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## THE UNITY AND STRUCTURE OF RABBI JOSEPH B. SOLOVEITCHIK'S THOUGHT

A great thinker, especially one who expresses himself in complex and subtle language, always risks being misunderstood. This has been the fate of great philosophers of the past and it continues to be the case among contemporary thinkers as well.<sup>1</sup> The religious and philosophical thought of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik is no exception to this rule. For the most part, the literature on the Rav's work tends, with some happy exceptions, either to mindless uncritical panegyric, or else to ill-informed and even hostile criticism. One of the criticisms that has gained considerable currency is that the Rav's thought lacks a single unifying center, that it is riddled with a mass of unresolved contradictions. I propose in this paper to show that there are, in fact, a clear and integrating central focus and a fully developed methodology which together serve to unify and structure the work of the Rav, despite the diversity of style and theme which is to be found in his published writings.

### I.

Before pursuing our study it is important to call attention to certain hazards which confront students of the Rav's thought. First, it is essential to maintain a very sharp distinction between those works which were written by him and published with his authorization and all the rest of the published corpus, whether authorized, quasi-authorized, or not authorized at all. Much has appeared in Rav Soloveitchik's name which purports to be his work, but is in fact only someone else's summary or paraphrase of what they believe him to have said. The very best example of a work prepared for publication by another hand is *Al ha-Teshuvah*, a collection of the Rav's oral

discourses which were first given in Yiddish and subsequently rendered into Hebrew by Pinchas Peli. The text rings true and it is as reliable a representation of his thought as one might hope for from someone other than himself. There are, however, a number of far less reliable works which represent themselves as essays by the Rav but have been done by other people. In most cases these have been published without any proper authorization, and in some cases even against the explicit opposition of the Rav and his family. In some instances they are of poor quality and are far from meeting the standards of style, content, and ideas that are characteristic of the Rav's own work. Unhappily, far too many people presume to speak and to write in his name. However well-intended, they do a great disservice to him and to the community of students and scholars who look to him as a teacher of Judaism of unparalleled scope and depth in our generation.

Anyone who seeks to achieve a reliable understanding and appreciation of the Rav's thought should confine himself to those studies which he himself wrote and whose publication he approved.<sup>2</sup> It should always be remembered that he writes with painstaking care and that every word and phrase is carefully chosen. Language and thought are inseparably connected in his work, and one must not rely on someone else's paraphrases or summaries even when they are well done. The Rav's style of meticulously careful writing is rooted in a long tradition. The most striking post-talmudic example is Maimonides who tells us in his Introduction to the *Guide of the Perplexed* that every single word of his book has been carefully and deliberately chosen and that the organization of the entire work is consciously planned at every point. A more recent model is Rabbi Hayyim Soloveitchik, the Rav's grandfather.<sup>3</sup> As the disciple of these paradigmatic figures, the Rav devoted infinite care to his writing. It is clear that no work published under his name should be taken as a reliable source for his teachings unless it actually came from his pen and was submitted for publication with his approval. Even in cases where the actual words may be his own, as recorded on tape or even in a privately held manuscript, a work is not to be taken as authoritative unless it was published with his explicit approval. He alone is the judge of what is in a form that he considers final and ready for publication. To ignore this *caveat* is to risk drawing unfounded conclusions about the Rav's thought based on formulations that he considered not fully finished.

A second danger which confronts the student of Rav Soloveitchik's thought springs out of a certain type of interpretive literature. There are writers who claim to know the Rav's unexpressed inner thoughts, his unspoken aims and purposes, his con-

scious and unconscious motivations, and who offer accounts of his thought based on this supposed secret knowledge. There is in this style of interpretation a level of presumptuousness which is not only tasteless, but also profoundly and inexcusably misleading. Once such conjectures about private motives are expressed, they tend to assume a life of their own and to become the basis for conclusions about the meaning and import of the Rav's work. It can be demonstrated, and I shall do so later on, that these conclusions are unfounded, that they are not sustained by the texts themselves, and that they derive from the mistaken supposition of the authors that they know the inner and unexpressed dimensions of the Rav's personality and therefore understand in a uniquely accurate way what the Rav "really" was saying.<sup>4</sup> Such claims should always be treated with extreme skepticism and should never be allowed to become the basis for deciding anything at all about the Rav's teachings. Even when practiced by the most skilled and sophisticated professionals, psychohistory is a dubious and ill-founded discipline. It should have no standing as a tool for penetrating into the thought of Rav Soloveitchik. His written and spoken word are all we have. As is the case with all thinkers, even reliable memory of the spoken word will dim as time passes, and it is the written word upon which we must rely. The Rav's writings need to be studied with the care and thought that they deserve, and no psychologizing can ever be a satisfactory or responsible substitute for such study.

Another danger to be avoided is posed by interpreters who do not understand the Rav's language correctly and draw unfounded conclusions based on mistranslations of his terminology. An instructive example is to be found in the article by Singer and Sokol to which reference was made above (note 4). They address the admittedly important question of the place and function of Western philosophy in the Rav's thought. They conclude that the Rav "uses Western thought to serve his own (Jewish) theological purposes." By itself this is certainly a conclusion which is possible and which may be defensible. They go on, however, to accuse the Rav of deliberately dressing up his Jewish thinking in Western philosophical garb as a way of winning adherents to his position. It is important to see exactly how they express themselves. "Soloveitchik latches on to neo-Kantianism as a way of adding to the prestige of talmudism; he dresses up talmudism in neo-Kantian garb so as to make it more appealing to a modern, secularized audience. . . . he uses neo-Kantian philosophy *as a mere packaging device*." The authors then add with a triumphant note what they take to be the incontrovertible proof of their claim. They assure us that, "Soloveitchik himself underscores this point when he states (in a footnote in 'Halakhic Man' that has

been ignored in all discussions of his work) that he is drawing upon neo-Kantian thought so as to make talmudism more 'palatable' to the reader. Exactly!"<sup>5</sup>

The entire charge rests on a misreading and mistranslation. In the text to which the authors refer, Rav Soloveitchik tells us that he has made use of the example of philosophical idealism from Kant to Hermann Cohen and his disciples, "*kedei le-sabber et ha-ozen beniddon ish ha-halakhah, she-ein hakhmei ha-dat regilim bo.*"<sup>6</sup> The phrase, *le-sabber et ha-ozen*, certainly does not mean "to make more palatable." There is nothing sinister in the phrase, nor does it refer to some hidden propagandistic agenda. It is a standard expression which means "to make intelligible" or "to make more readily understandable." The Rav is simply saying that the concept of "halakhic man" is totally unfamiliar to people schooled exclusively in the standard literature of Western religious thought. Consequently, in order to make that concept intelligible to readers of that type, he has expressed aspects of the typology in the more familiar language of philosophical idealism. He is not engaged in some kind of vulgar packaging in order to market his ideas successfully. He is certainly not concerned to make his views more "palatable" to properly enlightened Westerners. He is just doing what any good teacher or writer does, namely, making a body of unfamiliar concepts intelligible to his audience by comparing them to that with which he presumes his audience is already acquainted.<sup>7</sup> It should be clear that the works of interpretation need to be read with the greatest care and with appropriate caution. Even seemingly scholarly interpreters can mislead their readers, especially when they are determined to make the Rav fit into their own preconceived mold.

