

Revisionism and the Rav: The Struggle for the Soul of Modern Orthodoxy

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THERE IS A MAJOR STRUGGLE CURRENTLY TAKING PLACE within the modern Orthodox community, a struggle over the correct understanding of the person and teachings of Rav Joseph B. Soloveitchik, *ztz"l*, better known simply as the Rav. The Rav, one of the towering rabbinic scholars and thinkers of our era, was, as is well known, the teacher, guide, and, above all, the supreme halakhic and haskafic authority of the modern Orthodox community for over fifty years. The struggle, then, is not just scholarly, but ideological as well. Indeed, in the deepest sense, it is a struggle over the direction and future course of the modern Orthodox community, a struggle over its very soul.

This type of struggle is not new to the modern Orthodox community. If we look at other rabbinic heroes of modern Orthodoxy, for example, Rav Samson Raphael Hirsch (1808-1888), founder of enlightened German neo-Orthodoxy, rabbinic scholar, Biblical commentator, and communal leader, or Rav Abraham Isaac Kook (1865-1935), the first Chief Rabbi of mandatory Palestine, talmudist, kabbalist, poet, communal leader, and Orthodox herald of the Jewish national renewal, we find that their persons and teachings as well have been and, indeed, still are the subjects of intense, often heated debate. Nor should this be surprising: Rav Hirsch, Rav Kook, and the Rav were, in different ways, very rich, complex figures: major rabbinic scholars who at the same time seriously engaged modernity intellectually; individuals whose teachings and persons blended together, in striking ways, conservatism and innovation, strict traditionalism and intellectual daring. It is intrinsically difficult to paint nuanced intellectual portraits that will do justice to the richness of their religious legacies. Moreover, different elements of the modern Orthodox community focus on those aspects in the teachings of these figures that they find intellectually or religiously congenial and gloss over those aspects they find uncongenial. Thus, the more modern, "left wing" elements of the modern Orthodox community tend to focus on the more innovative, humanistic, and universalist aspects of the legacies of these three giants, and minimize the more conservative, authoritarian, and particularist aspects of their legacies, while that community's more traditional, "right wing" elements simply reverse the order of priority.

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Thus there are those who emphasize the deep strain of humanism and idealism in the thought of Rav Hirsch, his focus on the Bible as opposed to the Talmud, his refusal to accept rabbinic *aggadot* as authoritative, and his universalist and diaspora-centered vision of the mission of Israel, while there are others who would point to his vision of a separatist Orthodox community, his fierce attack upon all forms of modern historical Jewish scholarship, his deep talmudic learning as reflected in his Commentary on the Pentateuch, and his opposition to all changes in synagogue ritual, set forth in his surviving responsa.¹ Similarly, as Dr. David Singer has recently argued, the religious and intellectual legacy of Rav Kook is being vigorously contested, and he has been portrayed by some "as a paradigmatic modern Orthodox Jew—open, tolerant, and deeply engaged with currents of secular thought," while others "hail him as the messianic Zionist supreme-dreamer of a reborn Jewish state, believer in the imminence of the final redemption, and upholder of the Jewish people's right to the whole of the Biblical land of Israel."² In both instances, each of the opposing camps, not surprisingly, dismisses those features stressed by the other as secondary.

A similar battle seems to be shaping up over the teachings of the Rav. But precisely on this account, I would contend, the real task with regard to the Rav—as, indeed, with regard to Rav Hirsch and Rav Kook—is to avoid the oversimplifications of both the left and the right and arrive at a portrait of the Rav that will do justice to the complex and multi-faceted nature of his teaching.

Shortly after the Rav's passing, Rabbi Norman Lamm, President of Yeshiva University, in a eulogy for the Rav delivered on April 25, 1993, urged his auditors to "guard . . . against any revisionism, any attempts to misinterpret the Rav's work in both worlds [the world of Torah and the world of *Madda*]. The Rav was not a *lamdan* who happened to have and use a smattering of general culture, and he was certainly not a philosopher who happened to be a *tsamid hakham*, a Torah scholar. . . . We must accept him on his terms, as a highly complicated, profound, and broad-minded personality. . . . Certain burgeoning revisionisms may well attempt to disguise and distort the Rav's uniqueness by trivializing one or the other aspect of his rich personality and work, but they must be confronted at once."³

R. Lamm's phrase "burgeoning revisionisms" is significant. It suggests that the process of revisionism was taking place even as he was speaking. Indeed, we can say that this process—and here I am speaking about revisionism from the "right"—began with the eulogy for the Rav, delivered at the Rav's *levayah* on *hol ha-Mo'ed Pesah*, April 12, 1993, by his younger brother, this distinguished rabbinic scholar and Rosh Yeshiva, Rabbi Aaron Soloveitchik. In his powerful eulogy R. Soloveitchik offered the following *meshal*. "[There are] three physical phenomena in respect to light. . . reflection, refraction, diffraction. Reflection . . . designates the process whereby the rays of the sun pass through a certain medium . . . which has no light of its own. . . . Refraction . . . involves the bending of rays [of the sun], while in diffraction . . . the rays of the sun are broken up into the spectrum of colors. Refraction and diffraction

both involve the . . . bending of the rays, except in refraction the rays of the sun are bent on account of passage of the rays without encountering an opaque medium, but in diffraction it encounters an opaque body.²⁴

So far the *mathal*. And what is the *nimshal*? R. Soloveitchik continued:

[My grandfather,] Reb Hayyim Briker had to have recourse only to the process of reflection. The air of Volozhin was pure and uncontaminated. . . . My father, *z"l*, . . . had to have recourse to the process of refraction . . . because he had to give classes at Yeshivas Rabbeinu Yitzchok Elchonon to American boys, who while pious and devout from good American Orthodox homes, still the air they breathed was not like that of Volozhin and Briker. . . . However, in his endeavor to [publicly teach] Torah he did not encounter any opaque medium.

When my brother became Rosh Yeshiva in Yeshivas Rabbeinu Yitzchok Elchonon, he started to encounter opaque people in the right and the left camps. . . . He was forced to have recourse to reflection, refraction, and diffraction. He delivered lectures in Jewish philosophy. . . . From time to time he mentioned Plato, Aristotle, Descartes, Hobbes, Kant, and Hermann Cohen. . . . Through that he was able to reach many opaque people from different camps.²⁵

The clear implication is that the Rav engaged in the study and teaching of both Jewish and general philosophers and resorted to using their writings so extensively in his own essays primarily for apologetic purposes, that is, "to reach opaque people," to lend an air of respectability to traditional Jewish teaching by presenting it through the prism of Jewish and general philosophy.

As R. Larum indicated, the Rav was a highly complicated individual. One need not and should not therefore deny the existence of an apologetic motif in the Rav's teaching. But to say the Rav used Jewish and general philosophy primarily as a means of reaching "opaque people" is a serious oversimplification which trivializes the *Madda* aspect of the Rav's teaching.

This reductionist approach to the Rav's use of philosophy should be contrasted with the more judicious and balanced approach of the Rav's son-in-law, the much lamented Rabbi Professor Yitzhak Twersky.²⁶

The Rav's teaching is not cast as an apology for traditional Judaism or as an attempt to harmonize it with some general school of thought. The *mesorah* is not subordinated to any extraneous system nor does it need to be validated by aligning it with Kant and Hegel. It needs to be appropriated and explicated, to be analyzed and conceptualized. The Rav's teaching—drawing freely from Torah and *halakhot*—fascinates us for its compelling interpretive insights . . . its theological subtleties, philosophical perceptions and moral nuances, its beauty and profundity. . . . The Rav's message is the following: When you know your

way—your point of departure and goals—then use philosophy, science and the humanities to illumine your exposition, sharpen your categories, probe the profundities and subtleties of the *mesorah* and reveal its charm and majesty; in so doing you should be able to command respect from the alienated and communicate with some who might otherwise be hostile or indifferent to your teaching as well as to increase the sensitivity and spirituality of the committed.²⁷

Note that Professor Twersky makes place for the apologetic motif in the Rav's use of philosophy, but this is a minor strand in a rich and colorful tapestry. The use of science, philosophy, and the humanities is primarily designed to deepen one's own understanding of the *mesorah*. While such use may also enable one to reach such perhaps otherwise unreachable opaque people as the alienated, hostile, and indifferent, it also serves "to increase the sensitivity and spirituality of the committed."

