<sup>32</sup>

Rabbi Soloveitchik, unquestionably, subscribes to this view but would qualify the universality of this Neo-Kantian description of the scientific process by claiming that it only applies to modern science, as shaped by Galileo and Newton, and not to medieval Aristotelian science. Aristotelian science tried to understand the world in its terms, that is in terms of qualities. Aristotelian science was not creative but rather classified and organized the sense-data that natural phenomena pour forth.<sup>33</sup> The Galilean-Newtonian revolution was set into motion by the construction of abstract-formal mathematical systems in terms of which natural-sense phenomena could be explained. Thus the scientist no longer explains the world in its own terms but constructs his own terms and modes of discourse and understanding.<sup>34</sup> The world of science, in this sense, as a world of mathematical equations can, indeed, be said to be the product of man's thought.

Rabbi Soloveitchik is of the opinion that his grandfather Rabbi Hayim Soloveitchik introduced a revolution in the study of Halakhah comparable to the Galilean-Newtonian revolution in science.<sup>35</sup> Before Rabbi Hayim, halakhists studied and explained the Halakhah in its own terms: organizing, classifying, resolving difficulties and problems. Rabbi Hayim, however, created a whole system of abstract concepts by means of which he explained and understood the Halakhah. Before Rabbi Hayim, halakhists merely dealt with the technical and external aspects of many areas of the law, for example, the laws of prayer, *kashrut*, documents, among others. It was Rabbi Hayim who created conceptual structures into which these laws could be integrated and in the light of which their inner logic would become clear.<sup>36</sup> In the place of conglomerations of diverse, seemingly unconnected laws, Rabbi Hayim introduced unified logical structures. Rabbi Soloveitchik, no doubt partially motivated by family pride, is quite emphatic on this point. He writes:

Torah scholars used to denigrate those who studied the laws of



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*kashrut*. Only those who were about to enter the rabbinate would study this area. Who could guess that the day would come [when Rabbi Hayim would arrive on the scene] and these laws would be freed from the bonds of facticity, external and common-sense explanations, and become transformed into abstract concepts, logically connected ideas that would link together to form a unified system . . . Suddenly the pots and the pans, the eggs and the onions disappeared from the laws of meat and milk; the salt, the blood, and the spit disappeared from the laws of salting. The laws of *kashrut* were taken out of the kitchen and removed to an ideal halakhic world . . . constructed out of complexes of abstract concepts.<sup>37</sup>

In the light of this, the initial comparison between the scientist and the halakhist should compare the scientist-world relationship with the halakhist-Halakhah relationship.<sup>38</sup> As the scientist creates mathematical equations out of his own autonomous reason to answer the problems posed by the world, so the halakhist creates abstract concepts out of his autonomous reason to answer the problems posed by the revealed Halakhah. A second comparison then follows between the scientist-world relationship and the halakhist-world relationship, for both the scientist and the halakhist approach the world in terms of their *à priori* creations.

Rabbi Soloveitchik's emphasis on the objective nature of the Halakhah and his description of it as a self-contained conceptual system is well-taken. Students of the history of Halakhah have begun to realize that halakhic categories cannot be reduced to social or economic ones but must be judged on their own terms.<sup>39</sup> Jewish law has, of course, responded to external challenges but it has responded in accordance with its own immanent logic and rules of development. Rabbi Soloveitchik's analogy between Halakhah and mathematical physics is, thus, apt and enlightening.

Nevertheless it would appear that Rabbi Soloveitchik, at times, presses this analogy too hard. For the Halakhah while essentially objective and self-contained is neither wholly objective nor entirely self-contained, unlike mathematical physics. It is not wholly objective for certain important halakhic categories are inherently subjective, e.g., "her ways are ways of pleasantness," "ways of peace" etc. Such categories can only be defined and

applied on the basis of general non-halakhic value judgments.<sup>40</sup> Nor is the Halakhah entirely self-contained for many conceptual realms impinge upon it and affect major halakhic decisions, e.g. *aggadah*, *kabbalah*, philosophy, science, etc. Surely Maimonides's philosophical convictions affected many of his halakhic decisions, as Professor Isadore Twersky, among others, has convincingly shown.<sup>40a</sup> Professor Gershom Scholem<sup>41</sup> has described, in his clear and penetrating fashion, the role of *kabbalah* in forming and influencing Halakhah. Indeed, the question as to how wide or restricted a role philosophy or *kabbalah* should have in halakhic decisions is a recurrent theme in the history of Halakhah.<sup>42</sup> The same considerations apply, equally well, to *aggadah* and science.<sup>43</sup> Rabbi Soloveitchik's position, then, while basically valid, needs to be qualified.