## II.

One of the recurrent lines of criticism in some of the secondary literature is that the Rav's thought is beset by internal contradictions and conflicting purposes, that it lacks systematic unity and coherence. Here again we can find an excellent paradigm of such criticism in the article by Singer and Sokol. They assert that, "a reading of Soloveitchik's *oeuvre* makes it clear that his theological concerns . . . are characterized by tensions, polarities, and outright contradictions."<sup>8</sup> They quote a passage from "The Lonely Man of Faith" and assure us that "the Soloveitchik of the main body of 'Halakhic Man' would find this statement totally alien, while the Soloveitchik of the introduction to the essay would fully endorse it."<sup>9</sup> A superficial reading of the Rav's works might readily lend support to this picture

of a figure who is torn between opposed worlds that he cannot bring together, especially if it starts out from an erroneous set of preconceptions. These critics, like some others, see in Rav Soloveitchik a thinker who lives simultaneously in totally inconsistent and contradictory intellectual and spiritual worlds. He is, according to this view, the scion of and superb spokesman for something that they call Litvak-mitnagged talmudism which is described conventionally as coldly unfeeling in its pure intellectualism and without a shred of religious emotion or passion. At the same time he is also portrayed as an existentialist religious spirit (perhaps hasidic or quasi-hasidic), one who has the deepest religious feelings and for whom the life of the intellect alone does not answer true religious concerns. Since it is assumed that these two are intrinsically and mutually contradictory positions, it then follows, in the view of these writers, that brokenness, disunity, and systematic incoherence characterize the Rav's thought.

My primary purpose in this study is to establish and explicate the fact that, contrary to these assertions, an overarching unity of doctrine, methodology, and structure inform the Rav's thought. A sound understanding of the Rav's works will reveal in them an underlying and widely encompassing thematic and systematic unity. We must not rest with superficial first impressions. Let us begin by considering a number of general points. First, it is true that the Rav's works are written in different styles, but this is by itself hardly an indication of internal lack of unity and coherence. The style which is appropriate for *hiddushei Torah*, written in a classical mode, is hardly appropriate for a philosophical or theological essay. What is appropriate when writing systematic philosophy is not the style in which one makes a personal religious statement. From the fact that the Rav writes in different styles (although always in a way that is unmistakably his own) we can draw no conclusions about the unity or lack of unity in his thought.

Second, we need to keep in mind that not only the style but also the content of any work is determined by its particular purposes. A single thinker may very well write about different aspects of a given topic and do so from diverse perspectives and in diverse frameworks. Tone and content will reflect these variegated aims and objectives. The traditional teaching that the one divine Torah has seventy faces<sup>10</sup> is not just a rhetorical flourish. It expresses the conviction that the Torah is infinitely deep and varied, that it transcends the capacity of any person, no matter how gifted, to contain it all within a single structure. A student of the Torah can only present its teaching from particular aspects and perspectives, exhibiting and explicating some of its facets, never all of them. This is what great figures of the past

have always done, and it is characteristic of the work of Rav Soloveitchik in our own time. We know of *tannaim* and *amoraim* who were great masters of both halakhah and aggadah. Maimonides wrote his *Mishneh Torah* in a manner quite different from his *Guide of the Perplexed*, and these both differ from his style in some of his epistles or in his responsa. The style and focus of the *Shulhan Arukh ha-Rav* of Rabbi Shneur Zalman is strikingly different from his *Tanya*. In these and similar cases there may be those who will argue that we have deep internal conflicts and contradictions, but there is little evidence to support the claim.<sup>11</sup> In the case of Rav Soloveitchik, differences of style, theme, or orientation in his various works do not by themselves support the claim that his work is internally contradictory and is lacking in any systematic unity. The great talmudist, the master of halakhah, the deeply searching religious thinker, the incomparable preacher, the Jew of simple piety, are all one and they live together in a carefully nuanced and consciously forged systematic unity.

### III.

The unifying principle in all of the Rav's work is his frequently stated conviction that the only legitimate source of Jewish doctrine is the Halakhah. As he has often expressed it, "The halakhah is the objectification and crystallization of all true Jewish doctrine." In his various studies, the controlling force and focus is the Halakhah. Religious and philosophical accounts of Jewish spirituality are sound and meaningful in his view only to the extent that they derive from the Halakhah. The deepest religious emotion, the subtlest theological understanding, can only be Jewishly authentic to the extent that they arise from reflection on matters of Halakhah, and are integrated into its disciplined intellectual structure. I propose to focus on a single case which can teach us how this general rule of method is carried out in practice in the Rav's work. The case I have in mind is the Rav's treatment of the problem of evil, the fact that there is human suffering for which we can find no reason and for which we can produce no religiously satisfactory explanation. This is a classic philosophical-theological problem, one which has preoccupied religious thinkers from the Prophets down to the present. I choose this example because of its intrinsic interest and because it illuminates so well the way in which halakhic norms generate theological principles. This case is particularly useful as a paradigm since the Rav's treatment of it is frequently cited, but not always very deeply understood.

His essay, "*Kol Dodi Dofek*," opens with the statement that suffering is one of the most obscure and enigmatic phenomena that Judaism has struggled to understand from the earliest days.<sup>12</sup> The Rav rejects out of hand a number of proposed solutions to the problem of human suffering which he takes to be fundamentally in error. Prominent among these is the effort to explain away all instances of suffering by treating the very phenomenon as somehow illusory. This is the way in which some philosophers have chosen to resolve the problem. Deny the reality of suffering and the problem has been dissolved. This is a solution which the Rav considers to be so contrary to actual human experience that no one can seriously affirm it. "Evil is a fact which cannot be denied. There is evil; there is suffering, there are hellish agonies in the world. . . . One cannot overcome the reality of monstrous evil through philosophic speculation."<sup>13</sup> He argues furthermore that there is no philosophic solution to the problem of evil. Here he is responding to the long history of philosophic treatments of the subject, not one of which is finally convincing. However, he goes further and takes it to be a fundamental Jewish teaching that philosophical solutions to the problem of evil are in principle not possible. Man's view of the world is only partial. We do not grasp historical or metaphysical reality from the all-encompassing perspective of God, but only from our varying finite and limited perspectives. What may be intelligible just from the divine perspective can never be fully known by any human being, and it follows that a true philosophical answer to the riddle of why the righteous suffer can never be available even to the wisest of men. The tradition teaches us that Moses himself could not arrive at a satisfactory human answer to this agonizing question.

