Behaviorism and the Unity of Knowledge, Love and Action in Halakhic Man

In reality, this equation of knowledge, will and action with one another is one of the principles of imitatio Dei. ¹

The Halakhah is a doctrine of the body.²

The question of whether Judaism accords supreme value to study or to action—limmud or ma‘aseh—has an ancient and venerable pedigree. In Halakhic Man, Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik (the “Rav”) seems to proffer his own answer to that question, affirming that the life of study is the highest ideal in Judaism. But matters are not so simple.

The Rav is rightly known as a dialectical thinker of immense power and originality. Never satisfied with simplistic doctrines of harmony, the Rav often highlighted two opposing ideals or emotions that must be held in tension by the religious personality. Yet alongside the tension-riddled nature of the Rav’s thought, at times we also find an emphasis on unity and integration. In U-Bikkashtem mi-Sham, the Rav proclaims the unity of knowledge, will and action. This unity is central to his elaboration of the main dialectic in U-Bikkashtem mi-Sham, and exists right alongside numerous works where he emphasizes tensions and conflicts that are never harmonized.

Is halakhic man a figure of unity or of permanent conflict? According

¹. Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, And From There You Shall Seek (U-Bikkashtem mi-Sham), trans. Naomi Goldblum (Jersey City, 2008), 93.
². Ibid., 117.
to the Rav, halakhic man is a stable hybrid of cognitive man and *homo religiosus*:

Halakhic man is not some illegitimate or unstable hybrid. On the contrary, out of the contradictions and antinomies there emerges a radiant, holy personality whose soul has been purified in the furnace of struggle and opposition and redeemed…

As Lawrence Kaplan elaborates:

Harmony, rather than incongruities and contradictions, is the ultimate criterion, although this harmony indeed emerges from an entanglement of contradictions and incongruities. Moreover, attaining this harmony is indeed the main religious aim of the ideal man living within the covenant. Halakhah itself . . . gives man the means to achieve this end.

But even within the ostensibly unified personality of an archetype such as halakhic man, we nevertheless still find hints of ruptures, unresolved tensions, and conflicting ideals. As we touched upon at the outset, one such conflict—well-known throughout the history of Jewish thought and re-played in halakhic man—is that of the ultimate supremacy of study *vis-a-vis* action.

As mentioned earlier, on some readings, *Halakhic Man* provides a rather straightforward answer as to which is to be regarded as greater, study or action. That answer is: study. Indeed, a central theme of *Halakhic Man*, if not the central theme, is that the primary activity of halakhic man is the cognition of the theoretical law. The Rav majestically proclaims the supremacy of study for its own sake, not for the sake of action: “The foundation of foundations and the pillar of halakhic thought is not the practical ruling, but the determination of the theoretical Halakhah.”

Halakhic man focuses his intellect on the construction and elaboration of an ideal world, replete with abstractions and generalizations. In this singular focus on a cognitive experience detached from the realities of daily living and the humdrum emotions that make up most of our waking lives, the Rav, following in the tradition of R. Hâyîyim of Volozhin, elevates study for its own sake to the loftiest of heights.

Yet that is not the whole of halakhic man. For while glorifying study for its own sake, halakhic man also desires nothing more than the

The transformation of the physical world: “Halakhic man’s most fervent desire is the perfection of the world...the realization of the a priori, ideal creation...in the realm of concrete life.” So halakhic man both cognizes and desires to actualize the Halakhah. The contrast between cognition and actualization, or study and action, runs through the entirety of Halakhic Man. The chart below reveals just how pervasive this contrast is:

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<tr>
<th>Highest Ideal is Cognition of Halakhah</th>
<th>Ultimate Desire is Actualization of Halakhah</th>
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<td>His deepest ideal is not the realization of the Halakhah, but rather the ideal construction which was given to him from Sinai . . . (23).</td>
<td>The most fervent desire of halakhic man is to behold the replenishment of the deficiency in creation, when the real world will conform to the ideal world . . . and the ideal Halakhah, will be actualized in its midst (99).</td>
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<td>Halakhic man is not particularly concerned about the possibility of actualizing the norm in the concrete world (63).</td>
<td>Halakhic man implements the Torah...for such implementation, such actualization is his ultimate desire, his fondest dream (90).</td>
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<td>The maxim of the sages: “Great is study, for study leads to action”, has a twofold meaning: 1) action may mean determining the . . . ideal norm. . . . Halakhic man stresses action in its first meaning (64).</td>
<td>Halakhic man’s yearnings for the national redemption . . . draw upon his hidden longings . . . draw upon his hidden longings for the full and complete realization of the ideal world. . . (28-29).</td>
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<td>The foundation of foundations and the pillar of halakhic thought is not the practical ruling, but the determination of the theoretical Halakhah (24).</td>
<td>The perfection of creation, according to the view of halakhic man, is expressed in the actualization of the ideal Halakhah in the real world (107-108).</td>
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The apparently contradictory statements in Halakhic Man regarding the ultimate supremacy of study or action have led some scholars to question the consistency of the Rav’s writings on this topic:

6. Ibid., 94.
Rabbi Soloveitchik’s writings do not reflect clearly his views on the teleology of the Halakhah. In his paper on “Ish Ha-Halakhah,” he seems to express contradictory views. In one place he maintains that the ideal halakhic forms rather than their realization constitute the objective of halakhic thinking [Halakhic Man, 23—A. S.]. Elsewhere he states that the ontological approach merely serves as a vestibule through which one enters into the temple of the normative conception. The man of Halakhah perceives the world as an object to be subjected to religious deeds and sacred acts. . . . A clarification of this problem by Rabbi Soloveitchik is a desideratum.7

Lawrence Kaplan takes issue with the charge of inconsistency; there is, rather, only a tension:

