Rav Soloveitchik's New World View

By: DAVID P. GOLDMAN

"Out of the sources of Halakhah, a new world view awaits formulation," R. Joseph B. Soloveitchik concluded his 1944 essay *The Halakhic Mind*.[1]

We are still waiting for the "new world view" for which R. Soloveitchik hoped. Not only have we have failed to make progress in R. Soloveitchik's program, but in some ways we have lost ground. Thanks to the devoted efforts of the Rav's students, we have an extensive body of lecture notes and transcriptions that provide intimations of his "new world view." But we have a shrinking number of students prepared to follow his train of thought in such writings as *The Halakhic Mind*. To the extent that Western philosophy is taught at all at Jewish institutions, it is taught in the conventional Western way: Aristotle espoused this doctrine, Kant taught this doctrine, Heidegger taught another doctrine. That is like saying, "Kant's doctrine is to fill a bucket with water," when in fact Kant wants a bucket of water because Aristotle is on fire. Western philosophy is not a grand edifice to be admired, but a series of misadventures to be subjected to forensic analysis.

A good deal of academic research is devoted to the "influences" of Western philosophers upon the Rav. It is surely valid to speak of such influences, in the same way that we might say that a man who observes a train wreck is influenced by trains.[2] Nowhere, though, does the Rav take Western philosophy at face value. He does not look up to Western thinkers, but rather looks askance at them from the vantage point of Jewish tradition. Notably, he emphasizes the prior role of mathematical discovery, because innovation in philosophy often responds after the fact to the

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1 P. 102.

2 An exception might be made for Søren Kierkegaard, whose distinction between the aesthetic and the ethical personality clearly informs the Rav's exposition of Genesis 3. See *The Emergence of Ethical Man*, pp. 101–128. See also David Schwartz, Introduction p. xvi.

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failure of previous philosophy to account for discoveries in mathematics and physics.

It might be helpful to provide supplementary context for the Rav's exposition, and to suggest some updates to his presentation in light of later developments that bear on his objective. In my 2016 essay on the Jewish idea of freedom for this journal,[3] I sought to show that rabbinic thought as refined by R. Soloveitchik offers an ontology more robust than that of the Western philosophers. In particular, the concept of *tzimtzum* resolves the paradox of multiplicity that bedeviled philosophy from Aristotle's "third man" problem to Cantor's set theory. Nonetheless there is something to be learned from the secular philosophers: even when their efforts end in failure, we would not understand why they failed had they not attempted a systematic treatment of the issue. To ignore Western thought is a manifestation of false piety. Even the failed intellectual projects of ancient Greece and modern Europe help us to sharpen our own thinking, without forgetting that the misadventures of the West arise from its own failings. The philosophical crisis of the West reported by the Rav is a tragedy in the classic sense of the term, an outcome of inherent failings that were present from the earliest foundations of Western thought. Jews are in the West but are not of it. We do not take responsibility for its failures.[4]

The failure of Western philosophy, moreover, parallels the spiritual deterioration of the West. The Rav decried the unconstrained subjectivity that reigned in Western philosophy after the collapse of the Kantian and positivist schools, with such baleful consequences as Martin Heidegger's Nazi Party affiliation and Jean-Paul Sartre's apologies for Stalin. His "new

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3 "The Jewish Idea of Freedom," *Ḥakirah* v. 20.

4 The story of the Jewish contribution to the great accomplishments of the West remains unwritten. As I noted in my essay "The Jewish Concept of Freedom," Leibniz—the co-inventor of the Calculus and the greatest philosopher of the 17th-century scientific revolution—blamed Spinoza's misunderstanding of Kabbalah for the failure of his philosophical system. Historian A. P. Coudert argues that Leibniz's understanding of *tzimtzum* informed his ontology, which in turn provided a philosophical foundation for the Calculus. See A. P. Coudert, Leibniz and the Kabbalah (Springer 1995), pp. 88-89. A future historian of science might rank the Lurian Kabbalah among the sources of the Calculus. Nonetheless Leibniz rejected (or fail to grasp) the starting point for rabbinic ontology: the assertion that God deliberately left Creation unfinished so that man might become His partner in completing the work. Leibniz' "best of all possible worlds," as lampooned by Voltaire in *Candide*, made him a standing joke in popular perceptions of philosophy.

world view" demands a phenomenology of human experience that remains grounded in science.

The records that the Rav left us of his engagement with Western philosophy are rich with insight but in some ways incomplete. The subject came second to his role as a *melamed*, a teacher of Torah.[5] *The Halakhic Mind* leaves us *in medias res*, that is, with a snapshot of the Western philosophical crisis as of 1930, when the Rav submitted his dissertation, at a moment when the revolution in mathematics was about to reach its climax. His later engagement with Western philosophy is reflected in the Maimonides lectures and *The Emergence of Ethical Man* in the early 1950s. New discoveries in mathematics and physics were the point of departure for *The Halakhic Mind*, but we have no indication that R. Soloveitchik pursued the denouement of the intellectual drama he depicted in the 1944 essay. In 1931 the Austrian mathematician Kurt Gödel published his celebrated Incompleteness Theorems, which showed that no logical system could prove its own premises.[6] That was a momentous result, perhaps the single most important discovery in logic in the history of the West. More than any other mathematician of the 20th century, Gödel validated the Rav's intuition, but there is no evidence that the Rav took his work into account. In light of subsequent discoveries in mathematics, *The Halakhic Mind* appears all the more prescient, but also somewhat dated. R. Soloveitchik expressed disdain for the program of the logical positivists,[7] but he could not have anticipated the mortal blow that Gödel dealt to their hopes of demonstrating "the logical construction of the world," as in the title of Rudolf Carnap's 1928 treatise. I will endeavor to retell part of the story *ab ovo* and to sketch a sequel from subsequent discoveries in mathematics.

Perhaps R. Soloveitchik's most jarring assertion in *Halakhic Man* compares the halakhist to a mathematician.[8] There is more to this than metaphor. Some of the academic literature ascribes this view to the influence

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5 It is well for the Jewish world that the Rav devoted his main energy to Torah rather than philosophic investigation, but that does not relieve us of the responsibility to continue his work.

6 What Gödel showed, to be precise, is that no logical system powerful enough to account for arithmetic could prove its own axioms. There are several accessible presentations available of Gödel's theorems. See for example *The Emperor's New Mind*, by Roger Penrose, and *A World Without Time: The Forgotten Legacy of Gödel and Einstein*, by Palle Yourgrau (Basic Books 2005).

7 "Positivism of today is servile to science. It accepts scientific statements without analyzing them critically." (*The Halakhic Mind*, p. 13).

8 "Halakhic man, well furnished with rules, judgments and fundamental principle, draws near the world with an a priori relation. His approach begins with an ideal

of the neo-Kantian philosopher Hermann Cohen, the subject of R. Soloveitchik's 1930 doctoral dissertation at Berlin.[9] This in my view is misleading. To begin with, philosophy in general and Hermann Cohen's philosophy most of all found themselves in crisis because mathematical and scientific discoveries had shown up their adequacy, as R. Soloveitchik was keenly aware. "The new scientific constructs were incompatible with philosophical methodology," he wrote in *The Halakhic Mind*.[10] "They could neither be assimilated by modern philosophy, nor fitted into the traditional philosophical frame. Philosophy could not keep pace with the accelerated progress of scientific research. As a matter of fact, philosophy is not, as yet, fully cognizant of the new perspectives that have been disclosed in the various fields of mathematics and physics, perspectives which transcend the confines of the empirical and reach into the speculative and metaphysical."[11] This broad statement shows unequivocally that the Rav did not take Western philosophy at face value. On the contrary, he viewed much of it as an after-the-fact response to mathematical discovery.

Kant devised a patch to rescue the old Aristotelian metaphysics after it collapsed in the face of the Newton-Leibniz revolution in mathematics and physics. As R. Soloveitchik wrote: "Newtonian physics found its philosophical apostle in Kant; modern physics is still awaiting its philosophical expounder."[12] In contrast to philosophy, which struggled and ultimately failed to come to grips with mathematical discovery, mathematics is an unbounded investigation into Creation, just as

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creation and concludes with a real one. To whom may he be compared? To a mathematician who fashions an ideal world and then uses it for the purpose of establishing a relationship between it and the real world." *Halakhic Man*, p. 19.

9 See *The Philosophy of Rabbi B. Soloveitchik* by Dov Schwartz (Brill: Boston 2007), p. 105: "The mathematical methods that emerge from the mathematical natural sciences are therefore the foundations of Cohen's idealist method and the guarantee of its existence…The mathematization of cognitive man's cognition will be reflected in the cognition of halakhic man, which R. Soloveitchik will claim is predicated on 'objective, quantifiable measurements.' "

10 *Ish ha-Halakhah* first appeared in Hebrew in 1944, the same year that R. Soloveitchik wrote *The Halakhic Mind*. According to Prof. R. Shalom Carmy of Yeshiva University, the latter essay was based on lecture notes from a course that R. Soloveitchik gave at Yeshiva University approximately a decade earlier. The two essays should be considered contemporary expressions of R. Soloveitchik's mature thought.

11 *The Halakhic Mind*, p. 10.

12 *The Halakhic Mind*, p. 12.

Halakhah is an unending investigation into the will of the Creator.[13] The collapse of the deterministic, mechanistic world of Newtonian physics led to philosophical despair and the subjectivism of Nietzsche and Heidegger. R. Soloveitchik sought in Halakhah the foundation of a new philosophy with objective foundations in revelation. By no means did R. Soloveitchik suggest that Halakhah constitutes the beginning and end of Jewish thought. As R. Shalom Carmy wrote in 2006, Jewish learning displays "ontological pluralism."[14] The Rav's meaning was quite specific: a "new world view" that challenges secular philosophy must proceed from Halakhah, that is, with the action of human will grounded in Divine will. Halakhic acts create Jewish time, and enable covenantal man to become a co-creator alongside God, emulating God's creation of time itself.

The Rav would have agreed with Plato's encomium not to study philosophy until one already has learned mathematics. That by no means implies that mathematics is a more elevated mode of thinking. On the contrary: It is a simple mode of thinking. The deviations of actual melody from mere mathematical regularity are so complex that artificial intelligence programs are hard put to distinguish even simple tunes. The deviations of Renaissance artists from the linear perspective are so subtle that no mathematical formula has been found to explain them. Precisely because mathematics is simple, it is a laboratory for elementary investigations into ontology and epistemology. *Kal va-ḥomer*, a philosophy that cannot make sense of mathematics cannot comprehend the richer and more complex real world or the human mind.