Rav Soloveitchik argues that according to Jewish teaching the proper question to ask is not why is there suffering in the world, but rather what is the appropriate response to the experience of suffering, an experience which no person escapes. He formulates his answer by setting forth two modes of response which he calls *goral* and *yi'ud*, which deal with that experience either as fate to be endured or as a call to destiny to be realized. The *goral* response is simply to endure the suffering and to try vainly to deal with it by way of illusory philosophical or theological solutions. The *yi'ud* response is a call to man to deal with his experience actively and creatively. In this mode one does not deny or minimize the fact of the suffering, but one asks what can I do to transform it into something positive and meaningful. Man should not be a passive object, a plaything of the various forces and events that affect him. Man is rather called upon to "transform fate into destiny, passive existence into active and effective living."<sup>14</sup> The Jew must approach his suffering with a

halakhic question, namely, what must the sufferer do to live affirmatively and creatively with his suffering.

The most fundamental question is, what obligation does suffering impose on man. Judaism was particularly concerned with this question and set it at the center of its universe of thought. The Halakhah is concerned with this question as it is with other [more familiar] halakhic questions that focus on the forbidden and the permitted, obligation and absence of obligation. We do not reflect on the mysterious ways of God, but rather on the way in which man should go when he confronts suffering. We do not ask about the cause of the evil or about its ultimate purpose, but only how we can rectify and elevate it. How shall a man behave in a time of trouble? What shall man do so as not to be destroyed by his suffering?<sup>15</sup>

Rav Soloveitchik replies to these questions with what he specifically labels a halakhic answer. The Halakhah requires man to make use of suffering creatively, not just to submit to it passively and hopelessly. It requires us to use the experience of suffering to elevate ourselves, to refine ourselves, to increase our sensitivity, in short, to make ourselves better human beings than we were before.

The great model which exemplifies this response to suffering is Job. The Rav points out the crucial difference between Job before his suffering and after, a point that has gone largely unnoticed. Before his suffering Job is ego-centered. He prays only for himself and his children. When he becomes the victim of great catastrophe, he can make no sense of it. He only continues to affirm his own righteousness and to demand a coherent explanation of his suffering. All of his philosophizing leads him nowhere, until he finally shifts from the attitude of *goral* to that of *yi'ud*. He stops justifying himself and demanding explanations, but instead uses his suffering to elevate himself to a higher plane. It is only at this point that things turn in a new direction. As the biblical text notes at the end of the long Job episode, God rebuked Job's friends for their attempts to give a theological explanation of Job's suffering. He says to Eliphaz, "I am incensed at you and your two friends, for you have not spoken the truth about Me as did My servant Job." They are instructed to offer up sacrifices so that Job might pray for them. The biblical text then notes, "The Lord restored Job's fortunes when he prayed on behalf of his friends." Here we have the transformed Job who prays for his friends with the same concern and the same fervor that he had previously extended only to his own children. The critical point is that Job's suffering becomes meaningful only when it serves to make him a more sensitive, less self-centered person than he was before. The pain he endured was real. His attempts to account for it philosophically were futile. The only positive outcome of his experience is that he learned to use his suffering affirmatively and creatively



to transform his character and to make himself a more virtuous human being. His human concerns now extended beyond the narrow circle of his family to encompass other human beings in need of his compassionate help. This is the model which the Rav proposes should guide us whenever we confront our own pain.

The question which arises at this point is whether a response in accordance with the Jobian model has anything to do with the Halakhah. Despite the invocation of the Halakhah, it would appear that we have here a brilliant and moving proposal for dealing with suffering, but we do not see initially its relevance to or dependence on the Halakhah. However, further study will show that what we have here is one of the most clear and explicit cases in which important religious doctrine emerges from a proper understanding of the Halakhah. The Rav bases his views on his understanding of the Mishnah which teaches, "Man is obligated to bless God for the evil which befalls him, just as he is obligated to bless God for the good that befalls him."<sup>16</sup> The point of this halakhic prescription requires explication.

We need first to understand what the significance of *berakhah* is. For this purpose we must grasp a principle which is deeply rooted in the Rav's halakhic analysis. In the act of doing a mitzvah there are, according to him, two elements. The first is the *pe'ulat ha-mitzvah*, that is the purely technical performance of the act which is required. I am obligated to put on *tefillin* each week day, and there are many rules with respect to the correct way to perform this action. The *tefillin* themselves must be constructed in a particular way, otherwise the performance is invalid. They must be put on in the way that is prescribed by law, and at a time which is prescribed by law. This and much more is included in *pe'ulat ha-mitzvah*, the technical performance of the set of actions required by the Halakhah. To perform these actions properly is a necessary condition for the fulfillment of the *mitzvah*. I do not fulfill the halakhic obligation unless I have done these actions in the prescribed way. Exalted thoughts, even the highest level of theological speculation, are no substitute for performing the required action. However, doing the act correctly is only part of what is involved in fulfilling a divine commandment. It is a necessary condition, and it may even be counted as formally satisfactory, but it is not the totality of a proper halakhic performance.

