Abstract

Two philosophical positions adopted by Soloveitchik in his doctoral dissertation continued to inform his Jewish philosophical writings throughout his career. The first position, epistemological pluralism, stands behind Soloveitchik’s approach to the religious view of causality and repentance in his writings during the 1940s–1960s. It also grounds his consistent use of the dialectical method. The second position, the eternal mystery of the unknown, comes from the Marburg neo-Kantian Paul Natorp; this idea is a consistent thread throughout Soloveitchik’s writings and a foundation of his existentialist writings through the late 1970s. The conclusion suggests how these two positions might be related to one another.

Keywords


1 Introduction

Trying to pin down consistently held philosophical positions in the Jewish philosophical writings of the Orthodox rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik (1903–1993) has proven a challenge for scholars of his thought. Many have noted that in his later writings he writes like an existentialist, emphasizing the emotional religious experience, while in his earlier writings he writes more like...
a phenomenologist, focusing on the structure of religious consciousness, or a neo-Kantian, interested in the cognitive relationship between religion and science. His son-in-law Isadore Twersky, aware of these fluctuations, writes that scholars of Soloveitchik’s thought should avoid trying to “artificially constrain” him into this or that philosophical school, and that it is “not very edifying” to argue “whether his thought should be described as existentialist or dialectical, Kierkegaardian or neo-Kantian.” The disparity of philosophical sources that underlie Soloveitchik’s thought has led some to classify Soloveitchik as an eclectic thinker with no philosophical center other than his being an Orthodox rabbi committed to Halakhah. His distinguished erudition in secular knowledge, they say, allowed him to borrow various ideas from modern academia merely in order to couch his traditional views in terms that would sound sophisticated to the modern ear. Others seek unifying factors among the different writings, believing that Soloveitchik is generally a consistent and methodical philosopher whose changes in style and emphasis over his various writings do not negate the consistency of his fundamental philosophical convictions. Twersky, after arguing that Soloveitchik cannot be classified within this or that philosophical school, continues in the same paragraph to say, “The Archimedean points of his teaching always need to be identified.” The allusion is to Descartes, who, referring to his quest to find one, indubitable, foundational point upon which he could build a philosophical system, said, “Archimedes, that he might transport the entire globe from the place it occupied to another, demanded only a point that was firm and immovable.” The notion of an Archimedean point is useful in illustrating the position that despite Soloveitchik’s hopping from this to that philosophical school, it is worthwhile to seek those stable and invariant ideas that inform his philosophical outlook.

This article aims to contribute to the argument for unity in Soloveitchik’s thought by locating such Archimedean points using a generally neglected source of Soloveitchik’s thought, his doctoral dissertation. Written in the

1 Honorifics are omitted in keeping with journal standards.
University of Berlin in the early 1930s and titled “Pure Thought and the Constitution of Being in Hermann Cohen,” the dissertation analyzes and critiques Cohen’s theory of knowledge. Among the likely reasons that the dissertation is usually ignored by Soloveitchik scholars are that it was never translated from German, it was not until recently easily available to the general public, and its subject matter, the epistemology of the neo-Kantian Marburg school, is somewhat obscure. The absence of any discussion about Judaism or religion in the dissertation is also significant. Nevertheless, it is our contention that the roots of some of Soloveitchik’s most central and persistent convictions about Jewish philosophy can already be discerned in the dissertation.

Two such convictions, which can be called epistemological pluralism and the eternal mystery of the unknown, are examined in this study. Epistemological pluralism is an idea that appears explicitly in only one early work of Soloveitchik. It is therefore easy to dismiss it as something Soloveitchik briefly entertained but never revisited. However, epistemological pluralism plays a significant role in the dissertation, and the particular angle given to that idea in the dissertation shines a spotlight on implicit uses of epistemological pluralism in Soloveitchik’s later writings. Regarding the eternal mystery of the unknown, we will present the case that Soloveitchik’s existentialist attitude in his writings nearer to the end of his career is supported in part by a pillar that was already erected as early as his dissertation at the dawn of his career. Some elements of his existentialist turn, following his earlier neo-Kantian period, can thus be seen not as a sharp break with his earlier thought but as a new emphasis of an old idea he consistently held throughout the various periods of his many writings.

6 Exceptions include Avinoam Rosenak, “Hashpa’ot shel modelim filosofiyim al hahashiva hatalmudit shel Harav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik” (master’s thesis, Hebrew University, 1994); Dov Schwartz, Religion or Halakha: The Philosophy of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik (Boston: Brill, 2007); Reinier Munk, The Rationale of Halakhic Man: Joseph B. Soloveitchik’s Conception of Jewish Thought (Amsterdam: J. C. Gieben, 1996); Moshe Meir, “Harav Soloveitchik kimetavekh ben haguto shel Hermann Cohen uven haortodoksiyah,” in Rav Beolam Hadash, ed. Avinoam Rosenak and Naftali Rothenberg (Jerusalem: Magnes, 2010), 85–96. Munk argues that Soloveitchik’s opposition in the dissertation to Cohen’s denial of any being that transcends thought persists in Soloveitchik’s earliest Jewish writings. Meir shows how the dissertation can serve as a conceptual bridge between Soloveitchik’s earlier neo-Kantian idealism and his later existentialist themes. The current study can be viewed as complementary to Munk’s and Meir’s work, although it focuses on different, but not unrelated, themes and passages.

7 The dissertation is currently available for download at http://tzvee.blogspot.com/2017/03/das-reine-denken-und-die.html.
One reason that the dissertation is such a valuable source for identifying and understanding Soloveitchik’s philosophical convictions is that there is a tendency among some scholars to treat Soloveitchik’s arguments from Western academic sources as apologetics. They contend that Soloveitchik employs these arguments solely in the interest of defending Orthodoxy or making Orthodoxy more appealing and that he never scrutinized them rigorously on their own merits, and therefore such arguments need not be taken too seriously. But claims about the opportunism of Soloveitchik’s arguments are significantly weakened by the continuity in his philosophical positions from his doctoral dissertation through his Jewish writings. The dissertation was not written for a Jewish audience, and it does not deal with religion at all. It is purely an academic work of philosophy, written to convince a board of judges at the University of Berlin of Soloveitchik’s worthiness of a doctorate in philosophy. The current study, therefore, contributes not only to understanding the unity and consistency of Soloveitchik’s thought, but also to assessing the seriousness of Soloveitchik’s attitude toward certain ideas from Western philosophy that play a role in his Jewish writings.

2 Overview of the Dissertation

Before delving into an analysis of specific examples, a brief overview of the dissertation is in order. The theory of knowledge critiqued in Soloveitchik’s dissertation, which comes from Hermann Cohen’s 1902 book *Logic of Pure Cognition*, is referred to by Soloveitchik as Cohen’s “scientific idealism.” Cohen’s idealism is a response to the problem of the thing-in-itself that afflicts the realist view (7).8 Briefly put, the problem with realism is this: If the objects of the world that we know are what they are independently of our knowledge of them, that is to say, they have an absolute being, then our knowledge of them will always be incomplete and suspect. What is the guarantee that our knowledge of objects truly and accurately portrays them the way they really are? One may think of this problem as similar to, although not exactly the same as, the problem of the inherent inaccuracy of translation between languages. If knowledge of objects is a different language from the language of what objects really are in themselves, then the translation of objects into knowledge of objects will always be at least inaccurate, but at worst it will be impossible since no one knows the language of objects in themselves. In order to save knowledge from

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8 Numbers in parentheses refer to pages in Soloveitchik's dissertation. All translations of the text of the dissertation are my own.
such skepticism, idealism refutes realism by denying absolute being to objects, asserting that objects have no being beyond our knowledge of them, because objects are a product of thought. What is accomplished by idealism is that it eliminates the gap between our knowledge and the objects of our knowledge by placing both knowledge and objects in the same realm, the realm of thought. Objects and knowledge of objects are the same language. We know objects exactly as they are because all they are is what knowledge has made them. The title of Soloveitchik’s dissertation, “Pure Thought and the Constitution of Being in Hermann Cohen,” is to be understood in this light. For Cohen, the being of objects does not lie in a realm that is independent of thought about those objects; rather, their being is constituted by thought.

The modifier “scientific” in the term “scientific idealism” comes from a special twist that Cohen puts on idealism. “If we wish to characterize Cohen’s idealism, we could say with Cohen: it is mathematical-scientific idealism” (11). Cohen arrived at this unique view primarily through his interpretation of Kant (17). Kant tackled the problem of knowledge in his *Critique of Pure Reason* by showing that the most fundamental concepts of experience, such as substance and causality, are not presented to us by the outside world but are imposed on experience by our own understanding, and Cohen interprets Kant as referring to mathematical and scientific experience. For Cohen, Kant’s primary question was, How is science possible? What compels nature to adhere to our predictions based on mathematical laws that our scientific thinking has constructed? The answer is that the objects of our experience were originally constituted by mathematical scientific thinking. The scientist merely makes explicit what was already implicit in everybody’s ordinary experience of objects in nature. Therefore, for Cohen, “Mathematical thought is really that thought which constitutes knowledge and being” (17).

Of course, Cohen’s reduction of all being to thought, and all thought to mathematical thought, sounds strange from a commonsense perspective, and Soloveitchik does not hold back from calling such aspects of Cohen’s system “alienating” (16), but when one considers the serious epistemological problems with the naïve realist view that lead to skepticism – problems that this theory purports to solve – one cannot simply dismiss it. Soloveitchik’s critique of Cohen comes from a careful consideration of the advantages and disadvantages of the details of Cohen’s system, and he ultimately concludes that Cohen’s brand of scientific idealism fails to solve the problem of knowledge because it cannot adequately account for fundamental aspects of knowledge, such as knowledge of particular, individual things, passive knowledge from sensations, consciousness and the subjective side of knowledge, and the being
of objects that are not mathematical and scientific, like objects of emotions. Cohen was well aware of many of these challenges, and much of the dissertation explains and analyzes the various concepts Cohen employs to deal with them, only to demonstrate Cohen’s solutions to be inadequate.