The halakhist because he experiences the Halakhah as his own creation does not, Rabbi Soloveitchik contends, view it as an alien law imposed upon him from the outside. Rather,

one who occupies himself with the *Torah* and creates within it enjoys perfect freedom . . . for this [halakhic] world is his possession.<sup>44</sup>

Here, I believe, Rabbi Soloveitchik fails to distinguish clearly between the study and observance of Halakhah. It is one thing to say that the halakhist when studying the *Torah* experiences the Halakhah as his own creation and possession. It is quite another matter to say that when the halakhist has to put the commandments into practice he does not feel any compulsion whatsoever. Rabbi Soloveitchik writes,

The great Jewish scholars did not experience the same struggle with their evil desires (*yetzer ha-ra*) that the Christian saints underwent.<sup>45</sup>

But does not the Talmud state, "The greater the man the greater his *yetzer hara*?"<sup>46</sup> Rabbi Soloveitchik, in this instance, appears to have overlooked the gap existing between knowledge and action.<sup>47</sup>

The adjectives that Rabbi Soloveitchik uses to describe the personality of the halakhic scholar are very revealing: master, powerful, creator, autonomous, independent, etc.<sup>48</sup>

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The halakhic scholar merits these adjectives primarily on two accounts. First he has succeeded in creating, out of his own reason, a bold all-embracing ideal halakhic world. Second, the halakhist, by means of this ideal halakhic world, transforms all natural phenomena into objects of his intellect and, thus, becomes the master over these phenomena. Rabbi Soloveitchik writes,

The mysterious relationship that exists between the subject who knows and the object which is known, even though it is logical and not psychological, results, in any event, in man's viewing himself as master and ruler with respect to that which is about to be comprehended. The subject rules over the object, the person over the thing. Knowledge by definition, is the subjugation of the object to the mastery of the subject.<sup>49</sup>

Knowledge, then, is power, not in the Baconian sense that knowledge brings in its wake technological progress, but, rather, in the sense that intellectual mastery of a phenomenon results in the psychological feeling of possessing and owning that phenomenon.

In this context Rabbi Soloveitchik makes a very fascinating comparison between Rabbi Hayim and Tolstoy with respect to their attitudes toward death.<sup>50</sup> Just as Tolstoy conquered his fear of death by making it an *object* of his artistic creation so Rabbi Hayim conquered his fear of death by making it an object of his halakhic creation. Rabbi Soloveitchik relates that when Rabbi Hayim felt the fear of death approaching him he used to devote himself totally to the study of the very complex and difficult laws governing the ritual impurity of the dead. As death, the most terrifying phenomena of all, is tamed by being integrated into the artistic structure of *The Death of Ivan Ilyitch*, so is it tamed by being integrated into the legal structure of a novella of Rabbi Hayim.

This, then, is the picture of the halakhic scholar as it emerges from "Ish-Ha-halakhah." The picture is clearly patterned along the lines of the scientific personality. The halakhist like the scientist, becomes a prime example of man come of age, of the individual whose autonomous reason creates bold systems of

thought and imposes these systems upon nature in all her complexity.