Cf., however, [p. 23], where Rabbi Soloveitchik states that the ideal halakhic forms revealed at Sinai, rather than their realization constitutes the objective of halakhic thinking. No doubt there is a tension in Rabbi Soloveitchik’s thought between the cognitive and normative aspects of Halakhah but he would contend, I believe, that this tension exists in the consciousness of every concrete halakhic personality. . . . We must, therefore, reject David S. Shapiro’s contention . . . that this tension constitutes an inconsistency in Rabbi Soloveitchik’s thought. On the contrary, this “inconsistency” is of the very essence of his thought.8

Presumably, for Kaplan, the tension between cognition and action as each forming the highest aspiration of halakhic man is yet another one of the many dialectical struggles of halakhic man. However, the problem with Kaplan’s interpretation is that the Rav never displays this particular dialectic as fraught with tension, never betrays any anxiety generated by the opposing ideals of study and action. In fact, the Rav asserts the opposite—that halakhic man does not despair and does not feel anxious when the ideal cannot be actualized:

Halakhic man’s ideal is to subject reality to the yoke of halakha. However, as long as his desire cannot be implemented, halakhic man does not despair, nor does he reflect at all concerning the clash of the real and ideal, the opposition that exists between the theoretical Halakhah and the actual deed, between law and life [emphasis added].9

The quotation above shows that this tension does not “exist in the consciousness of every halakhic personality,” since halakhic man does “not reflect at all” concerning the dual ideals. In *U-Bikkashtem mi-Sham*, the Rav explicitly rules out both inconsistency and tension and asserts a fundamental unity between cognition and action: “In reality, this equation of knowledge, will, and action with one another is one of the principles of *imitatio Dei*.10

There is no tension between cognition and action because they are not two separate values pulling halakhic man in opposing directions. Rather, cognition and action are unified in the thought of the Rav. “Thus have true halakhic men always acted, for their study and their deeds have blended together beautifully, truly beautifully.”11

But how are we to understand this unity? As Dov Schwartz has put the challenge:

[H]alakhic man strives for the full realization of the ideal halakhic world. . . . And the question is: What for? Such a realization will contribute nothing to halakhic cognition, which is already fully revealed now, or, more blatantly: Will the future implementation of, for instance . . . the four varieties of capital punishments, add anything to the creative process of halakhic knowledge?!12

According to Schwartz, this desire for the actualization of the Halakhah is completely independent of halakhic man’s cognition. Nothing with respect to his cognitive activity is changed as a result of this extrinsic desire to actualize the Halakhah; in particular, nothing is added. There is cognition of the law on the one hand, and desire for actualization on the other, but there is certainly no unity, merely two independent aspects of halakhic man.13

10. Soloveitchik, *U-Bikkashtem mi-Sham*, 93. This essay assumes a somewhat unified picture of the Rav’s works. However, Dov Schwartz has argued that the man of God in *U-Bikkashtem mi-Sham* and the figure of halakhic man have almost nothing in common. See Schwartz, *Religion or Halakha*, 55. For a more moderate overview of the differences between these two works, see the introduction to *U-Bikkashtem mi-Sham* by David Shatz and Reuven Ziegler, xxxv-xxxvii. A moderate understanding of the differences is consistent with my claim that the unity of knowledge, will, and action espoused by the Rav in *U-Bikkashtem mi-Sham* is also applicable to halakhic man. Moreover, the doctrine of the unity of knowledge, will, and action is expressly connected to halakhic man in *U-Bikkashtem mi-Sham*, where the Rav writes that the doctrine is applicable to both “halakhic man” and “the man of God.” See p. 93.


13. More precisely, for Schwartz, halakhic man’s primary concern is the cognition of the theoretical law, not its actualization. The statements regarding halakhic man’s deepest desires for the realization of the Halakhah are not to be taken at face value. See Schwartz, *Religion or Halakha*, 120-125.
The problem is exacerbated by the Rav’s assertion that cognition is not limited to the practical ruling, as we have seen: “The foundation of foundations and the pillar of halakhic thought is not the practical ruling, but the determination of the theoretical Halakhah.” How then, are we supposed to unify action with the cognition of theoretical norms which are far removed from daily life? What does it mean to assert that knowledge and action are unified when the knowledge is of “seemingly ‘irrelevant’ halakhic minutiae”14 which are unlikely ever to be actualized? It would seem that cognition of the theoretical law has absolutely nothing in common with action.

This essay proposes a novel way of understanding the unity between cognition of the theoretical law and action, inspired by the writings of a group of contemporary philosophers who could not have been more temperamentally different from the Rav—the philosophical behaviorists who flourished in Oxford in the 1950’s. The behaviorists denied the existence of consciousness, subjectivity and mental states, were thoroughgoing materialists, asserted that many philosophical problems were merely linguistic in nature, and generally betrayed no awe, reverence, anxiety or existential angst in their writings. And yet, they produced a genuine breakthrough in conceptually unifying thought and action, and it is this development which I wish to exploit in order to render the Rav’s reflections on the unity of thought and action philosophically coherent and compelling. I am not claiming that the Rav’s “authorial intent” was a behaviorist one. There is no reason to think that the Rav ever read behaviorist writings— and certainly he would not have endorsed them. Rather, I am trying to provide a coherent account of the Rav’s doctrine regarding the unity of knowledge, will, and action, and I argue that the core insight of behaviorism contributes mightily to such an account.15