Even if philosophy is an afterthought, it is an indispensable one, R. Soloveitchik concluded: "There is only a single source from which a Jewish philosophical Weltanschauung could emerge: the objective order: the Halakhah." Philosophical investigation "might possibly penetrate the basic structure of our religious consciousness. We might also evolve cognitive tendencies and aspects of our world interpretation and gradually grasp the mysteries of the religious halakhic act."

The Rav added that philosophical investigation

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13 See for example R. Meir Soloveitchik, "Torah and Incarnation," in *First Things*, October 2010: "Torah learning is the definitive Jewish mode of communion with God. Although the Torah contains in potential all that God wants to teach us, all the generations of Israel labor together to make this manifest. Because the Torah is infinite and inexhaustible, learning Torah yields new insights—what the rabbis called ḥiddushim, or innovations."

14 See Shalom Carmy, "Polyphonic Diversity and Military Music," in *Lomdut: The Conceptual Approach to Jewish Learning* (Yeshiva University, 2006), especially pp. 66–70.

> …would help us to discriminate between the living and the dead in Jewish philosophy. What, for instance, is of halakhic nature in the *Guide* and the *Kuzari*, and what merely an echo of Platonic-Aristotelian philosophy? The purpose of such an analysis is not to eliminate non-Jewish elements. Far from it, for the blend of Greek and Jewish thought has oftimes been truly magnificent.[15] However, by tracing the Jewish trends and comparing them to the non-Jewish, we shall enrich our outlook and knowledge. Modern Jewish philosophy must be nurtured on the historical religious consciousness that has been projected onto a fixed cognitive screen. Out of the sources of Halakhah, a new world view awaits formulation.

These gnomic observations are found in the all-to-brief conclusion to *The Halakhic Mind*, and leave the reader hanging. The Rav's lectures of the 1950s, including his graduate course on Maimonides and the lecture series published as *The Emergence of Ethical Man*, enable us to fill out the fragmentary conclusion of *The Halakhic Mind*. To do this we should begin at the beginning.

The trouble with Western philosophy

There are two problems with Western philosophy, namely the Platonists and the Aristotelians. The two 5th-century B.C.E. schools quarreled over whether there are things in the mind that are true but do not come from the senses. Plato's Theory of Forms asserts that there exist ideal species (*ideon*) of which the objects of the senses are imperfect instances, for example, Truth, Beauty, or geometric shapes. There are obvious problems with this notion; as the young Socrates is questioned by Parmenides in Plato's eponymous dialogue, we are less comfortable with Forms of hair, dirt, mud, and so forth. So-called strong Platonism asserts that whatever comes into our heads must have a corresponding instance in reality, and has few defenders. Most mathematicians are "weak Platonists," in that they believe that well-founded mathematical arguments point to a physical equivalent. The trouble with Platonism is that it offers us no clear means of distinguishing between workable insights and hallucinations.

Aristotle by contrast insists that the mind is like a blank piece of wax upon which the senses make impressions; it has no material for thought

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15 R. Soloveitchik may have had in mind G.W. Leibniz's Monadology (1714), which draws on the Lurian concept of *tzimtzum* as well as Greek philosophy. See Joseph Soloveitchik (Josef Solowiejczyk), *Das reine Denken und die Seinskonstituierung bei Hermann Cohen*, Dissertation at the Friedrich-Wilhelm University of Berlin, 1930.

except what it receives from sensory data. Once sensory experience has made an impression on the wax, the rational function of the mind can manipulate it after the fact. Sense data, Aristotle asserted, are parsed according to ten "categories" (essence, quality, quantity, position, movement, time, place, etc.). Instead of Plato's Forms, Aristotle proposed instead instantiated "Universals," which are collections of objects of the senses.[16]

Neither the Platonic nor the Aristotelian school offers a satisfactory account of the relationship between the mind and the senses, for long-studied reasons I reviewed in my 2016 *Ḥakirah* article.[17] As a matter of logic both theories fail, and the efforts of philosophers up through Bertrand Russell to repair them have failed as well. Apart from their logical deficiencies, Plato's Forms and Aristotle's Universals offend (or should offend) healthy common sense. If everything in our mind corresponds to the real world, then we have no means of distinguishing real insights from hallucinations; if there is nothing in our minds except sense data then our mental life is impoverished. That there do exist objects in our minds that do not come from the senses but nonetheless are demonstrably true was a consequence of the scientific revolution to which R. Soloveitchik refers.

Flawed or not, Aristotle's view was more influential until the Scientific Revolution of the 17th century, when the discoveries of Leibniz and Newton challenged the ancient link between sensory data and mental constructs. Ancient mathematicians prominently including Archimedes knew how to calculate the area under certain curves through the method of exhaustion, by dividing the area into a very large number of polygons. Nicholas of Cusa in the 15th century conceived of a circle as a regular polygon with an infinite number of sides. In the 1670s, though, the Leibniz-Newton Calculus introduced a revolutionary idea: the sum of an arbitrarily large series of arbitrarily small numbers summed up to a finite real number. What Leibniz called "inassignable quantities" or "infinitesimals" and Newton called "evanescent quantities" could not come to the mind from the senses, because they were arbitrarily small. That posed an insoluble problem for the old metaphysics.

The Leibniz-Newton revolution was centuries in preparation, to be sure, but the invention of new kinds of numbers founded on the arbitrarily small divisions of curves was a devastating blow to the Aristotelian understanding of reality. The integral (the area under a curve) was an actual number like any other, except that it was reckoned as the sum of an infinite number of infinitely small divisions of the area. The differential

16 Aristotle, De Anima, 429b29–430a1.

17 "The Jewish Idea of Freedom," *Ḥakirah* v. 20.

(the instantaneous rate of change in the slope of a curve) was a definite number that represented the curve's slope at an arbitrarily small instant in time.

Kant's attempt to repair metaphysics

The new numbers of 17th-century science and mathematics created a crisis for philosophy. The scholastic Aristotelianism that dominated European thinking from Thomas Aquinas in the 13th century to the beginning of the 17th century left the mainstream of philosophical thinking altogether and was relegated to a sectarian function as the official doctrine of the Catholic Church. In 1781 Immanuel Kant offered a way to restore Aristotle's dysfunctional metaphysics. Objects of perception do not simply make an impression on the mind like a stylus mark on a wax tablet, Kant offered. We do not know the inner nature of objects of perception, or things-in-themselves (*noumena*) but only what we perceive of them (*phenomena*). We have an innate mechanism inside the mind called "synthetic a priori reason." The mind still is dependent on sense data, as in Aristotle, but according to Kant it plays a more active role in "synthesizing" the phenomena of perception into concepts. With this patch Kant preserved Aristotle's categories, by turning them into a subjective requirement. Time and space in particular are inborn ("a priori") categories of perception, a sort of internal Cartesian grid enables us to conceive of things in place and motion. All statements are either synthetic (the mind creates something new out of sense data) or analytic (tautological). An analytic statement is true by virtue of its meaning, for example, "π is a number." A synthetic statement is, "π is a transcendental number." Kant thought all mathematical equations, for example, 2+2=4, required synthetic judgments, and for this reason was attacked by the positivists who thought them nothing more than logical identities. 2+2=4 simply is a tautology in their view: mathematics is simply a language, and "4" is merely what "2+2" means. The positivist position is easier to defend in the case of arithmetic than in the Calculus, and yet more difficult in higher mathematics.

To summarize Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* while standing on one foot is woefully inadequate, to be sure, but that is Kant's fault in large measure. He claimed in the preface to the first edition that "there is not a single metaphysical problem which has not been solved, or for the solution of which the key at least has not been supplied."[18] In reality, Kant's theory was savaged from all sides as soon as it was published. By excising

[18] Quoted in Bertrand Russell, *A History of Western Philosophy*, p. 707.

the objectivity of perception asserted by Aristotle and reducing sense-information to the uncertain impressions left by the "mysterious thing-in-itself," Kant opened a Pandora's box of subjectivism, as the Rav observed.[19]

Kant's synthetic a priori reason does not quite bridge the chasm between what he called "sensory" [or "sensuous"] intuition and the imperceptible quantities of the Calculus. The whole object of his work was to rescue the relationship between the senses and the intellect. He categorically ruled out "intellectual intuition," denying that objects could exist in the mind that were real but did not ultimately derive from sensory inputs. That in my view is confusing as well as ahistorical, for the thinkers who paved the way towards the Newton-Leibniz Calculus were inspired by St. Augustine's claim that "numbers of judgment" existed in the mind that did not derive from the senses. The leading exponent of Augustine's view in the early modern period was the philosopher and churchman Nicholas of Cusa, whom most historians acknowledge as a forerunner of Leibniz.[20]

Kant's influence drew a second wind from the work of Hermann Cohen and his students at the University of Marburg, who put Leibniz' infinitesimal at the center of their Kant interpretation. His 1883 book *The Principle of the Infinitesimal Method* struggles to square Kant's theory with the Calculus, and seems quaint in retrospect today. "The infinitely small eludes the conditions of intuition—and all perception must be representable in intuition. The contradiction becomes all the greater when we consider that the infinitely small, even though intuition takes no part in it, nonetheless serves the intuition. It is specifically in the interest of intuition that the tangent problem [that is, the derivative in Calculus – DG] arose to begin with. This apparent contradiction can be removed by recalling an

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19 "The Kantian dualistic approach to reality, ascribing validity and universality to certain scientific propositions of phenomenal nature while, concomitantly, confessing ignorance in the realm of the Absolute, led to speculative thought replete with philosophic anomalies. If there be a mysterious 'thing in itself,' however unintelligible it prove, the philosopher is challenged to grasp it. Speculative philosophy was born the very moment Kant discovered the incomprehensible 'Thing in itself.' Schelling's artistic intuition, Schopenhauer's voluntaristic metaphysics, Hegel's excessive idealism and contemporary metaphysics of the Absolute… are characteristic of the daring mood of the philosopher who undertakes to solve the insoluble. The net results of these metaphysical acrobatics were philosophic confusion and logical bewilderment. Scientific skepticism is a blessing while transcendental skepticism very often leads to metaphysical perplexities and mysticism." *The Halakhic Mind* p. 121.

20 See David P. Goldman, "The Divine Music of Mathematics," in *First Things* (April 2012).

elementary aspect of the critique of perception, which is conceded from every point of view. It is an error to subordinate to intuition all the means, conditions and foundation of perception, simply because all perception must be representable in intuition. According to the Kantian doctrine as it is generally received, intuition is one source of perception, coequal with thought. Thus, thought is no less a source of perception. For every perception of an object the two sources of perception must unite; every particular perception is determined by the union of these two means of perception."[21]

This explanation is utterly confusing, because it is confused to begin with. To make matters worse, Cohen draws on a murky feature of Kant's theory of perception, that is, "intensity of perception."[22] The differential, Cohen argued, was the high point of critical perception of nature, and the "necessary transmission of infinitesimal magnitudes occurs as intensive magnitudes."[23] Cohen seems to think that by staring harder and harder at infinitesimals we perceive enough of them to allow our thinking to do the rest and comprehend them in the Calculus.

