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**REVIEW ESSAY:
INTO THE WHIRLWIND:
THE PERSISTENCE OF THE DIALECTIC
IN THE WORKS OF RABBI JOSEPH B.
SOLOVEITCHIK**

Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, *Out of the Whirlwind*,
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“**T**he tension between the subjective and objective” was, for R. Joseph Soloveitchik, as R. Aharon Lichtenstein observes, “a major life-long concern.”¹ That tension, perhaps better expressed as a dialectic, emerges in a new light with the publication of *Out of the Whirlwind*—R. Soloveitchik’s heretofore unpublished essays on, as the subtitle of the work advertises, mourning, suffering, and the human condition.² That is, the essays published in *Out of the Whirlwind*, written between 1957 and 1974, almost uniformly take as their starting point the *subjective*, both complicating and enriching our overall sense of R. Soloveitchik, the philosopher and theologian. As early as *Halakhic Mind*, R. Soloveitchik emphasized the dialectical relationship between subject and object, undermining the opposition inherited from enlightenment and later nineteenth-century German philosophy. Indeed one of the primary aims of *Halakhic Mind*—freeing the religious philosopher from the yoke of scientific conceptions of objectivity—was predicated on complicating overly simplistic conceptions of the subject-object distinction. As R. Soloveitchik himself argued in *Halakhic Mind*, there is neither “pure subjectivity,” nor “pure objectivity.”³ From this perspective, it would be mistaken to construe the essays collected in *Out of the Whirlwind* as somehow contradicting the objectivist emphasis on logos, rationality and law of *Halakhic Mind* and *Halakhic Man*. The subjectivist strains of the essays in *Out of the Whirlwind*, do not, as David Singer and Moshe Sokol

aver of *The Lonely Man of Faith*, represent a “transvaluation” of the sensibility or the earlier works.⁴ To bifurcate R. Soloveitchik into the “talmudist” and “existentialist” is to fail to see the ways in which the tension between subjectivist and objectivist tendencies provides the energies from which *all* of his work emerges.⁵ If R. Soloveitchik’s essays of the fifties and sixties articulate a perspective antithetical to *Halakhic Man*, it is not an antithesis which emerges as a function of contradiction, but rather as part of a continuing dialectical process evidenced throughout R. Soloveitchik’s life and work. The distinction between subjectivity and objectivity, as R. Soloveitchik wrote in *Halakhic Mind*, is “only directional” (*Mind* 76). For reasons both biographical and historical, the works of the forties move in the direction of the objective, while the essays collected in *Out of the Whirlwind* move in the direction of the subjective.

To be sure, the works upon which R. Soloveitchik’s reputation as a philosopher primarily rest, *Halakhic Man* and *Halakhic Mind*, emphasize—even as they articulate the subject-object relationship—the priority of the objective realm. *Halakhic Mind*’s attack on religious subjectivism not only focuses upon the degraded forms of ethics and religious experience entailed by “recondite subjectivity,” but also alludes to a framework in which a philosophy based upon subjectivist intuitionism had been historically embodied (*Man* 80). R. Soloveitchik’s attack on religious subjectivity may follow a Brisk tradition going back to *Nefesh ha-Hayyim*, but the attack on “subjective intuitive attitudes,” associated with “the most celebrated philosophers of the Third Reich” (Heidegger among them), shows the extent to which *Halakhic Mind* was, among other things, a meditation on contemporary events in Europe: “When reason surrenders its supremacy to dark, equivocal emotions, no dam is able to stem the rising tide of the affective stream” (*Mind* 53). *Halakhic Man* similarly demonstrates an awareness of contemporary events: the Kantian “principle of the spontaneity of spirit,” transformed by Schopenhauer into the “‘blind’ will,” and by Nietzsche into the will of the “superman” had been, finally, “perverted” by contemporaries “into the desire for brutal and murderous domination.” Such views, R. Soloveitchik concludes, “have brought chaos and disaster to our world, which is drowning in its blood” (*Man* 164). Although the “halakhic man” may be timeless, the arguments of the work bearing his name resonate more powerfully when seen in their historical context. That is, for R. Soloveitchik, religious subjectivism attenuated (primarily in America) into a theology based on an insular self-satisfaction, but in Europe into the “barbaric and deleterious” forces of the Nazi regime (*Mind* 80).⁶

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Of course, halakhic man's emphasis on the objectification of law not only serves as a response to contemporary historical tragedy, but also a strong family consciousness of death, registered throughout *Halakhic Man*, and rendered paradigmatic in the account of R. Soloveitchik's grandfather, R. Hayyim (to be discussed below). The outpouring of emotion associated with death—both historical *and* personal—finds relief in the objectifications of halakha. In the typologies of *Halakhic Man*, the “objectivity” of halakhic man is set against the “highly subjective” tendencies of the “*homo religiosus*.” The latter is immersed in the emotive realm of a subjectivity that leads towards the “blurring of forms and boundaries”; by contrast, the halakhic man, evidencing a “psychic equilibrium,” is characterized by his “thrust towards objectivity and lawfulness” (*Man* 66). The halakha sets down statutes “that serve as a dam against the surging, subjective current coursing through the universal *homo religiosus*” that threatens “to sweep away his entire being” (*Man* 66-67).⁷

To be sure, the consciousness of death which informs the subjective excesses—the “fascination and repulsion”—experienced by the *homo religiosus* is experienced by the halakhic man, but ultimately overcome. Death may be “frightening,” “menacing,” and “dreadful,” but when the halakhic man succeeds in transforming death into an “object” of cognition, the “horror is gone” (*Man* 73). So R. Hayyim would famously overcome his fear of mortality, R. Soloveitchik writes, by means of the processes of cognition—through, for example, the study of the laws of ritual defilement. The account of his Brisk ancestor provides a primary instance of how “objectification triumphs over the subjective terror of death” (*Man* 73).