The other element in halakhic action is what the Rav calls *kiyyum ha-mitzvah*, the appropriate internal effects of the prescribed action. The action achieves its total import as the fulfillment of a divine commandment only when it generates the thoughts, feelings, attitudes, state of mind, and inner commitment which are appropri-

ate to it. For example, the rites of *avelut* for close relatives are prescribed in careful detail, but one can hardly consider them to be true mourning if they are only an external performance without any inner feeling. It is obvious that the *kiyyum ha-mitzvah* is only achieved when there is a deep sense of loss, pain, grief, all those attitudes which one expects to accompany mourning for a loved one. Moreover, for the *kiyyum* to be complete the mourner must ask himself what this experience teaches him, what it demands of him with regard to his own life. This point is made very clearly by Maimonides in his *Code*. He sets forth at considerable length the detailed rules for the technical performance of the obligation of mourning. Every aspect of the precise ways in which the *pe'ulat ha-mitzvah* is to be done is explicated carefully. At the very end of his discussion he introduces us to what is required for *kiyyum ha-mitzvah*, the inner state without which one cannot be said to have truly mourned the dead. Excessive mourning is forbidden since it suggests an unwillingness on the part of the bereaved to accept the divine judgment and to recognize that death is an inescapable aspect of the order of the world in which we live. Excessive mourning is, in a sense, a denial of God, and might be construed as nullifying the effectiveness of the technical performance of the mitzvah. On the other hand, "Whoever fails to mourn in the way which our sages commanded is cruel and unfeeling." True mourning, i.e., the *kiyyum ha-mitzvah*, says the Rambam, is expressed not only in the performance of the external rites, not only in the sorrow which is experienced, but in addition the mourner should see his loss as a challenge to his own life. "He should be overcome by fear and anxiety, which should, in turn, lead him to examine carefully his own deeds, and this should be followed by *teshuvah*, repentance."<sup>17</sup> It is fairly easy in the case of such halakhic obligations as mourning or rejoicing to see that the technical performance is incomplete if it does not generate an inner state of mind. It is less obvious in the case of many other *mitzvot* that there is anything more required than the pure technical performance. There may well be some commandments which we fulfill completely and satisfactorily just by doing the prescribed action in the prescribed manner. What the Rav has taught us in his explication of the Halakhah is that this is the exceptional, rather than the normal standard for the true fulfillment of a *mitzvah*.

Let us turn now to the rule of the Mishnah which requires us to bless God for the evil which befalls us as well as for the good. The rules for the technical performance of this obligation are clear enough. We are commanded to recite prescribed liturgical formulas on specified occasions of joy or sorrow. This, however, is incomplete unless it is accompanied or followed by the *kiyyum ha-mitzvah*, a

certain inner state. A *berakhah* is more than just the recitation of a liturgical formula. It is the explicit acknowledgment that whatever has occurred to us comes from God and this imposes on us an obligation to respond appropriately to the divine gift, whether it initially brings us joy or sorrow. The *berakhah* is the formal act in which we commit ourselves to treat our fortune, good or bad, as a challenge to transform our experience into a proper service of God.

When the Holy One, blessed be He, gives a person wealth and property, influence and honor, the recipient of these goods needs to know how to make proper use of them. He needs to know how to transform these precious gifts into fruitful creative forces, how to share his great happiness with others, how to perform acts of kindness with the divine gifts which flow to him from the Infinite Source. If the abundance of good which comes to a man does not generate in him complete submission to God, then he has been guilty of a fundamental sin.<sup>18</sup>

It is clear that in the Rav's view the true fulfillment of the obligation to bless God for the good begins with the recitation of the *berakhah*, but is only completed properly when we treat our good fortune as a challenge which refines us and fills us with a sense of responsibility for others and a spirit of generosity toward them. The evidence of the sincerity with which one has spoken the liturgical formula lies in the attitudes and actions which follow. This is the *kiyyum ha-mitzvah*.<sup>19</sup>

The same is true, *mutatis mutandis*, with respect to our response to the evil which befalls us. There is a prescribed technical performance, the recitation of the required *berakhah* at the specified time. This is the first step in fulfilling our halakhic duty. For it to be complete, however, it must be followed by the elevation of our suffering to a level of divine service just as we are expected to do with our rejoicing. It is the Halakhah, not abstract theological speculation, that teaches us that we must use our pain as an occasion for self-refinement and moral growth. If we understand the Halakhah properly, as the Rav has taught us, then we will know that it requires of us *kiyyum ha-mitzvah* which is already implicit in the *pe'ulat ha-mitzvah*, in the act of reciting the *berakhah*. What Rav Soloveitchik has done in this case is typical of his method throughout his work. The integrating center is always a proper grasp of the full meaning of the Halakhah. Authentic Jewish religious ideas are derived from the halakhic sources.<sup>20</sup> At times, as in the case of the problem of evil, he spells this out explicitly. At other times the point is implicit. But it is never absent. Careful study of such a seemingly non-halakhic work as "The Lonely Man of Faith" will show that its conclusions derive from the halakhah no less than the conclusions concerning the meaning and purpose of human suffering.

We can now see the halakhic understanding of suffering in a larger context. The general halakhic imperative with respect to

suffering is that we are to respond creatively. This emphasis on human creativity is an overarching theme in the thought of Rav Soloveitchik and serves to integrate the various facets of his religious teachings into a systematic unity. At the very broadest level he takes creativity to be the fundamental thrust of the entire Halakhah, the ultimate form of *kiyyum ha-mitzvah* throughout the halakhic system. The Torah itself teaches us that holiness is the aim of all the commandments. "You shall be holy, for I, the Lord your God, am holy."<sup>21</sup> The major halakhic authorities, among them Maimonides and Nahmanides, treat this as an all inclusive commandment which adds a special dimension to the fulfillment of every mitzvah. As Maimonides expresses it, this is a commandment "to fulfill the entire Torah, as if He had said, 'Be holy when you do all that I have commanded you to do, and when you refrain from doing all that I have prohibited.'"<sup>22</sup> Rav Soloveitchik explicates this general commandment as having to do with creativity. He shows that creativity is the *telos* of the Halakhah and concludes that, "The dream of creation finds its resolution in the actualization of the principle of holiness. Creation means the realization of the ideal of holiness."<sup>23</sup> Holiness is identified by the Rav as "the descent of divinity into the midst of our concrete world." To be holy is to make oneself godlike, and imitating God is the ultimate form of human creativity.

The divine creation of the world is an act in which form and structure are imposed on an initially formless mass. Chaos is turned into cosmos. This model of creativity is embedded in the Halakhah as well. To create is always to form and to limit the raw material with which we begin.<sup>24</sup> The aim of the Halakhah is the creation of human beings in whom the divine image is fully realized. The norms of the Halakhah form, structure, and shape the human individual. They are the instruments for actualizing the divine potentiality which is present in every person. "Herein," says the Rav, "is embodied the entire task of creation and the obligation to participate in the renewal of the cosmos. The most fundamental principle of all is that man must create himself. It is this idea that Judaism introduced into the world."<sup>25</sup> This explains in some degree the Rav's great preoccupation with *Hilkhot Teshuvah* over the years, since it is through the process of *teshuvah*, above all, that a person creates and recreates himself.