The first of Soloveitchik’s ideas to be discussed here, his epistemological pluralism, appears in the dissertation as a rejection of Cohen’s scientific monism. In order to recognize it in the dissertation, however, it is necessary to review Soloveitchik’s presentation of epistemological pluralism in the work where he develops it, *The Halakhic Mind*.10

3 Epistemological Pluralism versus Mathematical-Scientific Monism

The opening argument of *Halakhic Mind*, written twelve or so years after the dissertation,11 is that the beginning of the twentieth century saw a change in how we view science. “The problem is, rather, whether the scientist’s interpretation is to be exclusive, thus eliminating any other cognitive approach to reality.”12 The answer to this problem is a resounding no. Science is not the only valid way to view reality. Recent developments in the humanities demonstrate definitions of fundamental categories of experience alternative to those used in science. Time, for example, is defined differently for the physicist than the psychologist.13 But even without contrasting science with the humanities, science itself in the modern era, especially the developments in modern physics, leads to the conclusion that there is more than one way to view reality. Specifically, while the concepts of classical, Newtonian physics did not differ too much from the everyday picture of the world, modern developments in quantum physics involve new conceptions of space, time, substance, and causality that are utterly incompatible with the way these concepts are used

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9 For the issue of knowledge of individual things, see the end of ch. 1 of the dissertation. On passive knowledge from sensations, see ch. 7. On consciousness, see ch. 4. On emotional and volitional objects, see p. 86.
11 Although the work was not published until 1986, it was written in 1944. See the author’s note at the beginning of Joseph B. Soloveitchik, *The Halakhic Mind* (New York: Seth, 1986).
12 Ibid., 5.
13 Ibid., 14.
The most tenable conclusion is that there are valid ways to interpret the world besides the scientific viewpoint. This new outlook, called by Soloveitchik epistemological pluralism, is a particularly propitious development for philosophers of religion. Since “there can be no valid reason for the monopolization of creativity by the mathematical sciences,” religion can now offer its own, independent and autonomous definitions for the fundamental concepts of experience. This signals a historic win for religion, which for centuries had to bow to the hegemony of science’s claim for the title of rational knowledge. While there is no solitary source to which Soloveitchik attributes his theory of epistemological pluralism, he cites Henri Bergson as well as the later works of William James and Ernst Cassirer as some of its expositors.

The way that Soloveitchik uses epistemological pluralism in the dissertation is notably different from the way he uses it in *Halakhic Mind*. In *Halakhic Mind*, epistemological pluralism is used as a defense, as a way to build a case that religion in general and Judaism in particular have a right to claim autonomy in the realm of knowledge. In the dissertation, it is used as a challenge against the mathematical-scientific monism of Cohen and his Marburg school. One must have a stronger conviction of an idea to use it as a challenge than as a defense, because one can defend a case without insisting that this defense is the only way to see it, but in order to claim effective refutation of an idea one has to be confident that there is no easy escape from the refutation. This, however, changes the way we see the argument of *Halakhic Mind*. Far from just a clever way to use modern philosophy to rescue Judaism from the challenges of Western thought, epistemological pluralism had already been for over a decade a well-established and firmly held principle in Soloveitchik’s view of knowledge in general. In order to understand how Soloveitchik views this principle, let us examine the way he uses epistemological pluralism in the dissertation as a refutation of Cohen.

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14 Ibid., 11–12.
15 Ibid., 22–27.
16 Ibid., 27.
17 Ibid., 8–9, 20–22.
18 To be clear, I am not addressing the question of which came first in Soloveitchik’s own thinking, the philosophical or the religious use of epistemological pluralism. It is certainly possible that even during his dissertation stage he already considered the religious advantages of epistemological pluralism, which may have influenced his adoption of the theory. Rather, my reference to the chronological distance between the use of epistemological pluralism in the dissertation and in *Halakhic Mind* aims to underline the seriousness with which Soloveitchik held this theory; it was not for him a disposable idea of only narrow usefulness. This seriousness is exhibited both by the theory’s longevity and by his application of it in a nonapologetic, rigorously philosophical context.
When he says that all experience of reality is mathematical, Cohen does not mean to say that mathematical science is the only field of knowledge that has value. After all, Cohen himself wrote books on ethics, aesthetics, and religion. But only mathematical science provides knowledge of what there is. “Ethical, aesthetic and religious thinking cannot be contained in logic” (18). The prevalent distinction between is and ought is at play here, but Cohen’s innovation is to constrict the world of “is” to only mathematically quantified objects.

We might therefore expect Cohen to exclude from the list of reality-centered sciences any science that involves non-mathematical objects. Cohen understood this, however, to be untenable, for only physics would remain. Physics belongs in the realm of mathematics because, although the laws of physics are learned from empirical experience, the objects that physics deals with are stripped from all sensual qualities, such as color, sound, smell, and taste (12), and converted into pure mathematical objects like waves and atoms. For example, for physics, we do not consider “the sun” to be the unique, individual object we see in the sky (20); instead, the sun becomes a general representation of a series of quantities of heat, mass, and motion that functions within a spatial-geometrical coordinate system. Like mathematics, physics does not deal with individual things, but with general principles. But what of all the other sciences, which do deal with unique, individual objects and qualities? Cohen refers to such sciences as descriptive, as opposed to the more mathematical ones which he calls explanatory, but ultimately even the descriptive sciences can be shown to be essentially mathematical (19). Soloveitchik examines Cohen’s attempts to include various descriptive sciences, such as biology, chemistry, zoology, botany, geology, and geography under the mathematical-explanatory umbrella. Cohen’s approach is to show how in each of these as well, the qualitatively experienced, individual objects are transformed into general mathematical objects. Of course, the prominence of the mathematical object is greater in physics than in biology or certainly zoology. Primates and protoplasm are not generally viewed as mathematical objects. But Cohen sees the various disciplines as flowing into each other on a hierarchical continuum, in which zoology first constructs the object, and biology then puts it into a system of lawful relations that is ultimately mathematical. The same happens with the objects of geology, which begin as individuals but are then converted

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19 Soloveitchik’s claim that Cohen excludes these areas from logic needs to be evaluated. For the purposes of this paper, we understand this to mean that because Cohen equates logic with being, Soloveitchik’s claim that these disciplines are outside of logic means that they do not involve being, in the sense that they are not about objects of the world.
into systematic representations where they become part of physics (22). Thus Cohen seeks to preserve his mathematical monism for all scientific knowledge.

But Soloveitchik concludes that Cohen’s attempt to reduce descriptive sciences to the mathematical, fails. It is true that all these sciences involve a process that “is guided by the tendency to resolve into a mathematical-mechanical explanation,” but that “does not push the objection out of the way” (23). Why not? Because the descriptive disciplines merely point to the more abstract mathematical ones; they do not dissolve themselves into them. The descriptive disciplines do not “flow into” mathematical science. They remain in the qualitative world of sense experience. “It would be an inner contradiction if we were to claim that the descriptive method, which works entirely by qualitative means, attempts to quantify its object, which would be identical to the dissolution of the object it has posited” (23). The difference between qualities and quantities is that qualities are properties that are presented to our five senses, whereas quantities are picked up not by our senses but by mathematical thinking. Geography describes a land and its environment according to sense data; zoology classifies animals based on sensible qualities; biology describes and explains the observable behaviors of living bodies. It is true that physics and chemistry can subsequently mathematize the objects of these disciplines, but that is a different discipline with a different method. The descriptive sciences have their own method with their own objects, and if they are considered to be knowledge, then knowledge is not only mathematical. Cohen cannot maintain that these disciplines provide knowledge and still dismiss from knowledge the world of colors, sounds, smells, and tastes.

Up to this point in the dissertation we have the beginnings of Soloveitchik’s epistemological pluralism, but not the complete version of it. Soloveitchik here argues that the different disciplines use disparate methods – description versus mathematical explanation – and refer to different kinds of objects – individual versus general – making mathematical monism untenable. The full version of epistemological pluralism says that different disciplines see the world from unique vantage points because they also have different definitions of the fundamental concepts of experience, which include the concept of time, as mentioned above, as well as concepts such as space, causality, and substance.20 In the ensuing pages of the dissertation, where Soloveitchik extends his rebuttal of mathematical monism to the work of Ernst Cassirer, Hermann Cohen’s student and a prominent representative of the Marburg neo-Kantian school, a more complete notion of epistemological pluralism emerges.

20 Soloveitchik, Halakhic Mind, 50.
Although Soloveitchik aims to focus his dissertation on Cohen, he opens up a discussion of Cassirer because he understands Cassirer’s theory of concepts, as developed in his work *Substance and Function* (1910), to be characteristic of the Marburg school in general and of Cohen in particular (24, 107). Although Cassirer’s later work *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* (1923–1929) is cited in *Halakhic Mind* as a source for pluralism, during the earlier stages in his career, when he wrote *Substance and Function*, Cassirer was still in a monistic mode, asserting that all concepts are essentially mathematical. Cassirer aims to demonstrate that even in the study of history the fundamental method of the mathematical sciences is sustained. Cohen himself never tried to include the humanities under the umbrella of his mathematical-scientific monism, perhaps, suggests Soloveitchik, because of the prominence in his day of positivism, which also favored empirical science and mathematics. But as attention turned more toward the humanities in the final decades of the nineteenth century, followers of Cohen realized the need to include the humanities in their system. In order to both maintain Cohen’s monistic system of critical idealism and include the humanities in the realm of knowledge, Marburgers needed to devise a “revision,” in which “sometimes the rigor of the lawful-scientific method had to be softened,” because “[t]he new problems which were enmeshed in all areas of the humanities could hardly be solved under such a narrow point of view” (18). Obviously, history does not work with mathematical objects, but Cassirer seeks to show that there is still a certain monism of method between the two disciplines.