15. This is an important methodological point. In his discussion of the relationship between R. Hayyim’s interpretations of Rambam and Rambam’s texts, Marc Shapiro distinguishes between “historical” and “philosophical” understandings of a text. If I may be permitted to oversimplify, if you believe that upon being confronted with R. Hayyim’s novellae on the Mishneh Torah, Rambam would have responded: “Yes, that’s what I meant,” then you are in the realm of historical understanding. However, if you believe that after having been confronted with R. Hayyim’s novellae, Rambam would have been just as puzzled as Moses was when he was shown R. Akiva’s expositions of Mosaic law, then you would be discussing a “philosophical” understanding of Rambam’s texts. My essay proposes a “philosophical” understanding of the Rav’s works, in Shapiro’s terminology. See Marc Shapiro, “The Brisker Method Reconsidered,” a review of Norman Solomon’s book, The Analytic Movement: Haym Soloveitchik and his Circle, in Tradition 31, 3 (Spring, 1997): 78-102. David Shatz distinguishes between “studying” and “doing”
But in order to understand this unity between cognition and action through behaviorist lenses, we will need to avail ourselves of another of the Rav’s unities—the identity of love and cognition. What could the Rav have meant with his cryptic assertion that there is an “identity between love and cognition”? We can understand how love and other emotions can accompany or arise out of cognitive activity, but those relations hardly amount to that of an “identity.” Is the Rav’s language hyperbolic, or is there a deep truth in this identity that the Rav was gesturing towards? My argument is that the identity of love and cognition can be used to clarify the other of the Rav’s unities—that of cognition and action. So these “two unities” form an interlocking whole that can illuminate the unified nature of knowledge, love, and action in halakhic man.

Any Jewish discussion of the relationship between study and action must begin with the gemara’s famous question—“Which is greater, study or action?” (Kiddushin 40b). According to the gemara, study is greater, because it leads to action. This answer is enigmatic, as R. Norman Lamm points out:

Indeed, the very statement appears to be self-contradictory, for if study’s greatness lies in the fact that it leads to practice and is only penultimate to it, does this not imply that practice, which is the ultimate goal, is really superior?16

Nevertheless, whatever the correct interpretation of the gemara’s response, it seems clear that the gemara is attempting to connect the two activities. It isn’t just that study is greater as a self-sufficient philosophy, that is, between interpreting a thinker and advancing one’s own position. Shatz recognizes that there is no easy divide between the two. See David Shatz, Jewish Thought in Dialogue: Essays on Thinkers, Theologies and Moral Theories (Boston, 2009), xii-xiii. My essay straddles the borders with respect to Shatz’s distinction. That is, it is partly interpretive in that I am attempting to elucidate the texts of the Rav and the meaning of the various unities that he espouses, yet it is also partly “doing” philosophy, in that I am also trying to advance a coherent and compelling understanding of the unity between cognition and action that expands upon the Rav. I am providing an account of the doctrine regarding the unity of knowledge, will, and action that attempts to overcome some of the shortcomings of the Rav’s own account of this doctrine (see note 22).

16. Norman Lamm, Torah Lishmah: Torah for Torah’s Sake in the Works of Rabbi Hayyim of Volozhin and his Contemporaries (Hoboken, 1989), 141. R. Lamm outlines the various interpretations of the gemara’s enigmatic answer. See pgs. 141-43 and corresponding notes.
enterprise. Rather, its stature in part depends on its link to the world of action. The gemara, while wrestling with the precise nature of the relationship between the two, attempts to unify the two activities by at least connecting the stature of one (learning) with its capacity for it to lead to the other (action).

According to R. Lamm, Rambam, who considers the gemara above as normative, prioritized knowledge and rendered observance a means to such knowledge, thereby subordinating action to knowledge. As R. Lamm points out, his interpretation of Rambam is inconsistent with R. Yitzhak (Isadore) Twersky’s, wherein Rambam did not prioritize one over the other. Rather, according to R. Twersky, Rambam espoused “the unity of practice and concept, external observance and inner meaning, visible action and invisible experience.”

But what does this unity amount to? Twersky, in his book on Rambam, goes to great lengths to show that the latter did not have split allegiances. Rather, he believed that his philosophic and theoretical studies could inform halakhic observance and that the halakhic-normative laws furthered philosophic ends. So for Twersky, study and practice inform one another, are consistent with one another and live together in harmony. But where is the fundamental unity? The kind of unity that Twersky attributes to Rambam is what may be called an “empirical” unity—that is, a unity in which two terms may be consistent with one another or may inform one another or be in harmony with one another. But this is not the kind of unity that the Rav requires for his equation. For the Rav, the unity between cognition and action isn’t merely an empirical one, but a deeper, conceptual one:

In reality, this equation of knowledge, will and action with one another is one of the principles of imitatio Dei. In Him, Blessed Be He, is revealed the absolute identity of intellect, will, and action. By imitating this marvelous identity, man becomes like Him. . . .

According to the Rav, the doctrine of the unity of cognition and action is an aspect of imitatio Dei. In God, cognition and action are mysteriously unified and are really one. While of course humans cannot

17. Maimonides, Mishneh Torah, Hilkhot Talmud Torah 3:3.
18. Lamm, Torah Lishmah, 144.
21. Soloveitchik, U-Bikkashtem mi-Sham, 93.
approach this level of unity, the best we can do is to establish a conceptual unity, as opposed to an empirical one. If we were to establish a conceptual unity, one in which each term could not be understood apart from the other, we would thereby establish a much deeper and richer unity than a contingent, empirical unity where study and action cause one another or are harmonized with one another, but are not defined in terms of one another. If this is the case, then even if Twersky is correct in his interpretation of Rambam, he has not established this kind of deep unity. It therefore remains a puzzle as to how to provide a philosophically coherent account of the unity between thought and action, where the claimed unity is necessary and conceptual, and not merely empirical.22

Moreover, the Rav exacerbates the issue, as we have seen, by insisting that cognition is primarily of the theoretical law, not of the practical ruling. So even if we can account for the first problem, that is, we can provide a coherent account of the conceptual, and not merely empirical, unity between cognition and action, we are still left with a second problem, which is to find a compelling account for the unity of a very special type of cognition: cognition of the theoretical law with action.