In a more recent essay, however, "Al Ahavat Ha-Torah U-Geulat Nefesh Hador,"<sup>51</sup> Rabbi Soloveitchik introduces a significant modification into this picture. The halakhic scholar, in this essay, is not only an Adam the first figure but an Adam the second figure as well. There are two stages, now, in the development of the halakhic scholar. The first is the Adam the first—the stage that was described in "Ish Ha-halakhah." Here, as we have seen, the Halakhah is an object of the halakhist's intellect. The halakhist demonstrates his strength and intellectual greatness by creating magnificent halakhic structures. His relationship with God is an intellectual one—his contact with God being established through understanding His wisdom and will. At this point, however, Rabbi Soloveitchik proceeds beyond this already familiar portrait. Once the halakhist has achieved full intellectual mastery of the Halakhah, once he has reached the level of creating magnificent halakhic structures, a paradoxical transformation takes place. The halakhist changes from an Adam the first type to an Adam the second type. The magnificent halakhic structures that the halakhist has created become transformed from objects of his intellect to inspiring visions appealing to his emotions. The Halakhah is no longer a body of concepts but a living experience. The Torah no longer remains centered in man's mind but enters his heart. In this stage man's relationship to the Torah is no longer an active, creative relationship in which his intellectual greatness shines forth. Rather, he becomes receptive and opens his heart to the emotion-inspiring vision that proceeds to fill it.<sup>52</sup> Similarly, man in his relationship to God is no longer the intellectually independent student who studies his teacher's wisdom but rather resembles the small child who is enveloped in the warm protecting arms of his mother.<sup>53</sup> Here the image of God as mother in the Adam the second—God relationship appears quite clearly. And, by implication, God, in the Adam the first—God relationship, in this essay, is conceived in the image of a father. For it is the father who, according to Jewish law, is obliged to be the primary teacher of his son. And it is the father's wish that the son should

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come to possess intellectual creativity and autonomy.

### III

The *shomer mitzvot*, the observer of the commandments, as portrayed in "Ish Ha-halakhah," is, like the halakhic scholar in that essay, also an Adam the first type. He too is a creator which, as we have seen, is the primary role of Adam the first. This creation takes place on two levels. First, the *shomer mitzvot* completes the creation of the world that God has left incomplete when

He realizes the ideal Halakhah in the real world . . . when he concentrates transcendence in the midst of our incomplete world.<sup>54</sup>

In particular the halakhic ideals of justice and righteousness are to be implemented in the world with all of their explosive force. "The realization of the ideal of justice constitutes the fulfillment of the duty of creation that was placed on man."<sup>55</sup> In this connection, Rabbi Soloveitchik relates the following tale about his grandfather:

Once Rabbi Hayim was asked what was the function of a Rabbi. He replied: "To redress the grievances of those who are abandoned and alone; to protect the dignity of the poor and to save the oppressed from the hands of the oppressor."<sup>56</sup>

It is particularly here that Rabbi Soloveitchik shows himself to be alive to the dimensions of secularity that the modern experience has uncovered and to their religious possibilities. The conventional religionist, the *Ish-Ha-dat*, attempts to reach God by rising up from the sense world to the realms of transcendence.<sup>57</sup> The halakhic personality, to the contrary, through the realization of the ideal halakhic world in the center of reality, brings transcendence downward.

The halakhic personality differs from both the religious personality who rebels against the rule of concrete reality and seeks refuge in a world of transcendence and from the scientist who is unconcerned with the existence of realms of transcendence. The halakhic person-

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ality recognizes the existence of transcendent realms but instead of fleeing to them, rather, lowers them to himself. Instead of raising up the lower world to higher realms, he brings down the higher realms to this lower world . . . The religious personality ascends to God. God, however, descends to the halakhic personality.<sup>58</sup>

Holiness does not consist in escape from the world but, rather, in its sanctification through the practical application of the Halakhah to every aspect of reality.

Holiness, according to the viewpoint of the Halakhah is created by the appearance of a distant lofty transcendence in the midst of our physical world, by the "descent" of God, who is totally incomprehensible, to Mount Sinai, by the imposition of a hidden concealed world upon the face of reality . . . An individual does not become holy through metaphysical attachment to the hidden, nor through mystical union with the infinite . . . but, rather, through his corporeal existence, his bodily actions and *through fulfilling his task of realizing Halakhah in the sense-world* . . . Holiness is realized through a life ordered and fixed in accordance with the Halakhah, is manifested in the observance of the laws governing illicit relations, forbidden foods, etc.<sup>59</sup>

Indeed, the ideal halakhic world was only created in order to be realized in the real world.<sup>60</sup> And this realization of the Halakhah cannot be limited to narrow segments of reality but must embrace life in its totality.