In R. Soloveitchik's rendering, the cognitive act is akin to an act of first acquisition and then conquest: it is through “cognition that he ‘acquires’ the object that strikes such alarm into him”; through the cognitive act, “he brings it into his domain and obtains title to it.” As a result, the “terrifying abyss disappears, the strangeness fades from sight and leaves no trace behind” (*Man* 73-74). The source of the most profound of *homo religiosus*'s emotional excesses—death—is here confronted by halakhic man, and fully domesticated through the act of cognition. The objectifying rationality of halakhah is thus an antidote not only to the unbridled subjectivity manifested in the events played on the contemporary historical stage; it is also more personally, but no less profoundly, an antidote for the outpouring of emotions associated with death.⁸ Standing proudly as both “lord and master,” the halakhic man triumphs over the surging emotional forces to which the *homo religiosus* remains vulnerable (*Man* 73).

The halakhic man's confidence in the efficacy of cognition does undergo qualification in *Halakhic Man*, but only in a brief footnote which identifies an exception: "the cognition of God." For when "man cognizes the Creator of the cosmos," he is confronted by an "aura of mystery" (*Man* 154). The acknowledgement of the inadequacy of the cognitive gesture in relation to the divine cognition, relegated to a footnote in the earlier work, leads in *Out of the Whirlwind* to the full experience of the mystery of the divine and to the experience of the "crisis of human finitude" that it elicits. The essays in *Out of the Whirlwind* anatomize that crisis, distilled in R. Soloveitchik's confessional account of his illness and operation in 1959 which, he writes, initiated him "into the secret of non-being" (*Whirl* 131). Of the encounter with mortality, R. Soloveitchik writes, "I suddenly ceased to be immortal; I became a mortal being." "The night preceding my operation," he continues, "I prayed to God and beseeched Him to spare me" (*Whirl* 131). This pivotal experience seems to have led R. Soloveitchik to return to the "trace" of the "horrifying abyss" of death excised in the earlier work. In this sense, the encounter with "non-being" in his life contributed to R. Soloveitchik's resolve to re-confront the crisis ostensibly overcome in *Halakhic Man* (*Man* 72).⁹ From the acknowledgment of the limits of the powers of cognition and rationality, and the corresponding acknowledgement of the finitude of human existence, the "blind alleys and narrow pathways of the world's emptiness and chaos" re-appear, and as more than a mere "trace" (*Man* 72).

Indeed, consciousness of human finitude and the resulting focus on death evolves, for R. Soloveitchik, as the central philosophical emphasis of the essays collected in *Out of the Whirlwind*—especially the four essays written between 1957 and 1961 (collected together at the end of the volume). With their focus on evil, suffering and crisis, the essays reflect an ongoing engagement with the legacy of the *Shoah*, but also resonate with R. Soloveitchik's personal history, as well as his perception of American Jewish life in the 1950s. In *Out of the Whirlwind*, it is not the prospect of an unbridled subjectivity which poses the greatest threat to *avodat Hashem* ("service" in the lexicon of these essays), but rather the processes of rationalization, cognition, and objectification—which unqualified by the experiential—undermine, if not render impossible, the "full adventure" of man (*Whirl* 176). Through the recognition of the crisis of finitude, and the consequent immersion *into* the whirlwind of his emotional life, the figure of the halakhic man undergoes a process of internal transformation not fully articulated in the earlier works.

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II

“A Halakhic Approach to Suffering” (1961) revisits the subject of the cognition of God. The “scientific adventure,” R. Soloveitchik writes, echoing the language of the earlier work, represents the “human desire for conquest”; the “crowning victory,” however, of cognitive man is not knowledge of the natural world, but rather “finding God” (*Whirl* 106). In the approach to the divine, man is not only a warrior, but he is a “conqueror, an aggressive, bold, courageous adventurer, yearning and longing for self-vastness, for self-explanation, for the infinite” (*Whirl* 107). The energies of conquest and expansion which resolve in the “peace and tranquility” of *Halakhic Man* (*Man* 73) are, however, undermined by an awareness through which the “incessant drive for self-enlargement” necessarily “comes to a halt.” The very man who had pursued “conquest upon conquest” now returns to his “point of departure and is defeated” (*Whirl* 107).

Such defeat in *Out of the Whirlwind* is engendered by the realization of the *failure* of the powers of cognition. The cognitive gesture, R. Soloveitchik writes in “The Crisis of Human Finitude” (1957-58), remains insufficient in the face of what he calls “the *mysterium magnum*” which necessarily “escapes our comprehension” (*Whirl* 156). While man’s knowledge rests, in further echoes of the language of *Halakhic Man*, upon “substitution of the known for the unknown, the comprehensible quantity for the qualitative phenomenon,” the mystery of being remains elusive, outside of the grasp of knowledge. The knowing subject attempts to expand the realm of cognition: but the “wider the area” the intellect explores, “the greater and more challenging becomes the mystery of being as a whole” (*Whirl* 156). The mystery—eliciting the experience of human finitude—renders absurd cognitive man’s desire for absolute intellectual conquest. The recognition of the “unknown” leads to a creaturely awareness; as “part of finite reality,” he acknowledges his condition as “incomplete, deficient and impregnated with paradoxes and absurdities” (*Whirl* 157). The seamless efficacy of cognition as acquisition or conquest yields, in *Out of the Whirlwind*, to a conception of knowledge which reveals its inadequacy in the presence of a reality which it can never fully assimilate.