So cognition seems to be one thing—a mental process, and action seems to be another—a physical process. But in the middle part of the twentieth century, this dualistic view of how the mind and body were related (or separated) came under assault. In the overly exuberant and triumphant scientific spirit of the day, philosophers known as logical behaviorists argued that all internal states, including thoughts, beliefs, desires, moods, sensations, pains, and emotions, were to be understood with reference to external, publicly observable behaviors or dispositions to behave.

While logical behaviorism was the subject of vigorous and devastating attacks almost as soon as it was proposed, and I reject its sweeping program emphatically, it produced some genuine insights. The behaviorists

22. The Rav himself provides an account of this unity, but his account does not rise to the level of a conceptual unity and, more problematically, entirely sidesteps the problem of unifying knowledge of the theoretical law with action. When the Rav discusses the unity of the knower and the known, he has in mind the cognition of the theoretical law, but when he switches to the equation of knowledge, will, and action he ignores the cognition of the theoretical law (and seems to have in mind only knowledge of the practical law) and the problems this would create for his account of such an equation with action. See U-Bikkasitem mi-Sham, 91-95. In other words, the Rav never shows how this equation of knowledge with action is to make sense if knowledge is of the theoretical law, as opposed to the practical law. (Also note that I leave out the third term—“will”—in my account, as I believe that this omission will not affect the substantive argument.)
were the first philosophers to attempt to provide a coherent account of how mind and body were *conceptually* related, and it is this account that can help illuminate the strength of the unity between cognition and action. On this view, there is no opposition or tension between cognition and action because cognition is partly defined in terms of action, and conceptually linked to it in important ways, and therefore both can serve, at the same time, as the highest ideals of halakhic man. In the fullness of halakhic man’s cognitive/active state, there are not two ideals, there is only one complex ideal. To see how this conceptual unity is arrived at, we need to examine how behaviorists explained the mind in terms of action. Moreover, the behaviorist emphasis on *dispositional* states of the body will also provide insight into the further problem generated by a central feature of halakhic man’s cognizing—the cognizing of a theoretical norm. These dispositional states will help unify action with cognition of a theoretical norm far removed from the demands of practical life.

**Behaviorism**

**Overview**

The style of thought of philosophical behaviorists is captured succinctly by John Searle, a leading contemporary analytic philosopher: “In its simplest version, behaviorism says the mind just is the behavior of the body. There is nothing over and above the behavior of the body which is constitutive of the mental.” For the behaviorists:

[a] statement about a person’s mental state, such as the statement that . . . a person is feeling a pain in his elbow just means the same as, it can be

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23. As an analogy, the legal theorist Ronald Dworkin has mounted a spirited attack on Isaiah Berlin’s pluralism, focusing his ire on Berlin’s claim that liberty and equality are two opposing ideals of Western liberal democracies, forever doomed to live in irreconcilable tension with one another. Dworkin has argued that Berlin is wrong, that when understood correctly, liberty and equality should not be seen as antagonists or opposing ideals. Rather, for Dworkin, liberty and equality are defined in terms of one another. They are not two independent concepts. Therefore, Berlin’s tragic pluralism, argues Dworkin, is misguided. See Ronald Dworkin, “Do Liberal Values Conflict?” in *The Legacy of Isaiah Berlin*, ed. Mark Lilla, Ronald Dworkin, and Robert B. Silvers (New York, 2001), 73-90. The strategy adopted in this essay is similar.

24. Logical behaviorism should not be confused with the famous behaviorist doctrines of B. F. Skinner and others. The latter restrict research in psychology to the study of observable behavior, and seek to explain human and animal behavior using concepts like conditioning, which make no reference to inner states. The two forms of behaviorism, logical and Skinnerian, may go together, but need not.

translated into, a set of statements about our actual and possible behavior. . . . The idea was that having a mental state was just being disposed to certain sorts of behavior. . . .26

In his influential *The Concept of Mind*, Gilbert Ryle, the leading behaviorist philosopher, explains what he means by defining inner states in terms of behavior and behavioral dispositions by providing an analogy to the properties of everyday objects:

When we describe glass as brittle, or sugar as soluble, we are using dispositional concepts, the logical force of which is this. The brittleness of glass does not consist in the fact that it is at a given moment actually being shivered. It may be brittle without ever being shivered. To say that it is brittle is to say that if it ever is, or ever had been, struck or strained, it would fly, or have flown, into fragments. To say that sugar is soluble is to say that it would dissolve, or would have dissolved, if immersed in water.27

For Ryle, properties of physical objects serve as appropriate analogies to his recasting of “inner” states, which in his view are in reality dispositions to behave in certain ways under the appropriate conditions.

For instance, it is commonly assumed that if we label a person vain, we are ascribing a character trait to him over and above his behavior or his disposition to behave. Feelings of vanity are supposed to be “internal,” and are to be distinguished from actions which may be caused by the “internal” feeling of arrogance and which may serve as evidence of the “inner” trait. But Ryle thinks this way of talking about character traits is wrong-headed. Rather,

When someone is described as a vain or indolent man, the words ‘vain’ and ‘indolent’ are used to signify more or less lasting traits in his character. . . . His vanity and indolence are dispositional properties, which could be unpacked in such expressions as ‘Whenever situations of certain sorts have arisen, he has always or usually tried to make himself prominent’. . . . Motive words used in this way signify tendencies or propensities and therefore cannot signify the occurrence of feelings.28

Vanity, for Ryle, is not some occult or mysterious inner character trait or feeling tucked deep inside the labyrinths of the mind, subsisting far beyond the reach of the discerning eye. We do not infer vanity, we see it. To be vain just is to be disposed to act in certain ways under the appropriate circumstances.

26. Ibid., 51-52.
And what of the arrogant man who hides his arrogance? Is he not still arrogant even though no behavior can be considered to be an explicit manifestation of his arrogance? Doesn’t this possibility show that arrogance is really “in the heart”? This fundamental—and rather obvious—problem led behaviorists to modify their theory, spawning a view now labeled functionalism. This is how behaviorists and their contemporary descendants—known as functionalists—handle “secretive” vanity.