A study of the proper halakhic sources fully sustains the judgment that human creativity is the teleological and axiological crux of the Halakhah. In the *Mishneh Torah* we find that Maimonides sets forth among the first *halakhot* the obligation to know the existence and nature of God to the extent that man is capable of such knowledge, and then the duty to love and fear Him. These latter *mitzvot* are fulfilled by reflecting on the wonders of God's creation. It

then becomes clear that the commandment *le-hiddamot bi-derahkav* means to imitate God in all the ways that are possible for man, but above all to aspire to the fullness of creativity of which we are capable. It is in this way especially that man realizes the divine image with which he is endowed. The Halakhah provides us with the forms and structures which make this self-creating activity possible. The *telos* of each individual Halakhah or complex of related *halakhot* provides us with the occasion and the direction for specific forms of creative striving. Wherever one turns in the works of Rav Soloveitchik, one finds that he reverts to this basic doctrine which emerges from his understanding of the Halakhah and from his mode of halakhic reasoning and analysis. This focus on the centrality of the Halakhah as the only true source of Jewish doctrine is the thread that runs through all his thought, the thread which provides for the systematic unity of that thought in all the diversity of subject matter with which it deals.

#### IV.

The question may well be raised as to whether the Rav's way of understanding the Halakhah is legitimate and whether it genuinely derives from the halakhic sources. Some critics have suggested that Rav Soloveitchik is simply imposing his own theological ideas on the halakhic materials. A similar criticism has been made of the analytic categories which R. Hayyim Brisker developed for the explication of the Halakhah.<sup>26</sup> To resolve this question we must try to understand Rav Soloveitchik's account of Torah learning at its most profound level. As he expounds it, there are two types of learning which stand at the very top of the hierarchy of Torah scholarship. The lower of these is characterized as a state of *erusin*, betrothal to the Torah, and highest of all is called *nissu'in*, marriage to the Torah. Those who are described as betrothed to the Torah are *talmidei hakhamim* of unusually high caliber. They represent standard modes of Torah learning which have been developed to the best possible level. These scholars are the typically familiar Torah sages of very high rank. They write important *hiddushei Torah*, produce important collections of responsa, and compose analytic and expository books of great value. Through their teaching and writing they provide us with deep insight into the Halakhah. These *talmidei hakhamim* stand head and shoulders above all other students of the Torah, but they are still not at the absolute summit of true creative insight.

That summit is reserved for the small number of sages who achieve the very greatest depth of understanding and perception.

They are described metaphorically by the Rav as connected to the Torah in a covenant of marriage. The partners in a true marriage are united in a relationship of intimacy which breaks down all barriers. Similarly, the supreme Torah sage lives in a relationship of such intimacy with the Torah that his perceptions go beyond the normal limits of intellectual apprehension. We find a secular model of this mode of understanding set forth in the philosophy of Plato. In the typical dialogue, a subject is investigated with all the power that rational discourse can bring to it. This is certainly an achievement of major significance, but it is not the end of the matter. At the point where rational discourse has reached its outer limit and can go no further, Plato normally introduces a myth. The purpose of the myth is to give literary expression to the philosopher's vision, and this is the deepest and the most revealing dimension of his work. That vision transcends the boundaries of purely discursive knowledge, and in all probability it precedes that knowledge, despite the fact that as a literary-expository device Plato generally places the myth at the end of the dialogue. This vision of truth which the true philosopher apprehends is treated by Plato as the deepest and most illuminating of all philosophic insights. This vision is only possible for a thinker of the most highly developed and purified intellect who lives in the closest intimacy with the subjects of his reflections. On the one hand, it presupposes and grows out of the most complete rational analysis that is possible, but paradoxically it also shapes and directs that analysis. There is a kind of reciprocal movement here, beginning in conventional study, reaching the greatest depths of rational insight, breaking through to the vision which transcends the limits of reason, and then turning back on itself to reshape the materials which were initially understood in the purely discursive mode. To follow out the Platonic metaphor, the philosopher who has left the cave and achieved a unique vision of the ultimate truth must return to the cave to make that vision effective in the world of ordinary men.

Although I am not certain whether Rav Soloveitchik would approve the use of this Platonic mode, I believe that it is a helpful heuristic device for the understanding of his account of the sage whose relationship to the Torah is marriage, not just betrothal. To begin with, he distinguishes between the two by way of a kabbalistic paradigm. The *talmid hakham* who is betrothed to the Torah apprehends it through the *sefirah* of *binah*, while the sage who is married to the Torah apprehends it through *hokhmah*. The former is the highest level of apprehension open to discursive understanding, but the latter opens up supernal vistas of insight available to only a chosen few. The Rav makes the following observation concerning this highest mode of Torah understanding.

When the last barrier that separates man from the Torah is completely removed, there open before him not only all the modes of halakhic thinking and apprehension, but also all the modes of halakhic perceptivity and vision. The Almighty endows this person not only with an intellectual soul, but also with a soul that is capable of halakhic vision. The purely logical mode of halakhic reasoning draws its sustenance from the pre-rational perception and vision which erupt stormily from the depths of this personality, a personality which is enveloped with the aura of holiness. This mysterious intuition is the source of halakhic creativity and innovative insight. . . . The sage to whom the Torah is married begins with the teachings of the heart and concludes with the teachings of the mind. Creative halakhic activity begins not with intellectual calculation, but with vision; not with clear formulations, but with unease; not in the clear light of rational discourse, but in the pre-rational darkness.<sup>27</sup>

This is the picture that the Rav presents of the highest level of Torah understanding. The particular context is a description of the achievements of his grandfather, his father, and his uncle, but it can be taken as a model for all of those rare spirits who arise from time to time in our history and are "married" to the Torah. We permit ourselves the judgment, which he himself would never permit, that Rav Joseph B. Soloveitchik is to be included in the company of those rare spirits.

Viewed from this perspective, the deepest level of halakhic study opens up for us an understanding not only of the technical Halakhah, but of the ideal world from which that Halakhah flows and which, in turn, it seeks to realize. The precise conceptual restructuring which R. Hayyim introduced created a revolution in the mode of Talmud study and in the exposition of halakhic thought. The religious-spiritual restructuring of the content of *kiyyum ha-mitzvah* which our contemporary Rav Soloveitchik has introduced has created a comparable revolution in our grasp of halakhic philosophy and theology. Both are the product of the marriage to the Torah which is the special merit of these unique *talmidei hakhamim*. The insights of such sages are not only Jewishly valid and authentic, but they are, in the full sense of the term, halakhically valid and authentic. Their teachings are not the product only of vast learning and incomparable intellectual capacity. They are no less the product of that special quality of halakhic vision with which they have been endowed. Without that vision, no one could achieve their creativity in understanding the deepest levels of the Halakhah. Once they have exercised that vision and worked out its consequences, we are able to grasp their teachings and see for ourselves how they follow from true halakhic intuition.