Central then to the essays of *Out of the Whirlwind*, and especially the title essay, is the terminology borrowed from Rudolf Otto’s *Idea of the Holy* (1917). Otto himself had sought to set the grounds of a “profounder” Christianity by re-instating “the non-rational element” into an experience which had become “one-sidedly intellectualistic.”¹⁰ For Otto,

that goal could be achieved by cultivating the “creature feeling,” man’s “submergence into nothingness before an overpowering absolute might of some kind”—which he dubbed alternatively the *mysterium tremendum*, or more simply the ‘numinous.’” So R. Soloveitchik foregrounds the “creature feeling” and defines the “apocalyptic experience of God” as a “leap outside of oneself in a journey from a here-and-now reality to the numinous” (*Whirl* 172, 121). The awareness of the sublime otherness of the “numen” entails crisis, manifested in suffering: God “reveals Himself through a ‘whirlwind’ of pain and sorrow,” appearing to “man through the violent shock of encountering infinity.” Through the “apocalyptic trauma of revelation,” man, facing the “numinous, all-powerful and all-negating” God, becomes painfully aware of the “suspension of his own selfhood” (*Whirl* 128).

For R. Soloveitchik, the prophet Ezekiel’s “distressing encounter with nihility,” presented through the lens of Otto’s “numen,” serves as a model for the experience of modern man. Ezekiel experienced the “historical cataclysm” and entered into a great dialogue “with the hidden, numinous, mysterious God” (*Whirl* 147). The message of the experience of cognitive inadequacy—in particular, the awareness of suffering which transcends the rational grasp—is transferred from the historical experience of the prophet to modern man. The “catastrophic disclosure,” instigated through the experience of the “numinous,” must be incorporated into the “all-embracing existential awareness” of the contemporary spiritual personality (*Whirl* 140-41).¹¹ Indeed, the “shock” of the encounter with non-being, of “peeping into the abyss of nihility,” must leave a mark on his consciousness. The “heart engages in a dialogue with nihility”; this dialogue, R. Soloveitchik affirms, “should never be terminated” (*Whirl* 130-31). But the experience of the numinous is not only placed in the service, as it was for Otto, of a mystical theology founded upon “awe” (*Mind* 119). Rather, in R. Soloveitchik’s appropriation of Otto, the emotional experience of awe is the necessary pre-requisite for an *ethical* perspective (*Whirl* 141). To represent the ethical consequences of the failure to integrate the “numinous,” R. Soloveitchik returns to a familiar type rendered more complex in *Out of the Whirlwind*: the figure of Job.

III

Job, of course, had appeared in the earlier “*Kol Dodi Dofek*” (first delivered as a lecture in 1956, a natural companion-piece to the essays published in the current collection) as a type of philosopher, a slave of fate,

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eschewing ethical engagement for metaphysical speculation.¹² In the title essay of the current collection, Job is not so much the philosopher (though he is that as well), but rather a figure who was addressed by God first through abundance and wealth, the plenty of the “ontic revelation.” Only when Job misses “the message” is he visited by the catastrophic revelation of suffering (*Whirl* 139).¹³ The poles of experience which Job endures provide the parameters for the experience of contemporary man. Like Job, modern man oscillates between the natural revelation which addresses itself to the “joyous ontic consciousness” and the “catastrophic revelation” which addresses itself to the “tormented nihilistic consciousness” (*Whirl* 137).

In “The Crisis of Human Finitude,” Job is represented simply, and somewhat surprisingly (given his earlier stature as the philosopher), as the “philistine.”¹⁴ Job’s philistine tendencies show themselves in his desire for “conquest and security”: he “leads a narrow, shut-in-existence,” and all of his efforts are aimed to maintain the status quo, to secure “safety for himself and his family.” Job, the philistine, relates to religious life as an economic affair; his “religious act” is “the expression of a utilitarian, economy-minded individual” (*Whirl* 152). Akin to the “one dimensional man” of Herbert Marcuse’s nearly contemporary study, Job, the philistine, reifies his spiritual service: religion is merely “a business venture, a pragmatic affair” through which he “hopes to appease his Creator and thus secure success and safety for himself and his family” (*Whirl* 152).¹⁵ As R. Soloveitchik relates, Job thus brings his “bourgeois notions” even to his “ostensibly spiritual *avoda*,” domesticating the mystery of the divine through an attempt to subordinate it to his utilitarian designs (*Whirl* 152).

Job’s desire to be “the first to attain and the last to lose” evidences itself as much in the spiritual realm as it does in the material (*Whirl* 151). As a cognitive “absolutist,” his schemes function only to insulate him from a reality which he refuses to acknowledge. In this sense, the perspectives of the philosopher Job of “*Kol Dodi Dofek*” and the philistine Job of “The Crisis of Human Finitude” merge. For the tendencies of the “philosophico-speculative thought” led the Job of the earlier essay to employ his capacities for “intellectual abstraction” to develop a “metaphysics of evil.” Yet such a metaphysics bent on accommodating evil through the powers of philosophical speculation is presupposed upon self-deception: Job as philosopher uses the cognitive tools at his disposal to domesticate evil, to simply “cover it up.”¹⁶ So Job the philistine clings to “a definitive pattern of existence” never willing to relin-

quish his cognitive mastery (*Whirl* 153). Unmindful of the “dialectics of being,” Job makes himself prone to the “absolutization and hypostatization of experiences,” projecting his own designs on a world which will ultimately resist them (*Whirl* 138). Job attributed to his own “desires, dreams, ambitions and visions” an “absolute significance,” an act described by R. Soloveitchik as an “an idolatrous performance” (*Whirl* 138). Subjecting the divine to human models is nothing less than idolatry—an aspiration which aspires to place the “numinous” fully within man’s intellectual grasp. Just as evil cannot be accommodated through the philosopher’s abstract speculations, so reality cannot be safely domesticated within Job’s idolatrous schemes.