The synagogue is not the center of the Jewish religion . . . [For] the Halakhah, which brings the Divine presence into the midst of the world of the senses, of physical concrete reality . . . the true temple is the sphere of our daily, mundane activities and existence, for it is there that the Halakhah is realized.

In *fine*, we may say that the *shomer mitzvot*, the observer of the commandments, for Rabbi Soloveitchik, does not meet God by turning *away from* the world but, rather, encounters His presence by turning *to* and acting *in* the world.<sup>62</sup>

Rabbi Soloveitchik sums up his viewpoint on this issue very succinctly with an equation:

the realization of Halakhah = the concentration of transcendence in this world = holiness = creation.<sup>63</sup>

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Second, both aspects of the halakhic personality, that of halakhic scholar and that of observant Jew, merge in the task of self-creation. "The most fundamental principle of all is that man must create himself."<sup>64</sup> A person must not be an *Ish Ha-min*, a mere random example of the biological species subject to the iron laws of cause and effect, subject to a mechanical and mindless determinism,<sup>65</sup> but through an act of will on his part must become a free and self-determining *Ish Ha-E-lohim*, a godly individual.<sup>66</sup> In his development of the concept of the self-determining personality, Rabbi Soloveitchik, as he himself admits, has been influenced by Scheler and Heidegger,<sup>67</sup> though he, unlike them, gives the concept of self-creation an ethical emphasis.<sup>68</sup>

This concept of self-creation involves primarily two inter-related aspects of man's conception and utilization of time. First the self-determining individual does not allow the past to, univocally, determine the present and the future. True, every cause has its effect, every act its repercussions—Rabbi Soloveitchik does not advocate a total rejection of determinism—but the individual can mold and shape the effect of his past deeds. Thus, a resolve, on man's part, for the future, can change the course and direction of the past. This is the concept of *Teshuvah*: the future enters into the present and changes past misdeeds into a source of merit and good.<sup>69</sup> Sin will inexorably sever a man from God, but precisely in the moment of separation he may yearn for God as he has never yearned before, and so achieve a relationship of closeness that he never achieved before. The sin, then, through man's resolve, becomes a source for a more intensified relationship with God.<sup>70</sup>

Since the self-creating individual is able to shape time he experiences it in a unique way. For him the past is not dead, the future unborn, and the present a fleeting moment. Rather, as we have seen, the future enters into the present and changes the past, thus enabling the past to become a source of merit for the future. Past, present and future form one unity—a unity possessing ethical and religious dimensions.<sup>71</sup>

Second, the self-creating individual, in his present moment, not only experiences his own individual past and future as his

possession, but in addition, possesses the collective historical past of the Jewish people, as well as its eschatological vision of the future. The individual, by means of the Halakhah, both its study and its observance, integrates himself into the collectivity of the Jewish people, into its history, past, present and future. For him eternity has entered into time.<sup>72</sup>

I believe that Rabbi Soloveitchik no longer views *Shmirat Ha-Mitzvot*, observance of the commandments, solely from the purview of creation, either creation and perfection of the world or self-creation, though for this interpretation I am forced to depend on his unpublished addresses.

Rabbi Soloveitchik's present approach, it appears to me, tends to distinguish between the "ethical" *mitzvot* and the "ritual" *mitzvot*. As we have already pointed out, Rabbi Soloveitchik is of the opinion that the "ethico-moral norm addresses itself almost exclusively to the majestic community where its realization takes place." He seems to feel, however, that "ritual" *mitzvot* are essentially sacrificial acts, whereby the individual humbly and unreservedly submits to the will of God.

Rabbi Soloveitchik has developed this concept of the sacrificial act with respect to the *mitzvot* of *shabbat*, *kashrut*, and, in particular, with respect to the *mitzvah* of *taharat ha-mishpakhah* (the laws of family purity) since that commandment, for him, is the exemplar, *par excellence*, of the sacrificial, almost irrational, act.<sup>73</sup> In order to underscore the sacrificial nature of the observance of *taharat ha-mishpakhah*, he has often quoted and, dramatically—at times melodramatically—elaborated upon the well-known *midrash* on the phrase "hedged about with roses" from the Song of Songs.