The approach taken in R. Aaron Soloveitchik's eulogy found fuller expression in a collection of studies about the Rav, *Nefesh ha-Rav* by Rabbi Hershel Schachter, one of the Rav's leading disciples and currently Rosh Kollel of Yeshiva University.²⁸ Of course, any work by R. Schachter is a major and invaluable contribution to furthering our understanding of both *torah* ha-Rav and *nefesh* ha-Rav, of both the teaching and the person of the Rav. At the same time, it must be said that a clear revisionist tendency runs throughout the work. That is, R. Schachter consistently seeks to minimize many of the more innovative and unconventional features of the Rav's activity and person, features that may not, at least in R. Schachter's view, sit easily with the image of the Rav that R. Schachter seeks to paint, namely, that of the great traditionalist Rosh Yeshiva. That the Rav was first and foremost a great traditionalist Rosh Yeshiva goes without saying. Still, R. Schachter consistently in *Nefesh ha-Rav* emphasizes and even, at times, exaggerates the traditionalist features of the Rav at the expense of the more innovative and unconventional features.

The first section of *Nefesh ha-Rav* consists of a general portrait of the Rav. In this section R. Schachter, while lauding the Rav's greatness, downplays his originality. Thus, one of the section's major contentions is that the Rav subordinated himself entirely to the teachings and directives of his teachers and masters, first and foremost of whom was his father, Rav Moshe Soloveitchik, who, in turn, received his teaching from his father, the great luminary and leading Talmudic scholar of his generation, Rav Hayyim Soloveitchik. There is no doubt a great deal of truth in this claim, particularly in the realm of Talmudic scholarship, though, as I sought to argue in a review essay,²⁹ even here I believe R. Schachter exaggerates. But what is very strange is that R. Schachter claims that the same holds true for the Rav's essays and discourses in the area of Jewish thought. Thus he states, "Together with the tradition [that the Rav] received concerning theoretical halakic principles and practical rulings, he also received an exceptionally powerful tradition in the realm of *hashkafah* and faith."³⁰

But, can one believe that Rav Hayyim would have been happy with the exceptionally strong this-worldly and anti-transcendental thrust of *Halakic Man* and its emphasis on individuality and self-creation? with the affirmation in *The Lonely Man of Faith* of the religious significance of the creative cultural consciousness of Adam the first (even if hedged about with significant qualifications)? or with the extended attempt in *U-Vikashem mi-Sham* to reconcile the rational religious consciousness with the revelational religious consciousness? To what extent, if any, would Rav Hayyim have been in sympathy with or taken seriously the problems and issues concerning liberalism, subjectivism, freedom, creativity, and inwardness that the Rav grapples with in these and other of his essays? I leave to the side the Rav's positive attitude to religious Zionism and secular studies, where even R. Schachter has to admit, albeit grudgingly, that the Rav's views differed from those of his grandfather, weakly attributing the divergence to "changing circumstances."¹¹

I, therefore, find myself in agreement with the view of Rabbi Aharon Lichtenstein, the son-in-law and one of the leading disciples of the Rav, who forcefully argues that Rav's *ma'alah* was "neither an extension nor an expansion of an existing tradition, but a genuine innovation. . . . The areas of experience explored, the mode and level of inquiry, the resources employed, the problems formulated, above all, the ideas and emotions expressed—these, indeed, constitute, conjunctively, a new departure."¹²

If in the first section of *Nefesh ha-Rav*, R. Schachter downplays the Rav's originality, in the second section, consisting of a series of essays devoted to major issues that the Rav dealt with time and again in the course of his long career, R. Schachter minimizes or omits altogether the more strictly philosophical aspects of the Rav's thought. Consider the essay, "Concerning the Commandment 'And You Shall Walk in His Ways,'" where R. Schachter very finely sets forth and elaborates upon practical consequences that the Rav drew from the principle of *imitatio Dei*, in particular, that just as God is unique so each individual should strive to be unique, and that just as God is a Creator so should each individual be a creator. What he does not explain, however, is the Rav's philosophical understanding of the principle of *imitatio* and, more specifically, his conception of the nature of the divine attributes that we are commanded to imitate.

An inquiry into the matter quickly reveals that the Rav grounds his own understanding of *imitatio*, as he states in *U-Vikashem mi-Sham* and other essays, upon Maimonides' famous discussion of the divine attributes of action in the *Guide of the Perplexed* I:54. This inquiry further reveals that the Rav, in his own analysis of this Maimonidean doctrine, argues that for Maimonides the attributes of actions are to be seen as infinite, teleological ethical ideals, compounded of thought, will, and action, an argument heavily indebted to Hermann Cohen's interpretation of Maimonides found both in *Religion of Reason* and in his essay, "Charakteristik des Ethik Maimunis."

Indeed, one can understand how the Rav extends the imperative of *imitatio* to include uniqueness and creativity only in light of his philosophic

understanding of the divine attributes of action. After all, the commandment of *imitatio* refers to divine attributes of action such as God's loving kindness, righteousness, and justice. What is the basis for the claim that man also ought to imitate God's creativity or His uniqueness?

With reference to creativity, an answer is readily available. As the Rav himself suggests, all the divine actions are expressions of the infinite divine creativity. Conversely, "the creation of the world is an ethical act, and a person is [consequently] obligated to imitate God by devoting himself to creative actions."¹³

The Rav's demand that man imitate God's uniqueness is more problematic. For, as Maimonides emphasizes, divine uniqueness belongs not to the realm of the attributes of actions, but to those of essence. God's uniqueness, together with His oneness and necessary existence, are thus signified by the Tetragrammaton, the articulated name (*shem ha-meforash*), as distinguished from the epithets (*kenuyim*) which signify the attributes of action. How, then, may the divine uniqueness be imitated?

Perhaps the Rav agrees with the view of the kabbalists that even the articulated name signifies divine activity. But it appears to us that here as elsewhere the position of the Rav must primarily be understood in light of the philosophy of Hermann Cohen. It is Cohen who insists that God's oneness means first and foremost His uniqueness. More significant, Cohen argues that "God's holiness is identical with His uniqueness."¹⁴ Man imitates God's uniqueness, then, by imitating God's holiness, i.e., by becoming holy. However, for Cohen, man's holiness as an ideal is identical with his morality.¹⁵ In this respect, Cohen follows Maimonides (though Maimonides does not identify God's uniqueness with His holiness) who at the end of the *Guide* I:54 argues that man becomes holy by being merciful and gracious. It is consequently no surprise that, as R. Schachter shows, the Rav emphasizes that man's uniqueness must be expressed in his religious and moral service of God.

Obviously, this is not the place for a full scale discussion of the Rav's understanding of the principle of *imitatio*. But I have tried to show two things. First, that there is a significant philosophic dimension to the Rav's thinking on this matter that R. Schachter omits entirely. And second, that many of the specific points of the Rav's teaching concerning *imitatio* that R. Schachter does discuss can be understood only in light of this philosophic dimension.

In the third and longest section, "*Likkutei Hanhagot*," which occupies more than half the book and is clearly its most important part as well, R. Schachter, culling from his years of studying with and attending upon the Rav and from the recollections of other of the Rav's students and acquaintances, presents hundreds of the Rav's practical halakhic rulings on an exceptionally wide range of issues covering all four sections of the *Shulchan Arukh*. Particularly rich are the units on prayer, holidays, weddings, and mourning, but a host of other subjects are treated as well.