In retrospect we marvel at the magnitude of Hermann Cohen's standing in German academic philosophy, which he dominated for a generation. To modern ears Cohen's train of thought seems strained at best and obtuse at worst, but it nonetheless offered a consolation to a generation that believed in the triumph of reason and the inexorable forward march of the natural sciences. Kant's attempt to repair Aristotelian metaphysics after the intellectual storm of the scientific revolution was conservative in spirit; it affirmed the continuity of Western thought from the time of Plato and Aristotle to the turn of the 19th century, and appeared to anchor human thought in the firm ground of perception, even if reason was allowed to send up balloons to an altitude far above this ground.

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21 Cohen, *Infinitesimalsmethode* (Berlin: Harrwitz und Gossman, 1883), p. 15-16 (author's translation).

22 One Kant scholar explains: "According to the Principle of Intensive Magnitudes, every possible object of experience will, as a matter of a priori and transcendental necessity, display some determinate 'degree' (Grad) of 'continuous' or 'intensive magnitude' (intensive Grösse) of 'reality' (Realität). An intensive magnitude is a measure of how an object 'fills' (erfüllt) space or time. Kant's official formulation of the principle reads, 'In all appearances, the real, which is an object of the sensation, has intensive magnitude.' " See Tim Jankowiak, "Kant's argument for the principle of intensive magnitudes," in Kantian Review 18:3 (2013). Prof. Jankowiak comments, "Most commentators dismiss the argument as a failure."

23 Cohen, *Infinitesimals Methode*, p. 15.

Whether this sort of speculation sheds any light on how the mind interprets the arbitrarily small magnitudes of the differential Calculus was in any event a moot point well before Cohen published his breakthrough book on the Infinitesimal. That the book saw the light of day at all is proof of how badly informed Cohen was about the state of mathematical research. The notion that if one stares hard enough at the tangent on a curve it will in some fashion become an object of perception might have persuaded Hermann Cohen, but by 1872 the mathematicians knew better. In that year Karl Weierstrass discovered a family of "pathological" functions that are everywhere continuous but nowhere differentiable. That put a stake through the heart of Kant's theory. Long before that, Kant's attempt to rescue the Aristotelian categories by making time and space a priori forms of perception had collapsed with the discovery of non-Euclidean geometries. It became possible to conceive of physical events in terms of a geometry of more than three dimensions, that is, outside the limits of perception.

As the Rav commented in a footnote in *The Halakhic Mind*:

> That mathematics is not synonymous with receptive intuition, as Kant thought, was amply demonstrated by modern mathematics. It is sufficient to consider the Weierstrass curve in order to convince oneself of the incommensurability of mathematical knowledge with 'sensuous' intuition. The development of non-Euclidean geometry refuted Kant's 'Transcendental Aesthetics' completely.[24]

Hermann Cohen thought he had found a way to reconcile the infinitely small interval at which a tangent is drawing to a curve with sensory perception. What Weierstrass had discovered, it turned out, is that there are different orders of the infinitely large or infinitely small. His student Georg Cantor demonstrated in the celebrated diagonal proof of 1891 that the rational numbers and the real numbers (the set of all possible points on the continuum line) belonged to different orders of infinity: the set of real numbers was "denser" than the set of rational numbers.[25] The connection between the concept of infinity and sense-perception collapsed.

Above we saw that Kant had divided judgments into "analytic," that is, logically self-evident, and "synthetic," requiring the interaction of synthetic a priori reason with sensory information. After Weierstrass and Cantor burned down the neo-Kantian bridge between sense-perception and thought, the philosophers pursued these two directions separately. At the heart of Kant's theory of perception lay the ill-defined (as the Rav

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24 *The Halakhic Mind* p. 126, fn. 76.

25 See Joseph Warren Dauben, George Cantor: His Mathematics and the Philosophy of the Infinite (Princeton University Press, 1979) pp. 165, 167.

says, "mysterious") thing in itself. Weierstrass' doctoral student Edmund Husserl began his career as a mathematician, but chose instead to pursue psychology and philosophy in the hope of correcting Kant's theory. The result Husserl named Phenomenology, and its motto was, "Back to the things themselves!" That led Husserl and the Phenomenologists into an infinite loop of subjective introspection and made Heidegger's unconstrained, conscienceless subjectivity possible.

At the other end of the Kantian divide, logical philosophers attempted to banish the problems inherent in synthetic a prior reason by reducing everything to analytic propositions. That was the approach taken by Gottlob Frege and Georg Cantor, and pursued by Bertrand Russell and Alfred Whitehead in England. Kant's grandchildren thus split into a "metaphysical" camp (Phenomenology) and a logical positivist camp, with entirely different concerns and without a common language. The logicians claimed that the metaphysicians used imprecise language to produce meaningless statements, and the metaphysicians dismissed the positivists as trivial.

Kant's great-grandchildren dominated philosophy in the 1920s: Husserl's protégé and teaching assistant Martin Heidegger at the University of Freiburg, and Rudolf Carnap at the University of Vienna. The heirs to Kant's metaphysics and his logic spoke of different things to different audiences. By ironic coincidence the last great statement of metaphysics, Heidegger's 1927 tome *Being and Time*, and the most comprehensive presentation of logic as an alternative to metaphysics, Carnap's 1928 treatise *Der logische Aufbau der Welt*, appeared almost simultaneously, and by another ironic coincidence, both projects were in tatters by 1931.

Heidegger came to understand that metaphysics could not provide a solution to the problem of Being that he had reformulated and posited as the decisive issue before philosophy, and retreated into mystical contemplation of romantic German poets.[26] He also became a member of the

[26] There is an extensive literature on Heidegger's turn away from metaphysics. A good summary is found in *Kierkegaard and Heidegger: The Ontology of Existence*, by the Orthodox Jewish philosopher Michael Wyschogrod (Routledge and Kegan Paul: New York 1954), pp. 67–77. Heidegger failed to publish the promised third section of *Being and Time* because, as he wrote years later, "thinking failed to express adequately this change [in his understanding of Being] and did not come through with the help of the language of metaphysics." The "late Heidegger" believed that Being could only be approached through the language of poetry, and devoted a good deal of his attention to the obscure verse of Friedrich Hölderlin. Heidegger is perhaps the only philosopher of rank to make his reputation on a theory that he immediately proceeded to refute, although it

Nazi Party, an atrocious action for which he never apologized. Kurt Gödel's 1931 proofs destroyed the logical positivists' hope of creating a system of formal proofs ("analytic propositions," in Kantian language).

Western philosophy after the crisis I: The rise and fall of analytic philosophy

We have seen that the problems that bedeviled Greek philosophy returned with a vengeance after the 17th-century Scientific Revolution, and that Kant's attempt to place a patch on Aristotle metaphysics came to grief as his intellectual descendants split into two schools, each of which came to a dead end just after R. Soloveitchik finished his dissertation at Berlin. At this point Western philosophy comes to an end. There still are departments of philosophy at universities and people who call themselves philosophers, to be sure, but they are like disembodied spirits without the ability to sway the thinking of their contemporaries about any subject of importance. A generation or two ago most laymen with a university degree would have had a ready answer to the question "Who is the greatest living philosopher?" They might have mentioned Sartre, Heidegger, Russell, Maritain, Tillich, or any number of names known at least in some way to the general public. After Gödel the logical philosophers retreated into secondary issues that no longer bear on the grand project of universal knowledge. The Existentialists have become a sort of self-parody after Sartre.

There still are pockets of professing philosophers who claim the mantle of the Greeks. There will be Thomists and hence Aristotelians as long as the Catholic Church is there, although the influence of Thomas Aquinas long since disappeared outside his sectarian setting. Among modern Thomists, only Alasdair McIntyre has a following in the English-speaking world.[27] There is also the Leo Strauss cult which claims to represent the

might be argued that Aristotle's formulation of the "third man" problem was self-refutation of his theory of universals.

27 McIntyre proposes "an Aristotelian point of view" of human behavior: "The autonomy granted to the human agent by modern moral philosophy breaks down natural human communities and isolates the individual from the kinds of formative relationships that are necessary to shape the agent into an independent practical reasoner," according to his entry in the Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy. For this he blames "Christian divine command ethics since the fourteenth century [which] has remained essential to secularized modern morality since the eighteenth century." McIntyre refers to the 13th-century theologian Duns Scotus, whom the Rav held in esteem. See *Halakhic Man*, pp. 52-53.

political wisdom of the ancients and promotes an "esoteric" reading of classical Greek as well as Hebrew sources. Strauss argued that Judaism and philosophy were inherently incompatible, [28] and claimed that Rambam was "absolutely no Jew" because he was a philosopher. Strauss claimed that Rambam embedded this view "esoterically" in *The Guide for the Perplexed*. R. Soloveitchik vehemently rejected the claim that Rambam was an "esoteric" writer.[29] Strauss' esoteric readings have not stood up

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In keeping with R. Soloveitchik's emphasis on the precedence of mathematics over philosophy, a case can be made that the first intimations of modern mathematics played a role in the dissolution of Scholastic philosophy. Galileo is usually cited as a 16th-century forerunner of Newton. In fact, the Oxford mathematicians of the late 13th and early 14th centuries discovered the laws of kinetic motion later attributed to Galileo, for example, the instantaneous velocity of an object moving with constant acceleration (the "mean speed theorem"). This is quantity that cannot be "seen," for instantaneous velocity "exists" for an arbitrarily small instant. It only can be imagined in the mind. The mind is capable of looking into the interstices of Creation and perceiving through intuition what is imperceptible to the senses; it also is capable of directly receiving Revelation from Scripture. The Catholic Church asserted its authority on the strength of a Natural Law founded on Aristotle; the self-styled Augustinians at Oxford asserted the capacity of human intuition to commune directly with the Divine. Thomas Bradwardine, the most famous of the Oxford Calculators, and his more famous student John Wycliffe prepared the ground for what later became Protestantism. Just as Bradwardine anticipated Galileo, Wycliffe anticipated Luther. To make Revelation accessible to all of Christendom, Scripture had to be available in vernacular languages, and Wycliffe's translation of the Bible into Middle English set the precedent for hundreds of vernacular translations and scores of printed editions that predated Luther. At least eighteen complete German Bible editions were in print before Luther as well as ninety versions of the New Testament.