Modern man, like Job, fails to realize that his dreams and desires, even his “values,” are themselves simply contingent human projections which only serve to insulate him from the presence and demands of the infinite. The God-man relationship, forged at the moment of “numinous awareness” entails the recognition that though the soul may have momentarily “befriended some value,” that bond must always be considered dissoluble (*Whirl* 178). Man’s failure to manifest an awareness of the necessary dissolubility of his value commitments—whether pragmatic or philosophical—invites the catastrophe. In this sense, Job and his contemporary American counterpart who abuse the revelation of “plenty,” R. Soloveitchik suggests, may share a similar fate.

For Job, the “catastrophic disclosure” (*Whirl* 146) is the cure for idolatrous tendencies: the closed world opens only after the revelation of nihilism which eventually leads him, as it does in the account of “*Kol Dodi Dofek*,” to both community and prayer (representing a responsiveness to both the human and divine respectively). Mistaking “a fantasy for a fact, a mirage for a reality,” Job had rendered himself unable to see beyond the limits of his own horizon. Living at the “majestic plane,” complacent and “adopting a false sense of happiness and perfection,” R. Soloveitchik writes, “must end in eternal failure and holocaust” (*Whirl* 165). In the forties, facing the chaos and disaster rendered by the Nazis, R. Soloveitchik emphasized the necessity of objectification; in the America of the fifties, where the modern Jew, “myopic” and insensitive, “shuts out the spiritual values of Judaism,” R. Soloveitchik emphasized the experience of infinitude, mystery and emotion bracketed in the earlier works.¹⁷ In his reading, even the apparently noble undertaking of living in the “service of a . . . system of values” manifests modern man’s “neurotic” strategies to insulate himself from the call of the infinite (*Whirl* 177). “Catastrophe” and “holocaust” were wrought in the

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forties through the apotheosis of the will and the “unbridled tide of the affective stream.” Amidst the “plenty” of America in the fifties, however, catastrophe, even holocaust, remains a possibility for those who, Job-like, turn away from the mystery.

Job’s self-transcendence is presupposed upon the embrace of defeat and humility, the consecration of “human incompleteness as an offering to God” in the “giving up” of “illusions of grandeur and glory, of success and conquest” (*Whirl* 158). So R. Soloveitchik relates, in a personal register, that on the eve of his operation in 1959, “the fantastic flights of human foolishness and egocentrism were distant from me” (*Whirl* 131). Here the assuredness of the halakhic man seems to be most aggressively qualified:

The more knowledge I accumulate, the more the mystery deepens, the more complex is the problem, the more fascinating is the unknown. I shall restlessly explore, investigate, search and try to comprehend, but know that the radius of the scientifically charted sectors will grow one-dimensionally, while the area of the problem will expand two dimensionally (*Whirl* 158).

This may appear like an utter rejection of the “method of quantification”—the “difficult calculations” and “mathematical functions”—elaborated by the halakhic man (*Man* 55, 83). R. Soloveitchik, however, continues, “I am not regretting my search for knowledge, but I am renouncing my arrogant desire for a complete cognitive experience, for conquest which is not followed by defeat” (*Whirl* 158). The internalization of the dialectic—the move between triumph and defeat—does not undermine the project of halakhic man, but qualifies it. For only after the self-sacrifice, the admission of the possibility of cognitive defeat, when man “rises to the height of an open existence” is the genuine encounter with the other—upon which “service” is predicated—possible. Instead of framing one’s existence through the narratives that impose values onto the world, the man of service stands before a world to whose call he is finally responsive. By living in the moment of time—outside of “an illusory eternity”—he can hear God’s call, the “summons” to “His service” (*Whirl* 147). By eschewing the all-embracing claims of knowledge, the “definitive patterns of existence” in which he took solace, and by thus evidencing an awareness of the contingency of his own values, Job, embracing the moment of “creative performance,” is free to act (*Whirl* 149).

IV

Given the volume's emphasis on the "raging turbulence" of emotions rejected in *Halakhic Man*, "A Theory of the Emotions," though among the earliest of the essays (1957-58), provides a fitting coda to the collection. In this essay, R. Soloveitchik distinguishes between those emotions that contribute to the ideals of "service" and those that merely lead towards an abyss of self-indulged subjectivity.¹⁸ In "*Avelut Yeshanah* and *Avelut Hadashah*" (first delivered to the RCA in 1969), a less philosophical rendering of some of the issues explored in the earlier essay, R. Soloveitchik, seeming to accommodate a contemporary existentialist emphasis on emotional authenticity, allows—even demands—a full expression of unadulterated emotion. Judaism, he writes, "does not tolerate hypocrisy and unnatural behavior which is contrary to human sensitivity." The confrontation with death entails suffering that "must precipitate a show of protest, a bitter complaint, a sense of existential nausea and complete confusion." God Himself demands existential honesty: "I want the sufferer to act as a human being. . . . Let him not suppress his humanity in order to please Me" (*Whirl* 12). Here the dialectic seems to falter—with the subject given unlimited range to pursue the authenticity of an emotional response, unchecked (so unlike the earlier account of his grandfather) by the constraining powers of logos, law and reason.