The groom enters the bridal chamber filled with love and yearning for his bride. As he approaches her she tells him "I have seen a speck of blood the size of a mustard seed." Immediately he turns away. Did a snake bite him?! Did a scorpion sting him?! Rather, the words of the Torah which are as a hedge of roses.<sup>74</sup>

The Adam the first and Adam the second personality types, then, in the halakhic scholar, manifest themselves in a sequential dialectical manner while the *shomer mitzvot*, the observant Jew,



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in his observance of certain *mitzvot* plays the Adam the first role, and in his observance of other *mitzvot*, the Adam the second role.

We can see that while in "Ish Ha-halakhah," Rabbi Soloveitchik was primarily under the influence of the Neo-Kantianism with its emphasis on man's cultural and scientific creativity, in his later essays he has come increasingly under existentialist influence with its emphasis on loneliness, inter-personal dialogue, the sacrificial non-rational act, etc.

Or, to sum up the matter typologically, the halakhic personality in "Ish Ha-halakhah" is an Adam the first personality type; the halakhic personality, in Rabbi Soloveitchik's present thinking, incorporates within himself both the Adam the first and Adam the second personality types.<sup>75</sup>

Rabbi Soloveitchik's religious philosophy, in its main outlines, then, is fairly clear. Nevertheless, it is incomplete. Indeed, considering its almost exclusive concentration on man, we are led to agree with Eugene Borowitz's description of his thought as a phenomenology of the religious personality,<sup>76</sup> rather than as a philosophy or theology. Such major theological topics as God, revelation, providence, while touched upon tangentially, never receive systematic treatment.

Nevertheless we must appreciate what Rabbi Soloveitchik has offered us. For despite various problems and lacunae that exist in his writings, he has constructed a religious philosophy that comes to grips with both the secularity of modern man and his existential loneliness and anxiety. And he has pioneered in the long neglected area of the philosophy of Halakhah insisting upon the integrity of the Halakhah, both in its theoretical and practical aspects, as an autonomous religious structure, while at the same time just as strongly insisting that the Halakhah must and can speak to the present human condition in all its complexity, absurdity and grandeur.

### NOTES

1. See Eugene Borowitz, *A New Jewish Theology in the Making* (Philadelphia, 1968), pp. 160-173 and Lou H. Silberman, "Concerning Jewish Theology

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in North America's: Some Notes on a Decade," in *American Jewish Yearbook*, 1969, pp. 50-54.

2. To avoid confusion I shall refer to Rabbi Soloveitchik's article "Ish ha-Halakhah," by its title but shall refer to the *ish ha-Halakhah* described within that article as "The halakhic personality."

3. "The Lonely Man of Faith," in *TRADITION*, Spring, 1965, pp. 5-67.

4. *Ibid.*, pp. 10-11. For a discussion of Rabbi Soloveitchik's typological method and his philosophic use of Biblical texts, see the above cited studies of Borowitz and Silberman.

5. *Ibid.*, pp. 11-15.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 15.

7. *Ibid.*

8. The subject of Rabbi Soloveitchik's doctoral thesis was "Das Reine Denken und die Seinkonstituierung bei Hermann Cohen" (Berlin, 1932). I hope to give a full account of Cohen's influence on Rabbi Soloveitchik at some later date.

9. "Lonely Man of Faith," pp. 19-23.

9a. *Ibid.*, pp. 13, 16, 18, 54.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 27.

11. *Ibid.*, pp. 28-30.

12. *Ibid.*, pp. 26-27.

13. *Ibid.*, pp. 33-43.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 44.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 45.

16. Address delivered March 10, 1968, at Yeshiva University on the occasion of the first anniversary of the death of Rabbi Soloveitchik's wife, Mrs. Tonya Soloveitchik.

17. "The Lonely Man of Faith," p. 51.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 52.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 55.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 61, note \*.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 52, note \*.

22. *Ibid.*, p. 55, note \*.

23. "Ish ha-Halakhah," pp. 663-664.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 665.

25. *Ibid.*, pp. 665-667.

26. *Ibid.*, p. 676.

27. *Ibid.*, pp. 665-666, 675-676.

28. *Ibid.*, p. 665, cf. "Mah Dodekh Mi-Dod" in *Ha-Doar* (Vol. 42, No. 39), pp. 757-8.