28 "On February 16, 1938, Strauss wrote to his longtime friend Jacob Klein: "One misunderstands Maimonides simply because one does not reckon with the possibility that he was an 'Averroist.'" Strauss knew, of course, that 'to pull Maimonides out of Judaism is to pull out its foundation,' but his recent insights into Maimonides's *The Guide for the Perplexed* had led him to the 'determination that Maimonides in his beliefs was absolutely no Jew' because he was a philosopher. Strauss had long maintained, as he wrote to Klein, 'the incompatibility in principle of philosophy and Judaism.' Eight years earlier in Berlin, he had argued heatedly with Julius Guttmann that 'Jewish philosophy' was a contradiction in terms. But he had never overtly proven the claim for a major Jewish figure, and now he was getting ready to do so. See Suzanne Klingenstein, "Of Greeks and Jews: Old letters throw new light on Leo Strauss," in *The Weekly Standard*, Oct. 25, 2012.

29 Maimonides "seeks to negate any educational policy of esotericism. He was against any esotericism in education." *Maimonides Between Philosophy and Halakhah*,

well to scholarly criticism,[30] but remain in circulation due to academic inertia.

The Halakhic Mind, as we have seen, leaves us at the denouement of the crisis of Western philosophy, after the Kantian synthesis fractured into "logical" and "metaphysical" schools. The misadventures of both camps provide signposts for R. Soloveitchik's unfinished project for a Jewish philosophy of religion. We return first to Kurt Gödel, who ruined the positivist hope of encompassing all mathematical knowledge in a consistent set of analytic proofs. "Although he did not go to church," his wife Adele told the logician Hao Wang shortly after Gödel's death in 1978, he "was religious and read the Bible in bed every Sunday morning."[31] He told Wang, "Spinoza's God is less than a person. Mine is more than a person, because God can't be less than a person. He can play the role of a person."[32]As a man of faith in a militantly secular profession, he was personally and professionally isolated. "Ninety percent of contemporary philosophers see their principal task to be that of beating religion out of men's heads," he wrote to his mother in 1961. Gödel's God is not the well-behaved deity of the old natural theology, or the happy harmonizer of the intelligent-design subculture. He hides his countenance and can be glimpsed only in paradox and intuition. He confronts those who seek him with paradox, uplifting man through glorious insights while guarding his infinitude from human grasp.

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by R. Joseph B. Soloveitchik (KTAV 2016), p. 82. The Rav contends that "in the *Mishneh Torah*, in the realm of Halakhah, he was able to mint new terms, to fashion new philosophical categories. There he was creative in all senses. But in the *Guide* there is sterility as to the form of presentation. He used the old, routine Aristotelian philosophical jargon. Perhaps his use of Arabic hampered him; he was so overawed by Aristotle that he adopted his tools and took on his tradition" (p. 76). Strauss contended that Maimonides was a feigned Jew and a secret philosopher. R. Soloveitchik argues rather that "Maimonides the halakhist defeated Maimonides the philosopher. Maimonides, like Koheleth, was very skeptical. Koheleth began his book by declaring '*Haveil havalim*,' 'Vanity of vanities… all is vanity' (Eccles. 1:2). But in the end he could not escape his own personality. 'The end of the matter, all being heard: fear God and keep His commandments, for this is the whole of man' (Eccles. 12:13). The same was true for Maimonides. After all his adventures in the field of philosophy, he came back to the Halakah." (pp. 238-239).

30 See for example *Concealment and Revelation: Esotericism in Jewish Thought and its Philosophical Implications*, by Moshe Halbertal, trans. Jackie Feldman (Princeton University Press, 2007).

31 *A Logical Journey: From Gödel to Philosophy*, by Hao Wang (MIT 1997), p. 51.

32 Wang, p. 88.

Of all major 20th-century thinkers, Gödel is perhaps closest to R. Soloveitchik in his appreciation of the impact of mathematics on philosophy. In my 2016 essay on the Jewish concept of freedom, I cited his 1961 essay on the supposed "foundational crisis" in mathematics:

> At the turn of the 20th century was not a problem for mathematics at all, but for philosophy: "Around the turn of the century…it was the antinomies of set theory, contradictions that allegedly appeared within mathematics, whose significance was exaggerated by skeptics and empiricists…I say "allegedly" and "exaggerated" because, in the first place, these contradictions did not appear within mathematics but near its outermost boundary towards philosophy, and secondly, they have been resolved in a manner that is completely satisfactory and, for everyone who understands the theory, nearly obvious…The certainty of mathematics is to be secured by seeking to gain insights into the solvability, and the actual methods for the solution, of all meaningful mathematical problems…. it turns out that in the systemic establishment of the axioms of mathematics, new axioms, which do not follow by formal logic from those previously established by formal logic, again and again become evident… every clearly posed mathematical yes-or-no question is solvable in this way. For it is just this becoming evident of more and more new axioms on the basis of the meaning of the primitive notions that a machine cannot imitate.[33]

Let the philosophers fret over their failure to discover consistent universal laws that govern epistemology and ontology, Gödel says in so many words: reality will provide an infinite richness of meaningful problems for the mathematicians to address. It is of no small importance that the greatest logician of the century validated R. Soloveitchik's intuition about the relationship of mathematics and philosophy.

Popular culture, to be sure, has lionized Gödel, but for the wrong reasons.[34] What Gödel offered as an act of religious faith is presented as a statement of relativism: If we cannot devise complete and consistent formal proofs for mathematical systems, the pop version goes, we can't really know anything, and therefore all ideas are equally unprovable and therefore equally valid. Banal as this sounds, it encapsulates the view of relativists after the breakdown of Kantian metaphysics.

Although Gödel's Incompleteness Theorems took root in the popular mind, his later investigation of the nature of infinity is known only to specialists. As we have seen, infinity was the stone on which Aristotelian

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33 Kurt Gödel, Collected Works Volume III (Oxford 1995) pp. 377–385.

34 See for example *Gödel Escher Bach* by Douglas Hofstadter (Basic Books 1979).

metaphysics broke their teeth. Hermann Cohen's attempt to tame the infinite for the benefit of Kant's theory of sensuous intuition collapsed after Weierstrass proved that the calculus discovered by Leibniz and Newton could not integrate or differentiate some classes of functions. The Weierstrass Curves mentioned by the Rav are "spiky" functions in which changes in sign, for example, occurred in arbitrarily small intervals. From the study of such functions came the disturbing insight that some infinities are "bigger," that is, more densely packed with numbers, than other infinities. That inspired George Cantor to attempt to treat the different orders of infinity as if they were just another kind of number—the "transfinite numbers"—and thus to domesticate infinity. There is a one-to-one correspondence between the integers and the rational numbers, such that the rational numbers may be thought of as a "countable" infinity. But there is no such correspondence between the integers and the real numbers, conceived of as a continuum line.

Cantor believed that he had solved not only a mathematical conundrum but a fundamental problem in philosophy. At least in the realm of numbers, Cantor believed, infinity itself could be ordered with a new series of "transfinite numbers," each representing a different order of infinity. He envisioned a new kind of cardinal numbers denoting infinite sets of numbers. The infinitesimal monads of Leibniz thus would no longer require God and the principle of sufficient reason to differentiate themselves because infinite series of numbers would arrange themselves naturally into Cantor's transfinite ordering. Cantor asserted that the infinity of the integers and rational numbers was the first transfinite number, and he named it "Aleph-zero," written as $\aleph_0$. What, then, was the second transfinite number, or $\aleph_1$? He had proven that the infinity of the continuum of real numbers was "denser" than that of the integers; unlike that of the rational numbers, it could not be counted. He assumed that if the first transfinite number contained the integers, the second transfinite number would contain the continuum, and that no other transfinite number could be discovered between these two.

That is Cantor's celebrated Continuum Hypothesis, which claims to identify the first and second transfinite cardinal numbers. From there, he believed, all the possible orders of infinity could be counted, the same way the integers count groups of one, two, three, and so forth. Cantor spent the last thirty-five years of his life in a vain effort to prove this. It was Gödel and, later, Paul Cohen who demonstrated respectively that Cantor's continuum hypothesis could be neither proved nor disproved within existing set theory as formulated by Zermelo and Fraenkel. Cantor's hypothesis remains maddeningly undecidable. Intuition, Paul Cohen argued, strongly suggests that Cantor's hypothesis is wrong: Among the infinite

number of transfinite numbers, there are an infinite number of cardinalities between the integers and the points on the continuum line, and mathematical investigation of the infinite will remain infinitely fruitful.[35]

The infinite remains ineffable. Mathematicians have proven that an infinite number of transfinite numbers exist but cannot tell what they are or in what order they should be arranged. This has deep resonance with Jewish thought. Dov Schwartz observes that R. Soloveitchik distinguishes carefully between the mathematical concept of infinity as potential, and the Kabbalistic concept of actual infinity (*Ein Sof*) when he cites R. Shneur Zalman of Lyady, "that great luminary of Halakhah and mysticism," on pp. 55-56 of *Halakhic Man*. Gödel and Cohen help us to distinguish between the actual infinite in the mind of God and the infinite as it presents itself to human understanding.[36]

Western philosophy after the crisis II: The descent into subjectivity

One outcome of the Kantian fracture, namely Gödel's achievement in mathematical logic, reinforces and clarifies themes that R. Soloveitchik thought relevant to religious philosophy. Far murkier is the subjectivist side of post-Kantian philosophy culminating in Heidegger. There is no doubt that the Rav read Heidegger thoroughly. As Heidegger's terminology became standard in philosophical language, the Rav on occasion adopts his usage, for example, the distinction between "ontological" (that which pertains to the concept of Being) vs. "ontic" (pertaining to an individual being). But the Rav reserved his deepest contempt for the unbridled subjectivism that stemmed from Husserl's attempt to "go back to the things themselves." Phenomenology in his view lost itself in a swamp of subjective perception and led to a catastrophic outcome:

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35 "A point of view which the author [Cohen] feels may eventually come to be accepted is that CH is obviously false. The main reason one accepts the axiom of infinity is probably that we feel it absurd to think that the process of adding only one set at a time can exhaust the entire universe. Similarly, with the higher axioms of infinity. Now $\aleph_1$ is the cardinality of the set of countable ordinals, and this is merely a special and the simplest way of generating a higher cardinal. The set $\boldsymbol{C}$ [the continuum] is, in contrast, generated by a totally new and more powerful principle, namely the power set axiom. It is unreasonable to expect that any description of a larger cardinal which attempts to build up that cardinal from ideas deriving from the replacement axiom can ever reach $\boldsymbol{C}$." *Set Theory and the Continuum Hypothesis*, by Paul J. Cohen (Walter Benjamin, 1966), p. 151.