When we say that wood is combustible, we are attributing a dispositional property to wood. We are in effect saying that if fire touches wood, it will burn. True, we are not saying that wood will burn under all circumstances in which fire touches it. For let us suppose that while we light the wood on fire, we also apply a neutralizing chemical to the wood which blocks and cancels out the effect of the fire. In such a case, wood is still in part defined by the property of combustibility, even though not all instances of fire touching wood will lead to the wood’s burning. What is important to note, however, is that “combustibility” is not some property over and above the disposition to burn under the appropriate circumstances. There is no mysterious force called “combustibility.” Similarly, arrogance, for a behaviorist, is defined by certain behavioral traits and dispositions. If an arrogant man hears talk of himself, he is likely to encourage more talk and lean in closer, and so on. However, it can also be the case that this arrogant man has another desire, such as a desire to keep his arrogance secret, and this desire for secrecy—like a neutralizing chemical—cancels out and blocks the realization of the normal behavioral dispositions associated with arrogance. But the fact that the dispositional traits of a vain man are sometimes not “activated” is no reason to assume that those dispositional traits are not essential to the definition of vanity.  

29. Behaviorists would note that dispositions need not be translated into overt behavior in each instance. Dispositional traits or “feelings” such as arrogance or sadness are behavioral in the sense that they are defined by a pattern of behavior. This can only be part of the story, which was filled out in more detail by the functionalists, as per the sketch above and in the two notes below.

30. To be more precise, “secretive” pride posed a problem for behaviorists, since it became clear that in addition to claiming that feeling arrogant is the disposition to behave in certain ways when circumstances are appropriate, behaviorists had to add that arrogance is the disposition to behave in x fashion as long as there is no countervailing belief or desire (say for secrecy). But this desire for secrecy is itself also a mental state, so behaviorists would have to analyze that desire in terms of behavioral dispositions, and round and round it went, until it became clear that mental states needed to be defined not just in terms of the behavioral dispositions, but also in relation to other mental states. So the theory of functionalism was born (which was also a response
It still remains the case that vanity is the behavior of vanity or the disposition to behave vainly. For behaviorists, the mind is just the body behaving in certain ways.

The behaviorists didn’t just explain character traits along the lines suggested above. Their goal was nothing short of a fundamental transformation in the way we conceptualize all mental states, including desires and emotions. For instance, most of us intuitively think that fear is an internal, mental state. But a typical behaviorist query might be:

Can we imagine a world in which fear has no tendency to give rise to avoidance of the thing feared, or in which desire has no tendency to give rise to pursuit of the thing desired? Offhand it would seem not.\(^3\)

In other words, isn’t a tendency to avoidance—which is a behavioral dispositional state—what we mean by the claim that something is feared? The behaviorist focuses on tendencies and dispositions as being necessary features of a mental state.
The Double Life of Mental Terms

Yet the behaviorist account of the inner life and of emotions is radically incomplete. Behaviorists are wrong: emotions are not just the behavioral expressions or dispositions of the body. There is something internal as well, a subjective feeling of what it is like to be in love or feel anger that cannot be reduced to the outward expressions of such love or anger. But despite the failure of their program of eliminating inner feelings, and despite their over-exuberance, exaggeration, and ultimately error, what behaviorists got right is that internal feelings and emotions are tied to the body in very strong ways. In fact, they were right in pointing out that part of what is meant by having an emotion is the outward expression of that emotion. A person cannot be angry if there is no trace of that anger either in physiology or behavior. Someone who claims to love her children cannot in fact love them if she exhibits absolutely no behavioral expressions of that love. Part of what it means to love someone is to act compassionately towards him, and to behave or be disposed to behave in ways that manifest care for that person. In other words, behaviors of love are built into the concept of love itself.

This dual aspect of emotions (and other mental states) has led the contemporary philosopher David Chalmers to espouse what he calls “the double life of mental terms.” As the philosopher Peter Goldie explains:

The two sorts of perspective . . . are in different businesses, deploying different kinds of concepts—call them respectively, phenomenal and theoretical concepts. When we use a phenomenal concept to talk about, for example, the experience of being afraid . . . we are thinking partly in terms of what it is like to be afraid. On the other hand, a purely theoretical concept of being afraid would be one which, roughly, picks out the emotional experience by its causal role, and which leaves out entirely what it is like to be afraid . . . our Martian, in possession of

32. See the classic article by Thomas Nagel, “What Is It Like to be a Bat?,” Philosophical Review 83 (October, 1974): 435-50.
33. This may help answer the well-known question of how God can command us to love our neighbor, for how can God command feelings? A traditional response is that God commands us to act as if we loved our neighbors, and eventually through those actions, the inner feeling of love will arise. But if the foregoing analysis is correct, this response is too mild. Behaviors of love are part of what is meant by loving our neighbor. Not all of it, too be sure, but part of it. Therefore, when God commands us to at least behave in ways associated with a loving person, he is commanding us to love. There is no need for the “as if”.
a complete scientific account of the workings of the human being, would still have no conception of what it is like to have the experiences that the impersonal experience picks up using its theoretical concepts.35

For Goldie and Chalmers, mental terms have two aspects, but what is crucial for our purposes is to point out that the objective, scientific, behavioral aspects of a mental state are essential. In other words, while “mental” states are not exhausted by their physical manifestations, they are in part constituted by them.36 Subjectivity does not exhaust what it means to have emotions, which contain both phenomenal and scientific/behavioral properties. The disposition to act in loving ways is built into the concept of love. And to say that manifestations of behavior and dispositions to behave in loving ways are built into the meaning of love is to say that action is conceptually a part of the meaning of love. On this account, “love” contains an irreducible, behavioral component, and so love and action form a conceptual unity. To love someone is in part to be disposed to act in certain ways.

