

**Overinterpreting Maimonides: Rabbi J. B. Soloveitchik's *Between
Philosophy and Halakhah***

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*Do I contradict myself?
Very well then, I contradict myself.
(I contain multitudes). (Whitman 1892)*

The question of reading and understanding religious texts in the contexts which they were meant to be interpreted is crucial, since some of those religious texts which have survived and currently exist, and which we wish to interpret in a fair context, only exist in fragments or in translation. An example of the first kind of text is the Dead Sea scrolls of Qumran. An example of the second kind of text is the Book of Maccabees, which now only exists in translation. Of a third kind, we have the book of Judith, which may or may not be a translation of a text. We, as temporally displaced readers, must understand that the actual empirical production of these texts happened under various circumstances, so that the history and historicity of any religious texts, their pedigree if you would, becomes as important to the scholar, as the texts themselves. We can even state that in modernity, we may have similar issues of readership. To supply an example, while we know that Rabbi Soloveitchik's graduate seminars on the topic of *The Guide of the Perplexed* (Maimonides 1963) did indeed take place at Yeshiva University in the late 1950's, the relationship between those lectures and the document we have in hand today, *Maimonides - Between Philosophy and Halakhah: Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik's Lectures on the Guide of the Perplexed at the Bernard Revel Graduate School (1950 - 51)* (Kaplan 2016) is extremely important and must be examined closely. The volume, *Between Philosophy and Halakhah* purports to be a faithful reproduction of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik's original lecture series at Yeshiva University. When we actually read the book, however, we discover several issues. Because of the manner in which this "reproduction" was produced, and, based on perceived problems with the text, we readers have good reason to question the usefulness of this work.

Parenthetically, it must be stated that, given the high esteem in which we hold Rabbi Soloveitchik, as both a rabbi and a philosopher, it must be understood that any critique of Soloveitchik's *Maimonides: Between Philosophy and Halakhah* (Kaplan 2016) is not meant to denigrate Rabbi Soloveitchik in any manner, or to undermine his understanding of Maimonides, which is of its time, and its theological and theoretical bias. Instead this particular paper is an attempt to understand observed discrepancies between what we know of Soloveitchik's scholarship and the representation of that scholarship as it has been presented. Ultimately, *Between Philosophy and Halakhah* suffers from several issues, some of which are editorial, some of which are textual, and some of which are of understanding and philosophical bias.

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Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik (1903 - 1993) was *Rosh Yeshiva* at Yeshiva University and an esteemed professor of philosophy in its graduate school. In the years 1950 – 1951, he taught a graduate level seminar in *Maimonides' Guide of the Perplexed*. Over 50 years later, these lectures were redacted into *Maimonides, Between Philosophy and Halakhah: Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik's Lectures on the Guide of the Perplexed* (Kaplan 2016). We readers should prefer the term redacted over the term edited because of their different connotative meanings. Editing presumes a full manuscript which has been parsed for clarity. As we might expect then, in the preface, Lawrence Kaplan notes that notebooks, on which this edition was based, were “lightly edited” (Kaplan 2016, 15), so that we readers may presume that the text was published pretty much as it was received. Perhaps the text was corrected for spelling and grammar, because that is what we connote to be edited, lightly. On the other hand, the word “redaction” connotes a preparation for publication which may include parsing together several texts, filling in gaps, and emending texts. As Kaplan himself admits, just one page after he says the text was “lightly edited,” the manuscript “naturally required a fair amount of semantic and syntactic filling in on my part” and that “I found it necessary to fill in the gaps from other essays or published works” (Kaplan 2016, 16). While we may have been hoping for something closer to a transcription of the seminars’ proceedings or even of Soloveitchik’s own lecture notes, what we have instead is an attempted reconstruction based on the notes taken by a student who sat in on those seminars. We must bring forward that this work is not Soloveitchik’s lectures as “lightly edited” by Kaplan but is instead something else. In fact, as Kaplan tells us, the text we are reading is based on the “very good notes” of a Rabbi Homnick who attended the lectures. What we are then reading is not Soloveitchik’s lectures as much as it is Kaplan’s interpretation and redaction of another student’s notes, and it is those notes which in turn based were based on the lectures that Rabbi Soloveitchik gave over 50 years ago. While, according to the editor, these notes “allow us to reconstruct the Rav’s [Soloveitchik’s] lectures with a high degree of confidence” (Kaplan 2016, 15), we can question this statement based on other problems which we will see below.