29. "Ish ha-Halakhah," p. 664.

30. *Ibid.*, pp. 666, 671, cf. "Mah Dodekh Mi-Dod," p. 757.

31. "Ish ha-Halakhah," p. 664.

32. Samuel H. Bergman, "Hermann Cohen: The Religion of Reason from the Sources of Judaism" in *Faith and Reason: An Introduction to Modern Jewish Thought* (B'nai Brith: Washington, D.C., 1961), pp. 34-35.

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33. "Mah Dodekh Mi-Dod," p. 755.
34. *Ibid.*, p. 755.
35. *Ibid.*, p. 755.
36. *Ibid.*, pp. 755-756.
37. *Ibid.*, p. 756.
38. See Harry Wolfson, *Crescas' Critique of Aristotle* (Cambridge, Mass., 1929), pp. 25-27, cf. Isadore Twersky, *Rabad of Posquieres* (Cambridge, Mass., 1962), pp. 60-67.
39. See Gerald Blidstein, "Method in the Study of Talmud," in *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* (June, 1973), pp. 186-192.
40. See Eliezer Goldman, "Ha-Musar Ha-Dat ve-Ha-Halakhah: Chapter Three" in *Deot* (Vol. 22), pp. 65-84, cf. Eliezer Berkovitz "Authentic Judaism and Halakhah" in *Judaism* (Winter, 1970), pp. 66-76. For an example, not cited in these two articles, of a situation in which the principle of "her ways of pleasantness" plays a role in influencing halakhic *pesak*, see *Responsa of Haham Zvi*, No. 46 cited in *Sidrei Taharah on Shulkhan Arukh, Yoreh De'ah* Chapter 188, paragraph 1.
- 40a. Isadore Twersky, "Some Non-halakhic Aspects of the Mishneh Torah" in *Jewish Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, edited by Alexander Altmann (Harvard University Press: Cambridge, Mass., 1967), pp. 95-118.
41. Gershom Scholem, "Tradition and New Creation in the Ritual of the Kabbalists" in *On The Kabbalah and its Symbolism* (New York, 1969), pp. 118-157.
42. See, for example, *Responsa of Solomon Luria* No. 98 on the role that Kabbalah should play in influencing ritual.
43. See, for example, Solomon ibn Adret, *Responsa*, Vol. I, no. 98.
44. To be sure one may distinguish between halakhic scholarships *per se*, i.e., the theoretical analysis of Talmudic texts and concepts, and halakhic *pesak*, the actual process of decision-making in a particular case. The former is from a strictly juridical standpoint "purer" than the latter. When engaging in theoretical scholarship, one ought to engage in a very rigorous self-contained process of legal analysis. When engaging in *pesak* all types of technical and "extraneous" considerations, of necessity, come into play. It is no coincidence, then, that all of our citations demonstrating the presence of "subjective" elements in Halakhah pertain to the area of *pesak*. Nor is it a coincidence that Rabbi Soloveitchik is noted for his expertise in the theoretical analysis of juridical concepts and *not* for the relatively few *responsa* he has written. Perhaps, precisely because he has not engaged in *pesak* he has been free to "ignore" the subjective elements in Halakhah and focus on its rigorous objective aspects. Indeed, a number of reliable individuals have informed me that Rabbi Soloveitchik, in casual conversation, has admitted to the presence of subjective elements in the process of *pesak*.
45. "Ish ha-Halakhah," p. 692. My translation re-arranges slightly the order of the original, without affecting, I hope, its sense.
46. *Sukkah* 52a.
47. Interestingly enough, I once heard Rabbi Soloveitchik quote his grand-

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father Rabbi Hayim as saying: "By nature I am very harsh and cruel. By nature I am a *rasha* and I had to break myself to perform acts of *hesed*."

48. "Ish ha-Halakhah," pp. 665-671, 677, 691-692, 794-798, 700-702, 710-735; "*Mah Dodekh Mi-Dod*," pp. 755-757.

49. "Ish ha-Halakhah," p. 697.

50. *Ibid.*, p. 697, note 79.

51. "*Al Ahavat Ha-Torah U-Geulat Nefesh Ha-Dor*" in *Ha-Doar* (Vol. 39, No. 27), pp. 519-22.