What specific new developments imparted to history and other humanities the same stature that had previously been limited to the natural sciences? One such development cited by Soloveitchik is the position of Heinrich Rickert that the study of history is not only a valid source of knowledge of reality on par with science, but history is actually superior to science in capturing reality, because history preserves the reality of the individual that science dissolves into an abstract series (27). “The scientific concept,” according to Cassirer’s paraphrase of Rickert’s view, “must fail to grasp and reproduce reality, which is always present only in individual form.” Cassirer therefore aims to “save” science by showing that history’s method is much more similar to science’s

21 See below, p. 283. A full exploration of how Soloveitchik uses Cassirer’s theory of concepts, known as “series concepts,” in his philosophy of Halakhah is the topic of an upcoming paper. Cassirer’s series concept is briefly explained in the next section of this article.

22 Ernst Cassirer, “*Substance and Function*” and “*Einstein’s Theory of Relativity*,” trans. William Curtis Swabey and Marie Collins Swabey (Mineola, NY: Dover, 1953), 223. For Cassirer’s full explication of his dispute with Rickert, see ibid., 221–233.
method than Rickert realizes, and therefore history has no epistemological advantage over science.

Soloveitchik highlights two aspects of Cassirer’s comparison between the two disciplines. The first is that historical persons, places, and events are transformed by the discipline of history from isolated individuals into abstract members of a series (26). Julius Caesar is understood not simply as an isolated individual, but as one of a series of Roman emperors, whose life can only be understood historically when treated as one element that stands in connection with a series of events, individuals, and places. This corresponds to how numbers, according to Cassirer’s theory of concepts, do not stand for individual, particular items but are abstract symbols that are connected with one another through mathematical laws. We already saw how for Cohen, physics makes this kind of move with the sun.

The second similarity between history and mathematics for Cassirer is that the series to which historical events belong is governed by laws of causal necessity. Just as math and physics have laws that demand that \( y \) necessarily follow \( x \), so too in history, when historians posit a causal connection between events A and B, they indicate a law stating that whenever A happens, B must follow by necessity (26).

Soloveitchik’s response here is interesting and important, as he disagrees with both Cassirer and Rickert, taking a middle position. With Cassirer and against Rickert, Soloveitchik agrees that history gets no closer to reality than science. History and science both engage concrete reality at a certain degree of removal, but nevertheless each captures an aspect of reality. “Both are abstraction-formations that do not falsify reality, but organize and recognize it” (27). History does not occupy a superior position that gives it direct access to reality.

Despite his acknowledgment that both history and science involve abstraction, Soloveitchik maintains that Cassirer has gone too far in this comparison. His disagreement with Cassirer resembles his approach to Cohen, which is to refute the blending together of what he insists are separate disciplines with disparate methods. Regarding Cassirer’s first point, that, like mathematics, historical study transforms isolated individuals into members of a series, Soloveitchik counters that while it is true that the historian engages in a kind of abstraction, it is type of abstraction different from the mathematical. It is an “individualizing abstraction” (30), whereby the historian “takes a selection from the tangle of the given material” (26) in order to produce a coherent picture. Because the objects of history are abstracted from the “given material,” the method for historical abstraction is actually the reverse of the mathematical one, for mathematical elements are first constructed from ideal propositions, and only
then applied to the real world – $2 + 3 = 5$ is logically prior to the fact that two apples added to three apples gives us five apples – while historical abstraction proceeds from given, real, individual elements to more general propositions. “In history, we do not go from top to bottom, i.e., from idealistic propositions to the empirical givenness, but from the historically alive to general images” (27). As a result, the historical concept aims to produce an organized system not of symbols, in the way that numbers are symbols, but of concrete, vivid images.

As for Cassirer’s placing lawfulness and causality at the center of both history and mathematical science, it is at this point that Soloveitchik completes his notion of epistemological pluralism by showing that the two disciplines not only have different methods, but also different fundamental concepts of experience. Soloveitchik argues that causal necessity is defined differently and functions differently in the two disciplines. In mathematical science, lawful necessity means that infinite repetitions of A must always necessarily produce B. Under such a law, any instance of A, loses its individuality to the infinite ways that A can be reproduced, as the general law overshadows the particular objects. But in history, A is a unique event with no option of repetition. Therefore, the necessity of B following upon A should not be considered a law, but a dependence, one that involves “the peculiarity of individual necessity.” In this brand of dependence, “the individual trait of history remains preserved” (28). Because mathematical science is a universalizing discipline and history is an individualizing discipline, they involve two different notions of causation. “If one assumes two objective spheres, one must also presuppose two kinds of necessary combination” (28).

Thus, unlike Cassirer, who squeezes the discipline of history into the mathematical model, and unlike Rickert, who elevates history above mathematical science, Soloveitchik argues for a pluralist position that considers the two disciplines equal in stature but separate in essence. There is no debating which definition of causality is superior, the lawful, generalizing one of science or the individualizing one of history, because each definition is appropriate to the kind of knowledge its discipline seeks to generate within its own “objective sphere.” Soloveitchik does not call his position in the dissertation “epistemological pluralism,” but it is recognizable by its content. It is precisely the position developed in full detail in the first two parts of Halakhic Mind and extended in part 3 to admit religion into the pantheon of separate but equal disciplines of knowledge that work with differently defined fundamental concepts of experience. What exactly it means for religion to be a discipline of knowledge is a topic for another discussion; the task here is to show how Soloveitchik’s pluralism in the dissertation, including his account of the incommensurate definitions of causality among different disciplines, prevails throughout Halakhic.
Mind and subsequent writings, all of which together show that this idea was of enduring importance to Soloveitchik.

In Halakhic Mind, after mentioning the different definitions of time employed by the physicist and the psychologist, Soloveitchik says, "A similar pluralism may be discerned in other categories as well, as, for example, in causality, which is interpreted differently by the physicist and humanist."23 In part 3, where religion is given a place at the table, he refers to the different definitions of causality among science, the humanities, and religion. Religion, he says, "comprehends the world from a unique aspect,"24 and after a comprehensive analysis of the way religion differs from both the sciences and the humanities in its definition and understanding of the concept of time,25 Soloveitchik offers a partial list of other such fundamental concepts of experience that gain a unique meaning in the religious realm.

In a similar manner, all basic concepts of reality should be subjected to reexamination. Causality, space, quantity, quality, necessity, etc. will then assume new meaning. If, for example, causality be analysed, it would be seen that neither the mechanistic causality of science nor the sensate, teleological causation of the humanistic sciences suffice for religion.26

Is the "mechanistic causality of science" here the same as the general, law-based causality of science of the dissertation? Is the "sensate, teleological causation" of the humanities here the same as the individualized causation of history in the dissertation? Not really. The mechanical/teleological dichotomy is essentially a question of whether the present is caused by the past, as in the billiard ball now rolling because of the other ball that hit it a moment ago, or whether the present is caused by the future, as when one procrastinates in order to feel energized by last-minute pressure. This is not quite the same as the general/individual dichotomy, although with some creative thinking they might be presented as two sides of the same coin. But it is irrelevant for the current study whether the concepts of causality used in the dissertation match those in Halakhic Mind. Both works use the identical argument, namely that different definitions of causality in the sciences and the humanities are a sign of separate but equal disciplines.

23  Soloveitchik, Halakhic Mind, 14.
24  Ibid., 44.
26  Ibid., 50.
What is significantly new in *Halakhic Mind*, in contrast to the dissertation, is that now religion has a third definition and conception of causality. Nowhere in *Halakhic Mind*, however, does Soloveitchik elaborate on this new, religious meaning of causality in the same way that he explores the religious meaning of time. He merely hints that this new kind of causality promises new insights into classic philosophical-religious problems such as the clashes between causality and providence, causality and freedom, and causality and repentance—problems in which we have become mired due to our habit of thinking of causality only from the scientific standpoint.

Fortunately, the religious version of causality was an important enough idea to be picked up in another work written around the same time as *Halakhic Mind*, which is Soloveitchik’s *Halakhic Man*.28 There, the topic is not causality in religion in general but specifically as seen from the halakhic vantage point. In part 2 of *Halakhic Man*, in a discussion about repentance, Soloveitchik notes that philosophers such as Spinoza and Nietzsche who disparaged the idea of repentance were working with the scientific definition of causality in which \( a \) causes \( b \) and then \( a \) is no more, as it becomes “lost in the abyss of oblivion.” For this view of causality, repentance is indeed futile. But for Halakhah, which esteems repentance, “[t]he law of causality, from this perspective, also assumes a new form,” in which “[t]he cause is interpreted by the effect, moment \( a \) by moment \( b \).” According to this standpoint, “The future transforms the thrust of the past. This is the nature of that causality operating in the realm of the spirit.”29 This new, halakhic definition of causality is reflected by the talmudic dictum that for the repentant soul, “deliberate sins” from the past are now “accounted to him as meritorious deeds.”30 From this perspective, as opposed

27 Ibid.
29 Soloveitchik, *Halakhic Man*, 114–115. Eliezer Goldman’s incisive analysis of *Halakhic Man*’s presentation of causality and repentance contrasts the religious and the humanistic views of causality in a manner slightly different from the contrast expressed here. Our main concern is not the precise definition of causality but the consistency of Soloveitchik’s position that different disciplines involve different definitions of causality. See Eliezer Goldman, “Teshuvah uzman behagut Harav Soloveitchik,” in *Yahadut lelo ashlayah*, ed. Dani Statman and Avi Sagi (Jerusalem: Hartman, 2009), 134–149. For the same reason, it is not necessary to address here Dov Schwartz’s argument that the interpretation of time and causality in repentance for the religious figure of *The Halakhic Mind* significantly differs from the interpretation of time and causality in repentance for the halakhic man. See Schwartz, *Religion or Halakha*, 296–301.
to the scientific view, man has the freedom to recreate himself, to become the master of his past.