R. Schachter, however, neglects to mention one practical halakhic ruling of the Rav of enormous importance, which the Rav, moreover, maintained

with remarkable consistency over the course of many decades. I refer to the Rav's view that nowadays women are to be taught *Torah she-be-'al Peh*, and specifically Talmud. This view found clear and public expression in the Rav's insistence that in the Maimonides school, which he founded and guided, Talmud be included in the girls' curriculum, as it was included in that of the boys, as well as in his decision to give the inaugural lecture when the Bet-Midrash program was initiated at Stern College. There can be no doubt that Rav's stance on this issue has been extraordinarily influential. Indeed, it is hard to imagine that the teaching of Talmud to women in modern Orthodox high schools and *midrashot* would be as prevalent today as it is, given the still controversial nature of this issue, without the precedent set by the Rav.¹⁶ This startling omission can be accounted for only by assuming that, here as elsewhere, R. Schachter has chosen to blur or glide over an innovative or daring aspect of the Rav's teaching.¹⁷

Consider then Rabbi Moshe Meiselman's recent article in the distinguished journal of Orthodox Jewish thought, *Tradition*,¹⁸ entitled "The Rav, Feminism and Public Policy," whose purported goal "is to explore, explain and define the approach of . . . Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik to the entire issue of women's prayer groups, *halakot*, *aliyot* and all of the sundry other topics that have emerged from the feminist movement."¹⁹ But as one begins to read the article, it soon becomes evident that R. Meiselman has a broader, more far reaching agenda. For what we find in this article are the outlines of a revisionist portrait of the Rav that makes R. Schachter's portrait look positively mild by comparison.

R. Meiselman, a noted rabbinic scholar and nephew of the Rav, subtitles his essay "An Insider's Overview." As he states: "I write these lines not only from the perspective of a close disciple, but also from that of one who was privileged to be part of his family and household, and who was able to know him, speak to him and learn from him as only a family member can."²⁰

While I was a student of the Rav for several years and, indeed, was privileged to work closely with him in the course of my translation of his classic essay, *Isk ha-Halakha*, I, unlike R. Meiselman, cannot claim to have been his close disciple, and I certainly do not possess any insider's view. I therefore do not wish to address the issue of the Rav's attitude to feminism, where R. Meiselman relies on his recollection and understanding of his private conversations with the Rav.²¹ But, as one who has been a close student of the writings of the Rav and the writings about the Rav for some thirty years, there are two things I can confidently say with regard to the larger picture of the Rav that R. Meiselman attempts to paint. First, R. Meiselman's "insider's view" is, at many points, clearly contradicted by the insider views of other distinguished members of the Rav's family who were also his close disciples. I have in mind particularly several addresses about and eulogies for the Rav written by his two sons-in-law, to whom I have already referred, R. Professor Yitzhak Tversky and, *yibbadel le-yamim tovim arukhim*, R. Dr. Aharon Lichtenstein. Second, and even more important, wherever it is possible to check R. Meiselman's claims

against the Rav's writings, it turns out that those claims are clearly and explicitly contradicted by clear and explicit statements of the Rav.

Regarding R. Meiselman's "insider's" view, I will limit myself to two points. First, R. Meiselman, like R. Aaron Soloveitchik, suggests that the Rav's use of philosophy in essays like *Isk ha-Halakha* (*Halakha Man*) was intended to "show the general American public the intellectual respectability and sophistication of halakha."²² This reductionist suggestion, as I have already indicated, needs to be greatly modified in light of R. Tversky's much more perceptive and balanced "insider's" analysis of the Rav's use of philosophy. (I should add parenthetically that 99.9% of the "general American public" would not have been able to understand the rich rabbinic Hebrew of *Isk ha-Halakha*. As the Rav once quipped to me: "Who could read *Isk ha-Halakha*? Only rabbanim! But what do rabbanim know about philosophy?"²³)

Second, in the course of his article R. Meiselman refers to the Rav's classic eulogy for Rav Hayyim Ozer Grodzenski (delivered in 1940 while the Rav was still a member of the Agudat Israel) where "the Rav declared that the *talmid hakham* is the leader of the community in all areas, halakha and political as well."²⁴ In a footnote R. Meiselman comments: "The supposed claim by some feminist authorities that the Rav subsequently changed his mind about the position taken in this eulogy is contradicted by the fact that the Rav chose to have it reprinted in the early eighties."²⁵ I must say that this argument strikes me as extraordinarily weak, as if people do not reprint all the time essays of theirs with which they may no longer be in full agreement. But since my perspective may be dismissed as that of an outsider, let me cite the following nuanced "insider's" analysis of R. Aharon Lichtenstein:

The Rav did not over the course of time continue to espouse the ideology [of] *Das Torah*, which claims that all political issues contain a clear-cut halakhaic dimension and therefore are subject to the binding and exclusive decisions of *Gedolei Torah*. At the start he advocated this view and presented it with passion [in his eulogy for Rav Hayyim Ozer]. But after a while he abandoned it, and during subsequent decades accepted and even sharpened the distinction between matters of halakha (*dinai mitzvah*), which are subject to the rulings of rabbinic authorities, and matters of policy (*dinai reshut*), where significant consideration is to be accorded to the views and authority of other groups. At the same time, though he denied a decisive role to rabbinic authority in the political dimension, he insisted that activity in this sphere be guided by fundamental values and . . . a pure spiritual perspective [which can be provided only by] *yehidei segulah*.²⁶

I now turn to the second and more critical question of how R. Meiselman's claims on two central issues: 1) particularism and universalism; and 2) religious Zionism measure up against the Rav's writings.

Particularism and universalism. R. Meiselman, on the basis of his conversations with the Rav, claims: "The Rav in all his concerns was exceedingly parochial. He viewed all social issues of the day from one pragmatic standpoint: how they would affect the spiritual and practical needs of the Jewish people. . . . I do not believe that one can find a single instance where the Rav was involved in any of the universal issues of the day. His concerns and involvement revolved around his parochial concern for the well being, both spiritual and physical, of the Jewish people."²⁶

I can not, of course, vouch for the contents of R. Meiselman's conversations with the Rav. What I can state is that his claim that "the Rav in all his concerns was exceedingly parochial" is contradicted by the Rav's writings where universal concerns are clearly to be found. Thus in his classic article *Confrontation*, to which R. Meiselman explicitly refers, the Rav writes: "We Jews have burdened with a two fold task. . . . We believe that we are the bearers of a double charismatic load, that of the dignity of man, and that of the sanctity of the covenantal community. . . . We are summoned by God, who revealed Himself at both the level of universal creation and that of the private covenant, to undertake a double mission—the universal human and the exclusive covenantal confrontation."²⁷

Interestingly, the Rav acknowledges the often narrowly parochial focus of much of the Jewish community, but attributes this focus to the "unfortunate" fact that "the non-Jewish community has confronted us throughout the ages in a mood of defiance." The Rav explains: "As long as we were exposed to . . . a soulless, impersonal confrontation on the part of non-Jewish society, it was impossible for us to participate to the fullest extent in the great universal creative confrontation between man and the cosmic order. The limited role we played until modern times in the great cosmic confrontation was not of our choosing. . . . We have always considered ourselves an inseparable part of humanity and were everready to accept the divine challenge, 'Fill the earth and subdue it,' and the responsibility implicit in human existence."²⁸

Similar statements appear in "The Lonely Man of Faith." Let me just cite, however, a passage from an unfortunately little known policy statement formulated by the Rav, "On Interfaith Relationships,"²⁹ which brings out the universal dimension of Judaism in perhaps an even sharper fashion than the passage we cited from "Confrontation."

The Jewish religious tradition expresses itself in a fusion of universalism and singularism. On the one hand, Jews are vitally concerned with the problems affecting the common destiny of man. We consider ourselves members of the universal community *charged with the responsibility of promoting progress in all fields, economic, social, scientific, and ethical* [emphasis added]. As such we are opposed to a philosophy of isolationism . . . which would see the Jews living in a culturally closed society.