52. *Ibid.*, pp. 519-520.

53. *Ibid.*, p. 520.

54. "Ish ha-Halakhah," pp. 716-717.

55. *Ibid.*, p. 708.

56. *Ibid.*, p. 708.

57. *Ibid.*, pp. 660-662, 677-680.

58. *Ibid.*, p. 678, cf. pp. 680, 684-686, 716-717.

59. *Ibid.*, pp. 680-681.

60. *Ibid.*, p. 671. Cf., however, p. 667 where Rabbi Soloveitchik states that the ideal halakhic forms revealed at Sinai, rather than their realization constitutes the objective of halakhic thinking. No doubt there is a tension in Rabbi Soloveitchik's thought between the cognitive and normative aspects of Halakhah but he would contend, I believe, that this tension exists in the consciousness of every concrete halakhic personality. Indeed, to use Rabbi Soloveitchik's own analogy, does not this same tension exist in the personalities of the mathematician and the physicist. At times, they take delight in the purely theoretical, almost "useless" aspects of their disciplines, while at other times they are fascinated by the powerful tools their disciplines have developed for interpreting and, more important, changing, controlling and mastering reality. We must, therefore, reject David S. Shapiro's contention ("The Ideological Foundations of the Halakhah" in *TRADITION* [Spring-Summer, 1967] p. 117 note 2) that this tension constitutes an inconsistency in Rabbi Soloveitchik's thought. On the contrary, this "inconsistency" is of the very essence of his thought.

61. *Ibid.*, p. 709.

62. Rabbi Soloveitchik's remarks about man's meeting God by turning to this world seem to be based on a doctrine of God that we may term voluntaristic immanentism. God while not naturally immanent in this world made Himself immanent in it by an act of will on His part (p. 685). This notion is, however, sketchy and not really developed.

63. "Ish ha-Halakhah," p. 717.

64. *Ibid.*, p. 718. Cf. "*Kol Dodi Dofek*" in *Torah U-Melukhah* (Jerusalem, 1961), edited by Simon Federbush, pp. 11-44, especially pp. 11-16.

65. "Ish ha-Halakhah," pp. 720-722, 724-725, 727-728.

66. *Ibid.*, p. 728. Cf. *Kol Dodi Dofek*, p. 11-14, where Rabbi Soloveitchik operates with two personality types similar to the *Ish Ha-min* and *Ish Ha-E-lohim*, viz. the *Ish Ha-goral*, the man of fate and *Ish Ha-Yiud*, man of destiny. The man of fate is an object who is acted upon. The man of destiny is

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a subject who acts.

67. *Ibid.*, pp. 720 note 113, 725 note 113a, 734 note 135.

68. *Ibid.*, pp. 734. "Man's will . . . creates for him a new free existence which is not enclosed within the general causal structure . . . The will is the source of repentance, providence, prophecy and the freedom of the spirit. However, this whole process proceeds in an ethical-halakhic spirit. Man's intellect, will, feeling and [self-] creation all must be directed in a ethical path." We note here a very strong voluntaristic strain in Rabbi Soloveitchik's anthropology, a strain that, as we saw in note 62, manifests itself in his theology as well. God created the world by an act of will and made Himself immanent in it by an act of will. Man creates himself by an act of will and meets God by an act of will. But as the quote in this note demonstrates Rabbi Soloveitchik is very careful to insist on the ethical orientation of the will. In p. 734, note 131, he strongly laments the transformation in modern times of the ethically-oriented Divine and human wills of Judaism into the "blind will" and "will-to-power" of Schopenhauer and Nietzsche.

69. *Ibid.*, pp. 720-722.

Rabbi Soloveitchik, in his description of *Teshuvah*, explicitly acknowledges his indebtedness to both Scheler and Heidegger. With respect to Scheler it is quite clear that Scheler's essay "Repentance and Rebirth" (pp. 35-65) in *On The Eternal in Man* translated from the German by Bernard Noble (London, 1960), to which Rabbi Soloveitchik makes reference, exerted a significant influence on Rabbi Soloveitchik's thinking about this question.