## V.

We shall take one final step in establishing our claim that Rav Soloveitchik's thought is a unified structure, and for this we return to

our initial observation that he appears to have presented us with a body of writing that is riddled with contradictions. In our earlier discussion we simply noted that one should not rush to conclude that there are internal contradictions in the *oeuvre* of any serious thinker. Attention has to be given to the variety of contexts in which he writes, the particular purposes of each work, etc. Although this is certainly true with respect to any responsible reading of the Rav's works, it is important to add another and more telling dimension to the discussion.

It is characteristic of the Rav's writing, and therefore also of his thought, that pairs of opposed phenomena appear with great regularity. Every reader is familiar with the contradictions between *homo religiosus* and cognitive man, between majestic and covenantal man, Adam I and Adam II, fate and destiny, loneliness and fulfillment in society, the drive for moral autonomy and the religious fact of an imposed heteronomy, sin and repentance, etc.<sup>28</sup> It is clear that we have here instances of phenomena which are in genuine opposition to each other. Moreover, Rav Soloveitchik makes no effort to hide or suppress these contradictory features. On the contrary, he makes a special point of calling them to our attention and dwelling on their significance. Does it follow then that his thought is so riddled with contradictions that there is no hope of finding within it any systematic unity? By no means!

We must distinguish clearly between the contradictory phenomena that a thinker discerns in the world which he describes and explicates, and the actual presence of contradictions in his own thought. The latter might be a fatal flaw, but the former is the set of inescapable facts with which the thinker has to deal. We must not condemn a philosopher or halakhist for being guilty of contradictions if all he is doing is bringing to our attention the existence of contradictory elements in reality. The philosopher's intellectual creativity becomes evident in the way in which he deals with this apparently broken reality. In our case the Rav has chosen to confront these contradictory phenomena with full consciousness of their power. He has chosen even to seek them out and bring to our notice instances of which we may not have been aware. He does not seek to dissolve the contradictions or to harmonize them through the use of subtle intellectual gymnastics. Just as he insists that we must face the fact of suffering and not delude ourselves that it is only illusory, so does he insist that we must face the fact of this network of contradictions and not delude ourselves into thinking that intellectual acumen will make them disappear.

Contrary to the expectations of some of his critics, the Rav's program is not to harmonize the contradictories for this would go



counter to reality itself. There is in man both the striving of the *homo religiosus* and the cognitive drive. We are called upon to achieve a majestic dignity, and also to experience the redemptive defeat of submission to a higher power. One could go through the entire list of such contradictory phenomena in this same way. What the Rav teaches us is that neither thought nor life itself need be broken by the fact that we are beset by these contradictory drives. He approaches the problem dialectically, that is, he recognizes that we must affirm in each case both of the contradictory elements and strive to live with them in a balanced tension. Neither pole can or should be eliminated. The glory of man lies in some measure in the very fact that he is a complex being whose nature is fully realized only when these contradictory elements are both prized for their individual value and are simultaneously held together as forces forming a unified human life.

The task is a demanding one, but we avoid it only at the expense of denying or trivializing our humanity. We have familiar biblical instances of the tensions within man, for example, between man conceived as the creaturely actualization of the image of God, and man seen as a mere animal. In this particular case, as in all the others, our task is to affirm both dimensions of human reality, to extract the highest value from each, and to balance them within an integrated life and a unified system of thought. It is in just this way that we affirm and give expression to our humanity. Man is both an animal and a creature in the divine image. Man is both a religious being seeking his fulfillment in the transcendent, and a cognitive being whose fulfillment comes from his subjecting all phenomena to the shaping force of his intellect. What the Rav teaches us is that we arrive at the deepest illumination that Judaism can offer us when we recognize that we must affirm the contradictory elements and learn to live with them in that dialectical tension which gives to each its full effective force. This way is far more difficult than a monochromatic harmony, but we cannot escape our own existential reality, and we must not make ourselves less than we are just to be at ease with ourselves and our world.

This may leave us dissatisfied if we are seeking comfort rather than depth of insight, complacency rather than religious and moral challenge, self-involvement rather than the most significant engagement of which we are capable with God and with the world He created. It is human self-conceit to suppose that our finite intellects can encompass the whole of reality in its rich and diverse texture, and that we can create an ontology which will make all the pieces fit together neatly and harmoniously. It is no less a human self-conceit to suppose that we can use our powers to do something similar with

the varied modes and dimensions of human existence and with man's experience of himself. The greatest philosophers have always known that our understanding breaks down when we presume to force the infinite and the eternal into the restrictive mold of the finite intellect. This was well known to the greatest of the Jewish philosophers, Maimonides, as it was to the major philosophers who preceded and succeeded him.<sup>29</sup>

This is why the Rav makes such a point of teaching us that the greatest of thinkers also has within himself the soul of a child. His breathtaking intellectual sophistication, the exquisite complexity and subtlety of his insight, are balanced by the openness, and naive simplicity of the unspoiled child. One who is so completely the prisoner of his own maturity that there is no place left in him for the openness of the child "is unable to draw near to God." His oversophistication leaves him with the misplaced confidence that in his philosophic or halakhic categories he is capable of capturing the whole truth about the divine and to penetrate to total knowledge of the Torah. He becomes guilty not only of overweening pride, but also of the fatal error of exaggerating the claims of his intellectual powers. In creating his own neatly ordered world, he tacitly discards whatever does not fit. In the process, he reduces God and Torah to the finite dimensions of the human intellect. Only when that superb intellect is balanced by a childlike simplicity can it recognize its own limits. As the Rav puts it, only the simple faith of the child can break the austere barriers that confine us to our finite world. Only that childlike stance can bring us into a personal relationship with God.<sup>30</sup>

Here again we have seemingly opposed forces brought together in the Rav's thought. There are those who think that he must choose between philosophic and halakhic sophistication, on the one hand, or childlike faith, on the other. Failure to do this presumably leaves him with unacceptable and insoluble contradictions in his work. If this were a sound criticism, it would follow that the Rav's thought rests on methodological practices which are intellectually shoddy, and that there can be no talk of any systematic unity in his work. However, in this case, as in all the others that we have discussed, there is, in fact, both methodological soundness and systematic unity. The Rav is affirming here the subtlest of methodological principles, namely, that no single methodology and no single intellectual stance is adequate to bring us to an understanding of ultimate truth and ultimate reality. Here too there is a dialectical tension between the extremes of intellectual sophistication and childlike simplicity. The former without the latter is, as we have noted, the victim of its own arrogance. The latter without the former denigrates the role of reason which is man's greatest glory. The mark of true maturity is precisely the

capacity to develop the intellect to its highest possible level and learn all that it can teach us, while at the same time retaining the openness of the child to the reality which transcends our intellectual categories and can only be known intuitively. We cannot remain permanently and exclusively in either world, but must move between them in our never-ending search for the knowledge of God and of His Torah.