36 Schwartz 178–181.

> …the phenomenological, existential, and antiscientific school of Heidegger and his coterie, and from the midst of which there arose in various forms the sanctification of vitality and intuition, the veneration of instinct, the desire for power, the glorification of the emotional affective live and the flowing, surging stream of subjectivity, the lavishing of extravagant praise on the Faustian type and the Dionysian personality, etc. etc., have brought complete chaos and human depravity to the world.[37]

Shamefully, certain Jewish academics have sought to identify R. Soloveitchik with Heidegger, to the point of alleging that he adopted *Völkisch* (racialist) notions from the Nazi philosopher. I refer to recent articles by Daniel Herschkowitz and Michael Fagenblat. Daniel Herschkowitz writes of R. Soloveitchik's "endorsement of *Volkisch* [racialist] thought,"[38] while Michael Fagenblat concocts a guilt-by-association allegation that Soloveitchik adopted his concept of Jewish "fate" and "destiny" from Heidegger.[39] It is scandalous that the editorial standards of "Jewish studies" journals have sunk low enough to publish such an amalgam of malice and ignorance. The libel against the Rav may be outlandish, but libel of any sort requires an answer. Some benefit can be drawn from the exercise.

Heidegger's story, we have seen, begins with Edmund Husserl's response to the destruction of Kant's theory of perception by his teacher Weierstrass. The Rav writes:

> It is no mere coincidence that the most celebrated philosophers of the Third Reich were outstanding disciples of Husserl. Husserl's intuitionism (*Wesenschau*) which Husserl, a trained mathematician, strived to keep on the level of mathematical intuition, was transposed into emotional approaches to reality. When reason surrenders its supremacy to dark, equivocal emotions, no dam is able to stem the rising tide of the affective stream. The modern philosopher-mystic is a disguised apostle of Dionysus (Nietzsche's life-affirming God)… "The society of life-affirmers" whose task was the reestablishment of "superabundance of life," brought havoc and death instead. They left in their wake "*Wahn, Wille, Wehe*" [madness, will, misery] and "the rebirth of tragedy."[40]

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37 *Halakhic Man*, p. 141.

38 Herskowitz, Daniel (2015) "Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik's Endorsement and Critique of Volkish Thought," Journal of Modern Jewish Studies, 14:3, 373–390.

39 Fagenblat, Michael. "The Thing that Scares Me Most: Heidegger's Anti-Semitism and the Return to Zion," in *Journal for Cultural and Religious Theory* vol. 14, no. 1 (Fall 2014): 8–24.

40 *The Halakhic Mind*, p. 53.

But the first stirrings of Heidegger's metastatic subjectivism appear with contemporary responses to Kant's 1781 *Critique of Pure Reason*. Kant opened the door to subjectivity by asserting that we cannot perceive the thing-in-itself, but only interpret the phenomena that appear in our senses through inborn categories. This begged the question asked by Johann Gottlob Fichte (1764–1814): Who is the "I" who translates these subjective perceptions into concepts, and in what form of consciousness does Kant's perceptual sleight-of-hand occur? This consciousness, Fichte asserted, must be national consciousness, and Heidegger followed Fichte in identifying "authentic Being" with historically conditioned nationalism.[41] Whereas Kant insisted that all thought ultimately depended on sensory intuition, Fichte insisted that I-ness (*Ichheit*) arose from the individual's pure reflection on his consciousness. His watchword was, "The I posits itself." With Fichte, Kant's subjective perception teeters on the edge of a deep well of subjectivity. With the Romantics, it tumbles in.

Fichte's students Friedrich Hölderlin (1770–1843) and Novalis, the pen name of Georg Philipp Friedrich Freiherr von Hardenberg (1772–1801), reproached Fichte for proposing an abstract and impoverished account of consciousness. Following St. Augustine,[42] Novalis argued that all consciousness was time-consciousness, a synthesis of memory and anticipation. Augustine's celebrated paradox of time states that the past is gone, and therefore no longer exists, while the future is not yet here, and therefore does not yet exist, while the present that separates past and future is vanishingly brief and therefore cannot be grasped. "It is in you, my mind, that I measure times," Augustine wrote in Chapter XI of his *Confessions*. If the measurement of small intervals of time occurs in the mind, then what can we say about our perception of distant past and future? If our perception of past events depends on memory, then our thoughts about future events depend on expectation, and what links both is "consideration." For "the mind expects, it considers, it remembers; so that which it expects, through that which it considers, passes into that which it remembers." Our perception of past and future arises from expectation and memory. "It is not then future time that is long, for as yet it is not: but a long future, is 'a long expectation of the future,' nor is it time past, which now is not, that is long; but a long past is 'a long memory of the past.'"[43]

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41 See for example Findler, Richard, "Was Fichte Heidegger's Political Fürsprecher?" in Symposium, Volume 3, Issue 2, Fall 1999.

42 Confessions, Chapter XI.

43 I argued in my essay on Jewish Freedom that the Church Father probably adapted this view from Kohelet 3:15.

Novalis wrote: "The paired concept of 'Anticipation' and 'Fulfillment' can only be related to the subjective experience of time, for an objective quantity of time permits no qualitative valuation. Fraught waiting, hoping and longing are conditions of the soul which are directed towards the future. They come to expression in intimations, prophecies and dreams… In decisive moments the process comes to a head in a comprehensive look backwards and forward, which brings together all times. Through dreams, feasts, delirium, pleasure, love and poetic inspiration, every consciousness breaks its boundaries and is lifted up over continuous time."[44]

Novalis adopted Spinoza's term "ecstasy" (literally, "standing outside") but used it to mean something entirely different, namely the inspired, momentary unity of past and future into a single moment of insight. In his "Fragments" of 1798, he wrote: "Fichte doesn't understand the *hypostasis* (underlying reality), and for this reason he lacks the other half of the creative mind. Without *Ekstase*—gripping, all-displacing consciousness—you can't get anywhere with all of philosophy."[45] Novalis' notion that the whole of one's life can be condensed into a single inspired moment uniting past, present and future did not sit well with all of his contemporaries.[46] I suspect that the content of Faust's wager with Mephistopheles in Goethe's 1806 reflected the great poet's contempt for Novalis. Faust eschews the devil's offer of money, fame and women, and proposes instead that if the devil shows him a single moment that he wants to hold on to forever, his soul will be forfeit.[47] The wager with the devil was the most auspicious event in 19th-century literature, but Goethe's sober objections were overwhelmed in the subsequent surge of Romantic enthusiasm.

Responding to Kant, Novalis had formulated with great clarity what later became Heidegger's theory of time-consciousness. Heidegger fails to

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44 Quoted in *Astralis von Novalis: Handschrift, Text, Werk*, by Sophia Vietor. (Königshausen & Neumann, 2001), p. 211. Author's translation.

45 Novalis Schriften V. 2, Jacob Minor ed. (E. Diderichs, 1907), p. 219. Author's translation.

46 *Ästhetik des Augenblicks: der Dichter als Überwinder der Zeit*, by Bruno Hillebrand (Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1999), p. 46: "The classical competition, Goethe and Schiller, vehemently rejected the cosmic theory of the moment of [the Romantics].

47 Goethe's novel Wilhelm Meister portrays a young fellow from a merchant family who runs away to join a theater troupe and pursue art as a vocation, and at the end decides that fulfilling personal responsibility is more important than his art. Novalis denounced this as "prosaic" and inimical to his goal of poeticizing life. What Faust wants is life, not its illusions, and therefore dismisses the ecstatic moment as a devil's trick.

cite Novalis in any of his writing.[48] It is typical of Heidegger to occult his debts to earlier writers, including St. Augustine (whose theory of time he dismisses as a "vulgar time conception), or Kierkegaard (from whom he adapted his concept of Dread), or for that matter Goethe, from whom he borrowed the existential category of "care."[49] After discovering that metaphysics had failed him, Heidegger turned to the poems of Novalis' friend Hölderlin, whom he first met in the presence of Fichte in 1798. According to Charles Larmore, they "agreed in opposing one of the leading assumptions of Fichte's and later Hegel's idealism, namely, that reality is transparent to reason. For both of them, philosophy runs up against limits that poetry alone can point beyond."[50]

Nonetheless Heidegger's reliance on the concept of *Ekstase* is *formally* identical to Novalis' usage. He avers, "The future, the character of having been, and the Present, show the phenomenal characteristics of the 'towards-oneself,' the 'back-to,' and the 'letting-oneself-be-encountered by.' The phenomena of the 'towards…,' the 'to…,' and the 'alongside…' make temporality manifest as the *ekstatikon* pure and simple. Temporality is the primordial 'outside-of-itself' in-and-for-itself. We therefore call the character of the future, the character of having been, and the Present, the 'ectases' of temporality."[51]

A great gulf is fixed, though, between the Christian Novalis and the neo-pagan Heidegger. They agree that consciousness is a higher unity of memory and anticipation. The questions that divided them were first, memory of what, and second, anticipation of what. Novalis' critique was first of all a Christian riposte. In his 1799 essay "Christianity or Europe," Novalis proposed a return to the Christianity of the early Middle Ages, but a Christianity that would ennoble the tales (*Märchen*) of the past. The disenchanted world that Friedrich Schiller bemoaned in his poem "The Gods of Greece" would thus become reenchanted (*wiederverzaubert*)

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48 Scholarly literature on Novalis and Heidegger is sparse. Hanly, Peter Charles. "Figuring the Between," PhD Dissertation at Boston College, 2013. Http://hdl.handle.net/2345/3770. Hanly observes, "The fact that little attention has been given to the consideration of their relationship is undoubtedly owing to the fact that there is no sustained address to the work of the Jena Romantics in Heidegger's writing. However, the question of their relation merits reflection because of the insistence with which, albeit in a marginal way, Heidegger returns again and again in his work to fragments of Novalis."

49 *Faust* lines 11420–11510.

50 Charles Larmore, "Novalis and Fichte," in *The Cambridge Companion to German Idealism* (Cambridge University Press 2017), p. 205.

51 Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans MacQuarrie and Robinson (Harper and Row, New York 1962), p. 377.

through the fairytale world that underlay medieval Christianity. That in summary was the Romantic program. Where Schiller and Hölderlin hoped to re-enchant the world with Hellenism, the Romantics hoped to anchor memory in the putative Age of Faith.

The Romantics inevitably failed. Their ecstatic moment was a higher unity of memory and anticipation—but memory and anticipation of what? The robustness of Jewish identity stems in part from its firm anchor in time. "Revelation is the first thing to set its mark firmly into the middle of time; only after Revelation do we have an immovable Before and Afterward," wrote Franz Rosenzweig. "Then there is a reckoning of time independent of the reckoner and the place of reckoning, valid for all the places of the world." The peoples of the world look back in time, though countless conquests, migrations, and forced assimilations that stretch beyond all records. They encounter not time, but "once upon a time," in myth.