What we have here, then, is a groundbreaking interpretation of the halakhic view of repentance whose intellectual roots go back through *Halakhic Mind* all the way to the dissertation. Halakhah’s autonomous definition of causality in *Halakhic Man* relies on the same argument as history’s autonomous definition of causality in the dissertation, an argument fully developed in *Halakhic Mind*. Despite the fact that epistemological pluralism is mentioned by name in only one of Soloveitchik’s works, it cannot be dismissed as an idea Soloveitchik toyed with and abandoned.

Soloveitchik’s assignment of alternate definitions of causality to religion and science in *Halakhic Man* highlights an important feature of epistemological pluralism that is logical but not completely obvious. Between separate disciplines, the respective definitions of fundamental concepts of experience such as causality and time are not only different, but they may oppose or contradict each other. This point was not developed in the dissertation, where history and mathematical science were purported to hold different definitions of causality, but those definitions – universal laws and individualized dependence – do not seem to contradict one another; they seem rather to be two different conceptual foundations for two different kinds of procedures. Outright contradiction between disciplines is also not emphasized in the exposition of epistemological pluralism in *Halakhic Mind*, although there are instances of it. But in *Halakhic Man*, the focus of the discussion is how two disciplines lead to opposite answers to the same question about the nature of reality. Can the past be changed? From the standpoint of science, the concept of causality demands that the past cannot be changed. From the standpoint of religion, the concept of causality allows for the past to be changed. Within one logical system, a contradiction is generally a sign of error and it demands resolution. But between two different systems of how to view reality, there is no resolution to a contradiction, for there is no real conflict. Soloveitchik does not present halakhic man as an opponent or denier of science, in the way that certain religious sects might reject science. Science and religion are simply two different but equally valid standpoints, each resting on foundational axioms that oppose those of the other. Due to this “standpoint theory,” Soloveitchik

31 This “standpoint theory” has its roots in Kantian thought. In his third antinomy, Kant explores the question, Is there such a thing as freedom, or is every event, even human choice, determined by necessary laws? His answer is that it depends whether we take the standpoint of empirical science or the standpoint of ethics. See Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Paul Guyer and Alan W. Wood (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), B560–B586. I borrow the term “standpoint theory” from the lectures on
does not see the conflicting views of science and religion as a problem. To the contrary, the “conflict” between the two standpoints is the solution to the problem of repentance.

This last point is important for understanding the role of epistemological pluralism in Soloveitchik’s *The Lonely Man of Faith*, published almost thirty-five years after the dissertation. The discourse in that work revolves around a certain type of conflict between religious and scientific attitudes, but Soloveitchik is careful to note that this conflict is of a more practical nature than a theoretical one. He does not consider the theoretical conflict between the opposing positions of science and religion to be a problem. As he declares in the introductory section of that essay, “I have never been seriously troubled by the problem of the Biblical doctrine of creation vis-à-vis the scientific story of evolution,” and he continues, “nor have I been perturbed by the confrontation of the mechanistic interpretation of the human mind with the Biblical spiritual concept of man.” Two more issues that he says never disturbed him are the theories of Biblical criticism and the clash between historical empiricism and the mystery of revelation. But why don’t these problems of Judaism’s confrontation with modernity bother him? Soloveitchik does not say, at least not in that essay. Nevertheless, readers who follow the train of thought from the dissertation, through *Halakhic Mind* and *Halakhic Man*, know why, at least in part, but perhaps completely. The “confrontation” between the “mechanistic interpretation of the human mind” and “the Biblical spiritual concept of man” sounds like the contrast that is presented in those works not as a crisis or problem in need of a solution, but as a repercussion of two definitions of causality from two disparate standpoints within a pluralistic framework, the scientific mechanistic view and the halakhic freedom-to-create-oneself view. And if epistemological pluralism explains Soloveitchik’s lack of concern with one of the four conflicts mentioned here, it is reasonable to extend that argument to the other three.

Indeed, Rabbi Walter Wurzburger, one of Soloveitchik’s students, understood his teacher this way. He says of Soloveitchik,

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Kant delivered by Prof. Carl Posy at Hebrew University in 2019. This connection to Kant’s third antinomy is also noted by Rynhold and Harris. See Rynhold and Harris, *Nietzsche, Soloveitchik*, 30–31.


33 Ibid., 7.

34 For an overview of suggestions by various writers as to why Soloveitchik says he was not bothered by biblical criticism, see Aryeh Sklar, “Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik and the Problem of Biblical Criticism,” *Kol Hamevaser* 10, no. 1 (2016): 18–22.
The Rav’s objection to the employment of modern historic and textual scholarship to ascertain the meaning of Halakhah reflects not naive traditionalism but highly sophisticated post-modern critical thought. He insists that Halakhah operate with its own unique canons of interpretation. According to Soloveitchik, scientific methods are appropriate only for the explanation of natural phenomena but have no place in the quest for the understanding of the normative and cognitive concepts of Halakhah, which imposes its own a priori categories, which differ from those appropriate in the realm of science. It is for this reason that the Rav completely ignores Bible criticism and eschews the “positive historical” approach of the “Science of Judaism.”

Soloveitchik’s lack of concern with Bible criticism, as well as with the historical approach to Jewish law – two of the four issues raised in the introduction to Lonely Man of Faith – originates, according to Wurzburger, in the independence of Judaism’s a priori categories, “which differ from those appropriate in the realm of science.” We have shown that the origins of this pluralism can be traced back not only to Halakhic Mind, but to Soloveitchik’s dissertation as well. Wurzburger’s observation that Soloveitchik’s indifference to these contentious issues is not a result of “naïve traditionalism” but stems from “highly sophisticated” philosophical positions is therefore well founded in light of Soloveitchik’s extended critique of mathematical scientific monism in the dissertation.

Soloveitchik’s disclaimer at the beginning of Lonely Man of Faith, namely that he is not going to discuss nor is he even troubled by theoretical conflicts between science and religion, is not the end of that essay’s reliance on epistemological pluralism. The heart of the essay, which is the dialectical opposition of two types of man, reveals itself as rooted in epistemological pluralism most clearly when Soloveitchik explains that the two types have different conceptions of causality and time. Speaking of Adam the First, the scientific type or Majestic Man, he says, “[God] enabled man to interpret the world in functional, empirical ‘how’ categories to explain, for instance, the sequence


36 The term “post-modern” in the citation above is not meant in the way it is often used today, as referring to a school of thought characterized by skepticism of objective truth. That would be a mischaracterization of Soloveitchik’s position. Rather, Wurzburger uses the term to refer to an orthodoxy that neither evades nor accommodates modernity but rather confronts modernity from a pluralistic standpoint that endows religion with the dignity and authority to assert its own approach to reality.
of phenomena in terms of transeunt, mechanical causality and a quantified-spatialized, basically (if not for the law of entropy) reversible time, suitable to the majestic role."\textsuperscript{37} In contrast, for Adam the Second, the religious type, God “also requires of man to forget his functional and bold approach, to stand in humility and dread before the \textit{mysterium tremendum} surrounding him, to interpret the world in categories of purposive activity instead of those of mechanical facticity, and to substitute time, wedded to eternity, stretching from \textit{archê} to \textit{eschatos}, for uniform, measured clock-time."\textsuperscript{38} We are not going to get caught up here in an attempt to reconcile Soloveitchik’s different formulations in his various works of the religious approach to causality or time. After all, as we have seen, in \textit{Halakhic Mind} he insisted that “neither the mechanistic causality of science nor the sensate, teleological causation of the humanistic sciences suffice for religion.”\textsuperscript{39} Yet here the religious figure of Adam the Second is associated with a “purposive” causality, which, when contrasted to the “mechanical causality” of scientific Adam the First, sounds similar to the “teleological causation” of the humanities. However one deals with this apparent discrepancy, for the purposes of this investigation what is important is that readers of \textit{Halakhic Mind} remember that associating different disciplines with different definitions of the fundamental concepts of experience such as time, space, and causality is the heart of the theory of epistemological pluralism; the importance of that theory in \textit{Lonely Man of Faith} is thus demonstrated by its role in supporting the dialectical opposition between the two types of Man, the central idea of that work.\textsuperscript{40}

\textsuperscript{37} Soloveitchik, \textit{Lonely Man of Faith}, 77.

\textsuperscript{38} Ibid. A more elaborate discussion of the pluralistic view of time with respect to the two types of men can be found on pp. 66–70.

\textsuperscript{39} Soloveitchik, \textit{Halakhic Mind}, 50. See above at n. 26.