For R. Soloveitchik, however, the model of *aninut* and *avelut* stands as a testimony that the dialectic persists even as it seems to be suspended. The authenticity of the existential moment and the "pure emotion" which it engenders are in fact the necessary pre-requisites for a more complex emotional experience. It is only in the period of *aninut* in which the individual is permitted—indeed encouraged—to dwell in the realm of such emotional turmoil. Thus the laws of *aninut* provide a halakhic framework which, paradoxically, licenses the individual to experience emotions outside of the frame of halakhic obligation: "Let him tear his clothes in frustrating anger and stop observing *mitzvot* because his whole personality is enveloped by dark despair" (*Whirl* 12). When a man remains "emotionally neutral," when he does not give voice to "*bekhi*" or crying, "indicative of a spontaneous, overwhelming and uncontrollable grief," he demonstrates his lack of "*humanitas*" (*Whirl* 31, 34). The halakha therefore demands that man experience the "worthlessness and absurdity of life." Such a man is relieved of all of his obligations because, given his circumstances, "he is not free to act" (*Whirl* 194). Yet, he must not dwell in that realm of unfreedom: the "bitter consciousness of catas-

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trophe,” writes R. Soloveitchik, must always be transformed—that is, “redeemed”—to a “higher consciousness” (*Whirl* 13). So, for Abraham in “Abraham Mourns Sarah,” the emotional resources associated with *bekhi* are transmuted into *hesped* (*Whirl* 32). For R. Soloveitchik of *Out of the Whirlwind*, trauma, suffering and pain are the necessary conditions for transformation and eventual redemption.

Similarly, the “pure emotion,” for which the emotions of the *onen* are paradigmatic, is to be contextualized within both the totality of emotional life and the continuity of emotional experience (*Whirl* 179-80).¹⁹ The “feeling-in-itself,” described in “The Crisis of Human Finitude” as a mood, or an “unrestrained emotional response,” is simply “degrading” (*Whirl* 168). The mood, an “uncontemplative” reaction to “environmental events,” is an excess of unassimilated feeling—creating inertia and promoting passivity (*Whirl* 167). The transition from mood to emotion—from “pure emotion” to an “emotional awareness”—thus parallels the move in “*Kol Dodi Dofek*” from the “man of fate” to the “man of destiny.”²⁰ While in “the sphere of the mood,” R. Soloveitchik writes, “we are bondsmen, enslaved to our compulsory responses to a variety of phenomena.” Only when “emotion is raised to the level of experience” does one gain “the upper hand or control over” the emotions (*Whirl* 168). Moods are transformed into complex emotions through a process of objectification, enabled through a “feeling awareness” (*Whirl* 190). Through this process, which entails the engagement with the “primordial” mood, one discovers the “freedom of self-formation and self-actualization” (*Whirl* 188). Acquiescing to a mood entails the passivity of the man of fate; interpretive engagement with that mood is the beginning of the freedom of the man of destiny.

In the highly philosophical register of “A Theory of Emotions,” R. Soloveitchik elaborates the Aristotelian distinction between “intuitive” and “discursive” forms of knowledge to further clarify the distinction between mood and emotion. The first form of cognition is immediate, an “almost compulsive” response to a “challenge from outside.” This form of experience is not yet “knowledge,” but rather what R. Soloveitchik calls (following Edmund Husserl) “a source of authority for knowledge.” Hyllic matter—the “primordial emotional datum”—is transformed through an act of interpretation. As R. Soloveitchik writes, the “dialectics of the emotional experience belongs to the interpretive, not the primordial intuitive sphere” (*Whirl* 189). There is “no dialectical mood”: moods are the raw material awaiting transformation through a process of interpretation which leads to knowledge (*Whirl* 172).

What Job failed to understand—that “the experience of life is ambivalent because existence itself abounds in dichotomies and contradictions”—is central to the conception of emotions in *Out of the Whirlwind*. The pure emotion is responsive only to “the present moment.” Emotional awareness is dependent, however upon placing the “uncritical emotion” in the context of a “total-life experience” which encompasses a stream of events that cannot be exhausted by “one state of mind,” but rather a “full spectrum of feelings” (*Whirl* 193). From this perspective, the emotional experience at any particular instance is a “microcosm,” partaking not only of the “dominant emotion,” but also by its “antithesis at its periphery” (*Whirl* 193). The joy associated with *simhat ha-regel*, the festival joy described in Deuteronomy, for example, would seem to reinforce the self-satisfied contentedness of a Job-like figure: “He is contented with himself; he has been successful, he rejoices at his own great achievements, and he is ready to shut out the whole world in his exultation over his marvelous self.” The obligation of *ma’aser sheni*, however, ensures that the “joy aroused by man by the feeling of security” is tempered by an “apprehension of misery, destitution and want” (*Whirl* 206). Moods are simple and self-contained, shutting out the presence of the other; the emotions, however, which the Torah elicits are complex, always entailing a consciousness of their opposite.

The man of “service” may take conceptual precedence in *Out of the Whirlwind*, but the *homo religiosus*, who had been relegated to the margins in *Halakhic Man* takes temporal precedence—precisely because of his emotional receptivity. “Feeling,” as E.E. Cummings (somewhat sanctimoniously) wrote, “is first.” But the feeling-awareness advocated in *Out of the Whirlwind* has little to do with the drive for emotional authenticity celebrated by Cummings. Indeed, the ethical imperative saves contemporary man from the “nauseating experience of absurdity” so commonly experienced among existentialists in pursuit of the “pure emotion” (*Whirl* 207). That is, emotional *awareness* takes precedence—not, however, the emotional indulgence and self-satisfaction manifested in the figure of Job. In R. Soloveitchik’s dialectical consciousness, authentic emotions need always be cultivated, but only in so far as they serve as a prelude to the ethical consciousness.