On the other hand, we are a distinctive faith community with a unique commitment, singular relationship to God, and a specific way of life. We must never confuse our role as the bearers of a particular commitment and destiny with our role as members of the family of man.³⁰

We should also remember that, as many individuals very close to him have testified, the very last public act that the Rav performed was to phone the members of Mizrahi in Israel and insist that they support the call for a special commission to investigate the Christian massacres at the Palestinian camps of Sabra and Shatila. If they did not do so, he threatened, he would publicly resign from his position of honorary president of Mizrahi. In light of the Rav's written views cited above, I believe it is fair to conclude that this last public act of his reflected that "fusion of universalism and singularism" which he so eloquently expounded, and that he was motivated in this act, as in others,³¹ by both more particularist pragmatic concerns as well as general ethical ones.

Because R. Meiselman misunderstands the Rav's position regarding universalism and singularism, he also misunderstands and misrepresents the Rav's stance on interfaith dialogue. R. Meiselman, referring to the Rav's essay "Confrontation," claims that "When Pope John XXIII opened dialogue with the Jews, the Rav viewed this as a serious danger to Judaism, and declared that no such dialogue be pursued. . . . Despite the opposition to Judaism, and almost without exception no dialogues the Rav's position carried the day and almost without exception no dialogues have been conducted between Orthodox rabbis and the Catholic Church."³² But, as is well known, the Rav, with his delicate balance between universalism and singularism, never opposed interfaith dialogue. What he opposed, as he states in "Confrontation," was interfaith *theological* dialogue.³³ He always, however, approved of interfaith dialogue about matters of general ethical and social concern. Again, this position comes out with particular force and clarity in the Rav's position paper, "On Interfaith Relationships": "We are . . . opposed to any public debate, dialogue or symposium concerning the doctrinal, dogmatic or ritual aspects of our faith vis-à-vis 'similar' aspects of another faith community. . . . When, however, we move from the private world of faith to the public world of humanitarian and cultural endeavors, *communication among the various faith communities is desirable and even essential*. We are ready to enter into dialogue on such topics as War and Peace, Poverty, Freedom, Man's Moral Values . . . Civil Rights, etc., which revolve about the religious spiritual aspects of our civilization. *Discussion within these areas will, of course, be within the framework of our religious outlooks and terminology*" (emphases added).³⁴

In this connection, it is worth citing another "Insider" view. The past president of the Rabbinical Council of America, Rabbi Bernard Rosensweig, who worked closely with the Rav on matters of communal policy, writes in his article "The Rav as Communal Leader": "The RCA remained loyal to the guidelines which the Rav had set down [concerning interfaith dialogue] and distinguished between theological discussions and ethical-secular concerns,

which have universal validity. Every program involving either Catholic or Protestant churches in which we participated was carefully scrutinized. . . . Every topic which had possible theological nuances or implications was vetoed, and only when the Rav pronounced it to be satisfactory did we proceed to the dialogue.³⁵

So much for R. Meiselman's claim that, in accordance with the Rav's position, "almost . . . no dialogues have been conducted between Orthodox rabbis and the Catholic Church."

Religious Zionism. Here R. Meiselman's misrepresentations of the Rav's position are, if possible, even more serious than his misrepresentations of the Rav's position on the issue of singularity and universalism. R. Meiselman writes:

In his eulogy for his uncle, Rav Yitzhak Ze'ev Soloveitchik (the Brisker Rav), published subsequently under the title of *Ma dodekhi midad*, the Rav said that whereas a secular Jewish government in Israel does not fit into any halakhic categories, it is religiously irrelevant. This was not just a formulation of his uncle's position, but was his as well. This is the essential theme of his essay *Kol Dodi Dofek*, in which he states clearly that the importance of the State of Israel has to be evaluated in exclusively pragmatic terms. In [that essay] he lists the reasons that the achievements of the State are religiously positive and therefore outweigh whatever negative aspects may be present. Certain things have intrinsic value. Others have pragmatic value and have to be looked at in strictly pragmatic terms. There is no intrinsic value to that which does not have halakhic meaning.³⁶

Thus, as R. Meiselman concludes in an endnote, "The Rav's difference of opinion with other Torah giants was the degree of accommodation with the government of Israel. It existed on a pragmatic level only."³⁷

I proceed to correct R. Meiselman's misrepresentations *seriatim*.

First, R. Meiselman runs together the government of Israel and the State of Israel. But both in his essay "Brit Avot" and his essay "*Al Ahavat ha-Torah u-G'ulat Nefesh ha-Dor*" the Rav clearly and emphatically differentiates between government and State. As the Rav exclaims in "Brit Avot": "We know that the government itself is not the State. Governments come and governments go, but the land—and the State—we hope to God, remain forever!"³⁸ And in "*Al Ahavat ha-Torah*" he devotes an entire section to distinguishing between the government and the State.³⁹ Indeed, in that section he laments the fact that "many of my *Haredi* friends and many of the leaders of the secular [Israeli] parties" commit this error of confusing government and State.⁴⁰

This confusion on R. Meiselman's part leads to his second error, namely, his claim that the State of Israel, for the Rav, does not possess intrinsic halakhic significance, but just pragmatic value. This claim flies in the face of clear and unambiguous statements of the Rav in both "*Brit Avot*" and "*Al Ahavat ha-Torah*."

Thus, in "*Brit Avot*" the Rav, basing himself on the view of the Ramban regarding "*yishuv Eretz Yisrael*," maintains that "the establishment of the State possesses halakhic significance since by means of it we shall be able to fulfill the mitzvah of possessing the land of Israel. . . . The existence of the State of Israel and the fact that Jews and not Englishmen determine aliyah; that Jews and not Arabs are the political masters in the country; and that a Jewish government, army, and police forces exist, is the greatest possible fulfillment of the mitzvah of settling in Eretz Yisrael."⁴¹ Similarly, in "*Al Ahavat ha-Torah*," the Rav argues that "the State is the possession of the entire people to whom God has given it in His abundant loving kindness. *There is a complete identification between the land in its holiness and the State.* The commandment of taking possession of and settling the land of Israel expresses itself not just in cultivating and developing the land. . . but by the Jewish people taking hold of the land and exercising political dominion over it. The very fact that there exists Jewish political sovereignty and that Jews rule over the land. . . gives expression to the *primary aspect* of the commandment of taking possession and settling" (emphases added).⁴²

Third, R. Meiselman claims that in "*Kol Dodi Dofek*," the Rav "states clearly that the importance of the State of Israel has to be evaluated in exclusively pragmatic terms." Really? In "*Kol Dodi Dofek*," the Rav maintains that the establishment of the State of Israel was and continues to be God's great act of loving kindness on behalf of a Jewish people who had just suffered through the terrors and horrors of the holocaust. God, as the Rav writes in his poetic and passionate imagery, "suddenly manifested Himself and began to knock at the tent of His despondent and disconsolate love [the Jewish people], twisting convulsively on her bed, suffering the pains of hell. *As a result of the knocks on the door of the maiden, wrapped in mourning, the State of Israel was born.*"⁴³

As is well known, the Rav goes on to state that God knocked on the tent of His love at least six times. Let us look at the first three of those knocks.

First, the knock of the Beloved was heard in the political arena. No one can deny that from the standpoint of international relations *the establishment of the State of Israel, in a political sense, was an almost supernatural occurrence.* Both Russia and the Western countries jointly supported the idea of the establishment of the State. This was perhaps the only proposal where East and West were united. . . .

Second, the knocking of the Beloved could be heard on the battlefield. The small Israeli Defense Forces defeated the mighty armies of the Arab countries. The miracle of the "many in the hands of the few" took place before our very eyes. . . .

Third, the Beloved began to knock as well on the door of the theological tent. . . . All the claims of the Christian theologians that God deprived the Jewish people of its rights to the land of Israel. . . have been publicly refuted by the establishment of the State of Israel. . . . It is the voice on my Beloved knocking!"⁴⁴

Rav himself, and that he adopts this guise only in order to take issue with the view of his uncle regarding the religious status and significance of the State of Israel, without having to frame that disagreement in personal terms.⁴⁸ Indeed, the Rav, further on in the eulogy, again uses the device of the "yesh omrim" to take issue with Rav Velvel regarding the religious desirability of the institution of the Chief Rabbinate.⁴⁹

Sixth, and finally, since, as we have shown, the Rav did not view the State of Israel in exclusively pragmatic terms—and there is much more we could say about the subject⁵⁰—it follows that it is false to claim that "the Rav's difference of opinion with other Torah giants [regarding] . . . the government [better 'State': L.K.] of Israel . . . existed on a pragmatic level only." To the contrary. The Rav's difference of opinion with Torah giants from the *Haredi* community concerning the State of Israel expressed itself precisely in the fact that they evaluated the importance of the State in exclusively pragmatic terms, while the Rav ascribed to the State intrinsic positive religious⁵¹ and halakhic (though not messianic) significance.