Love, according to the analysis we have offered, is irreducibly and conceptually tied to actions. But what about cognition—what is the conceptual relationship between cognition and action? In U-Bikkashtem mi-Sham, the Rav espouses his claim that there is an identity between love and cognition. If this identity is to be taken seriously, it follows that insofar as love is in part a behavioral disposition, and love and cognition are identical, it must be the case that cognition is also in part a behavioral disposition.


36. Indeed, the view sketched here may be usefully referred to as “weak analytic functionalism.” It is a functionalist account because it asserts that for an organism to have a mental state is for that state to play a causal role—in conjunction with other mental states—in the behavior of the organism. It is analytic because I am not making an empirical claim. The behavioral dispositions and causal roles such states play are conceptually built into the meaning of concepts such as grief and love. And finally, it is “weak” in two ways: 1) I make no claims that a functionalist account can completely describe a mental state. There is a subjective, inner feeling of what it is like to be in grief and feel anger that cannot be reduced in the manner of a thoroughgoing functionalist. Consciousness and what philosophers call qualia (that is, subjective, experiential “inner” states, such as feeling pain or seeing blue), are real; and 2) not all terms can be given a functionalist account, even a partial one. While fundamental orientations, such as love, are susceptible to a partial functionalist account, it is likely that many other mental states, such as minor aches or the contemplation of set theory, are not.
The Identity of Love and Cognition

In my thesis the passions are not to be separated from reason; they are to be welded together into a single unit. I should like to view all of our acts as Shelley envisioned dreams, as “passion-winged ministers of thought.”—Robert Solomon.37

What Maimonides wanted to do was establish an enduring conjunction of the psyche with the intellect. Reason conjoins with emotion and is enriched by it. —R. Soloveitchik.38

There is a standard view of the relationship between emotion and reason that runs roughly as follows. Emotions are biased, subjective, and irrational attitudes that people express, while reason is cold, objective, dispassionate, and able to ascertain the truth. Emotions are:

“nonreasoning movements,” unthinking energies that simply push the person around and do not relate to conscious perceptions. Like gusts of wind or the currents of the sea, they move, and move the person, but obtusely, without vision of an object or beliefs about it. . . . This view is connected with the idea that emotions derive from the “animal” part of our nature. . . .39

The Rav, however, rejected the false dichotomy between reason and emotion. For the Rav, emotions are not just subjective outpourings of the heart. They can, and do, reveal an objective world to us. In The Halakhic Mind, the Rav states that emotions are cognitive—that they should be seen as making claims about the way the world is.40 And the specific aspect of the world that the emotions cognize is the value-laden world. As the Rav writes: “Emotions are the means by which the value universe opens up to us.”41

In an important note on the nature of cognition in U-Bikkashtem mi-Sham, the Rav asserts the identity of cognition and love, and in doing so, places emotion at the heart of cognition:

What Maimonides wanted to do was establish an enduring conjunction of the psyche with the intellect. Reason conjoins with emotion and is enriched

38. U-Bikkashtem mi-Sham, 156.
by it. Reason supports emotion but is also nourished by it; there is reciprocity here. On the one hand, when the affects blend with the intellect, their nature changes, and they become less passive. In place of involuntary impressions, free activity blooms. When cognition absorbs emotion, it converts it and subsumes it under free action and creation. Cognition bestows some of its glory onto emotion—the glory of free action and the desire for accomplishment. On the other hand, cognition too is elevated through its melding with emotionality. The unity of the knower and the known ... occurs only in a cognition imbued with love and desire. . . . Maimonides set forth love as the goal of divine worship. There is an identity of love and cognition [emphasis added]... 42

In the text above, the Rav makes the far-reaching claim that there is an identity between cognition and love. He further adds that Rambam focuses on “the emotional heart of logic.” 43 This phrase shows that emotions are central to cognition in such a manner that they actually help to form the content of “logic.”

Contrast the claim of identity above with some other writings that do not amount to a relation of identity. For instance, in Halakhic Man, the Rav writes that:

Halakhic Man is worthy and fit to devote himself to a majestic religious experience. . . . However, for him, such a powerful, exalted experience only follows upon cognition, only occurs after he has acquired knowledge of the a priori, ideal Halakhah and its reflected image in the real world. But since this experience occurs after rigorous criticism and profound penetrating reflection, it is that much more intensive.44

The passage above clearly displays the centrality of subjective experience and emotion for halakhic man—to be sure, not a sentimental or ecstatic and uncontrolled emotion—but an emotion which arises from cognition. Nevertheless, it does not show, on its own, that emotions are a constitutive part of cognition. In the passage, emotions “top off” or follow upon cognition, but they do not increase understanding, nor do they shape what halakhic man cognizes.

42. Soloveitchik, U-Bikkashtem mi-Sham, 156. See also The Halakhic Mind, 108-109, where the Rav writes that: “Our multi-methodological approach is warranted . . . by a multitude of interests latent in the cognitive act. . . . The reason is the instrument of the will, and the theoretical act is subordinated to the volitional. . . . [Pascal’s] ‘reason of the heart’ . . . represents . . . specific cognitive designs that govern man’s ‘volitional and emotional life.’ The Rav makes it clear here that the act of cognition is not “pure” or disinterested, but is rather based on the specific cognizer’s volitional and emotional make-up. I thank David Shatz for this reference.
43. Ibid., 156.
44. Soloveitchik, Halakhic Man, 83-84.
Similarly, consider the following famous passage from Rambam:

What is the path [to attain] love and fear of Him? When a person contemplates His wondrous and great deeds and creations and appreciates His infinite wisdom that surpasses all comparison, he will immediately love, praise, and glorify [Him].