Soloveitchik purportedly states that Maimonides’ arguments “lack creativity” since his arguments “follow those of Aquinas and Thomas Magnus” (Kaplan 2016, 76). This statement is significantly problematic because, historically, Maimonides preceded Aquinas and Magus, and they both quote him. Chronologically, Aquinas and Magnus follow Maimonides. We are posed with a dilemma which has several possible solutions and none of these answers is satisfactory: we may presume that Soloveitchik made an elementary error in chronology; we can posit that Soloveitchik meant something different than what is in the notes; that what Soloveitchik really meant was missed by the note taker; we may suggest that Rabbi Homnick knew what his notes meant, to him, alone; we may decide that there is a real problem with Rabbi Homnick’s notes themselves; or we may decide that Homnick misunderstood Rabbi Soloveitchik. Perhaps there is another solution. We do know that since Maimonides was the innovator and that Aquinas and Magnus “followed” Maimonides, we have a conundrum. We absolutely must then question the quality of all of these “good notes” to which we

are attributing Soloveitchik's thought¹ and if we continue reading, we must in mind that all may not be as clear as we had hoped.

To continue, then, according to Soloveitchik, or rather, according to the notes:

It is hard to say how *The Guide of the Perplexed* was written and what it attempted to achieve. Maimonides' own explanation of its aims in the Introduction to Part I is incomplete. The scope of the work is larger and exceeds by far the goals set out there (Kaplan 2016, 73).

The issue here is that if we are to believe what Maimonides himself says about the Guide, in the Guide, then we understand that he wrote it specifically as a didactic epistle, for a specific audience, his student "Rabbi Joseph." We know exactly how it was written and exactly what it attempted to achieve. Maimonides is clear that did not mean the Guide for all students but for a specific kind of student, of which type "Rabbi Joseph" is an exemplar. Maimonides explains that these students who have had, or would have, an issue of "perplexity" are the few, not the many. As Maimonides writes in the *Epistle Dedicatory* of The Guide, specifically to Rabbi Joseph, "Your absence moved me to compose this Treatise, which I have composed for you and others like you, however few they are" (Maimonides 1963, 4). Maimonides states explicitly that the Guide is absolutely not a guide everyone but for a specific type of student who suffers from a specific kind of "perplexity." Maimonides goes on to explain that "some very obscure parables" (Maimonides 1963, 6) in scripture are ambiguous, having both an external and internal meaning, and misunderstanding these "parables" may cause "perplexity," moreover, that explaining these will ensure that the "Rabbi Joseph" type of student will take "the right road" (Maimonides 1963, 6)². Oddly, Maimonides warns us, specifically, that he will absolutely contradict himself in the text and that when he does so, that he will always have some sort of didactic reasons for these apparent lapses (Maimonides 1963, 17 - 20). Maimonides the narrator must be watched, he will contradict himself; he will create a set of riddles and brain teasers which the Rabbi Joseph type of reader, alone must solve and is capable of solving³. Ultimately then, while Maimonides' arguments, as he himself states, may be obfuscated, his rationale and his methodology for the production of the Guide are absolutely transparent. What is not clear is why Rabbi Soloveitchik would have called Maimonides' aims unclear. Perhaps this assertion is another addition of Homnick's. Based on this argument we may, together, again question the quality of these "good" notes and of the text in hand.

The heart of the matter is this: Maimonides will not be stating ideas in a legislative, ethical or legalistic format, but instead has, early on stated that he will use a specific rhetorical style. This may jar those who are used to Maimonides' legal works. Historically, Jewish religious texts, even those of "philosophy" posed a question, proposed a legalism, or tried to understand an apparent contradiction between two verses or attempted to clarify an earlier question. Aside from any textual issues, we must also note that historically, at some point in the Rabbinic tradition, it was decided that any apparent contradiction in sacred texts was abhorrent, that all Hebrew scripture and all commentaries on these scriptures and

