

**Modern Orthodoxy in the 21st Century:
Lecture III: Majestic Man & Covenantal Man
The ideological framework of Modern
Orthodoxy in the thought of Rabbi Soloveitchik**
Rabbi Moshe Shulman, Shaarei Shomayim Congregation
Spring 5766

Selected Bibliography

- Rabbi Dr. Aharon Lichtenstein, *A Consideration of Synthesis from a Torah Point of View* (1963), Leaves of Faith: The World of Jewish Learning, KTAV, 2003
- *Rav Joseph B. Soloveitchik: As Posek of Post-Modern Orthodoxy*, Rabbi Dr. Walter Wurzbarger, Tradition, vol 29, 1994.
- *Some Comments on Centrist Orthodoxy*, Rabbi Dr. Norman Lamm, Tradition 22(3), 1986
- *Lonely Man of Faith*, Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, Tradition 7 (2), 1965

Rav Joseph B. Soloveitchik: As Posek of Post-Modern Orthodoxy, Rabbi Dr. Walter Wurzbarger, Tradition, vol 29, 1994.

Since the Rav stresses heteronomous divine Revelation rather than the autonomy of human reason and conscience, his notion of Adam I, the "man of majesty," is not a concession to modernity but an authentic interpretation of the Jewish value system.... It must, however, be emphasized that for the Rav **the endorsement of scientific methods is strictly limited to the realm of Adam I**, whose function it is to harness the world of nature for the benefit of humanity. But causal explanations are irrelevant in the domain of Adam II, who can overcome his existential loneliness only through the establishment of a "covenantal community," enabling him to relate to transcendence....

It is, however, one thing to affirm that halakhic concepts are *a priori*, and another to maintain that subjective factors play no role in halakhic decision-making. As a matter of fact, Rav Soloveitchik always emphasized that halakhic decision-making is not purely mechanical but highly creative. A *posek* is not a computer. It is therefore inevitable that like every one else's, the Rav's halakhic

rulings, especially the perception and assessment of the realities to which halakhic *a priori* notions are to be applied, reflect to some extent his personal philosophical convictions. From his perspective, human creativity and initiative in science and technology are not merely legitimate but eminently desirable, because they reflect the dignity conferred upon creatures bearing the divine image.

This stance is usually rejected by the so called "yeshiva world," which assigns religious significance to creativity only insofar as it is directly and immediately related to the field of Torah. R. Hayyim of Volozhin makes the point that while human beings are mandated to imitate the creativity of the Creator, this emulation is possible only in the exercise of spiritual creativity. This is in keeping with Kabbalistic doctrines which affirm that only Torah study and observance of the Commandments create new spiritual worlds in the higher regions of being and are instrumental in helping bring about the reunification of God with the *Shekhina*. In the view of the classical yeshiva world, science and technology do not qualify as genuine creativity, since they rely exclusively on purely natural processes. The Rav objects to this denigration of "secular" activities and contends that scientific and technological creativity also constitutes an intrinsically valuable mode of imitating the divine Creator.

It is against this background that we can appreciate the Rav's enthusiasm for scientific and philosophical studies. **Whereas in the Yeshiva world, secular studies are condoned only to the extent necessary to making a living, the Rav endowed them with intrinsic value, because they enable human beings to realize the ideals of Adam I.** This explains why he encouraged many of his disciples to pursue graduate studies in secular fields.

סוכה כח:א - אמרו עליו על רבן יוחנן בן זכאי: מימיו לא שח שיחת חולין, ולא הלך ארבע אמות בלא תורה ובלא תפילין, ... ולא אמר דבר שלא שמע מפי רבו מעולם...

Some Comments on Centrist Orthodoxy, Rabbi Dr. Norman Lamm, Tradition 22(3), 1986

For those of us in the Centrist camp, Torah Umadda does not imply the coequality of the two poles. Torah remains the unchallenged and pre-eminent center of our lives, our community, our value system. But centrality is not the same as exclusivity. It does not imply the rejection of all other forms or sources of knowledge, such that non-sacred learning constitutes a transgression. It does not yield the astounding conclusion that ignorance of Wisdom becomes a virtue. I cannot reconcile myself, or my reading of the whole Torah tradition, with the idea that ignorance—any ignorance—should be raised to the level of a transcendental good and a source of ideological pride.

Time does not permit a more extensive analysis based upon