R. Meiselman's claims about these positions of the Rav are, in the final analysis, just part of a larger attempt on his part to "haredize" the Rav, that is, to minimize, to the extent possible, the distance separating the Rav from the *Gedolei Torah* who are part of the *Haredi* community. In this connection R. Meiselman "remembers distinctly when the Rav told Rav Aharon Kotler, 'Our goals are the same (*unzere matara iz di zikh*); we disagree only on how to achieve that end.'⁵² The difference between the Rav and that towering leader and spokesman of the *Haredi* community, Rav Aharon Kotler thus reduces itself to one of tactics, just as the difference between the Rav and the Torah scholars from the *Haredi* community regarding the State of Israel supposedly exists "on a pragmatic level only."

In light of all the above, I would be extremely reluctant to decide such an important question as the similarities and differences between the Rav's views and policies and those of Rav Aharon Kotler solely on the basis of the reliability of R. Meiselman's memory. At the very least, I would like to know the context in which the Rav made that comment. But even granting the comment's reliability, I would contend that R. Meiselman misunderstands its import. To be sure, in a certain sense the Rav and Rav Aharon Kotler had the same goal: maximal halakhic observance and maximal Torah study. But what is evident and undeniable is that they sharply disagreed as to what are the implications of such maximal observance and study. For Rav Aharon Kotler, such maximal observance and study require that the Jew minimize, to the extent possible, his involvement with general culture and society. It certainly demands of the Jewish male that he devote only the absolutely minimal amount of time necessary for secular studies. To use a phrase of the Rav we cited above, a phrase the Rav did not intend as a compliment, Rav's Aharon's philosophy was a "philosophy of isolationism . . . which would see the Jews living in a culturally closed society." But the Rav, as we have seen, was strongly

That God's hand was manifest in the "almost supernatural" political establishment of the State, in the miraculous victories won by the Israeli defense forces, and in the State's theological significance as the public refutation of Christian theological claims—where in all this do we find an evaluation of the State in "purely pragmatic terms?"

Fourth, in fairness to R. Meiselman it must be said that the Rav does resort, among other things, to a pragmatic evaluation of the significance of the State. Thus the fourth, fifth, and sixth divine knocks mentioned in "Kol Dodi Dofek" are primarily pragmatic in character. The fourth knock is the important role of the State in slowing the process of assimilation, particularly among the young; the fifth knock is the fact that "for the first time in the history of our exile, divine providence has surprised our enemies with the sensational discovery that *Jewish blood is not thicker*," that is, the establishment of the State has given the Jewish people as a collectivity the power to defend themselves; and the sixth knock is the opening of the gates of the land, the fact "that a Jew who flees from a hostile country now knows that he can find a secure refuge in the land of his ancestors."⁴⁵

At the same time, the Rav views even these more pragmatic aspects of the significance of the State from a theological perspective. Thus, as the Rav suggests in "Kol Dodi Dofek" and as he states more explicitly in "Brit Avot," the pragmatic fact that the State has slowed the process of assimilation, the pragmatic fact that even partially assimilated Jews are still attached to the Jewish people via their concern for the well being and security of the State and its inhabitants, are not of exclusively pragmatic significance, but are the primary expression in our time of the covenant of fate that God first made with the Patriarchs and then confirmed with the people of Israel as a whole while they were still in Egypt.⁴⁶

Fifth, R. Meiselman states that in his eulogy for his uncle, Rav Velvel Soloveitchik (the Brisker Rav), the Rav attributes his uncle's opposition or indifference to the secular Jewish government in Israel to the fact that since such a government does not fit into any halakhic categories, it is religiously irrelevant. Once again, R. Meiselman confuses government and State. In the eulogy the Rav does not speak about his uncle's opposition or indifference to the government of Israel, but to the State of Israel.⁴⁷ But more troubling, R. Meiselman goes on to say that this view that the State is "religiously irrelevant" because it "does not fit into halakhic categories" was "not just a formulation of his uncle's position, but was his as well." This is simply not so.

In his eulogy, the Rav, contrary to the position of his uncle, expresses the view that the State of Israel, despite or perhaps precisely because of its secular nature, serves as a difficult but inspiring challenge to the halakhic community in general and the religious Zionist community in particular to show that the halakhah can be implemented in and serve to guide, fashion, and shape a modern Jewish society and State. To be sure, the Rav attributes this view to anonymous "yesh omrim," that is, "there are those who are of the opinion," but it is as clear as day that the "yesh omrim" are none other than the

opposed to such a culturally isolationist philosophy. For the Rav, maximal observance and study is consistent with and, indeed, demands to be complemented by significant study of *Hokhma* and significant involvement in the general culture and society, though, to be sure, such general social and cultural involvement needs to be hedged about with equally significant qualifications. If R. Meiselman fails to understand this, he simply fails to understand what the Rav was all about, he simply fails to understand the very heart of the Rav.

In sum, the fact that a distinguished rabbinic scholar like R. Meiselman, despite his having been a close disciple of the Rav and despite his having been "privileged to be part of his family and household," could write such a flawed article, an article that presents such a narrow, distorted, and almost unrecognizable picture of his uncle, only serves to underscore the dangers of the revisionist drive on the part of the "right" and the impossibility of refashioning the Rav to fit a *Haredi* mold.

While the most significant revisionism about the Rav has come from the right, the left has also not done justice to his views. A single, but revealing example of revisionism about the Rav from the left deals with the Rav's position on interfaith dialogue.

Both Rabbis Irving Greenberg and David Hartman, two thinkers prominently associated with the Orthodox left, have argued in various speeches that the Rav's opposition to interfaith theological dialogue was not a matter of principle, but an accommodation with a sociological reality. In their view the Rav's position regarding interfaith theological dialogue as set forth in "Confrontation" is highly problematic. There the Rav writes:

The word in which the multifarious religious experience is expressed does not lend itself to standardization or universalization. The word of faith reflects the intimate, the private, the paradoxically inexpressible cravings of the individual for and his linking up with his Maker. It reflects the numinous character and the strangeness of the act of faith of a particular community which is totally incomprehensible to the man of a different faith community. Hence it is important that the religious or theological logos should not be employed as the medium of communication between two faith communities whose modes of expression are . . . unique. . . . The confrontation should occur not at the theological, but at a mundane human level. There, all of us speak the universal language of modern man. . . . Our common interests lie not in the realm of faith, but in that of the secular orders. . . . In the secular sphere, [religious communities] may together discuss positions to be taken, ideas to be evolved, and plans to be formulated.⁵²

However, in a footnote to this paragraph the Rav introduces the following qualification: "The term 'secular orders' is used here in accordance with its popular semantics. For the man of faith, this term is a misnomer. God

claims the whole, not part of man, and whatever He established as an order within the scheme of creation is sacred."⁵³

But, query Rabbis Greenberg and Hartman, does not the Rav by introducing this important qualification undermine the entire distinction he seeks to draw in the text between "the realm of faith" and "the secular orders"? For if there is no "secular sphere," given that all the spheres God "established within the order of creation [are] sacred," does not "the secular sphere," then, also belong to the "realm of faith"? But if this sphere does belong to the realm of faith, how, in turn, is it possible for interfaith dialogue to take place in this supposedly secular-but-in-actuality-religious sphere, given the private nature of "the realm of faith"? Conversely, if interfaith dialogue can take place within this sphere, despite its religious nature, why can it not also take place within other religious spheres, say the more strictly theological sphere? Both Rabbis Greenberg and Hartman, believing that the Rav must have been aware of this weakness in his argumentation, conclude that such argumentation was not and could not have been the real reason for his opposition to interfaith theological dialogue.