That is a conundrum for the Christian world, which sees its spiritual origin at Golgotha but its ethnic origin in the impenetrable mists of the distant past. To be a whole person, the Christian must find a way to reconcile these two demarcations of memory. That is why Christianity embraces myth. C.S. Lewis argued that Christianity "is simply a true myth: a myth working on us in the same way as the others, but with this tremendous difference that it really happened: and one must be content to accept it in the same way, remembering that it is God's myth where the others are men's myths: i. e. the Pagan stories are God expressing Himself through the minds of poets, using such images as He found there, while Christianity is God expressing Himself through what we call real things." His Oxford colleague J.R.R. Tolkien devoted his life to creating a new myth that would provide a better foundation for Christianity than the ambient pagan myths.

Rather than re-enchanting the world with ennobled myths, the Romantics stood godfather to a revived paganism. Heinrich Heine warned in 1834 that "if ever the Cross—the taming talisman—were to fracture, then the wildness of the old warriors will clatter to the surface, their mad berserkers' rage . . . and the old stone gods will raise themselves up out of the forgotten dust and rub the dust of a millennium from their eyes, and Thor with his giant hammer will at last rise up and smash the Gothic domes." In the hands of Richard Wagner, the *Nibelungenlied* became an anti-Christian manifesto. In the 19th century Germany brought forth a peerless high culture in literature, music and the sciences, but its national sense of the sacred lost its way in the land of *Märchen* and was bewitched

by the pagan past.[52] Historicism—the belief that truth is relative to concrete historical circumstances—began with the Romantics and was coined as a neologism by their founding father August Wilhelm Schlegel. The search for historic memory in the service of national self-consciousness began a spiritual tangent that, as we shall see, culminates in Heidegger.

Novalis' Christian faith surely explains why Heidegger sought to obscure his debt to the Romanic philosopher. Heidegger was something of a charlatan, repurposing out long-debated and well-worn ideas with an original terminology. But he appealed to the *Zeitgeist*. The collapse of the House of Kant brought down the credibility of Greek metaphysics, because—as we have seen—Kant had tried and failed to rescue Greek metaphysics after the scientific revolution. Boldly, Heidegger announced that he had found an original solution to the paradox of Being that owed nothing to Plato and Aristotle, and although he admitted failure, the promise of a fresh start in metaphysics rallied philosophical opinion to his side.

Heidegger not only laid claim to the mantel of metaphysics: He proposed to capture the categories of religious experience in a purely secular philosophy, and his undertaking fascinated a world whose faith was shaken by the First World War. His student and sometime lover Hannah Arendt observed that the object of Heidegger's ontology was "to make Man the 'Master of Being,'" and to "put man in exactly the same place that God had occupied in traditional ontology."[53] The leading Thomist Etienne Gilson wrote in 1947 that "the great problem of Being and Time posed by Heidegger was the same posed by St. Augustine."[54]

Arendt knew precisely what Heidegger was up to; she helped him do it. Arendt wrote her dissertation on St. Augustine while conducting an affair with the married Heidegger, and her summary of Augustine's theory of time in the dissertation corresponds to Heidegger's later discussion of

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52 Wagner probably was the most influential figure of 19th-century Europe. Via Artur Schopenhauer, he adopted the Romantic notion of *Ekstase* and gave it musical incarnation. See David P. Goldman, "Why We Can't Hear Wagner's Music," *First Things*, December 2010: "Wagner had a gift, as well as an ideological purpose, for the intensification of the moment. If Goethe's Faust bets the Devil that he can resist the impulse to hold onto the passing moment, Wagner dives headfirst into its black well. And if Faust argues that life itself depends on transcending the moment, Wagner's sensuous embrace of the musical moment conjures a dramatic trajectory toward death."

53 Hannah Arendt, *Essays in Understanding* (Knopf Doubleday: New York 1954), p. 178.

54 Etienne Gilson, *Philosophie et Incarnation Selon S. Augustine* (Institute des études médiévales; Montreal 1947), p. 53.

time-consciousness in *Being and Time*.[55] She believed so fervently in Heidegger's project to transpose a theory of religious consciousness into a non-theistic framework that she helped to rehabilitate Heidegger after World War II, despite Heidegger's refusal to repudiate his Nazi Party membership or criticize Hitler. Leo Strauss gushed, "I am afraid that we shall have to make a very great effort to find a solid basis for rational liberalism. Only a great thinker could help us in our intellectual plight. But here is the trouble: the only great thinker in our time is Heidegger."[56] Heidegger was a great thinker, because he exhausted the metaphysics of Being and demonstrated its inherent limitations, but Strauss meant more than that. He added, "Heidegger is the only man who has an inkling of the dimensions of the problem of a world society."[57]

For the Romantics, deep memory was constructed from a fabled Christian past, and deep anticipation was anticipation of a death that promised salvation. Heidegger looked back to autochthonous ethnic roots and forward to a death that simply meant an end. Humanity's *Dasein* (literally, being-there) was merely "Being-unto-death." A former student at a Catholic seminary, Heidegger retained the sensibility of religious experience, even if he excised its theistic premise. Martin Heidegger's philosophy is derived from religious thought, R. Soloveitchik taught, as did Gilson, Arendt, and many of Heidegger's contemporaries. Academic criticism has shifted towards this reading, which is wholly consistent with Heidegger's support for the Nazi regime. R. Soloveitchik recognized the religious impulse in Heidegger, but warned that the substitution of human willfulness for the Divine Will has a horrific result:

> This concept of the obligatory nature of the creative gesture, of self-creation as an ethical norm, an exalted value, which Judaism introduced into the world, reverberates with particular strength in the

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55 Hannah Arendt, *Love and St. Augustine* (University of Chicago Press, 1996), Kindle edition location 479: "It is only by calling past and future into the present of remembrance and expectation that time exists at all. Hence the only valid tense is the present, the Now… The Now is what measures time backwards and forwards, because the Now, strictly speaking, is not time but outside time. In the Now, past and future meet. For a fleeting moment they are simultaneous so that they can be stored up by memory, which remembers things past and holds the expectation of things to come. For a fleeting moment (the temporal Now) it is as though time stands still, and it is this Now that becomes Augustine's model of eternity for which he uses Neoplatonic metaphors—the *nunc stans* or *stans aeternitatis*—although divesting them of their specific mystical meaning."

56 Thomas Pangle, ed., *The Rebirth of Classical Political Rationalism*: An Introduction to the Thought of Leo Strauss (University of Chicago 1989), p. 29.

57 Ibid. p. 43.

> world views of Kierkegaard, Ibsen, Scheler and Heidegger. In particular, the latter two set the idea of creation at the very center of their philosophies. Man's...development form "inauthentic existence" to "authentic existence" in the philosophy of Heidegger symbolizes that norm which aspires to the complete realization of man in the ongoing course of his ontic transformations. However, the fate of Maimonides' idea of creation was similar to the fate of ibn Gabirol's doctrine of the will, as it passed, via Duns Scotus, to Schopenhauer and Nietzsche. Both these ideas, which were pure and holy at their inception, were profaned and corrupted in modern culture. The will was transformed by Schopenhauer into a "blind" will, while for Nietzsche it was embodied in the "superman." Similarly, the longing for creation was perverted into the desire for brutal and murderous domination. Such views have brought chaos and disaster to our world, which is drowning in its blood.[58]

We have seen that Heidegger's understanding of time-consciousness derives from Augustine's concept of time, which in turn has a biblical foundation. It is possible, as R. Soloveitchik does in the passage just cited, to speak of a residual Jewish element in Heidegger. The late Michael Wyschogrod observed:

> I speculate that a thinker whose spiritual life was largely determined by [the poets Friedrich] Hölderlin and [Rainer Maria] Rilke could not break with the religious power of the Hebrew Bible and, therefore, with the religious significance of the Jewish people. Heidegger's anti-Semitism combined a certain contempt, and even hatred, for Jews with a grudging respect for them. He was a Nazi lout, but an unusual sort of Nazi lout.[59]

Something like the canonical definition of *chutzpah* is at work, though, in Daniel Herschkowitz's allegation that there is a residual Nazi element in R. Soloveitchik. His allegation that the Rav endorsed *Völkisch* ideology boils down to the perverse claim that the concept of the Jewish nation as such is inherently racialist.[60] Herschkowitz and Feigenblat both try to tar

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58 *Halakhic Man*, p. 164.

59 Michael Wyschogrod, "Heidegger's Tragedy," in *First Things*, April 2010.

60 In the cited article Herschkowitz quotes the Rav's statement that "Judaism has stressed the wholeness and the unity of Knesset Israel, of the Jewish community. The latter is not a conglomerate, it is an autonomous entity, endowed with a life of its own," and concludes, "The features in which the Jewish community is outlined here unequivocally mirror völkish terminology." That is utterly specious. The German adjective völkisch simply means "racial," and has meant that

the Rav by association with Heidegger. As evidence for this association Feigenblat writes: "Here we can also note that Soloveitchik's student, the important Orthodox Jewish theologian Michael Wyschogrod, wrote 'the first book-length study of Heidegger in English,' *Kierkegaard and Heidegger: The Ontology of Existence* (New York: The Humanities Press, 1954). His mature theological work, *The Body of Faith: God in the People Israel* (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aaronson, 2000), is infused with Heidegger's influence." The notion that Wyschogrod's work betrays the Rav's predilection for Heidegger, involves a peculiar guilt by association; as it happens, the Rav had no interest in the project. Wyschogrod gave the Rav a copy of his 1954 book, but to Wyschogrod's disappointment, R. Soloveitchik never spoke to him about it.[61] In *The Body of Faith*, Wyschogrod examines Heidegger thoroughly and utterly condemns him, averring that his "embracing of non-being is violence. In violence, being is turned against itself, toward its own destruction, toward nonbeing."

R. Soloveitchik's distinction between the "covenant of fate" and the "covenant of destiny," [62] Herschkowitz claims, sounds suspiciously like Heidegger's distinction between "fate" (*Schicksal*) and "destiny" (*Geschick*), while confounding (as well as misspelling) the German terms. This is malice tempered by orthographical incompetence, but it is instructive to set the matter straight. Heidegger employed the German equivalents for "fate" and "destiny" in a different, in fact diametrically opposite manner to R. Soloveitchik. On the other hand, Franz Rosenzweig in his 1919 *Star of Redemption* distinguished between the *Schicksal* and *Geschick* of the Jewish people exactly the way the Rav did, eight years before the publication of Heidegger's *Being and Time*.[63] What R. Soloveitchik thought of Rosenzweig

since it came into common use at the turn of the 20th century. In contradistinction to the much older term volkstümlich (national, popular, folksy), völkisch entered the language in service of the racialist program later embodied by National Socialism. At no time did völkisch simply mean "nationalist." See See Jörn Retterath, *Was ist das Volk? Volks- und Gemeinschaftskonzepte der politischen Mitte in Deutschland 1917–1924*. (Walter de Gruyter; Oldenbroug 2016). Retterath explains: "The adjective 'völkisch' was so strongly fraught with a radical nationalist and racist ideology that by the turn of the 20th century it was hardly used in a neutral sense…The word 'völkisch' found its way into everyday usage around 1900 and quickly became a slogan and stigma for a political ideology of the most extreme right-wing fringe" (author's translation).