Emotional awareness—forged out of the experience first courted by the *homo religiosus*—informs the humility demanded in “A Crisis of Human Finitude.” The mystery of the divine always shows the cognitive gesture to come up short; the complexity of a dialectical emotion, refined through its consciousness of time, shows itself to already contain

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an awareness of its opposite. This emotional awareness is the precondition for the ethical: “Through the emotional thrust into the antithesis which the individual experiences, he frees himself from self-absorption, and he begins to see the other fellow” (*Whirl* 207). The understanding that any emotional experience must always be qualified by an awareness of its opposite leads to a corresponding awareness that an emotion, or a “value” which emerges from it, created through “partial vision” is an “absurdity” (*Whirl* 190). Values informed by pure moods only masquerade as benevolence, and are in fact mere self-serving projections, psychic mechanisms designed to cover up “inner crisis” (*Whirl* 181, 176). The complex emotional awareness, by contrast, always holds out the possibility of an experience or perspective, a “rival antithetic emotion,” if not immediately present, always lurking in the shadows of an emotional continuum (*Whirl* 197). R. Soloveitchik is thus not advocating an ostensibly brisk emotional coolness, but an emotional depth, enabled through a “critical gazing” which relates the pure emotion to “the total existential experience” (*Whirl* 197).²¹ What T.S. Eliot attributed to the seventeenth century poet Andrew Marvell—the “recognition, implicit in the expression of every experience, of other kinds of experience which are possible”—marks the beginning, for R. Soloveitchik, of an ethical awareness.²² Out of this awareness, forged through the dialectic, R. Soloveitchik writes, “the feeling of sympathy emerges” (*Whirl* 206).

For R. Soloveitchik, emphasizing the centrality of the “experiential” for the fulfillment of the project announced in *Halakhic Man*, “the totality of our emotional life” is in fact a “halakhic principle” (*Whirl* 179). As the “aboriginal moral challenge is encountered by the heart,” it is the experience of the dialectical nature of emotions which emerges as the prerequisite for ethics (*Whirl* 197). The acknowledgement of the limits of knowledge—so central to the perspective of the redeemed Job—must be informed by the *experience* of the complexity of the emotional life. The recovery of the emotional in all of its dialectical turbulence (“the mystery of living in continuous tension”) is thus the pre-condition for the full realization of the values of halakhic man (*Whirl* 177).

The dynamics of this realization are rendered in R. Soloveitchik’s appropriation of the mystical conceptions of *hesed* and *mishpat*, as expansion and withdrawal respectively. The ideal of objectification implicit in *hesed* is predicated upon a precedent act of withdrawal: there is the act of contracting one’s own “egotistic existence,” of “displacing and removing” oneself “from the center of reality and taking up a peripheral position.” Without this movement, which entails a perform-

ance of self-limiting in order to allow others to enter—“*hesed* is a fantasy” (*Whirl* 214). Just as the service of Job the philistine was merely an expression of his egotistic desire for self-preservation, so *hesed* can be simply a manifestation of the need for self-promotion. Genuine *hesed* requires, R. Soloveitchik writes, “self-denial.” Having acknowledged that every emotion is accompanied by its “antithesis at the periphery,” entailing an understanding of the ultimate irreducibility of experience to any single value, the halakhic man can himself step back. The desideratum of halakhic man that the “ideal Halakhah” be “actualized and concretized” in the “very midst of the real world” requires first that act of withdrawal—of placing himself on the periphery (*Man* 90-91). For without such withdrawal, *hesed* is not a response to the call of the other, but simply a form of self projection, an act of “conquest and exploitation” (*Whirl* 216). Even the act of *hesed* can sometimes manifest itself not as a genuine desire for heeding the call of the other, but as another form of conquest. Only after having been purged of his egotistic tendencies (a simplistic and unqualified allegiance to his own values) through the experience of the emotional dialectic, can the halakhic man finally emerge. He may be still “adorned with the realm of absolute royalty,” but he has been internally transformed (*Man* 81).²³

Having descended into the whirlwind of “raging turbulence” (an act so ambivalently rendered in the works of 1944), *Out of the Whirlwind’s* “man of service” now stands ready to fulfill the agenda of the halakhic man:

He takes up his stand in the midst of the concrete world, his feet planted firmly on the ground of reality, and he looks about and sees, *listens and hears* . . . (emphasis added)

Responsive to the call of the other—the helpless, the poor, the oppressed—through listening and hearing, he actualizes the “ideals of justice and righteousness.” Realizing his role “as a rabbi and teacher in Israel,” he “serves his community” (*Man* 91). After the experience of the whirlwind of emotions, an experience not fully elaborated in the work of 1944, the halakhic man, now fully immersed in the antithetical life, finds himself more ready to *serve*.