In support of this conclusion, they point out that they informed the Rav in private conversations that they would engage in such interfaith theological dialogue, and he did not express any opposition. R. Hartman therefore suggests that the real reasons the Rav opposed such dialogue were first, because he was afraid that too many Orthodox rabbis lacked self-respect and would be so dazzled by the prospect of theological dialogue with the Vatican that there was the danger they might barter away fundamental Jewish beliefs, and second, because he was doubtful that there were enough Orthodox rabbis able to engage intelligently in such dialogue.

With reference to the problem that Rabbis Greenberg and Hartman discern with regard to the Rav's position regarding interfaith theological dialogue, even if we grant that their objection is valid, this does not constitute a sufficient reason for not taking the Rav at his word. But, in point of fact, I would argue that the problem they raise may be resolved if we look at the Rav's more nuanced discussion of this matter as found in "On Interfaith Relationships."

In this article the Rav's description of the boundary between permissible and forbidden interfaith dialogue differs subtly but importantly from his description of that boundary in "Confrontation."

As we saw earlier, the Rav in "On Interfaith Relationships" was "opposed to any public debate, dialogue or symposium concerning the doctrinal, dogmatic or ritual aspects of faith," aspects belonging to "the private world of faith." He, however, supported "communication among the various faith communities" in "the public world of humanitarian and cultural endeavors," on topics which "revolve about the religious spiritual aspects of our civilization." But it is important to note how the Rav understood this distinction. The Rav in this article is careful never to speak of "the secular orders" or "the secular sphere." He speaks of "the public world of humanitarian and cultural endeavors," of "areas of universal concern," of "socio-cultural and moral problems."

being whose thinking was comparatively simple and direct. . . . The minds so much less capacious, less bold, less profound than his. . . . *The Rav was a man of the broadest vision, intellectually and spiritually.*⁶⁵

It is, in conclusion, the task of the modern Orthodox community to staunchly resist any and all "burgeoning revisionisms," whether from the right or from the left, and to strive mightily, both intellectually and spiritually, to live up to the vision of the Rav in all its breadth, depth, complexity, and grandeur.⁶⁶

NOTES

1. See Noah Rosenblum, *Tradition in an Age of Reform: The Religious Philosophy of Samson Raphael Hirsch* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1976); Shalom Danziger, "Rediscovering the Hirschian Legacy," *Jewish Action* 56.4 (1996): 21-23; and the exchange between Rabbi Danziger and Rabbi Joseph Elias in "Hirschians Debate the True Meaning of Hirsch," *Jewish Action* 57.1 (1996): 51-63 (Elias), and 62-66 (Danziger). And see below, note 28, for a striking example of revisionism from the right about Rav Hirsch.
2. David Singer, "Rav Kook's Contested Legacy," *Tradition* 30.3 (1996): 6-20; but, of my "Letter to the Editor," *Tradition* 31.4 (1997): 84-87. Note, as well, Aviezer Ravitsky, "Fleeting Men: Hirsch's Torah? Modernist versus Traditionalist Orientations in Contemporary Orthodoxy," in *Engaging Modernity: Rabbinic Leaders and the Challenge of the Twentieth Century*, edited by Moshe Sokol (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, 1997), pp. 51-52.
3. Norman Lamm, "A Eulogy for the Rav," *Tradition* 28.1 (1993): 13. R. Lamm's reference to those who seek to "trivialize" one or the other aspect of [the Rav's] rich personality" implies that "burgeoning revisionisms" can come from either the "left" or the "right." In fact, however, by far the most significant revisionism has come from the right, certainly in print, and it is this form of revisionism, particularly in its latest and most extreme manifestation, that deserves our scrutiny. At the same time, there have also been attempts at revisionism from the left, though these attempts have been made orally and, to the best of my knowledge, are not to be found in writing; I will therefore also examine a revealing example of this brand of revisionism.
4. Although I was present at the Rav's *luyeh* and remember R. Aaron Soloveitchik's eulogy very clearly, I am neither relying on those memories nor on a tape of the eulogy (assuming one exists), but am citing a passage from a letter of R. Soloveitchik written to the *Algemeiner Journal* in which R. Soloveitchik sets down in writing and elaborates upon the fundamental point already made in the eulogy. See, "In Defense of my Brother, Rabbi Yosef Ber Soloveitchik," *Algemeiner Journal*, Friday, July 23, 1993, p. B4.
5. The full text reads, "From time to time he mentioned Plato, Aristotle, Descartes, Hobbes, Kant, and Hermann Cohen. When he mentioned these philosophers it was for the purpose of expounding a text in Chovos Halevovos, Kuzari and Rambam." If my memory serves me correctly, R. Soloveitchik in his eulogy spoke only about the Rav's lectures in Jewish philosophy, and did not even mention the Rav's use of general philosophy. I assume that R. Soloveitchik's acknowledgment in his letter that the Rav referred "from time to time" to non-Jewish philosophers was in response to criticism. R. Soloveitchik, however, proceeds to debate the significance of such references by claiming that they were just "for the purpose of expounding a text in Chovos Halevovos, Kuzari and Rambam." But a reading of *Halakic Man* or *Halakic Mind* makes it abundantly clear that such a claim is untenable. For example, in *Halakic Man* the Rav makes extensive use of such philosophers as Kant and Hermann Cohen, but doesn't even refer to any of the medieval Jewish philosophers, with the exception of the Rambam (and a passing glance at Ibn Gabirol). On the other hand, in *U-Wehlan mi-Sham*, where the central problem in the relationship of the rational religious consciousness and the revealed religious consciousness, the Rav, as one would expect, refers at length to the medieval Jewish philosophical treatments of this issue. But

Most important, he speaks of "universal religious problems." For, as the Rav emphasizes: "Discussion within these areas will, of course, be within the framework of our religious outlooks and terminology. . . . As men of God, our thoughts, feelings, perceptions, and terminologies bear the imprint of a religious world outlook. We define ideas in religious categories. . . . incomprehensible to the secularist. . . . In a word, even our dialogue at a socio-humanitarian level must . . . be grounded in religious categories and values. However, these categories and values, even though religious in nature and Biblical in origin, represent the universal and public—not the individual and private—in religion"⁶⁵ (emphasis added).

In sum, the line between permissible and impermissible interfaith dialogue is not between interfaith dialogue in "the realm of faith" and interfaith dialogue in "the secular sphere." It is between two types of religious interfaith dialogue. The Rav, that is, was opposed to interfaith religious *theological* dialogue "concerning the doctrinal, dogmatic or ritual aspects of faith," for those aspects represent the individual, unique, and private side of religion, but he supported interfaith religious *humanitarian* dialogue concerning socio-cultural and moral issues, for such dialogue was grounded in religious categories and values that represent the universal and public side of religion.⁶⁶

The revisionisms of the left and the right thus prove to be, in many respects, mirror images of each other. Both revisionisms tend to rely on private conversations in preference to the Rav's writings.⁶⁷ And while revisionists from the right find the Rav's profound engagement in the study and teaching of philosophy to be too "modern" for their tastes, to be discordant with their image of the Rav as the great Talmudist, and they consequently argue that it should be seen as a pragmatic accommodation with a sociological reality, revisionists from the left find the Rav's opposition to interfaith theological dialogue to be too "traditional" for their tastes, to be discordant with their image of the Rav as the sophisticated philosopher and theologian, and they consequently argue that such opposition should be seen as a pragmatic accommodation with a sociological reality.⁶⁸

I would argue, in opposition to both revisionisms, that our task is precisely to understand the complex mix of modern and traditional elements in the Rav's person and teaching, and not to explain away any element we may find uncongenial. Our task is precisely to see the Rav as both great Talmudist and sophisticated philosopher and theologian, and not to stress one side of his personality at the expense of the other. To cite the eloquent words of R. Lamm:

No one-sided distortion of this complex intellectual and spiritual giant [the Rav] should be countenanced. Let it be stated clearly and unequivocally: his attitude to the "wisdom of the nations," to Torah Umadda, to the broader Jewish community was . . . *le'khat'chilah*, not *bid'avad*. Any contrary assertion diminishes the *Gestalt* of this unconventional Rosh Yeshiva and *gaon she'bi-geonim*. The Rav was an integrated human

even here it is simply not true to say that the Rav's extensive references in that essay to the modern non-Jewish philosophical tradition are solely for the purpose of explicating the medieval Jewish philosophical tradition.