61 Interview with the author.

62 Joseph B. Soloveitchik, *Kol Dodi Dofek* (Yeshiva University 2006), pp. 65–68.

63 "Die drei Wallfahrtsfeste, zu denen einst alles vom Lande nach dem gemeinsamen Heiligtum zog, das Fest der Befreiung aus Egypten, das Fest der

is of little interest. R. Soloveitchik and Rosenzweig, as well as Heidegger, employed commonplace terms,[64] each in the service of his own objectives.

For R. Soloveitchik, one's fate is given, but one chooses one's destiny. Heidegger by contrast demands that the authentic individual embrace his fate. From that distinction flow two incompatible concepts of peoplehood. "What is the Covenant of Destiny?," the Rav asks.

> In the life of a people (as in the life of an individual) destiny signifies an existence that it has chosen of its own free will and in which it funds the full realization of its historical existence. Instead of a passive, inexorable existence into which a nation is thrust, an Existence of Destiny manifests itself as an active experience full of purposeful movement, ascension, aspirations and fulfillment. The nation is enmeshed in its destiny because of its longing for an enhanced state of being, an existence replete with substance and direction. Destiny is the font out of which flow the unique self-elevation of the nation and the unending stream of Divine inspiration that will not run dry so long as the life of the people is demarcated by the laws of God.[65]

God's people chooses its destiny of its own free will in search of a higher state of being, the Rav wrote. Destiny unites the "dead, the living, and the not-yet-born" in the living community:

> History, as a human event, unfolds in time. Yet, the experience of it is interwoven with a unique paradox. On one hand, time experience asserts itself in the fleeting, vanishing change of events. Each infinitesimal portion of time is experienced as something transient, undurable, passing, which can never be recaptured or retained. It is

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Offenbarung des Zehnworts, das Fest der Hütten in der Wüste, bilden zusammen ein Bild vom Geschick des Volks als des Trägers der Offenbarung. In der Offenbarung sind Schöpfung und Erlösung mitoffenbart, jene, weil sie um der Offenbarung willen geschah und also im engeren Sinn gradezu Schöpfung der Offenbarung ist, diese weil die Offenbarung lehrt, ihrer zu harren; so sind auch im Schicksalsgang des offenbarungserwählten Volks um den Augenblick und Tag des eigentlichen Empfangens der Offenbarung die breiten Festzeiten gelagert, in denen das Volk sich seiner Bestimmung zum Offenbarungsempfänger bewußt wird; diese Bestimmung entfaltet sich in den drei Stufen seiner Schöpfung zum Volk, seiner begabung mit dem offenbarten Wort, seiner Wanderung mit der empfangenen Thora durch die Wüste der Welt." Franz Rosenzweig, *Der Stern der Erlösung.* Universitätbibliotheck; Freiburg 2002, pp. 351-352.

64 The ordinary dictionary definitions for *Schicksal and Geschick* make the distinction clear no later than the turn of the 19th century. See for example Johann August Eberhard, *Synonymisches Handwörterbuch der deutschen Sprache* (Halle 1802) p. 230.

65 *Kol Dodi Dofek*, p. 65.

> conceived as an arrangement of temporal instances on a scale of "before" and "after" that are not interchangeable. Events run from an irreversible past into an anticipated future. Past means the grammatical "it was," which has ceased to exist; future means the designation "not yet." History is distance in time in both directions. We look in retrospect and become aware of the remoteness of events enveloped by the nebulae of canceled existences. We glance in prospect toward a dim future and marvel at the distance separating us from non-realized existences.
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> Yet there is an experience of closeness in historical time. Instead of being a straight line extending in two opposite directions, time presents itself as a three-dimensional magnitude—past, present and future—that envelops the historical consciousness, that explores not only the traces of a bygone past retained in temporary and a non-existent future anticipated in fantasy, but a living past and future which are projected against the backdrop of the present. The historical texture is woven of past and future; it is a focus in which the bygone and the expected converge…
>
> A historical community extends into both the past and the future. Its membership includes the living, the dead, and the not-yet-born. Historical awareness is multi-temporal. If this is true of universal history, then it is all the more true of Jewish history.[66]

This "experience of closeness in historical time" arises from a choice that only free people can make. Freedom is a precondition for consciousness of time. Not only the intimation of the future, but the moral responsibility and free capacity to change the future, are preconditions for time-awareness. Elsewhere the Rav explains:

> The first commandment they were given in Egypt which signaled the commencement of their liberation was to mark time. A slave is relieved of *mitzvot aseh she-ha-zeman gerama*, of time-bound positive commandments. This is because the slave lacks time experience. To the slave, time is a curse; he waits for the day to pass. The slave's time is the property of his master… His sense of the movement of time, the passing of hours, days, weeks is very dull. Life, to the slave personality, is motionless. He lacks the great excitement of opportunities knocking at the door, of challenges summoning him to action, of tense expectations and fears of failure. Any faith which is inseparably bound up with time is inapplicable to him…. to live in time and feel its rhythm, one must also move from the memory of the past to the unreality of the future. One must go from things and events that were and are no longer, toward that which will be real

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66 *Emergence of Ethical Man*, pp. 164-165.

> someday, even though it is not yet real—from reminiscing to anticipating. To live in time means to be committed to a great past and to an unborn future.
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> Time-awareness also contains a moral element: responsibility for emerging events and intervention in the historical process. Man, according to Judaism, should try to mold and fashion the future. That is exactly why he has been created as a free agent. Man is free to reach central and basic decisions that will determine his and sometimes the world's future.
>
> To connect retrospection with anticipation, memory with expectation, hindsight with foresight—one must cherish the present, fleeting moment as if it represented eternity: every minute is valuable, each second precious…The Halakhah is therefore extremely time conscious, finding the present moment so important. For instance, we are permitted to do work on a Friday afternoon until one minute before sunset, but are enjoined from doing work one minute later. A person reads *Keri'at shema'* at 9:05 and fulfills the mitzvah, but at 9:06, his performance is worthless. What did he miss? It was the same recitation, the same commitment, the same dedication. And yet, he has not fulfilled the mitzvah of *Keri'at Shema'* . Time is of critical importance—not years or months, but seconds and split seconds. This time-awareness and appreciation is the singular gift granted to free man, because time belongs to him; it is his time, and he can utilize it to the utmost or waste it.[67]

R. Soloveitchik calls on us to have the courage to make our own destiny in covenant with God. Heidegger demands rather that we have the resoluteness (*Entschlossenheit*) to accept our fate. His "authentic man" is a passive receptacle for what is handed down to the past and the helpless victim of death. To be authentic means merely to accept this fate and be "free for death." As Heidegger wrote in *Being and Time*:

> The resoluteness through which Dasein comes back to itself discloses the available, actual possibilities of authentic existing, and it discloses them in *terms of the heritage* which that resoluteness takes over in its thrownness. In one's coming back resolutely to one's thrownness, there is hidden a *handing down* to oneself of the possibilities that have come down to one, but not necessarily *as* having thus come down….The more authentically Dasein resolves—and this means that in anticipating death it understands itself unambiguously in terms of its ownmost distinctive possibility [because Dasein is Being-unto-death—DG]—the more unequivocally does it choose and

67 *Festival of Freedom*, pp. 37–42.

> find the possibility of its existence, and the less does it do so by accident. Only by the anticipation of death is every accidental and 'provisional' possibility driven out. Only Being-free *for* death, gives Dasein its goal outright and pushes existence into its finitude. Once one has grasped the finitude of one's existence, it snatches one back from the endless multiplicity of possibilities which offer themselves as closest to one—those of comfortableness, shirking, and taking things lightly—and brings Dasein into the simplicity of its *fate* [Schicksal]. This is how we designate Dasein's primordial historizing, which lies in authentic resoluteness and in which Dasein *hands* itself *down* to itself, free for death, in a possibility which it has inherited and yet has chosen.
>
> Dasein can be reached by the blows of fate only because in the depths of its Being Dasein is fate in the sense we have described. Existing fatefully in the resoluteness which hands itself down, Dasein has been disclosed as Being-in-the-world both for the 'fortunate' circumstances which 'come its way' and for the cruelty of accidents. Fate does not first arise from the clashing together of events and circumstances. Even one who is irresolute gets driven about by these—more so than one who has chosen; and yet he can 'have' no fate. If Dasein, by anticipation, lets death become powerful in itself, then, as free for death, Dasein understands itself in own superior power, the power of its finite freedom, so that in this freedom, which 'is' only in its having chosen to make such a choice, it can take over the powerless of abandonment…[68]

Despite the labored language and turgid translation, Heidegger's meaning is clear: We are caught between the heritage that is handed down to us and the inevitability of death. We are victims of fate. We are "free" only to resign ourselves to the inevitable and be "free for death." Man is not free to create his own destiny, but only has the miserable "choice" of resigning himself to his fate. The past is not promise to Heidegger; it is merely a death sentence: "Authentic Being-towards-death—that is to say, the finitude of temporality—is the hidden basis of Dasein's historicality."[69] Our resignation in the face of death, Heidegger says in so many words, prompts us to accept our heritage for what it is just as we accept our lugubrious future for what it is. We perceive this grim connection between our dull inevitability of the past and our ineluctable demise in a "moment of vision," of *Ekstase*, or standing outside ourselves:

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[68] *Being and Time*, Section II.5, pp. 435-436. Italics in the original.

[69] *Being and Time*, p. 438.

> Only an entity which, in its Being, is essentially futural so that it is free for its death and can let itself be thrown back upon its factical "there" by shattering itself against death—that is to say, only an entity which, as futural, is primordially in the process of having-been, can, by handing down to itself the possibility it has inherited, take over its own thrownness and be *in the moment of vision* for 'its time.' Only authentic temporality which is at the same time finite, makes possible something like fate—that is to say, authentic historicality.[70]

As Arendt and Gilson observed, Heidegger has secularized Augustine. Long memory is no longer the memory of revelation, and distant anticipation is no longer the anticipation of redemption. Instead we have the memory of pagan "heritage" and the inevitability of death. Heidegger's substitutions bring to mind the old joke about blintzes made without sugar, milk or butter.