V

In a 1955 address on “The Role of the Rabbi,” R. Soloveitchik condemned an approach to Judaism based upon “sentimentalism” and

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“empty ceremonies.” Rejecting such methods (as “*narishkeit*”), R. Soloveitchik advocated approaches able to address the “intellectual and metaphysical maturity” of American layman. In synagogues in which one day, R. Soloveitchik anticipates, “the majority of lay people will possess academic degrees,” the “white tablecloths” and “polished candelabras”—praised in a contemporary *kiruv* pamphlet—will simply not be adequate.²⁴

The essays in *Out of the Whirlwind*, in their content, style, and range of reference, reflect R. Soloveitchik’s commitment to an audience requiring sophistication of reference and argument. Indeed, as the editors of the volume assert, the essays are “difficult”; R. Soloveitchik expected “effort from his audience” (*Whirl xvi*). In what amounts to an implicit acknowledgment that R. Soloveitchik may have been writing—though unintentionally—for what the poet John Milton called “a fit audience though few,” the editors provide not one but *two* sets of introductory summaries (warning nonetheless, that they can be “no substitute for *experiencing* the essays”; *Whirl xvi*). Such editorial efforts attest that R. Soloveitchik may have in some sense over-estimated his American audience’s thirst for the kind of complexity and breadth provided in his most philosophical works.²⁵

The third in the *MeOtzar HaRav* Series, *Out of the Whirlwind* presents R. Soloveitchik’s philosophical and theological works as part of the corpus which the editors refer to as “the Rav’s Torah” (*Whirl viii*). But in filling out the legacy of “the Rav,” the editors may have been more sensitive to the needs of contemporary lay-readers than to the requisites of a scholarly edition of the works of a major thinker. The absence, for example, of a fully scholarly critical apparatus (for example, notes providing further basic information about R. Soloveitchik’s manifold citations) may have the effect of leaving R. Soloveitchik’s work in the province of an elite circle of students at Yeshiva University.²⁶ In this sense, the volume, and the series in general, sets the ground for future scholarly projects which may view the essays of R. Soloveitchik not so much as a contribution to an understanding of “the Rav’s Torah,” but as an understanding of his work in the contexts of twentieth century philosophy, theology, and the history of science. That is to say, there is much work still to be done in elucidating what the Cambridge historian, Quentin Skinner, has called the “discursive contexts” in which R. Soloveitchik worked.²⁷ To show more clearly, for example, the extent to which R. Soloveitchik was participating in a conversation the parameters of which were determined by the likes of Otto, Natorp (or Marburg neo-Kantians in general), and Herman Cohen (or

Emil Brunner and Alfred Adler, both mentioned in this volume) will not diminish his intellectual achievement, but rather enlarge it.²⁸ For understanding R. Soloveitchik's appropriation and transformation of the work of his predecessors and contemporaries will only give a clearer sense of his own creative accomplishment. It would be foolhardy to attribute to the editors a *resistance* to embarking upon such a task. They have succeeded magnificently in fulfilling their stated aim—presenting R. Soloveitchik's works in a framework accessible to those who most “eagerly” seek out his “teachings” (*Whirl viii*). To be sure, *Out of the Whirlwind* will allow *talmidim* (those at least who are willing to court “difficulty” and expend “effort”) to more carefully chart the astonishing “spiritual quest” of the Rav (*Whirl viii*). Future work awaits those, however, who will expand the legacy of the Yeshiva University Rosh Yeshiva—giving the works of Joseph B. Soloveitchik the place they deserve in the intellectual history of the twentieth century.

NOTES

I am grateful to Shalom Carmy and Jeffrey Saks for their guidance in helping to formulate the argument of the current essay.

1. R. Aharon Lichtenstein, *Leaves of Faith: The World of Jewish Learning* (Jersey City, NJ, 2003), 201. See also, David Shatz who writes, “A Reader's Companion to *Ish ha-Halakha*: Introductory Section,” *Rabbi R. Joseph B. Soloveitchik Institute* (2002), that R. Soloveitchik “displays a keen sense for the contradictions, tensions, and, to use another philosophical term for the same notion, antinomies of existence.” R. Soloveitchik's stress, Shatz continues, is on “understanding the inner reality of human life, and especially religious life, as a dialectic” (18). See also Shatz's “The Traveler's Route Home: Rabbi R. Joseph B. Soloveitchik and the Unending Dialectic,” *Jewish Action* 57:1 (Fall 1996):16-19.
2. Joseph B. Soloveitchik, *Out of the Whirlwind: Essays on Mourning, Suffering and the Human Condition*, eds. David Shatz, Joel B. Wolowelsky and Reuven Ziegler (Ktav 2003), hereafter cited as *Whirl*.
3. Joseph B. Soloveitchik, *The Halakhic Mind* (New York, 1986), 71; hereafter cited as *Mind*.
4. David Singer and Moshe Sokol, “Joseph Soloveitchik, Lonely Man of Faith,” *Modern Judaism* 2 (1982): 243, 240.
5. See Singer and Sokol's discussion, 239-246. As Singer and Sokol themselves suggest, the relationship between the perspectives articulated in R. Soloveitchik's work is perhaps more like “counterpoint” than contradiction (240).
6. Joseph B. Soloveitchik, *Halakhic Man*, trans. Lawrence Kaplan (Philadelphia, 1983), 164; hereafter cited as *Man*.