\textsuperscript{40} To be clear, Soloveitchik does not extend his theory of epistemological pluralism to non-Orthodox streams of Judaism that base their religious orientation on subjective foundations. According to his view, epistemological pluralism includes only objective disciplines. Science and history, to take the example from the dissertation, are considered objective, not subjective, disciplines, because, even though they have alternative definitions of causality, once the researcher is oriented toward one or the other set of definitions he must follow the rules and methodology of the discipline. The same is true regarding the pluralism between religion and science. This is how, in the very work in which Soloveitchik argues for pluralism, he is able to simultaneously disparage liberal streams of religion, for, he claims, they do not adhere to a methodology. See Soloveitchik, \textit{Halakhic Mind}, 88–90. Clarifying the meaning of “objective” and “subjective” in this context will be a focus of my upcoming doctoral dissertation. It is interesting to note that Rynhold and Harris see the persistence of epistemological pluralism in Soloveitchik’s confessions about the subjective nature of his Jewish philosophy that appear in a number of his writings. See Rynhold and Harris, \textit{Nietzsche, Soloveitchik}, 29.
The persistence of this theory in Soloveitchik’s writings invites a reassessment of the relationship between two of his greatest works. There is widespread acceptance of the view that *Lonely Man of Faith* signals a significant change in Soloveitchik’s philosophical writings, especially when compared to *Halakhic Man*. There is good reason for this view. As a personality type, halakhic man is undoubtedly not the lonely man of faith. The former is mostly a harmonious figure who successfully blends the best of the scientific and religious attitudes. The latter is an agitated figure who struggles with conflicting demands from technological-utilitarian and spiritual drives. Furthermore, Soloveitchik’s sympathies seem to shift between the two works. Of the two typologies that blend together to form the halakhic man, it is the *homo religiosus* who bears the brunt of Soloveitchik’s criticism for his flights toward mysticism, while the scientifically oriented, cognitive man seems much more in tune with the figure of the halakhic man, especially in those passages that compare the Halakhah to mathematical science. In *Lonely Man of Faith*, it is the reverse. In the dialectically opposed typologies of that work, it is Adam the First, the utilitarian master of science and technology – or at least the modern manifestation of that type – who is the main target of Soloveitchik’s critique for ignoring his spiritual side, while Adam the Second, the member of the religious community who pines for redemption, seems to have more of Soloveitchik’s sympathies. Some have also suggested that *Halakhic Man* should be classified as a work of phenomenology that seeks to describe the structure of religious consciousness, while *Lonely Man of Faith* is a work of religious existentialism that focuses on the subjective, emotional foundations of religious experience. All of these differences, however, should not obscure the fundamental unity of method between these two works. Both works present the reader with conflicting types, a more scientific type against a more religious type, using a dialectical method. In the dialectical method, neither side has a theoretical advantage over the other. There is no theoretical debate between the two sides, and no side must answer questions posed to it or respond to challenges leveled against it from the other side. On a practical level, a choice must be made concerning what to do and what not to do, and pragmatic and existential concerns may at times force one to choose one view over the other, but on a theoretical level, each side is granted legitimacy as stemming from a separate standpoint. This


standpoint theory for understanding contrary positions remains a consistent philosophical foundation throughout both *Halakhic Man* and *Lonely Man of Faith*, despite the differences between these works.43

We have already shown that this reorienting of contradictions from problems to standpoints is a feature of epistemological pluralism. It is what allows repentance to function from a religious standpoint, even as it violates the scientific standpoint on causality. It is what allows religion to view man as free while science views man as mechanical. And it is what allows Adam the Second to stand alongside Adam the First, or cognitive man alongside *homo religiosus*, as a separate standpoint among equals – equals in a cognitive and epistemological sense, although, as noted, an individual may deem aspects of one or the other more worthy in a practical or existential sense. Epistemological pluralism can thus be understood as the intellectual foundation of Soloveitchik’s dialectics.44

While Soloveitchik’s dialectical method may have been influenced by the Brisker analytical method of Talmud study45 or by the thought of Christian religious phenomenologists,46 its intellectual ground is to be found in the epistemological theory espoused by Bergson, James, and the later Cassirer. That is the same theory that moved Soloveitchik in his dissertation to reject Cohen’s and the earlier Cassirer’s attempts to subsume all academic disciplines under the mathematical model, and to reject Rickert’s attempt to make science subordinate to history. That theory, developed most fully in *Halakhic Mind* as epistemological pluralism, should thus be considered a central, enduring, and unifying foundation of Soloveitchik’s philosophical Jewish writings.47

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43 This approach is similar to that presented by Reuven Ziegler in a section of his book titled “Continuity in the Rav’s Thought.” See Ziegler, *Majesty and Humility*, 410–411.
44 Some of the dialectics expounded by Soloveitchik, the ones that remain within one discipline, would not necessarily be rooted in this theory, although they may be. *Halakhic Mind* considers the wave-particle duality of light to be suggestive of epistemological pluralism, even though both sides are in the one discipline of physics. See Soloveitchik, *Halakhic Mind*, 24.
The Eternal Mystery of the Unknown and Natorp’s Sphere

Soloveitchik’s writings that appeared after The Lonely Man of Faith continue to depart from his earlier presentations of the halakhic standpoint. Whereas Halakhic Man offers a harmonious blend of transcendent-religious and cognitive standpoints, and And From There You Shall Seek48 concludes with a triumphant resolution of the tension between love and fear of God, the later essays leave existentialist tensions unresolved, emphasizing themes of struggle, sacrifice, and defeat. That is not to say that religious life leads to bitterness and despair, however, for sacrifice and defeat are redemptive; by humbly accepting defeat before God, man elevates himself to a level of heroism and dignity unavailable before the defeat. Nevertheless, the shift in tone and theme from his early work is clear.

While there is plenty to say about the causes of this shift, the primary focus of this study is not a psychological appraisal of Soloveitchik’s motives or a sociological survey of his times; it is rather an exploration of the intellectual basis of his ideas. What is the conceptual foundation for this existentialist approach? What is the train of thought that leads to it? The position taken here is that Soloveitchik left a trail of evidence that shows that far from being a completely new way of thinking, his discourse of defeat is partially based on an idea that he had been writing about already in the 1940s, and even as far back as his dissertation. While writers have already called attention to some existentialist themes in Soloveitchik’s early writings, the current study shows that such tendencies reflect a fundamental philosophical conviction adopted by Soloveitchik at the dawn of his writing career. Already in his dissertation Soloveitchik chooses between two alternative conceptions of the nature of knowledge, a choice that ultimately becomes one of the supporting foundations of Soloveitchik’s existentialist mode of thought.

The trail begins with Soloveitchik’s exposition in his dissertation of two interrelated, key concepts in Herman Cohen’s thought: what Cohen calls the task, or Aufgabe, and the origin, or Ursprung. The task refers to the idea that knowledge will never finish its job, and there will always be more to learn and to know. Science is an endless endeavor; it will never close up shop and say it figured everything out. As science and knowledge advance, even the most basic things we thought we knew are recast in a new light. In Soloveitchik’s words,

48 Although it was not published until 1978, Soloveitchik drafted this essay in the 1940s. See Joseph B. Soloveitchik, And From There You Shall Seek (Jersey City: KTAV, 2008), introduction, xi.
For the time being, the task could be defined as follows: There are no completed cognitions, no finalized cognitive judgments, which do justice to their tasks and problems. Thought is never finished; rather, its problems grow and its task expands to the degree of its achievements and of the advancement of knowledge. (67)

Why is thought never finished? Is it because the physical world outside of thought has an inscrutable and impenetrable element? That is certainly not the reason for Cohen. From Cohen’s idealist viewpoint, there are no inscrutable elements. Anything that is, is knowable; there is no world outside of thought, since being is constituted by thought. Perhaps it is because knowledge is produced by an inquisitive, thinking subject who cannot stop asking questions about things? Again, that’s not Cohen. Cohen denies any and all being that transcends thought, whether it is the outside world or the inner thinking subject. For Cohen, “we proceed to reality, not from a subject, but from a subjectless knowledge and thought” (54). Thought is a self-enclosed, self-sustained, unified realm whose unity “requires no support other than that founded on purity and lawfulness” (55). Rather, the reason thought is infinite has to do with the mathematical nature of thought.

In order to better understand Cohen’s view on the infinity of thought, it is helpful to understand Cohen’s second key concept, the origin. To that end, the question needs to reverse direction, asking not about the end of thought but about its beginning. The question now is, From where does knowledge arise? “How does the cognitive process begin? What constitutes the starting point for thought?” (34). For the realist, knowledge is a result of the encounter between a thinking subject and an external world. The subject receives impressions that are given to it by the extra-mental objects, and these “givens” spark a process within the subject that leads to knowledge. But for Cohen, for whom there are no extra-mental objects and no subject, all that there is remains enclosed in the arena of thought, such that all knowledge is already in thought. So the question is, What is the cause that initiates the unfolding progress of knowledge?