In this brief sketch we have aimed to set forth in outline the grounds for our conviction that the religious thought of Rav Soloveitchik represents a unity in diversity. We have tried to show that the various topics which he deals with, the variety of styles in which he writes, the diversity of methods which he seems to employ, are all facets of a unified system of thought. He has not favored us with a single comprehensive work which brings together all the strands and expounds them in their methodological and metaphysical unity. That work is left to the reader of his collected writings. There is more than enough evidence to establish with confidence the claim this incomparably great Torah sage has built for us a coherent and integrated system of thought. That systematic structure is based on and is generated out of a deep understanding of the Halakhah. It is an authentic link in the chain of classical Jewish learning, authentic in its faithfulness to the past, and no less authentic in its creative originality.<sup>31</sup>

## NOTES

1. When Paul Arthur Schilpp established the Library of Living Philosophers some fifty years ago it was with the express hope that we could end disagreements and confusions about the ideas of contemporary philosophers once and for all. For each volume, the ablest scholars would be invited to write critical essays on aspects of the subject's thought and the subject would then reply. In this way, it was thought, we would get final and definitive resolutions about the exact meaning of the philosopher's ideas and arguments. It is one of the ironies of contemporary intellectual history that while the series of volumes is universally recognized as a major contribution to current philosophical literature, its strongest asset has been to continue, rather than end, the debate about what each of the philosophers really meant.
2. From this stricture I exclude, as noted, the work of Pinchas Peli which may not be in the Rav's *ipsissima verba*, but which seems to be accurate in setting forth his ideas.
3. See the introduction to *Hiddushei Rabbeinu Hayyim ha-Levi* which was written by the two sons of R. Hayyim, Rav Soloveitchik's father and uncle. They describe there the exquisite care and attention which their father gave to every word he wrote and the gravity with which he viewed the responsibility of giving permanent published form to his teachings.
4. Among the very worst offenders on this score are David Singer and Moshe Sokol in their article, "Joseph Soloveitchik: Lonely Man of Faith," *Modern Judaism* (2)1982, 227-272. Some aspects of this paper will be discussed later on in this study. One telling example of how these writers do their work can be seen in their reaction to some of the family anecdotes which the Rav relates in his various writings. They render their personal judgment that, "The behavior he describes is so radical, so extreme, as to make his presumed heroes seem grotesque." Having made this judgment, which is peculiarly their own, they assume that the Rav, being an enlightened man, certainly must share their feelings and their perceptions, and they are therefore able to assert with confidence that,

- "The vein of anger that runs through the anecdotal material in 'Halakhic Man' is not to be missed" (256). It is troubling that these writers are unable to see that they are simply imposing their personal feelings and attitudes on the Rav and then treating them as if they must be his own. An unbiased reader who allows the Rav's text to speak in all of its subtle nuances will certainly see that these anecdotes are always related in order to make or illustrate an important point, and that they are related with love, pride, and appreciation, not with anger. Rav Soloveitchik treats his father and grandfathers as models of the best type of Jewish learning and piety. The assertion that he relates to them and to their halakhic life style with anger and resentment could only come from people who are confident, for some unknown reason, that they know the Rav better than he knows himself and that they are able to penetrate to truths about his inner life and thought which he has hidden from himself. There is no evident reason why we should take these claims seriously, and many very good reasons why we should not. For other such claims in this article see, e.g., pp. 238, 254, 255, 256, 259, 260, 265, 271 fn. 95.
5. *Op. cit.*, pp. 237–238. My underscore. It is puzzling that Singer and Sokol think they have made a great discovery in finding that the Rav does not reinterpret Judaism in some radical new way. It is obvious that he never claimed nor intended to do any such thing. He never says that such radical reinterpretation is his program, nor is there any evidence that this is an unexpressed goal. He sees himself quite properly as standing inside the classical Jewish tradition as it is represented by *gedolei Yisrael* through the ages, not least among them his own immediate ancestors. This is not to say that he does not contribute brilliant new insights or open up new perspectives and new modes of religious understanding. Quite the contrary. In this regard he is also only carrying on the tradition of Torah learning and thought which he inherited and to which he has made his own remarkable contributions.
  6. "*Ish ha-Halakhah*," p. 63, fn. 16, in Pinchas Peli, *Be-Sod ha-Yahid ve-ha-Yahad* (Jerusalem, 1976).
  7. It is surprising that Lawrence Kaplan, who certainly knows better, also translated this expression with the phrase "to make the whole subject of halakhic man more palatable to scholars of religion who are not familiar with this type." *Halakhic Man* (Philadelphia, 1983), p. 146, fn. 18. For an example of another mistranslation by Singer and Sokol see their article, p. 261. Here they draw far reaching conclusions as a result of mistranslating a key phrase in a passage where the distinction is drawn between the technical performance of a commandment and the *kiyyum ha-mitzvah*, the inner state which is required in order to fulfill and give meaning to the action. The text reads, "*Ha-kiyyum talui be-regesh mesuyyam, be-matzav ru'ah mesuyyam*." They translate, "but fulfillment is dependent on attaining a certain degree of spiritual awareness." It does not require a very profound knowledge of the Hebrew language to know that "*matzav ruah*" does not mean "spiritual awareness."
  8. *Op. cit.*, p. 229.
  9. *Ibid.*, p. 244. Other statements about such seeming contradictions can be found at a number of different places throughout the article. Cf., 239, 241, 242, 243, 247, 256. These statements are often embellished by such expressions as, "startling," "eye-opening," "as if this were not strange enough," "what a claim," etc.
  10. Num. R., 13:15; Zohar I, 26a, 47b, and *passim*; *Otiot de-Rabbi Akiva*.
  11. Even with respect to Maimonides I do not believe, despite current fashions of exegesis, that the case can be made that there is a deep abyss separating the halakhist from the philosopher. On this point see the discussion in my forthcoming book, *Interpreting Maimonides: Studies in Methodology, Metaphysics, and Moral Philosophy* (Jewish Publication Society of America, 1989).
  12. See, "*Kol Dodi Dofek*," in *Be-Sod ha-Yahid ve-ha-Yahad*, p. 333.
  13. *Ibid.*, p. 336.
  14. *Ibid.*, p. 337.
  15. *Ibid.*, p. 339. See also the similar discussion in "*U-Vikashtem mi-Sham*," in *Ish ha-Halakhah—Galui ve-Nistar*, (Jerusalem, 1979), p. 144.
  16. *M. Berakhot*, 9:5.
  17. *H. Avel*, 13:11, 12. This is not the place for a detailed account of the process by which Maimonides arrives at this description of the *kiyyum ha-mitzvah*, but it can be worked out with little difficulty by any competent student of the Rambam. Similarly, we do not have the space here to work out the *kiyyum ha-mitzvah* of tefillin, although we used it as a familiar example of what is involved in *pe'ulat ha-mitzvah*.