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on each other, historical and contemporary, are, from the first “bet” in *Bereshit*⁴ to what exists today, in themselves, a single thing, a single conceptual whole, and all of this whole must be in agreement and consistent within itself from start to finish, either explicitly or otherwise, so that any apparent contradiction in the text or between texts must be reconciled or resolved in some manner^{5 6}. We call this whole, as well as its parts, Torah. To understand and to rationalize apparent contradictions within the text and commentaries, several forms of discourse developed where apparent scriptural anomalies or contradictions were explained in terms of homiletical or hermeneutic discourses, for example *Likuttei Amarim* (Schneur Zalman of Liadi 2014), which is a discourse on moral philosophy but which begins by trying to resolve a presented contradiction between a *Mishnah* and a *Baraita*. From these discourses, understanding was then derived, as were explanations and elucidations which would in turn illuminate the fact that these apparent contradictions in the sacred texts and commentaries, although apparently contradictory, were actually somehow in agreement. These discourses also generally had a homiletical component, as above, with the further purpose to expose that these contradictions somehow illuminate ethical, moral or spiritual ideas^{7, 8} so that while the “contraction” was not real, it appeared in the text to teach us something. In this tradition, and in this context, we may further understand some of the problems in Soloveitchik’s lectures on Maimonides’ Guide.

The more we read *Between Philosophy and Halakhah*, it becomes obvious to us that Soloveitchik’s understanding of the *Guide* is philosophical and is based on his own Neo-Kantian understanding of theology. Moreover, Soloveitchik is trying to understand Maimonides’ “philosophical” understanding of Judaism and of its statutes, its *Halakhah*, based on the entire corpus of Maimonides’ writings, rather than on the *Guide* itself. Soloveitchik treats the entire corpus of Maimonides’ writings as a single thing. He includes Maimonides’ *Mishnah Torah*, his compendia of responsa, his commentaries on the *Mishnah* and, also, the *Guide*; Soloveitchik views all of these as a single holistic whole. Maimonides, after all, is known, historically, for the *Mishneh Torah*, the *Sefer Ha Mitzvoth* and for his responsa, as well as the *Guide*. In the *Guide* itself, Maimonides invokes both Aristotle and Moses, the former whom we call a philosopher and latter whom we call a teacher and lawgiver or giver of *Halakhah*⁹. So, since the *Guide* is a “philosophical” document, since it invokes Aristotle, Soloveitchik then understands Maimonides’ “philosophy” as part of his Neo-Kantian theology and tries to resolve it that way. “Perplexity” as Soloveitchik understands it, then, is based on performance of *Mitzvoth* and how the performance of these impact existence¹⁰. In a sense, then, Soloveitchik is looking for his own neo-Kantian ethical beliefs in the pages of Maimonides.

Soloveitchik searches the *Guide*, in vain, for *Halakhic Man* (1983), in this case the Halakhic Maimonides, one who will assuage Soloveitchik’s own perplexities with which, we may suppose, that even Soloveitchik wrestles. Soloveitchik, will not find and answer in the *Guide*, because while Maimonides’ *Mishneh Torah* is a legal document, and while the commentary on the *Mishnah* is a commentary on legal texts and even, while Maimonides was known for his legal responsa, Maimonides explains quite simply in the *Guide*, that the *Guide* already presupposes the knowledge of and compliance with *Halakhah*. Maimonides lets us

know explicitly that compliance with Halakhah is absolutely not the issue with which he wants to concern himself or us (Maimonides 1963, 5). Instead, as above, Maimonides asserts that the Guide is an answer for the few, not the many and that not everyone will suffer from what we may term “Maimonidean perplexity.”

Soloveitchik tries to understand Maimonides as a modern Torah scholar such as himself, one who wrestles with Aristotle on one hand and Moses on the other hand. Soloveitchik then tries to reconcile what he perceives as Maimonidean internally inconsistent “philosophy” with what he believes is a positivistic and normative theology, based on Soloveitchik’s own neo-Kantian ideals. Notwithstanding that an older Rabbi Soloveitchik became a master of theology and one of the greatest Jewish minds of our times, if we understand Kaplan correctly, his difficulty with the Guide of the Perplexed is the paradoxical attempt to reconcile a specific species of Maimonides, the teacher of the *Mishnah Torah* and the *Sefer Hamitzvot*, with another species of Maimonides the teacher of the Guide. As Soloveitchik notes “For Maimonides to have deemed, in the manner of Aristotle, ethics to be a manner of practicability, not truth, would have accorded neither with the Mishneh Torah, nor with that of the sages in general (Kaplan 2016, 123).” This ambiguity and contradiction, however, is exactly what Maimonides has promised us, that there are ambiguities and contradictions in the Guide which do not exist in Maimonides’ legal codes. Soloveitchik’s issue is that his philosophy and morality have no room for ambiguity; he has in mind an idealized Maimonides, one who is a legalist, who will tell us what to think and more importantly what to do. On the contrary, Maimonides does not base his morality on reason.