Soloveitchik’s presentation of Cohen’s answer is complex (37–48), but it can be understood by referring to the series concept, an idea that Soloveitchik attributes to Cohen multiple times in the dissertation (21, 61, 107). According to Cohen, the progression of knowledge can be understood as working like an infinite mathematical series generated by a function. The members of the

49 Although Cassirer is the one who most fully developed and explained the series concept, Soloveitchik indicates that in doing so Cassirer was explicating a fundamental notion already adopted by his teacher Cohen.
mathematical series are represented by $x_1, x_2, x_3 \ldots x_n$, where “n” represents the position in the series. Say we have knowledge of three elements of such a series and they are 1, 2, 3, … Were we to guess the next member of the series, we would probably guess it is 4, based on the assumption that the members of the series are generated by the mathematical function $x_n = x_{n-1} + 1$. But what if we discover that the next number is not 4 but 5? If we are to make any more predictions, we must first rethink what function is operating here. In this case, we might consider that our initial three elements were starting from the third position of the Fibonacci sequence, 0, 1, 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, …, based on the function $x_n = x_{n-1} + x_{n-2}$ (where $x_0$ and $x_1$ are respectively defined as 0 and 1). Cohen maintains that all knowledge, which, to be precise, is mathematical-scientific knowledge, is governed by functions in this way. What generates progress in knowledge is our apprehension of the function generating new elements in the series. As new information comes in, we alter our understanding of the ultimate foundation or function. The axioms of Euclidean geometry, for example, used to be considered the foundation of all geometry, until new discoveries led mathematicians to alter their view of the foundations of geometry, replacing the Euclidean axioms with more general ones that allow for non-Euclidean geometries as well (39). There are echoes of Hegel in this theory, in that all changes in intellectual history are governed by an absolute principle, except that for Cohen this process never ends. We will never know this absolute function because the series is infinite, and so while we are always updating our latest approximation of it, we will never be able to say exactly what it is. The function that governs this process is called by Cohen the origin, or Ursprung. Origin is the answer to our question regarding the cause of the unfolding progress of knowledge. Origin is also the answer to the question of why knowledge is an endless task: because it works like an infinite mathematical series.

It may seem that the concept of origin transcends thought, hovering over it and guiding its progress, but the origin makes no claim of metaphysical or ontological independence. Cohen sees origin as immanent in thought, in the same way that the function is immanent in the series. Thought generates its own elements. Cohen thereby uses the concept of origin as a source of knowledge that dispenses with the need for extra-mental “givens” and a thinking subject.

Soloveitchik does not critique the concepts of task and origin themselves, but he finds difficulty in the way Cohen removes the thinking subject from the endeavor of progress in knowledge. Cohen understood that there has to be some mode to account for sensation and experience in the dynamic of

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knowledge, and for that purpose he admitted into his system the notion of consciousness. Consciousness for Cohen means that thought can investigate itself. “The category of consciousness means that thought can confront itself to make critical judgments” (53). But this is still a subjectless consciousness that is itself a product of thought (57). There is no self and no self-consciousness. But Soloveitchik rejects the possibility of such a notion. “A consciousness without self-consciousness cannot be understood” (56). In Soloveitchik’s view, “Consciousness is the characteristic feature of the psychic world, which is always related to an ego-subject” (56).

Nevertheless, Soloveitchik does not discard the concept of the infinite task of knowledge. As a central notion of Marburg neo-Kantianism, the task undergoes variations for different representatives of the school (66–67). As a contrast to Cohen’s view, Soloveitchik presents the notion of task according to Cohen’s student, Paul Natorp. Natorp answers the question of how knowledge begins, differently from Cohen. Natorp in part maintains the idealistic view of the Marburg school, that objects are constituted by thought, there being no extra-mental objects that bombard us with impressions (76). But, like Soloveitchik, Natorp disagrees with Cohen regarding the subjective ego. For Natorp, although the world does not transcend thought, the subjective self does. Knowledge arises from the subjective ego posing questions and problems in order to unify all the contents of its consciousness. “[I]n Natorp the direction of knowledge is not determined by the act of forming a series, but by the problem” (59), referring to the questions and challenges raised by the inquisitive subject. The task, which for Cohen involved getting closer to the objective function that is the origin, is different for Natorp, because for Natorp, “the task corresponds to the subjective” (71). “Pure subjectivity, viewed reconstructively, is the primordial source of thought” (74). Natorp’s notion of origin as well, is based on the inquiring subject, for “the problem is the origin of the thought process” (59). Soloveitchik notes that in Natorp, “There is here a shift of critical idealism toward the metaphysical direction” (75, also see 103), because Natorp puts at the center of his system a subjective being that transcends thought.51

51 Natorp himself might be more willing to call it a transcendental subject than a transcendent subject, since, like Cohen, he generally dismisses being that transcends thought. In Kantian parlance, the transcendental refers to something that is a condition for the possibility of experience, but would not be considered as transcending experience. Nevertheless, Natorp’s extensive expositions of subjectivity remain highly suggestive of a transcendent subject, whether or not he explicitly acknowledged such a being, and Soloveitchik seems to read him that way. In his dissertation on the Marburg school, Scott Edgar likewise concludes that for Natorp, in contrast with Cohen, “there could be
Soloveitchik seeks to clarify the difference between Cohen's and Natorp's views about the infinite task of knowledge with pictures of a line and a circle or sphere. For Cohen, knowledge progresses along a line, or series. The line is an infinite series, and the function that governs the progress of elements along the line is not a point on the line but the origin of the line. For Natorp, the elements of knowledge can be compared to points along the perimeter of a circle or a sphere that keeps growing (49). Natorp himself uses this analogy of a Kugel, or sphere (67). It is not immediately clear what the picture of the sphere contributes to Soloveitchik's argument, but it appears from the wider context that there are two aspects to the sphere that are not present in the line. First, the picture of the sphere adds a dualism that is missing from the line: the interplay between the center point and the points along the perimeter, which is a dualism that represents the interplay between thought and the thinking subject. For Natorp, the infinite task lies in “uniting the infinite number of points with the center” (50), following the Kantian scheme of the subject being the uniting principle of experience.52 Second, an additional dualism exists in a circle that is missing from the line, because the circle encloses an area that is separate from the perimeter that defines the circle. If the center represents the subject and the growing perimeter represents the progressive increase of knowledge through scientific and cultural progress, the area inside the circle represents the problems and questions that increase as knowledge increases. This is the aspect of the sphere that emerges from Natorp's own presentation of it, in the source cited by Soloveitchik, where Natorp explains that the image of a "sphere of infinitely growing radius" expresses "the extent of the problems that are posed to knowledge at any given stage as the boundary of what is known against what is not known."53 Natorp here provides a helpful illustration drawn from the scientific progress of astronomy. When the ancient picture of a finite universe in which the earth sat at the center of a small number of “spheres” nested in each other like the layers of an onion was shattered and replaced by the modern picture of an infinite universe with no center, the significant increase of knowledge was accompanied by the enormous growth of unknown territory, raising all sorts of new questions and problems.54 Natorp

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54 Ibid., n.
says, “The objects seem to stand outside us at a certain distance; by the pro-
gression of knowledge we aim to steadily decrease the distance between them
and us. To our astonishment, we discover that they always stay far away from
us, and always seem to move away.”55 The image of the sphere thus illustrates
how all that is known, represented by the perimeter of the sphere, always
touches on its boundary all that is not known, a boundary that reflects the
subject incessantly raising problems and asking questions.

Soloveitchik does not say explicitly in the dissertation that he favors
Natorp’s system over Cohen’s, nor would he, as he announces in the foreword
that he wants to stay focused on Cohen and will present Natorp merely for the
sake of comparison (9). Nevertheless, it is clear from his rejection of Cohen’s
elimination of a transcendent consciousness that he favors Natorp’s position
over Cohen’s. Indeed, we will now show that Natorp’s sphere pops up again
and again in Soloveitchik’s subsequent writings on Jewish thought, where he
gives it first a religious and then an existentialist meaning. The Marburg epistemological notion of “task,” according to Natorp’s version, will thereby reveal
itself as a core element for Soloveitchik throughout his various writings on
Jewish philosophy.56

Deserving brief mention here is Soloveitchik’s reliance on Natorp’s approach
to subjectivity in Halakhic Mind, where Soloveitchik outlines his method for
religious philosophy, which involves a particular way of viewing the relation-
ship between subjectivity and objectivity. Soloveitchik explicitly mentions
Natorp as the source for his method.57 While this supports the assertion that
Soloveitchik approves of Natorp’s approach to subjectivity, the specific issue at
hand is the notion of task as illustrated by Natorp’s sphere.

In the opening pages of Halakhic Man, Soloveitchik develops the contrast
briefly mentioned above between cognitive man and homo religiosus as two
antipodal types. While cognitive man aims to “solve the problems of cognition
vis-à-vis reality and longs to disperse the cloud of mystery which hangs darkly
over the order of phenomena and events,”58 homo religiosus, in contrast, “is
intrigued by the mystery of existence – the mysterium tremendum – and wants

55 Ibid., 10.
56 Again, as noted in the discussion of epistemological pluralism, I am not addressing the
question of which came first in Soloveitchik’s mind, the philosophical or the religious
version of the mystery of the unknown. It is quite plausible that even though he first
presented it in a purely philosophical context, his religious thought had already led him
there and influenced his philosophical view. In any case, our concern here is to highlight
 consistencies, not to determine the origins of ideas.
57 See Soloveitchik, Halakhic Mind, 62 and 126 n. 75.
58 Soloveitchik, Halakhic Man, 5.
to emphasize that mystery." A central idea of the essay is that halakhic man, as a third type, combines cognitive man’s drive to know with the devotion to a transcendent God of the *homo religiosus*. When Soloveitchik describes reality the way it is seen by the *homo religiosus*, the one for whom “[e]verything bespeaks secrets and enigmas, everything – wonders and miracles,” we find him turning to Natorp’s sphere. Referring to the wonders and miracles that fill reality, Soloveitchik says,

> The neo-Kantian philosophers gave striking expression to this ancient idea when they said that the function that holds between the solution and the problem is analogous to the function that holds between the radius and circumference of a circle and its area. As the radius and circumference increase arithmetically, the area increases geometrically. Existence plays a mischievous game with us, as though to tease and provoke us. In the midst of knowledge there yet once again arises the mystery; in the midst of contemplation the riddle gains new strength.