6. Yitzhak Twersky, "The Rav," *Tradition* 30.4 (1996): 13-44.

7. Twersky, "The Rav," p. 34.

8. *Nefesh ha-Rav* (Jerusalem: Reishit Press, 1994). For the significance of the title, see p. 44, n. 12. Cf., however, the caveat on p. 3.

9. Lawrence Kaplan, "The Multi-Faceted Legacy of the Rav: A Critical Analysis of R. Hershel Schachter's *Nefesh ha-Rav*," *BDD (Beit Hachochim Doreish: Journal of Torah and Scholarship)* 7 (Summer, 1998): 51-85.

10. Schachter, *Nefesh ha-Rav*, pp. 23-24. In support of this contention R. Schachter cites a Conservative rabbi, who in a critical review of the Rav's writings commented: "Everyone believes that Rabbi Soloveitchik developed a modern approach in the area of Jewish thought and philosophy, as evidenced by his modern philosophical terminology and his extensive citations from modern philosophers. But, in truth, there is not a single philosophical idea to be found in his writings that his grandfather would have been embarrassed to espouse" (Schachter, *Nefesh ha-Rav*, pp. 21-22).

R. Schachter, no doubt, appreciates the irony of his basing his own analysis of the *hashkafah* of the Rav on the negative evaluation of a Conservative rabbi. But presumably R. Schachter views the rabbi's comment as tantamount to an admission from a hostile witness, and simply reverses the statement's valence, changing, as it were, the curse to a blessing.

Now no one is questioning that a Conservative rabbi encountering that strict Orthodoxy, and finding the Rav's often innovative and creative ideas either not liberal or not radical enough for his tastes would hyperbolically exclaim, in a fit of exasperation, that all the Rav's views, in terms of content, are identical with those of his grandfather and that only the packaging, the dress, is new. It is nevertheless difficult to take such a position seriously.

11. Schachter, *Nefesh ha-Rav*, pp. 21.

12. Aharon Lichtenstein, "The Rav at Jubilee: An Appreciation," *Tradition* 30.4 (1996): 48.

13. Joseph B. Soloveitchik, *U-Vikhsam mi-Sham*, in *Sei ha-Halakhah Gabai ve-Nitmar* (Jerusalem: ha-Bistatut ha-Tyumi, 1978), p. 185, n. 16. In truth, the divine actions, for Maimonides, seem to express more divine wisdom than divine creativity. See *Guide* 3:25, 32, and 49. The Rav's position on this matter, as on so many others, appears to be influenced by Hermann Cohen.

14. Hermann Cohen, *Religion of Reason out of the Sources of Judaism*, translated by S. Kaplan (New York: F. Ungar Publishing Co., 1972), p. 403.

15. Cohen, *Religion of Reason*, p. 96. A thorough and penetrating analysis of these and related matters in Cohen's religious teaching may be found in Andrea Poma, *The Critical Philosophy of Hermann Cohen*, translated by J. Denton (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), pp. 171-198 ("The Uniqueness of God and Correlation").

16. For an insightful presentation of the Rav's stance on this issue, see Mayer Twersky, "A Glimpse of the Rav," *Tradition* 30.4 (1996): 96-99.

17. Note that R. Schachter does not neglect to inform us of the Rav's opposition to women's prayer groups. See *Nefesh ha-Rav*, p. 145.

18. Moshe Meiselman, "The Rav, Feminism and Public Policy: An Insider's Overview," *Tradition* 33.1 (1998): 5-30.

19. Meiselman, *Tradition* 33.1 (1998): 5.

20. Meiselman, *Tradition* 33.1 (1998): 5.

21. Cf., however, the important article by Aryeh and Dov Frimmer, "Women's Prayer Services: Theory and Practice," *Tradition* 32.2 (1998): 5-118, where the Rabbi Frimmer, on the basis of interviews with twenty six students and acquaintances of the Rav, paints a picture of the Rav's attitude toward women's prayer groups differing sharply from that painted by R. Meiselman. I should add that R. Meiselman does not sufficiently distinguish (pp. 24-25) between the Rav's

position regarding synagogues with mixed seating and his position regarding synagogues with separate seating but no *mechitzah*. As the Rav writes, "Separation has its origin in the Bible itself, whereas the requirement of a *mechitzah* must be attributed to a rabbinic ordinance." Therefore, "Although complete segregation [via erecting a *mechitzah*] is important, it should not be erected on a par with the principle of separation. While the latter determines the very essence and sanctity of the synagogue, the former, if violated, does not place the congregation in the class of a reform temple." See "An Open Letter," in *Sandwich of the Synagogue*, edited by B. Litvin (New York: Baruch and Ida Litvin, 1982), pp. 140-141. It is for this reason that the Rav was very careful to indicate that his famous ruling that one should pray at home on *Rosh Hashanah* had not been the *shulchan* rather than "enter a synagogue whose sanctity has been profaned" refers only to those synagogues where men and women sit together during prayer. Thus, in his well known article, "On Seating and Sanctification," *Sanctity of the Synagogue*, pp. 114-118, where he sets forth this ruling, the Rav speaks only of the importance of separation and not segregation. He refers to "men and women sitting together," "the mingling of men and women," and "fairly Jews." Never once in the article does he refer to the importance of erecting a *mechitzah*. Nor should this surprise us, since, as we have just seen, the failure to erect a *mechitzah* while a grave violation of a rabbinic ordinance, does not, unlike raised seating, profane the sanctity of the synagogue, and it is that issue he is addressing in the article. (An even graver blurring of the distinction between these two very different positions of the Rav can be found in the article of R. Mayer Twersky, "A Glimpse of the Rav" [above, n. 16], pp. 97-98.)

In light of this, to say, as does R. Meiselman (pp. 25-26), that the Rav's position "on women's *halakot* . . . is similar to his position on mixed seating in synagogues" is, to speak plainly, simply absurd. Does R. Meiselman seriously wish to suggest that the Rav actually believed that a synagogue in which women's *halakot* take place is now a synagogue "whose sanctity has been profaned" or "a congregation in the class of a reform temple"? Even granting R. Meiselman's analysis of the Rav's position on women's *halakot*, which I do not grant for a moment (as I stated in the text I do not intend to discuss the Rav's position on this and similar issues in the present context), at best one might compare the Rav's position on women's *halakot* to his position on synagogues with separate seating but no *mechitzah*.

22. Meiselman, p. 6.

23. Meiselman, p. 22.

24. Meiselman, p. 30, n. 45.

25. Aharon Lichtenstein, "Divrei Hesped," *Masei* 9 (1994): 22-23.

26. Meiselman, pp. 27-28.

27. Joseph B. Soloveitchik, "Confrontation," *Tradition* 6:2 (1964): 17.

28. Soloveitchik, "Confrontation," *Tradition* 6:2 (1964): 19-20. Cf. Rav Hirsch's striking comment in *Nineteen Letters on Judaism*, newly translated and with a comprehensive commentary by Joseph Elias (Jerusalem and New York: Feldheim Pub., 1995), p. 226: "I bless emancipation when I see how inordinate oppression has isolated Israel from the mainstream of life, has stunted its spiritual development, [and] has inhibited the free unfolding of its noble character." As the reference to emancipation makes clear, Rav Hirsch is lamenting here the fact that the oppression of the Jews in the *diaspora* by the nations of the world prevented them from participating in the broader, surrounding society. Note, however, the apologetic explanation of R. Elias on p. 238: "The author is referring to the fact that the Jew, living among the nations, could not put into practice many aspects of Torah teaching, and Judaism became narrowed down to 'prayer and fasting.'" How the emancipation would alleviate this unfortunate situation, R. Elias does not explain. This comment may serve as an instructive example of Hirschian revisionism from the right.