The neo-Kantians such as Hermann Cohen, who had Soloveitchik as a student, and of whom we include Soloveitchik, absolutely bases his morality and religion on reason (Scott 2015). The trap that Soloveitchik falls into is that while he properly regards Maimonides as one of the greatest minds in Jewish history, he is unable to allow for ambiguity, something which Maimonides specifically teaches in the Guide and which he begins to demand of the Guide’s readers. Soloveitchik is looking for explicit moral philosophy in Maimonides and is frustrated when it is absent.

We may even speculate that Soloveitchik’s rejection of ambiguity is a hallmark of the Brisker Method, also called *Lomdus*, a pedagogical system where the ideal is “clarity in ideas.” The Brisker methodology is to keep making finer and finer distinctions, to ameliorate understanding between differences in ideas, so that we may understand the Halakhah more clearly and so that we may specifically eliminate ambiguity, where “ambiguity” in the Brisker sense may even mean apparent contradiction in Hebrew scripture, which as we saw above, is anathema. The Soloveitchik family instituted this methodology in the Brisk Yeshiva and they continue to teach this method, today. As Rabbi Soloveitchik describes the Brisker method, it exposes ideas and concepts as clearly and as precisely as possible, to demonstrate that different concepts are distinct so as to explain away any possible conflation or contradiction (in Saks, 1999). *Lomdus* may be useful in cases of Jewish law when one is attempting to clarify and rationalize why an observed contradiction in scripture is not actually so. While this method may work with ideas which are not perfectly clear, especially in problems such as Halakhah, where

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we presume a possible clarity, this methodology will not work when ideas are ambiguous and contradictory on purpose, as in the Guide. We may even propose that these fine distinctions could be the ideal which Maimonides tries to reach in all of his other works, the works on *Halakhah* but *Lomdus*, and its ideal of clarity, is the antithesis of Maimonides' methodology in the Guide. Soloveitchik's distinctions are useful when the subject matter at hand may be apprehended logically, such as his theology in *The Lonely Man of Faith* (J. D. Soloveitchik 1965).

Rabbi Soloveitchik looks in vain as his lonely man does not appear in the guide because Soloveitchik's "lonely man" is "Adam," whose name means "man" and who is for Soloveitchik exemplar of "Everyman." This Everyman represents the human condition but comparing Everyman to Maimonides' Perplexed man is comparing apples to oranges. Maimonides is interested in the "Rabbi Josephs" who are extraordinary, they are not "lonely men of faith," they are not Adams, they are not Everyman and they are perplexed specifically because those solutions for Everyman do not work for them.

Further then, we need to understand that for Soloveitchik, Judaism is about the performance of mitzvot and his understanding is that the 613 mitzvot are a fully complete and self-contained ethical system (J. D. Soloveitchik 1965). Soloveitchik makes the caveat that he sees nothing necessary beyond Torah, that it is all encompassing (J. D. Soloveitchik 1965). For Soloveitchik, any meaning in life is derived from the attentive performance of the mitzvot in tension with free will, and it is this dialectical tension between will and performance that is for Soloveitchik a representation of the human condition. In Soloveitchik's terms, to be human is to live in a substrate of Halakhah in tension with self will, as in *The Lonely Man of Faith*. Further, Soloveitchik's idea of "humanity" as the quality of Being" truly human, finds its greatest expression in being *Halakhic Man* (R. J. Soloveitchik 1983). *Halachic Man* is one who abnegates self in favour of the Halakhah, with the acknowledgement of the self will which serves as the foil against which he battles. Soloveitchik's Halakhic man derives meaning and existence via performance of the Halakhah, which in turn is about "man the creator" of meaning through doing the mitzvot. For Soloveitchik, the human condition is then to strive to better understand God and to cleave unto Him via performance of those mitzvot. Ultimately, Soloveitchik sees performance of the Mitzvot as the vehicle via which to experience the cosmos as mediated by better and better understanding of the Mitzvot by studying them and by performing them.