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7. The profile of the *homo religiosus* in *Halakhic Man* is ambivalent at best. Sometimes associated with emotions sanctioned by *Hazal*, sometimes with Jewish mysticism, the subjective emphasis manifests itself as well in the identifiably Christian petitions to God offered by those whose “hands are stained with the blood of the outcast” (*Man* 67, 93).
8. For an even more dramatic example of the triumph of halakha over death and the “affective realm,” see R. Soloveitchik’s account in *Halakhic Man* of R. Elijah Pruzna’s response to the death of his daughter (77-78).
9. “The Crisis of Human Finitude,” written in 1957-8 before his operation also partakes of the sensibility of “Out of the Whirlwind” and “A Theory of Emotions.” The first five chapters of the Rav’s *Worship of the Heart*, ed. Shalom Carmy (New York, 2003), originally composed as lecture notes in 1956-57, also stress emotions, crisis and the experience of distress (see especially, “Prayer, Petition and Crisis” [13-36]).
10. Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy* (New York, 1970), 3.
11. Joseph B. Soloveitchik, “*Kol Dodi Dofek*: It is the Voice of My Beloved that Knocketh,” in *Theological and Halakhic Reflections on the Holocaust*, Bernhard H. Rosenberg, ed. (Hoboken, NJ, 1992), 62. The notion of “revelation through the catastrophic” may be part of a philosophical argument that leads back to Kant (*Whirl* 129). As Gene Ray has recently shown in his “Reading the Lisbon Earthquake: Adorno, Lyotard, and the Contemporary Sublime,” *The Yale Journal of Criticism* 17.1 (2004):1-18, there is a connection between the notion of catastrophe employed by Kant in three short-tracts on earthquakes (following the Lisbon earthquake in 1755) and his conception of the sublime. Since, as Otto remarks, there “exists a hidden connection between the numinous and the sublime which something more than a merely accidental analogy,” R. Soloveitchik’s appeal in “Out of the Whirlwind” to both the “numinous” and to “catastrophe” may indeed point back to Kant. In this regard, see also Kant’s *On the Miscarriage of All Philosophical Trials in Theodicy in Religion and Rational Theology* (Cambridge, 2001), 19-38. On the connection between the Deuteronomic notion of “*hidihakha*” or “driving away,” and the “Greek *katastrophein*,” see *Whirl* 136-37.
12. “*Kol Dodi Dofek*,” 54.
13. On “missing the moment,” see “*Kol Dodi Dofek*,” 62-68.
14. Job appears in this essay with a counterpart, a type represented in the figure of Kohelet who “characterizes another form of living namely the daemonic.” The daemonic personality also betrays the notion of human finitude, not through the “limited existence of the egotist and philistine,” but rather through an “arrogant quest to equal God, to be great and bigger than He is, to transcend finitude and plunge into infinity” (*Whirl* 155).
15. Herbert Marcuse, *One Dimensional Man* (Boston, 1964).
16. “*Kol Dodi Dofek*,” 54. Of the metaphysics of evil in “A Halakhic Approach to Suffering” associated with “thematic Halakha,” R. Soloveitchik confides his own sense in the inefficacy of its message. “We know,” he writes, “that the friends of Job were not that successful in convincing Job about the nonexistence of evil. Can a rabbi be more successful? . . . I will be frank with you; I do not know” (*Whirl* 99).
17. See Aaron Rakefett-Rothkoff, *The Rav: The World of Rabbi R. Joseph B. Soloveitchik* (New York, 1999), 2.16-17.

18. In this sense, R. Soloveitchik anticipates Lionel Trilling's *Sincerity and Authenticity* (Cambridge, MA, 1971) which critiqued the unassimilated forms of emotion associated with modern conceptions of authenticity. Such a notion of the authentic individual first discovered by romantic poets, and later to be refined in Freudian psychoanalysis and Sartrean existentialism, for Trilling, reaches its apotheosis in a contemporary culture which celebrates an "authenticity of personal being" achieved through an "ultimate isolateness" (171).
19. The "totality" of emotional life places individual emotions in a synchronic context, while the "continuity" of emotional experience focuses on the diachronic element; the first is perhaps best categorized as spatial, the latter temporal. See *Whirl* 179-194; and the introduction, *xliv-xlvii*.
20. See "Kol Dodi Dofek," 53-55.
21. "What Judaism wants to attain with its principle of the dialectical emotion," R. Soloveitchik writes, "is not a restrained emotional experience, but a critical one." Indeed, the "creative emotion" must "possess a boundless energy and dynamic qualities; it must be overpowering, shattering all artificial hedges and fences which convention erects around it" (*Whirl* 196). For the distinction between the emotions elicited by Judaism and the Aristotelian mean, see *Whirl* 195-197.
22. T.S. Eliot, "Andrew Marvell," *Selected Essays* (New York, 1950), 262.
23. This internal transformation *does* represent a radical shift from the perspective of *Halakhic Man*. In the earlier work, R. Soloveitchik had argued that neither "modesty nor humility characterize the image of halakhic man"; he "is not particularly submissive and retiring, and not meek when it is a matter of maintaining his own views" (*Man* 79).
24. Rakeffet, 2.54-55.
25. R. Soloveitchik may have been right about the presence of academic degrees among lay-people, though the phenomenon may not always have had the salutary effect which he imagined. The class of people whom R. Aharon Lichtenstein has referred to as the "votaries of dispassionate objectivity" may evidence the formal skills to understand the Rav's intellectual arguments, though not the awareness of the subjective and emotional underpinnings of those arguments. See R. Aharon Lichtenstein, "Torah and General Culture: Confluence and Conflict" in *Judaism's Encounter with Other Cultures* (Jerusalem, 1997), 287. On R. Soloveitchik's sense of his own failure to kindle a "divine spark in sensitive hearts," see R. Lichtenstein, *Leaves of Faith*, 202.
26. Further, R. Soloveitchik's original citations of contemporary philosophers are left in the text, with no reference to either a contemporary edition or the edition which he may have actually consulted (see *Whirl* 151, 155).
27. See Quentin Skinner, *Visions of Politics*, vol. 1, *Regarding Method* (Cambridge, 2002).
28. David Shatz's "Reader's Companion" to provides additional contexts for *Halakhic Man*; see also Jeffrey Saks, "An Index to R. Joseph B. Soloveitchik's Halakhic Man," *Torah U-Madda Journal* 11 (2002-3): 107-122.