This mysterious and confounding aspect of reality is the source of the attitude of the *homo religiosus*, who “clings to a reality which, as it were, has removed itself from the cognizing subject and has barred the intellect from all access to it.” Cognitive man, in contrast, pays little or no attention to this hidden side of existence, focusing his attention on what is graspable.

Attributing the image of the circle to unnamed “neo-Kantians,” Soloveitchik is undoubtedly referring to the same sphere of Natorp that he references in his dissertation, only now he has given it a religious aspect. Because the unknown grows increasingly faster than our knowledge, the dream of ever catching up to the steadily retreating objects of mystery is dashed, and all that *homo religiosus* can do is gaze at the infinitely expanding realm of the unknown with awe and wonder, and in that encounter he experiences the infinity of the divine.

For the reader of the dissertation who recognizes Natorp’s sphere at play in this passage of *Halakhic Man*, the dichotomy between cognitive man and *homo religiosus* takes on new and surprising significance. Soloveitchik indicates that Hermann Cohen is a model of the cognitive man. When Soloveitchik says, “Cognitive man does not speak about the ‘existence’ of a thing whose content

59 Ibid., 7.
60 Ibid., 3.
61 Ibid., 8.
62 Ibid., 9.
63 Ibid.
and nature he cannot determine,”64 he explicitly refers to Hermann Cohen as an example. The neo-Kantian school represented by Cohen, Soloveitchik tells us, does not revel in the mysteries of the unknown, because “is it not the case that there is no existence without cognition?”65 Cognitive man’s tendency to “negate the unforeseen and the incomprehensible”66 does sound a lot like Cohen’s negation of any being that is outside the realm of thought, the central idea discussed in Soloveitchik’s dissertation. But now we see that a model for the other side, the homo religiosus, is Natorp. To be more precise, Natorp is not necessarily himself a homo religiosus, for he might not draw the relevant conclusions from his own system that Soloveitchik draws, but he provides the epistemological framework that animates the homo religiosus.67 The uninformed reader is likely to be confused by Soloveitchik mentioning neo-Kantianism as the epistemological foundation of both incompatible antipodes. But the reader of the dissertation recognizes here the internal Marburg dispute between Cohen and Natorp, discussed in the dissertation in detail in three separate chapters.68 Law versus problem, order versus enigma, is a dichotomy that drives a wedge both between cognitive man and homo religiosus, as well as between Cohen’s subjectless thought and Natorp’s questioning subject. Although, to be sure, Cohen also maintains that knowledge will never be complete for it is infinite, nevertheless in Cohen’s system, in which the unknown is simply the not-yet-known, everything is theoretically knowable. It is Natorp’s introduction of the transcendent subject, who attaches the question and the problem to all knowledge, that introduces a theory of cognition that points to the realm of the unknown.

One may ask, does the fact that Soloveitchik uses Natorp’s sphere as a basis for the attitude of the homo religiosus show that he accepts Natorp’s idea? After all, doesn’t Soloveitchik level much criticism at the homo religiosus in Halakhic Man? The answer is that Soloveitchik sees at least some truth in the approach of both homo religiosus and cognitive man, since he says that “the ontic dualism” of the two antipodal attitudes reflects “an ontological dualism”

64  Ibid., 144 n. 10.
65  Ibid., n. 11.
66  Ibid., 5.
67  Schwartz claims that Natorp’s idealism, like Cohen’s, denies a transcendent realm, i.e., a reality that is beyond thought, and Schwartz significantly limits the scope of Soloveitchik’s stated connection between the neo-Kantians and the homo religiosus’s interest in transcendence. See Schwartz, Religion or Halakha, 76–79. However, it seems clear that Soloveitchik reads Natorp as accepting transcendence in at least one area, in the reality of the subject. He writes that Natorp’s view of subjectivity represents a “shift of critical idealism toward the metaphysical direction” (see n. 51 above).
68  Soloveitchik, Das Reine Denken, chs. 2, 5, and 7.
possessed by reality, and he presents Natorp’s sphere as one ontological side of this dualistic reality. In fact, Soloveitchik never rejects the basic view that the unknown grows with the advance of knowledge. His quarrel instead is with the exaggerated attention that homo religiosus gives to the unknowable, becoming so transfixed by the mystery of the transcendent that he turns to mysticism instead of staying focused on the here and now, the way halakhic man does. A more moderate approach that acknowledges the eternal mystery of the unknown but interfaces with it through intellectual activity grounded in the concrete reality of this world is more in tune with the approach of halakhic man and more acceptable in Soloveitchik’s eyes. “Halakhic man apprehends transcendence”; nevertheless, “[t]ranscendence becomes embodied in man’s deeds, deeds that are shaped by the lawful physical order of which man is a part.”

Still, in *Halakhic Man*, the eternal mystery of the unknown remains mostly in the background of the discussion. In general, in that work, Soloveitchik tends to downplay the transcendent side of halakhic man, the homo religiosus so fascinated by the enigma of being, because one main goal of *Halakhic Man* is to replace the common conception of the religious figure as prone to flights of fancy into the world of mystery with a more sophisticated portrait of the Orthodox Jew, who is at least as committed to rigorous cognitive comprehension of the concrete world as is the scientist. In Soloveitchik’s later, existentialist writings, however, the eternal mystery of the unknown as illustrated by Natorp’s sphere attains a more central significance. In some of his most significant writings of the 1960s and 1970s, the main problem Soloveitchik grapples with shifts from how to present Orthodox Judaism in a more sophisticated and esteemed light vis-à-vis the modern intellectual world, to how religion in general and Orthodoxy in particular, can redeem a person caught in the emotional anguish of the existential crisis of human failure. In that context, Natorp’s sphere appears yet again, this time as one of the pillars that supports a religious existentialist outlook according to which religion redeems man by consecrating his failures and defeats as a sacrificial offering to God.

In fact, Soloveitchik had already begun to develop this new train of thought in the late 1950s. A chapter of the book *Out of the Whirlwind* called “The Crisis

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69 Soloveitchik, *Halakhic Man*, 8. I have altered Kaplan’s translation slightly to more precisely reflect my understanding of the original Hebrew.

70 Soloveitchik, *Halakhic Man*, 39–48. In this study I leave aside Schwartz’s esoteric reading of the figure of halakhic man not as a composite but as exclusively cognitive man. For that view, see Schwartz, *Religion or Halakha*.


72 Ibid., 45.
of Human Finitude” begins with the assertion that Judaism insists that man recognize not only the greatness a person can achieve, “but also the tragic fact of his own finitude and the consequent incompleteness of his existential experience.” Awareness that life always ends in death, and that human limitations always keep full satisfaction and fulfillment out of our grasp, can leave a person full of despair. The modern, secular response to this crisis, to ignore the problem and surge forward as if it does not exist, is dismissed by Soloveitchik as self-deceiving and doomed to fail. The religious answer, deemed by Soloveitchik far more truthful and successful, is to embrace our defeat and turn to God with it, acknowledging His greatness in our own incompleteness. But this consecration of our failure to God must be total. It must include all areas of life, including the intellectual, the ethical, and the religious. It is in Soloveitchik’s exposition of the intellectual consecration of failure that Natorp’s sphere makes its appearance.

If this singular being called man is caught in the incessant pursuit of the intellectual mirage, he must finally admit defeat. He must turn to God and say, “He who increases knowledges, increases sorrow” (Eccl. 1:18). The more knowledge I accumulate, the more the mystery deepens, the more complex is the problem, the more fascinating the unknown. I shall restlessly explore, investigate, search and try to comprehend, but I know that the radius of the scientifically charted sectors will grow one-dimensionally, while the area of the problem will expand two-dimensionally. I am not regretting my search for knowledge, but I am renouncing my arrogant desire for a complete cognitive experience for conquest which is not followed by defeat.

If Natorp’s sphere or circle was given a religious component in Halakhic Man, it is assigned an emotional and existential function in Out of the Whirlwind. My acceptance of the mystery that grows as I increase my knowledge becomes the springboard for an emotionally dynamic and redemptive religious experience.

It is important to put the eternal mystery of the unknown in its proper perspective within Soloveitchik’s existentialist thought so that its importance, on

74 Ibid., 151.
75 Ibid., 157.
76 Ibid., 158.
77 Ibid., 158. Emphasis mine.
the one hand, is not exaggerated, and on the other hand is not sidelined. In order not to overplay its importance, we note that intellectual defeat is only one among a number of areas of human failure. After Soloveitchik’s suggestion of how the intellectually inclined person connects to God in his intellectual defeat by confessing acceptance of the eternal mystery of the unknown, the passage continues with more “if he is such and such a type of person” statements, all involving the consecration and elevation of failure by bringing it before God. For the religious type: “If he happens to be a homo religiosus, the person should say: God Almighty, the closer I try to come to You, the greater is the distance that separates me from You.”78 For the ethicist type: “If he is an ethicist, a moralist in quest of the full realization of the good, let him confess his frailty and helplessness as far as the moral act is concerned.”79 These three areas – the intellectual, ethical, and religious – almost cover all of man’s cultural experience. Neo-Kantians tend to encapsulate cultural life in these three plus a fourth, the aesthetic sphere.80 We will soon see that Soloveitchik adds this fourth area in a later, parallel text. In any case, the eternal mystery of the unknown is not by any means the single root of Soloveitchik’s existentialism. Nevertheless, it constitutes one component that joins together with the eternally unconsummated encounter with God and the eternally unrealized ethical goal to produce the existential religious experience of the finite human being interacting with an infinite God.