Hence as, as Alex Sztuden notes, "Soloveitchik searches for the *religious experience* permeating the *Guide* (Sztuden 2018, 214)." Unfortunately, this search is in vain and doomed to futility because, despite Soloveitchik's search, the *Guide* is not a spiritual book, at least not in the sense that Soloveitchik wants to understand spirituality. As Sztuden notes, Soloveitchik completely disregards Maimonides' discourse on what is often called "negative theology" or of any metaphysics (Sztuden 2018, 213). In this Soloveitchik has again erred because Maimonides has carefully constructed a didactic and narrative structure where, ironically, one may find his positives in the negatives. When Maimonides denies

that God may be described in any sense, this statement itself is a positive stripping away of “clothing” to reveal a positive God who transcends description. While it may appear that Maimonides’ ethics and his “negative theology” are two different things, it could be argued that one keystone of Maimonidean ethics is the denial that God may be described and that the closeness which Soloveitchik desires is impossible, in Maimonidean terms, without Maimonides’ denial of God’s form or substance. As Maimonides himself says, the only way to truly appreciate God is to negate and that “you come nearer to the apprehension of Him, may He be exalted, with every increase in the negation of Him” (Maimonides 1963, 138), so that it is only by negation of what we know positively about God that we can truly “apprehend” His greatness. What Soloveitchik has, perhaps inadvertently done is to remove a key part of Maimonidean ethical theology, something for which he searched.

We must also contrast the statement that the best descriptions of God are none at all with the statement later in the *Guide* where Maimonides asserts that we can know that God is pure intellect (Maimonides 1963, 163 - 165). Again, this is a contradiction, but, as we know, Maimonides is not afraid of contradiction. Soloveitchik, however, complains that Maimonides contradicts himself, that he is “inconsistent” (Kaplan 2016, 163), in this case discussing the role of the angels in terms of “intellectual mediation” or “cultic mediation.” In this specific case, Soloveitchik’s conundrum is not understanding “why should Maimonides accept intellectual mediation on the part of angels and reject cultic mediation on their part? It should be one or the other” (Kaplan 2016, 163). Again, this contradiction or inconsistency is only a problem if one requires absolute internal consistency, something that Maimonides stated would be missing from the *Guide*. It is Soloveitchik, the Brisker legalist, who has a problem because he has been trained to find internal consistencies and to find a way to reconcile them. Since Maimonides is inconsistent by design and since Soloveitchik is used to reconciling these inconsistencies, Soloveitchik is left with a problem, one which is left as a series of contradictions.

All of the above is not to say that Halakhah does not matter to Maimonides. Maimonides is famous for his explanations of Halakhah and his responsa and he states explicitly that following Halakhah is a normative practice of “Perplexed” man (Maimonides 1963, 5). However, we may also state that mere compliance with the law is the reason which Maimonides gives for the perplexity in a “Rabbi Joseph” type of person. We can then state that Soloveitchik is certainly not a “Rabbi Joseph” exemplar, that he is not looking at Maimonides from the point of view of the perplexed student, but from another point of view, that of the modern philosopher.

This presents us with a problem of readership, or as Umberto Eco calls it “Overinterpretation” (Eco 1990). While we are all free to read Maimonides any way we choose, we must understand that some readings of some texts do not do the text justice. This does not render those alternate readings “wrong” but rather that these readings attempt to understand things which the author had not intended and as Umberto Eco has shown us “that there are, somewhere, criteria for limiting interpretation” (Eco 1990, 159) that these criteria exist, perhaps within the texts

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themselves¹¹. Eco's point is that while we are free to read texts as we choose, that some readings are torturous and some do not even make sense. As an extreme example, Eco suggests that one could choose to read the *oeuvre* of the Marquis de Sade as something other than pornographic sadomasochism. While the attempt to do so may be "noble" it is also extremely discomfiting and requires extreme mental gymnastics (Eco 1990). To be clear, this argument is not an accusation against Soloveitchik's interpretation as somehow obscene, but instead it is an illustration of what can go wrong when we "misread" a text and attempt to interpret it too far past the author's intention¹². Rabbi Soloveitchik is looking for consistency in the text, a consistency which the text itself says does not exist. We might say, as Eco concludes in his essay on overinterpretation, that, "Between the mysterious history of a textual production and the uncontrollable drift of its future readings, the text qua text still represents a comfortable presence, the point to which we can stick" (Eco 1990, 201), The point of the *Guide* is a didactic epistle to teach, not specific ethics, but is instead, in a sense, a training manual to guide the reader, a Rabbi Joseph exemplar, to learn how to formulate their own ethics, based on incomplete and contradictory data. We may, as Soloveitchik does, try to make the text do things which it cannot and to interpret it in ways which the author did not intend, but we will end up, like Soloveitchik, misreading or overinterpreting a text which includes the key to its understanding in the introduction. It is this introduction which Soloveitchik seemingly bypasses as irrelevant and which is crucial to understanding the *Guide*.