29. Joseph B. Soloveitchik, "On Interfaith Relationships," first appeared in the *Religious Council Record* for February, 1966; and was reprinted as an appendix to "Confrontation" in *A Treasury of Tradition*, edited by N. Lamm and W. Wurzburger (New York, 1967), pp. 78-80.

30. Soloveitchik, "On Interfaith Relationships," p. 78.

31. Thus R. Meiselman *albeit* that "during the Vietnam war, [the Rav] expressed concern that the isolationist tendencies of the war provision would negatively affect the security of Israel" (p. 28). But as many observers have noted, an equally important consideration was the Rav's fierce opposition to communism, both as an ideology and a movement, considering it to be not just anti-

Jewish and anti-Israel, but also false, cruel, immoral, and destructive. This opposition led him to sympathize with the U.S. government's military attempt to prevent the installation of a communist government in South Vietnam. Again, we find the Rav's motivations to be a "fusion of universalism and singularity."

I think it would be fair to characterize the Rav as a political conservative. And, no doubt, political conservatives on the whole are more appreciative of the virtues of particularism than are political liberals with their often facile universalism. At the same time, I would claim that just as it is possible to be a political liberal without succumbing to such a facile universalism, so it is possible to be a political conservative without succumbing to the narrow type of parochialism that R. Meiselman, inaccurately, as we have seen, attributes to the Rav.

R. Meiselman, p. 22.

32. "Confrontation," pp. 23-24.

33. "On Interfaith Relationships," p. 79.

34. "On Interfaith Relationships," p. 79.

35. Bernard Ronszweig, "The Rav as Communal Leader," *Tradition* 30.4 (1996): 214-215. In this connection, the following story, related by a long time confidant of the Rav, the distinguished rabbi and philosopher, Rabbi Dr. Walter Wurzbarger, may be of interest. An RCA committee was once reviewing possible topics for an inter-faith dialogue. One of the suggested topics was "Man in the Image of God." Several members of the committee felt that the topic had too theological a ring, and wished to veto it. When the Rav was consulted he approved the topic and quipped, "What should the topic have been? Man as a Naturalistic Creature?" Cf. "On Interfaith Relationships," p. 80.

36. Meiselman, p. 8.

37. Meiselman, p. 29, n. 10.

38. Joseph B. Soloveitchik, "Brit Avot," in *Hamash Dvarshot*, edited by D. Telsner (Jerusalem: Makhon Tal Orot, 1974), p. 89 [= "The Covenant of the Patriarchs," translated by A. H. Rabinowitz, *Five Addresses* (Jerusalem: Tal Orot Institute, 1983), p. 138].

39. Joseph B. Soloveitchik, "Al Ahavat ha-Torah u-G'eulat Nefesh ha-Dor," *Be-Sod ha-Yahid se-ha-Yahid*, pp. 424-426.

40. "Al Ahavat ha-Torah," p. 425.

41. "Brit Avot," pp. 88-89 [= "The Covenant of the Patriarchs," p. 137].

42. "Al Ahavat ha-Torah," pp. 424-425.

43. Joseph B. Soloveitchik, "Kol Dodi Dofek," *Be-Sod ha-Yahid se-ha-Yahid*, p. 354 [= "It is the Voice of my Beloved that Knocketh," translated by L. Kaplan, *Theological and Halakhic Reflections on the Holocaust*, edited by Bernhard H. Rosenberg and Fred Heuman (Hoboken, NJ: Ktav Publishing House, 1992), pp. 68-69].

44. "Kol Dodi Dofek," pp. 354-357 [= English Translation, pp. 69-71].

45. "Kol Dodi Dofek," pp. 357-362 [= E.T., pp. 71-76].

46. "Kol Dodi Dofek," pp. 80, 96-99 [= E.T., pp. 367, 390-394]; "Brit Avot," pp. 95-97 [= "The Covenant of the Patriarchs," pp. 148-152].

47. "Mah Dodekh mi-Dod," *Be-Sod ha-Yahid se-ha-Yahid*, p. 241.

48. "Mah Dodekh mi-Dod," pp. 243-244. Cf., "Mi-Tal ha-Shamasyim u-mi-Shemanei ha-Areiz," *Hamash Dvarshot*, pp. 112, 114-116 [= "Of the Dew of the Heavens and the Fat Places of the Earth," *Five Addresses*, pp. 174-175, 178-179].

49. "Mah Dodekh mi-Dod," pp. 249-250.

50. For the meanwhile, see Lawrence Kaplan, "The Multi-Faceted Legacy of the Rav" (above, n. 9), pp. 70-72; and "Rabbi Abraham Kook, Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik, and Dr. Isaac Breuer on Jewish Identity and the Jewish National Revival," in *Jewish Identity in the Postmodern Era*, edited by Charles Selengut (St. Paul, Minnesota: Paragon House, 1999), pp. 51-55.

51. Meiselman, p. 6.

52. "Confrontation," pp. 23-24.

53. "Confrontation," p. 24, n. 8.

54. "On Interfaith Relationships," pp. 79-80.

55. In truth, I believe that even in "Confrontation" the Rav had this distinction in mind, though his imprecise language blurred his point and left his argument in that essay open to the criticism leveled against it by Rabbi Greenberg and Hartman. He got it just right the second time around. To be sure, the distinction the Rav draws in "On Interfaith Relationships" may also be called into question. But while it is possible to charge the Rav's discussion in "Confrontation" with being inconsistent, such a charge, in my view, can not be brought against his discussion in "On Interfaith Relationships."

The other arguments of Rabbi Greenberg and Hartman are easily answered. Regarding their private conversations with the Rav, I would make the same point that I made with regard to R. Meiselman's memories of his private conversations, namely, that one cannot rely on private conversations, subject to the vagaries of memory and the multiple possibilities for ambiguity or misunderstanding, to override clear cut and consistently maintained public pronouncements that the Rav made in writing. As for the pragmatic reasons R. Hartman puts forward to account for the Rav's opposition to interfaith theological dialogue, even if these pragmatic considerations did play some role in his opposition, this does not exclude his opposition to theological dialogue on grounds of principle. Indeed, if one is looking for a pragmatic reason to supplement the Rav's opposition in principle to interfaith theological dialogue, one should seek it not so much in his supposed suspicion of the self-respect or theological competence of the Orthodox rabbinate, but rather, as Dr. Aryeh Strikovsky has argued, in his suspicion, expressed in a number of public addresses in Hebrew and Yiddish, of the possible missionizing intentions behind the Catholic Church's call for such dialogue. See Aryeh Strikovsky, "Afterward" (in Hebrew) to "T'mat" (the Hebrew translation of "Confrontation"), published as a pamphlet by the Torah Division of the Department for Education and Culture of the Jewish Agency (Jerusalem, 1978), pp. 24-25.

56. By contrast, all personal incidents or recollections of private conversations recounted in this essay serve a purely supplementary function, that is, they serve only to elaborate upon or sharpen ideas already to be found in the Rav's writings.

57. In fairness, I should state that no example of revisionism from the left of which I am aware even comes close to the type of revisionism found in R. Meiselman's article.

58. Norman Lamm, "Centennial Address," delivered on May 28, 1997, on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of the founding of the Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary.

59. At the same time I received the proofs for this article, *Tradition* 33.2 (1999) appeared, containing three Letters to the Editor by Rabbi Yosef Elan, Nathaniel Helfgot, and Eli Clark responding to R. Meiselman's article, and R. Meiselman's reply. Some of the points made in the letters overlap with those presented here. Nothing in R. Meiselman's reply induces me to change a single word of my essay.

Errata

In "Leviticus: Drawing Near the Other," by Susan E. Shapiro (Spring 1999), the words "plaid stars" should read "plaid skirts," p. 228. We regret this error.