The contrast between Heidegger's concept of time and R. Soloveitchik's helps to clarify what the Rav meant by philosophy out of Halakhah. It is misleading to speak of a "theory of time" in the first place. Time is not something that happens to passive man; to the extent that man is passive, he cannot form a conception of time as the unity of past and future in the present, like the slave in R. Soloveitchik's cited commentary on *Shemot* 12:2. If man is the passive receptor of "heritage" and the victim of death, his experience of time is limited to the ecstatic "moment of vision" that empties time out into a void that is filled by resignation to one's historical circumstances. With this chain of reasoning Heidegger talked himself into a brown shirt.

Time itself comes to be through the act of creation. R. Soloveitchik cites Maimonides in this respect:

> Maimonides states that when God "brought into existence out of nothing all the beings as they are," He also brought time into existence, "time itself being one of the created things." Just as the world was originated by God and had a beginning; and just as God "preceded" the world, He also "preceded" time.[71]

Man emulates God in creating and recreating time. That is his definitive act, the expression of his freedom, the human activity that distinguishes a free man from a slave. Covenantal man becomes God's partner in finishing the work of Creation. Chazal's first statement of this foundational rabbinic concept involves the creation of sacred time: "A person

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70 *Being and Time*, p. 437.

71 *Maimonides Between Philosophy and Halakhah*, p. 81.

who recites *Va-yekhulu* on the eve of Shabbat is considered as if he were a partner with God in the work of creation."[72] R. Soloveitchik's time is densely populated with *mitzvot* that enliven the past and bring the promise of future redemption into present life. Halakhah is the instrument by which the people of Israel create time, and the creation is the *sine qua non* of freedom. Heidegger's time is vacuous, emptied out into an ecstatic moment that frees us only for death. Faust was right: the moment we try to hold on to the passing moment, the *Ekstase*, our soul is lost.[73] Only Heidegger's "moment of vision" merely makes us "free for death." Heidegger is a disinterested observer describing the existential dilemma of man trapped in his circumstances and helpless before death.[74] Halakhic man is a creator. Judaism begins not with contemplation but with action, with Israel's response to the revelation at Sinai as "*na'aseh ve-nishma'*" (Exodus 24:7).[75] Starting with the commandment to mark time on the eve of the Exodus, the elaboration of the mitzvot through Halakha brings an infinite richness into Jewish life, recapturing the past and providing a foretaste of the future by sanctifying the moments of ordinary time. Halakhic practice is a free act of creation through which the Jewish people become God's partners in the creation of Time. It is not a "theory" but the expression of the covenantal people's engagement with the God who irrupts into human history.

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72 Shabbat 119b.

73 In my essay "The Jewish Idea of Freedom," I noted, "*Kohelet* 3:15 states: "That which is, already has been; and that which is to be has already been; and only God can find the fleeting moment." The word *nirdaf* is usually translated as "the pursued." The 19th-century Torah scholar and polymath Michael Friedländer (best known today as the first English translator of *The Guide for the Perplexed*) rendered it as "the fleeting moment" in his English version of the Tanakh, still in print as *The Jerusalem Bible* (Koren).

74 Michael Wyschogrod observes that "Heidegger accepts the philosophic desirability of basing all ontological research on the situation in which the existing thinker or Dasein finds itself," and thus finds himself in the paradoxical position of becoming an external observer of man's existential predicament. Because "his thinking is not that of subjective involvement…his addressing himself to the problem of Being as such is itself a basically non-existential undertaking." That paradox explains the failure of his metaphysics. See Wyschogrod, *Kierkegaard and Heidegger*, p. 131.

75 Rabbi Jonathan Sacks compares this to Faust's declaration, "In the beginning was the deed." See his 5776 commentary on Mishpatim, http://rabbisacks.org/doing-and-hearing-mishpatim-5776/.

Conclusion: A New World View

We have seen that two directions of inquiry fractured the Enlightenment concept of God, Man and World: the "objective" investigation of non-Euclidean geometries, the theory of functions, mathematical logic, and post-Newtonian physics on one hand; and on the other, the "subjective" inquiry into human identity through the prism of time consciousness. The Tower of Babel of Western philosophy challenged God for authority over nature and the mind, and like its biblical antecedent split into hostile camps speaking mutually incomprehensible languages. Secular philosophy culminates in paradox. As we have seen, infinity remains beyond the grasp of the mathematicians, who know that nested in the continuum of time are an infinity of infinities whose ordering lies outside the capacity of any known logical system. We cannot see the face of infinity, as it were, but only gaze on it from behind as it passes. We cannot grasp the subjective moment, as Heidegger sought, because in the attempt we hurtle back to a fixed past and the grim inevitability of death.

The time-perception of *homo religiosus*, R. Soloveitchik wrote, in 1944, pertains to neither of these secular camps:

> The category of time may serve as an illustration. The natural sciences attempt to convert time into quantitative chronometry (Bergson) or chronogeography (Russell); the humanistic sciences conceive it as a creative quality identifiable with the stream of consciousness (James) or pure duration (Bergson). Yet, religion can operate neither with the time concept of the physicist nor that of the psychologist. Time for religion is neither a system of reference nor a bed for the stream of mental life, but appears under the guise of a substance bearing accidents. Time is not a mere void but a "reality." Religion ascribes to time attributes such as "holy," "profane," but these can be applied only to a substance. New time vistas open for the *homo religiosus*.[76]

The "new time vistas" that open for *homo religious* also open the hidden dimensions of nature to *homo scientificus*. For the Greeks, time simply counted events outside the control of man, namely the regular movement of heavenly bodies. The Infinite was simply an endless count of such events, always a potential, as Aristotle said, but never actual, because the count never could be finished in time. The mathematics of movement in

[76] *The Halakhic Mind*, p. 47.

time, or functions, transformed our understanding of the infinite: Aristotelian philosophy collapsed when Newton and Leibniz brought the infinite back into the finite world through the Calculus, in which a convergent infinite series of numbers has a definite and finite sum. The function theory of the 19th century led to Cantor's discovery that there were different orders of infinity, or what he called transfinite numbers.

The "new world view" that R. Soloveitchik proposed can be formulated tentatively as follows: The ordering of sacred time through ethical practice, and the mathematical investigation of physical time, both arise from the ethical will. Adam the First, majestic man, and Adam the Second, covenantal man, ultimately are the same person. Covenantal man becomes a nation when Israel learns to mark time on the road out of Egypt, and creates time in moment of liberation. The first act of *Imitatio Dei* that defines the nation of Israel is an ethical one—to choose freedom—and its first creative act is the creation of time. From this creative act, covenantal man can begin to understand, however faintly, how God created universal time. Covenantal man thus becomes majestic man; the ethical will makes possible scientific discernment. The human creative faculty is not a Kantian black box containing "synthetic a priori reason," but an ethical will whose action makes possible understanding.

Scientific time is unidirectional while religious time is reversible, adds the Rav:

> The specific religious apprehension of time as cyclic motion or as an eternal repetition (Kierkegaard) is likewise utterly unintelligible to the scientist who measures spatialized time or to the metaphysician who views time as a directed flow. The experience of time as repetition is rooted in the typically religious time-awareness and is closely associated with the concept of the calendar that is indeed pure repetition…
>
> The cyclic appearance of time in religion goes hand in hand with time reversibility. Here again we encounter a notion which is alien to the scientific world-perspective. The scientist can apprehend either a mapped out and retraceable time or a directed time stream which is identified with irrevocable change. If he operates with static, spatialized time then "becoming" is precluded, as indicated above; for a universe that can retrace its course and regress in the minus direction with the same ease (theoretically) as it progresses in the plus direction is not susceptible to change. It can always undo the cosmic occurrence of the past. On the other hand, time flow which is continuous becoming renders reversibility impossible for change denotes a moment of superseding phases which cannot be reversed. Yet, the religious time awareness is so paradoxical as to register both becoming

> *and* reversibility. As to becoming, the idea of Creation introduces it metaphysically; and the religious norm with its associate postulate of freedom sponsors it ethically. Nevertheless, the reversibility of time and of the causal order is fundamental in religion, for otherwise the principle of conversion would be sheer nonsense. The act of reconstruction past psychical life, of changing the arrow of time from a forward to a retrospective direction, is the main premise of penitence.[77]

Religious time-consciousness stands apart from the time of the physicists and the time of the "subjective" strand of philosophy (the Romantics, the Phenomenologists and Existentialists). Nonetheless some correspondence must exist between religious thought and scientific thought: *homo religiosus* must act on nature in order to survive as mere *homo*. Man's activity as co-creator begins with the creation of time itself, in the ordering of time by Halakhah. This begins with our first intimation of freedom on the road out of Egypt, which gave us the reference-point in anticipation and hope that made time-perception possible to begin with. The same creative impulse that places the Sabbath evening Jew at the side of the Creator of the world in *Va-yekhulu* allows Majestic Man to tame nature and to fulfill human needs. Freedom from hunger, disease and natural disaster elevates and ennobles humankind, and scientific advances fulfill the rabbinic imperative for covenantal man to partner with God in completing the work of Creation.

Time-consciousness is the well of scientific creativity. Human thought rises above the dull succession of indifferent moments when it perceives a higher ordering of time. In Western thought, the first written mention of numbers that are in the mind but not in the senses comes from St. Augustine's reflections on the perception of musical rhythm, the "numbers of judgment" that make their way in mathematical history to Bonaventura, Nicholas of Cusa and Leibniz. The biblical idea of time is a precondition for these Western achievements.[78] As I reported in my 2016 essay, recent scholarship has shown Leibniz' dependence on the Lurian concept of *tzimtzum*.

As the Rav argues in *The Emergence of Ethical Man*, the covenantal people becomes the co-creator of time. Eternity no longer is an endless succession of moments stretching into an undefined future; it is incarnated in the infinite density of human life itself, through religious acts that unite the dead and the not yet born into the present. And the instrument by

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77 *The Halakhic Mind*, pp. 48-49.

78 Goldman, "The Divine Music of Mathematics," loc. Cit.

which this miracle of time-transcendence is accomplished is the Halakhah. The Halakhist is like a mathematician, but the mathematician is also like a halakhist.

R. Soloveitchik's "new world view" requires a synthesis of the internal experience of Halakhic time and external action upon the natural world. As I wrote in my essay on freedom, "Adam the First stands in fear and trembling before God, overwhelmed by his mortality. He perceives the infinite reach of eternity and the vanishing smallness of the moments of his life. In his search for redemption he reverses the arrow of time. He learns to 'count his days and gain a heart of wisdom.' With this wisdom Adam the Second reaches out to the infinite and joins God in the continuing work of creation." R. Soloveitchik has given us the conceptual tools and pointed the way towards the new world view he envisioned in 1944. To advance his work it behooves us to retrace his steps through the paradoxes and pitfalls of secular philosophy, the better to expound an independent Jewish philosophy of religion. ☙