In the passage above, no relationship of identity is established. Rather, according to Rambam, love follows cognition. It is the end result of a cognitive process (and may accompany it), but it is separable from it. While we may not experience appropriate love of God without knowledge, the two terms in no way stand in a relation of identity; one merely follows from the other. Emotion, in this reading, is not a constitutive part of cognition. So if we conceive of the relationship between emotion and cognition along temporal dimensions, whereby emotions precede, accompany, or follow cognition, emotions are not central to the cognitive process. They are “extrinsic” or external, to halakhic man’s primary activity—the cognition of the theoretical law.

But there is a way in which emotions are to be considered essential to the cognition of halakhic man. This way is hinted at in the Rav’s discussion of the arguments for the existence of God. In *U-Bikkashtem mi-Sham*, the

45. Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah, Hilkhot Yesodei Torah*, 2:2. It may be thought that Spinoza’s *amor intellectualis dei*, the intellectual love of God, which the Rav cites in *Halakhic Man*, 85, may serve as a model for the identity of cognition and love. But it does not, since according to Spinoza, this intellectual love is the feeling of pleasure which accompanies the act of cognizing God as the First Cause. Here, the affect doesn’t do any of the cognitive lifting; it simply arises out of or accompanies the act of cognition. Without the love, nothing cognitively is lost. See Jonathan Bennett, *A Study of Spinoza's Ethics* (Cambridge, 1984), 370.

46. And as Rambam continues in the same passage, such love, engendered by knowledge, may then lead one to yearn to attain even more knowledge, so that love first follows cognition, and then precedes it by serving as motivation to cognize even more. But an identity is never established. The Rav cites a similar passage from Rambam in his elaboration of the identity between love and cognition, but the Rav is engaging in creative interpretation of Rambam. Moreover, Rambam’s position is difficult to decipher as he says different things in different places. One may claim that the intellectual apprehension of God—that is, being in a state of constant and intense contemplation of God—is just what is meant by “loving” God. But then this “identity” is accomplished by sleight-of-hand, by a reduction and collapse of love into cognition. The love here is not shaping the content of what is being cognized. “Love” would here mean “being intensely attuned to” or “always thinking of” the object of one’s love. Some mystical doctrines perform the collapse the other way, by collapsing cognition completely into subjective experiential loving/knowing. What we need is to preserve in some sense both the meaning of love and the meaning of cognition in this identity, even as the meaning of each term will doubtless be altered.
Rav writes that the main problem with the cosmological and ontological arguments is that they have devolved into logical constructs divorced from the foundational experience which gives rise to a sense of God’s reality. It is the subjective experience of God’s reality which matters, and the logical arguments cannot be divorced from such experiences. If they are, they will be barren and empty and devolve into casuistry. Here, experience/subjectivity is doing more than merely serving as the contingent means of discovering certain truths. Experience here is primary.

Consider also the color red. As we previously discussed, there are two components to the color red, the “experiential” component, “what is like to see red,” and the “objective” components, red, translated into wavelengths and the science of optics. In both cases, whether we are discussing knowledge of red or knowledge of God, experience and subjectivity are essential to knowledge. In this way then, we can begin to approach the Rav’s “identity” thesis between love and cognition. In this account, love, emotions and subjectivity are primary modes of knowledge, and the objective constructs, like the cosmological argument or the objective wavelength nature of “red,” are derivative.

So when the Rav writes that Rambam was trying to focus on the “emotional heart of [halakhic] logic,” he is not being hyperbolic. Subjective experience and emotions are central to the cognition of the man of God. They don’t just serve to motivate or accompany the cognitive process, but rather, they help to shape the very content of cognition.

47. See U-Bikkashtem mi-Sham, 13, 157. On the relationship between the ontological argument and religious experience, see Ermanno Bencivenga, Logic and Other Nonsense: The Case of Anselm and His God (Princeton, 1993).
48. Recall our earlier discussion of “The Double Life of Mental Terms.”
49. The section on the identity of love and cognition groups together three different terms—subjective experience, emotion, and love. Each term is actually a sub-set of the previous term. What really matters is the cognitive value of subjective experience, broadly conceived. Emotion is a central component of subjectivity, and love is the paradigmatic emotion.
50. This claim is elaborated upon at length in my forthcoming essay, “On the Identity of Love and Cognition in the Thought of Rabbi Soloveitchik.” An abridged version of the essay served as the basis for a presentation at the Joint Yeshiva University/Bar-Ilan University International Conference—Reflections on the Thought and Scholarship of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik (July 31, 2012).
51. Justification for my addition of the word “halakhic” in brackets comes from Aviezer Ravitzky, who notes that when the Rav interprets Rambam in order to advance his own philosophy, he often changes the focus of Rambam from the world to that of Halakhah. See Ravitzky, “Rabbi J. B. Soloveitchik on Human Knowledge: Between Maimonidean and Neo-Kantian Philosophy,” Modern Judaism 6:2 (May 1986): 157-88.
since the objective laws are external manifestations of inner, “spiritual phenomena” that lend that content its meaning. When halakhic man cognizes the law, he does so in a state of “ecstatic cognition”\(^{52}\)—wherein subjectivity and emotion are constitutive of the cognitive act. “There is an identity of love and cognition.”

**The Unity of Ecstatic Cognition and Action**

We have seen that the cognition of halakhic man is not a “pure” cognition, devoid of emotion.\(^{53}\) Rather, halakhic man attaches himself to the theoretical Halakhah in a state of ecstatic cognition, and as we said, this ecstatic cognition is not just one whereby an emotion accompanies cognitive activity, but one whereby emotion and subjectivity are essential to his cognitive activity. It is through his ecstatic cognition, a cognition merged with and constituted by subjectivity and love, that halakhic man constructs the actual content of the theoretical law.