It seems that Soloveitchik's desire is to find a certain kind of meaning in Maimonides and we may speculate that this desire stems from Soloveitchik's need for absolutes. As we learn from neo-Kantian philosophy, it is from antinomous absolutes that we may then form dialectics (Scott 2015), dialectics which resemble the one which Soloveitchik presents to us in *The Lonely Man of Faith* (1965). Soloveitchik's exemplar of the lonely man is Adam, whose name means "human" and who represents Everyman¹³ and who faces a dilemma, based on the antinomies of the ability to create, similar to the divine, and the need for submission to that divine. For Soloveitchik, the human must both be creative in taming nature and also submissive when it comes to the yoke of God's will. Soloveitchik does not relieve this tension and instead presents this gap, as the dialectic tension of the human condition. On the other hand, Maimonides is very clear that he is not interested in educating Everyman, that he believes in a hierarchical structure based on several different capacities, so while we might call such an attitude "elitist," Maimonides simply believes that some humans are just not capable of becoming "Rabbi Josephs" even *in potentia*. For Soloveitchik, the questions that bother "Everyman" are questions of right and wrong, of ethics, questions of how free will may be exercised while still acceding to God's will when demonstrating "free will" can mean disobeying God's will; how he may do God's will while maintaining free will. This contrasts with the Rabbi Joseph type, the "Perplexed man," one who has accepted God's will and also knows what the proper behaviour is, but instead has questions, not of ethics, of right and wrong, but of meaning¹⁴. Everyman must also look for meaning, but his meaning is based on ethical actions for which he already has a predefined rubric based on Torah so, for Soloveitchik, his problem is ethical. Soloveitchik's Everyman must choose between right and wrong. "Perplexed

man's" dilemma is not based on an inability to make the choice between law and will or right and wrong. Instead, "Perplexed man" faces the fact that the choices he does have either do not have meaning, or, that their meaning does not sit well with him. It is this lack of meaning which make him "Perplexed" and, more importantly, it is the guide that will teach "Perplexed man" what he needs to know to overcome this problem and give himself and his own life meaning, or if not, at the very least, that the perplexed man will have the tools to live in within "Perplexity," the opposite of Soloveitchik's Adam.

Ultimately, after reading through the *Guide*, Soloveitchik finds Maimonides the Philosopher to be an anomaly. While Soloveitchik treats Maimonides seriously and with reverence it is obvious that his preference is Maimonides the Halakhist. As Soloveitchik starts to conclude he states "Here Maimonides the Halakhist defeats Maimonides the Philosopher (Kaplan 2016, 238). It is obvious, that aside from the great respect due to Maimonides as a Halakhist, that Soloveitchik has little time for Maimonides the Philosopher except as an oddity but one whom is worth indulging if only because of the greatness of his other works of Halakhah. It is in the *Mishneh Torah* where Soloveitchik sees Maimonides true worth. As Soloveitchik ends his lectures, he says, "After all his adventures in the field of philosophy, [Maimonides] came back to the Halakhah (Kaplan 2016, 239)." Maimonides the Philosopher, is, to Soloveitchik, an interesting aberration; one that needs to be taken seriously, but only because of who the writer is and not because of what he has written.