18. "Kol Dodi Dofek," p. 342.
19. For a similar treatment of the nature of *kiyyum ha-mitzvah* with respect to a whole range of *berakhot* see the discussion in, "U-Vikashtem mi-Sham," pp. 135–137. The Rav refers to the *berakhot* that we are required to recite when we observe various phenomena of nature and when we benefit from the natural world by eating, drinking, smelling or otherwise enjoying its products. He observes that we do not simply speak the words of the *berakhah*, words which thank or praise God for the magnificence and benevolence of the natural order, as a routine formula. Rather, the very moment we speak those words the natural order is transformed into "a supernatural world, a world of marvellous mystery." The *berakhah* bears witness to the fact that the Jew perceives the ordinary things of this world as extra-ordinary, that in his inner awareness the common has become uncommon, that the fixed order of nature becomes the superb work of the cosmic Creator. "The Halakhah says: Blessed is the creature who meets his Creator regularly as he makes his way in the world, the creature who recognizes his Creator whenever he drinks a bit of water or eats a piece of bread. Blessed is the man for whom God is a present reality every time he uses his senses and responds to his experience." Clearly, the *kiyyum ha-mitzvah* is only achieved when the technical performance generates in us the appropriate thoughts, feelings, and perceptions. This is as much a requirement of the Halakhah as is the recitation of the prescribed words.
20. Pinchas Peli has argued that this way of deriving theological ideas from the Halakhah is ultimately a mode of highly sophisticated *derush*. Although I admire Professor Peli as one of the best interpreters of Rav Soloveitchik's thought, I cannot agree with him on this point. A sound understanding of the full import of any Halakhah cannot be reduced to *derush*, unless we include under this rubric every mode of thought and analysis which is not part of the technical practical Halakhah. The Rav has demonstrated that *kiyyum ha-mitzvah* is as much part of the Halakhah as *pe'ulat ha-mitzvah*, and in this light the halakhic reasoning which brings us to understand the former is no less part of the legal system than is that which brings us to understand the latter. It may be that by *derush* Peli means something akin to the process of *midrash halakhah*, but that is not clear in his discussion. See his article, "Ha-Derush be-Hagut ha-Rav Soloveitchik—Mitodah o Mahut?" *Daat*, 4, Winter 1980. An English version recently appeared under the title, "Hermeneutics in the Thought of Rabbi Soloveitchik—Medium or Message?" *Tradition* 23(3), Spring, 1988.
21. Lev., 19:2.
22. *Sefer ha-Mitzvot, ha-Shores ha-Revi'i*. See the comments of Ramban to this section and also his commentary to Lev. 19:2, where he specifically treats this as a general all-inclusive commandment.
23. *Halakhic Man*, p. 108.
24. Of course the fundamental difference between human and divine creativity in our tradition is that God first creates the raw material (*ex nihilo*, according to most views) and then endows it with form and structure. Man always begins with material that is already there and applies to it his creative powers.
25. *Ibid.*, p. 109.
26. Singer and Sokol speak of R. Hayyim as "a talmudist who broke with the past." They suppose that Rav Soloveitchik himself sees his grandfather in this way, but that he tried to suppress the truth "because he had no desire to portray his grandfather" in what might appear to be an unorthodox position. *Op. cit.*, p. 237. As I shall try to show this is a superficial and unsound way of understanding the methodologies and the results of one of the profoundest Torah sages of modern times.
27. "Mah Dodeikh mi-Dod," in *Be-Sod ha-Yahid ve-ha-Yahad*, pp. 218–219. I have not translated literally the expressions, "*mem/tet sha'arei hashivah ve-hakarah*" and "*mem/tet sha'arei hargashah ve-hazut*." These expressions use the classic number, forty-nine, to convey the idea of the highest level of insight that is possible for man.
28. For a valuable discussion of this subject, see Ehud Luz, "Ha-Yesod ha-Dialekti be-Kirvei ha-Rav Y. D. Soloveitchik," *Daat*, 9, Summer, 1982, pp. 75–89. Luz has an even longer list of such instances of contradictory elements in the Rav's thought. I acknowledge with pleasure my debt to this study. In my brief remarks on this subject I do not claim to have added significantly to what Professor Luz has already taught us.
29. Singer and Sokol in their relentless search for difficulties in the Rav's thought show their misunderstanding of this point. They complain that, "Since he is such an ardent admirer of

Maimonides, one would expect him to be greatly influenced by the latter's religious rationalism—the attempt to logically demonstrate the truth of what Judaism teaches. In fact, Soloveitchik completely eschews any such aim, offering . . . dogmatics in the place of apologetic theology.” *Op. cit.*, p. 249. This is a misreading of Maimonides who knew very clearly where reason reaches its outer limits, and who explicitly adopted the stance of faith where reason could no longer serve him. He would fully endorse the point that Rav Soloveitchik makes, namely, that rational proofs for the existence of God establish, at best, the necessary existence of a first cause, but cannot provide us with a knowledge of the God who creates the world and continues to relate to it with providential care.

30. See the discussion in “*Peleitat Sofreihem*,” *Be-Sod ha-Yahid ve-ha-Yahad*, *op. cit.*, pp. 288–291.
31. A final note. When I began to write this paper it was not my intention to devote so much of it to refuting the views of Singer and Sokol, nor did I intend to tie it so closely to some of the topics which they treated. It is clear to me in retrospect that I did so because they represent, in my judgment, some of the best and the worst of what has been done by interpreters of the Rav's thought. They are intelligent and learned. They have read the work of the Rav carefully. They are able to formulate basic issues with clarity. This places them far above many who have written about the Rav's thought. At the same time, they are, in my opinion, singularly wrong-headed in their approach. They begin with their preconceptions of what the Rav says or ought to say, and with their preconceived categorizations of what options are open to him. In the process they misconstrue fundamental aspects of his thought and find the Rav's thought unsatisfactory because it does not do for them what they want it to do. Their extended study became, at first inadvertently, an appropriate foil for this paper. Let me confess that, after the fact, what was initially inadvertent has now become conscious and deliberate.