Furthermore, it is important to distinguish between two stages of the existential religious experience as described by Soloveitchik in this essay. The first is the experience of confronting failure and defeat, and the second is the response of elevating and consecrating it. The epistemological background of the eternal mystery of the unknown, the Natorpian endless task, may lead one to surmise the inevitability of intellectual frustration and failure, making the first stage necessary, but it does not play much of a role in the response stage of consecrating the failure.

One must also not make the mistake of considering the inevitability of intellectual crisis as the sum total of the religious attitude toward intellectual activity. To the contrary, Soloveitchik continued to trumpet the superlative value that Judaism assigns to intellectual achievement in all areas of life, in Torah study as well as in science and other cultural venues, throughout his career. While in “The Crisis of Human Finitude” Soloveitchik only briefly mentions

78 Ibid.
79 Ibid., 159.
80 See, for example, Natorp, Philosophie, which systematically discusses these four areas in separate chapters and sections as a way to philosophize about all of cultural life. See also the main text of this article at n. 19 above, where Soloveitchik refers to this division in Cohen’s work.
the counterbalance to accepting defeat in Judaism’s “activist philosophy with regard to man’s environment” and in the divine imperative of “organizing a defense system against disease, poverty, and other disasters,” the dialectical movement between triumph and defeat is most fully developed in Soloveitchik’s subsequent writings, as we shall soon see.

With all of these caveats, the importance of this idea should also not be underplayed. It remains true that the prominence of the eternal mystery of the unknown increases in comparison to Soloveitchik’s earlier writings, since it now forms one of the components that lead to at least the first and foundational stage of the existential religious experience, the acceptance of the finitude of humanity and of the inevitability of failure, a central focus of some of the later writings.

This remains true even after Soloveitchik in subsequent writings adds an additional layer to his existentialist thought: the demand that defeat be actively sought and embraced as part of the dialectic movement back and forth between triumph and crisis. This new layer is developed twenty or so years after “The Crisis of Human Finitude” in two of the four essays in the spring 1978 issue of Tradition, among the last writings of Soloveitchik to appear in his lifetime, and once again echoes of Natorp’s sphere play a supporting role. “Majesty and Humility” develops a dialectic of winning and losing in what Soloveitchik calls “two moralities, one of victory and triumph, one of withdrawal and retreat.”

This dialectic is developed further in the essay “Catharsis,” where Soloveitchik writes, “The Halachic catharsis expresses itself in paradoxical movement in two opposite directions – in surging forward boldly and in retreating humbly.” In both essays, as part of this dialectical oscillation, defeat is not merely inevitable and not only to be consecrated when it imposes itself upon a person, but, as strange as it may sound, it is to be actively sought. “When victory is near, man must invite defeat and surrender the spoils that he had quested for so long.” Man must actively invite defeat, must actively surrender his achievements, even when victory is near and defeat is not being forced upon him. This is not just defeat, but retreat. Man must retreat in part to train himself to be ready to accept inevitable failure, and in part to develop humility and internalize the difference between finite man and infinite God. Halakhah actively provides this training through the restrictions and demands it places on pleasure and even on emotions and feelings. Such training and the ensuing attitude are purifying in a manner captured by the word “catharsis.” Of course Soloveitchik

81 Soloveitchik, Out of the Whirlwind, 165.
84 Ibid., 44.
does not advocate never winning; rather, through the training of regular surrender, one purifies and redeems the march toward victory by infusing it with humility instead of arrogance. For example, a scientist on the verge of discovering a vaccine should certainly not retreat in the face of that victory; after achieving such a victory, however, the scientist must avoid total immersion in a congratulatory attitude and make room for the feelings of pain and confusion that are more in harmony with the reality of the limitations of human ability. “Then, and only then, is the scientific experience a humble and not an arrogant one.”

Below this new layer of active movement toward defeat, the foundational layer of Soloveitchik’s existentialism, the inevitability of defeat – whether sought or not – remains in play in these later essays, and this is where Natorp’s sphere becomes important. In “Catharsis,” paralleling the earlier “Crisis of Human Finitude,” Soloveitchik focuses on the limitations and disappointments of the intellectual endeavor as one of the areas that comprise the whole of human experience. “Halacha teaches that at every level of our total existential experience – the aesthetic-hedonic, the emotional, the intellectual, the moral-religious – one must engage in the dialectical movement by alternately advancing and retreating.” This list of areas of human experience is a little different from the one in the earlier “Crisis of Human Finitude,” and here the aesthetic is included as well, but the differences are of relatively little importance for our purposes. What is important is that when Soloveitchik subsequently goes through the list one by one, explaining how one advances and retreats in each arena, his arrival at the intellectual sphere brings us to familiar territory, where the eternal mystery of the unknown appears once again:

Cognitive catharsis consists in discovering the unknowability of being. Commitment to knowledge, to scientific inquiry, implies, ipso facto, the recognition of the eternal mystery, which grows with the advance of knowledge, which deepens with the triumphant march of the human mind, and which becomes, with every cognitive breakthrough, more baffling, perplexing and challenging.

Foundational to the demand that the scientist or scholar actively purge the cognitive gesture by inviting in and surrendering to the pain and despair of defeat is the prior “discovery” and “recognition” of the “eternal mystery” and the “unknowability of being.” Although there is no mention of a circle, sphere,
radius, or circumference here, the “mystery which grows with the advance of knowledge” is well known to us by now as rooted in Natort’s sphere.

Significantly, the “unknowability of being” mentioned here harks back to Soloveitchik’s rejection of Cohen’s identification of being with knowledge, his rejection of Cohen’s denial of transcendent being, and his preference for Natort’s system wherein the subject, a being who transcends knowledge, generates a world of questions and problems that forever elude the grasp of knowledge. What has changed since Soloveitchik’s presentation of this dispute in the dissertation is that he now sees the epistemological controversy as leading to an existential one as well. It is not just about what can and cannot be known, but it leads to radically different emotional attitudes about whether the basic state of man is optimistic or pessimistic with regard to his achievements and abilities. In these existentialist writings of Soloveitchik, this epistemological pessimism serves as one of the starting points of a redemptive process that begins with the first stage of recognizing the crisis, continues with the second stage of accepting it and then elevating and consecrating it by standing before God with it, and culminates in a third stage of purposefully and intermittently surrendering success in order to develop humility in the face of this inevitable crisis.

It should thus be clear that Soloveitchik’s reference to the eternal mystery of the unknown in his existentialist writings is not a mere rhetorical flourish. Its earlier exposition in the dissertation demonstrates that Soloveitchik thought through the idea rigorously in a philosophical context and did not just pick it up in a superficial fashion. Further, that early exposition, combined with the idea’s persistence throughout his writing career in a role supporting some of his most important concepts and principles, should give pause to any claim that Soloveitchik’s use of ideas from Western philosophy is merely of a casual and ornamental nature. To the contrary, although it is presented in different writings with different emphases, the epistemological notion that the mystery of the unknown grows as knowledge progresses is a core conviction of Soloveitchik that stands at the heart of some of the most significant themes in his philosophy.

5 Concluding Remarks

Structurally, the two analyses presented here stand in a temporally inverse relationship. The study of epistemological pluralism shows how an early theme in Soloveitchik’s writing persists through his later period; the study of the eternal mystery of the unknown demonstrates how a late theme of his writings rests on foundations laid much earlier. Conceptually, the two ideas demonstrated
here to be foundational and consistent in Soloveitchik’s work are not unrelated. They are both about the boundaries of knowledge. It might be said that while epistemological pluralism puts boundaries around knowledge horizontally, preventing axioms and conclusions belonging to one discipline from jumping over the fence into neighboring disciplines, the eternal mystery of the unknown puts boundaries around knowledge vertically, placing a slowly moving translucent ceiling above the known, through which advancing knowledge catches blurry glimpses of a quickly retreating world of the unknown. The vertical and horizontal boundaries result in two different types of dialectical activity. The horizontal dialectic involves combining or shifting between alternate systems of thought and knowledge, the way halakhic man combines cognitive and religious standpoints or the lonely man of faith oscillates between scientific and religious systems. The vertical dialectic results from the shifting of one’s attention from the accomplishments of any or all of these competing systems to their limitations and inevitable failures.\textsuperscript{88} It may also be that the two ideas discussed here and their resulting dialectics share the same root, namely, idealism. I refer not to the radical idealism of Cohen that identifies all being with thought, but to the notion of idealism that says that knowledge of reality is not mainly a passive endeavor of receiving sense impressions of objects, but rather is primarily, though not necessarily exclusively, a creative affair led by the constructive activity of a thinking subject. It is the activity of the subject that creates the pluralism of approaches to reality, and it is the activity of the subject that incessantly questions and probes reality, thereby guaranteeing that knowledge will never be complete. But to support this last point requires further investigation into Soloveitchik’s writings and their philosophical background.

We have presented two elements of Soloveitchik’s philosophical core, which are epistemological pluralism and the eternal mystery of the unknown. If one wishes to further develop the elements of Soloveitchik’s core philosophy and argue that he is indeed a systematic philosopher, these two areas offer a good starting point. The neo-Kantian students of Cohen who espoused these ideas, such as Natorp, who developed the transcendent subject as the source of the endless task of knowledge, and Cassirer, whose later writings promoted epistemological pluralism, seem like ripe areas of study for the further exploration of unifying and consistent foundations in Soloveitchik’s philosophy.

\textsuperscript{88} A case can be made that the structure of the essay \textit{The Lonely Man of Faith} may be summed up as a meeting of a horizontal dialectic with a vertical dialectic, each resulting in a different type of loneliness. I will leave it to the reader to assess the usefulness of such a scheme.