As we finish our journey through Rambam, via Soloveitchik, via Kaplan, we may conclude that while we have been told the quality of the notes from which Soloveitchik's book is derived is "very good" we have good reason to question that statement. As we have also noted, these notes have also been edited, sometimes smoothly, and sometimes not so smoothly, so that we may also question the editing of the volume. On the other hand, Soloveitchik's search into the *Guide* for a specific Maimonides, the theologian, or modern philosopher religion, is illuminating to us because it contains an, albeit redacted, early example of Soloveitchik's own thought on what it means to be a Jew, and as we know, these thoughts would later come to formulate his own belief system, a system which would lead to his own important books on theology. We might question how much of Soloveitchik's later works, with which the text was emended, informs this thought, and how much exists in the original document. While Soloveitchik is himself, seemingly, frustrated by the *Guide*, we are uncertain how much of that frustration is Soloveitchik's and how much is Hamner's or Kaplan's. Any inconsistency with Soloveitchik's own *oeuvre* would be explained by the quality of the source notes, which is lacking, but even though this is the case, Soloveitchik's work is still worth reading. While we may bemoan the quality, we may be thankful that this sample of early Soloveitchik thought exists.

Endnotes

¹ While we might quibble and say that this lapse is simple, that the writer of the notes knew better or knew what Soloveitchik had in mind, we must answer that these are the only notes that we have. Perhaps he misquoted Soloveitchik or

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misheard what was said. The issue is that this lapse exists and was not even corrected by the editor, so we as readers must question what other lapses might exist?

² Maimonides does not purport to solve these problems, or to subdue this “perplexity” and instead he suggests that once the proper kind of student has been through *The Guide* that they will either be able to answer these questions themselves or that these questions will no longer be “perplexing.”

³ The question to ask is “Is Maimonides contradicting himself and, if so, does this apparent contradiction change our understanding, add to our understanding, or is it simply a case of too many exemplars of different types pointing to a similar concept?” Cf. *The Guide*, Introduction.

⁴ *Bereshit* is the Hebrew name for the book of “Genesis” and “bet” is the first letter of *Bereshit*.

⁵ By scripture we mean Tanakh, Talmud and whatever texts are extant, synchronically, at the time of explication which count as “Written and Oral Torah.”

⁶ While there are different methodologies often used to resolve these contradictions, Soloveitchik uses the “Brisker Method” or “*Lomdus*” as derived by the Soloveitchik rabbinical dynasty who founded the Brisk Yeshiva and who served and still serve as the heads of these Yeshivas. It is analysis of fine distinctions and attempts to understand if qualities and quantities in things are the same or if they are different. Hence, Rabbi Soloveitchik attempts to understand Maimonides as an original thinker and as more than a mere re-teller of Aristotle via Jewish ethics, (Kaplan 2016, 123) rather than understanding Maimonides as internally contradictory.

⁷ Viz Rashi on Exodus 31:18. Rashi’s solution to an apparent anomaly is to state that “There is no “earlier” or “later” (no chronological order) in the events related in the Torah: in fact, the incident of the golden calf (related in Ch. 31) happened a considerable time before the command regarding the work of the Tabernacle was given (Ch. 25 and the following chapters) even though the scripture depicts the two events in the opposite chronology.

⁸ For a case in point see the Chassidic text *Likutei Amarim* which begins with an apparent contradiction between a *Baraita* and a *Mishnah* the reconciliation of which acts as a starting off point for a treatise on moral philosophy.

⁹ The title of Kaplan’s redaction of Soloveitchik, “Between Philosophy and Halakhah,” then makes sense as it would seem that Soloveitchik’s view of the *Guide* is a tension between Aristotelian philosophy, specifically the physics and ethics and Torah law. It must be made clear that Soloveitchik ensures that there is a clear delineation between the two.

¹⁰ This is the problem that Alex Sztuden addresses in his article, *God of Abraham, God of Aristotle: Soloveitchik’s Reading of Guide of the Perplexed* (Sztuden 2018). Sztuden is less critical of Soloveitchik and instead accepts the document as is, which is an attempt to understand the relationship between God, as identified by his attribute of *Hesed*.

¹¹ It is possible to speculate that the Brisker Method lends itself to overinterpretation even of the Halakhah, but any real analysis of this possibility is beyond the scope of this work.

¹² One could even argue that a “misreading” of Jewish sacred texts led to the Jesus Movement, which later became Christianity. In this sense a “misreading” of Jewish scripture later became normalized as another religion.

¹³ Although we may not presume Everywoman.

¹⁴ Maimonides views this as a kind of moral and intellectual integrity. The person Maimonides describes is not at risk of bad action, or sin, but bad beliefs, and these cause a kind of crisis. Cf. *The Guide* pp. 5 – 6.

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