

## *Rav Soloveitchik's New World View*

By: DAVID P. GOLDMAN

“Out of the sources of Halakhah, a new world view awaits formulation,” R. Joseph B. Soloveitchik concluded his 1944 essay *The Halakbic Mind*.<sup>1</sup>

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

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

---

<sup>1</sup> P. 102.

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

---

Trained as a music theorist, David P. Goldman is the author of numerous academic and popular articles on music, mathematics and philosophy, including two previous contributions to *Hakirah*. He is the author of *How Civilizations Die* (Washington, DC: Regnery, 2011). He has headed several quantitative research groups at major financial firms.