With respect to Heidegger, compare Rabbi Soloveitchik's definition of *Teshuvah* to the following description of Heidegger's conception of time. "The basic tense of existential time is the future. It moves not from past through present to future, but out of future through the past to the present. Reaching out of the future it turns back to assimilate the past which has made the present." "Martin Heidegger" in *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, edited by Paul Edwards (Glencoe Free Press: New York, 1967), Volume 3, pp. 459-465.

Despite Rabbi Soloveitchik's admitted indebtedness to Heidegger, which I hope to elaborate upon at some future date, he criticizes him very severely, both for his non-objectifying thinking ("The individual who frees himself from the rational principle and who rejects objective thought must eventually bring destruction to the world and *let the events of our era bear witness.*" [p. 653, note 4; italics added] ["Ish ha-Halakhah" was published in 1944]), and for his lack of ethical norms (p. 734, note 131). This critique of Heidegger, particularly in its allusion to the connection between Heidegger's Naziism ("Must eventually bring destruction to the world") and his non-objectifying thinking, adumbrates Hans Jonas' recent, but already famous critique: "Heidegger and Theology" in *The Phenomenon of Life* (New York, 1966), pp. 235-261.

70. See "The Sacred and the Profane" in *Gesher*, Vol. 3, No. 1, pp. 5-29, and "Rav Hayim Heller: Shmuel Ha-Kattan Shel Doreinu" in *Ha-Doar* (Vol. 40, no. 23), pp. 500-505, especially p. 500.

71. "Ish ha-Halakhah," pp. 720-722, 724-725, cf. "The Sacred and Profane,"

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pp. 13-15.

Rabbi Soloveitchik freely admits his indebtedness to Bergson on this point but, as usual, stresses the ethical aspect of this concept of time, in contrast to Bergson's primarily metaphysical emphasis.

72. "Ish ha-Halakhah," pp. 722-725, cf. "The Sacred and the Profane," p. 20-21.

73. Address delivered in Spring, 1966, on the occasion of the annual dinner of the *Chevre Shas* of Boston.

74. Rashi's version of the *midrash* to Song of Song's 7:3.

75. Our assertion that the halakhic personality, as described in "Ish ha-Halakhah," is solely an Adam the first type and is, thus, a *non-dialectical* personality type may seem contradicted by Rabbi Soloveitchik's own assertion in that article that the halakhic personality is a dialectical personality type, that he moves between moments of self-affirmation and self-negation, between yearning for the nearness of God and fleeing from His presence, etc. (pp. 651-654, and, particularly p. 652, note 4). But, what we are asserting is that Rabbi Soloveitchik portrayed the halakhic personality *qua* halakhic personality, i.e., *qua* *lomed torah*, and *shomer mitzvot* as an Adam the first type, as a creator in all of his activities. If the halakhic personality is a dialectical personality, it is only because, in addition to being a "pure" halakhic type he is *also* a general religious personality type. Thus, the actual concrete halakhic personality is a dialectical personality because 1) he embodies two distinct personality types within himself: the halakhic and religious personality types, and 2) because the *religious* personality type is itself a dialectical personality type (p. 652). But the pure halakhic personality type *per se* is non-dialectical in nature. Thus, Rabbi Soloveitchik (pp. 693-96) points to the concluding prayer of the Day of Atonement which in one breath quotes the verse "For man has no pre-eminence over the beast, for all is vanity" (Ecclesiastes 3:19) and in the next breath states "You have distinguished man from the beginning and have appointed him to stand in Your presence." A dialectical approach to this prayer would assent and hold on firmly to both of these perspectives about man. But such is not the approach of Rabbi Soloveitchik. He states "The man who does not live according to the Halakhah . . . is worth nothing. However, the man who knows his duty—his task as a partner in the creation of an [ideal] halakhic world and actualizing it in our [empirical] reality—has been distinguished by God from the beginning and appointed to stand in His presence" (p. 696). Again, we see how for Rabbi Soloveitchik, the halakhic personality is a being of dignity and majesty and how Biblical and Talmudic statements negating man's dignity are referred to non-halakhic personality types.

76. Borowitz, *op. cit.*, p. 169.

"The *Ish ha-Halakhah* is a mitnagged phenomenology of awesome proportions."