We are now in a position to unify cognition and action with the kind of unity that imitates God’s absolute unity: a necessary and conceptual unity. Our argument began with a behaviorist account of love, which necessarily includes manifestations of love and dispositions to behave lovingly. We then showed that in halakhic man, cognition and love are unified and merged with one another, and by straightforward deduction, it becomes clear that insofar as cognition is merged with love, it must also be merged with manifestations and dispositions of love, i.e. with actions of love. Cognition and action are conceptually unified through love. The ecstatic cognition of halakhic man, whereby love and other experiences help to shape and mold the content of the theoretical law, contains within it a disposition to act in loving ways.\(^{54}\)

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52. The term “ecstatic cognition” is inspired by—although different in meaning from—the “ecstatic rationalism” that Rebecca Goldstein attributes to Spinoza. See Rebecca Goldstein, *Betraying Spinoza: The Renegade Jew Who Gave Us Modernity* (New York, 2006), 186.

53. The Rav uses “pure cognition” pejoratively in *U-Bikkashtem mi-Sham*, 104.

54. See also Maimonides, *Guide for the Perplexed*, trans. Shlomo Pines (Chicago, 1974), 1:54, in his discussion of knowing God by knowing His attributes of action. With respect to emotions ascribed to God by the Torah, in particular the thirteen attributes (*ra‘ûm*, *hanun*, etc.), Maimonides adopts somewhat of a behaviorist posture. We have inner states; God does not. Therefore, the attributes that ostensibly imply divine emotions should be analyzed as referring to God’s acts, not His inner states. In that chapter, however, Maimonides says also that a leader should eradicate feelings when he performs appropriate acts. Since he regards such emotionless acts as emulations of God’s attributes, the leader’s “attributes” (emotions) could be analyzed behavioristically. By contrast, in *Hil. De’ot* 2:3, Rambam advises that a person should not feel anger but at times should act
Can this ecstatic cognition of the objective norm, replete with love, be a purely internal act? As we have shown, if a man loves his beloved, he must necessarily manifest that love in the concrete world. That is what the behaviorists, for all their fatal weaknesses, rightly intuited. Behaviors of love are built into the concept of love. And if halakhic man loves the norm, he must also manifest that love in the concrete world. In other words, he must actualize it. There is an equation which captures the conceptual unity of thought and action: To cognize the norm is to love the norm, to love the norm is to subordinate oneself to the norm, and to subordinate oneself to the norm is to act on that norm.\(^{55}\) In short, to cognize is to actualize.\(^{56}\)

Unlike other dichotomies that the Rav spells out in tragic language, where he emphasizes the discontinuities, ruptures and conflicts tearing at the heart of man, the Rav never evinces any sort of tension or anxiety generated by the twin ideals of cognition and action. There is no tension because there is no conflict. Cognition and action are unified and in part defined by each other. Ecstatic cognition of the norm is the love of the norm, and the love of the norm is the disposition to act on that norm when conditions warrant it.\(^{57}\)

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\(^{55}\) “Subordination to a norm” cannot be a wholly internal state. An “argument” inspired by Wittgenstein’s *Philosophical Investigations* might run as follows. What does it mean to “subordinate oneself” to a norm? Is this merely an “inner” state? What is the difference between contemplation of a norm and subordination to a norm? Let us imagine a man, sitting down, upright back, eyes shut tightly, in intense contemplation of a norm. Where is the “subordination” to be located? Is it in the quantity or intensity of the contemplation, so that if he closes his eyes more tightly, focuses more intently, he is now not only contemplating, but also subordinating himself, to the norm? Or is subordination to be located in the contents of the thought itself, so that in addition to the contemplation of the structure of the norm, there is an additional thought simultaneously passing before his mind, whose content is “I am subordinating myself to this norm”? But then, what does “subordination” mean in that additional thought?” In other words, subordinating oneself to a norm cannot be merely an inner process, for the difference between one who contemplates the norm and one who subordinates himself to that norm cannot be located in the intensity or the contents of the cognition itself. It is, rather, in part “located” in the dispositions to behave in accordance with that norm when conditions warrant it. That is what “subordination” means.

\(^{56}\) As David Shatz has noted, there are many contemporary accounts of what it means to hold a belief which explicate possession of a belief partly in terms of how one would act. This position should be differentiated from the position advocated by R. Aharon Lichtenstein, which states that when one is engaged in Torah study for its own sake, one must also possess a desire to actualize the Torah. In R. Lichtenstein’s account, the desire is “external” to the cognitive act. That is, there is cognition which is accompanied by desire, but if the desire were lacking, there would be no decrease in understanding. There would simply be a separate moral-spiritual defect, not a cognitive one. See R.
Theoretical norms and the practical ruling
Cognition and action are unified by love. But what about the cognition of theoretical norms which have only the barest connection to the concrete world? As we have seen, halakhic man focuses on the theoretical norm, not the practical ruling. If this is the case, then how can we understand the unity between this kind of theoretical cognition and action? The role of dispositional states can bridge that gap.

Recall that Ryle noted that for glass to be brittle, it does not actually need to be shaking: “The brittleness of glass does not consist in the fact that it is at a given moment actually being shivered. It may be brittle without ever being shivered.” 58 Britteness is a dispositional property. Analogously, the dispositions created by subordination to a theoretical norm need never be actualized. It is enough that they would be actualized if circumstances warranted it. This point is central to understanding the conceptual link between action and cognition of a theoretical norm. It is of the essence of ecstatically cognizing a theoretical norm that it be, in part, understood as necessarily being constituted by dispositions to act on that norm. So cognition need not be limited to the practical ruling in order to remain conceptually tied to actions. The ecstatic cognition of a theoretical norm includes the dispositional state to act in accordance with that norm when circumstances warrant such action, even if the conditions for the actualization of that norm are unlikely ever to materialize. 59

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Halakhic man is always and everywhere disposed to act in accordance

Aharon Lichtenstein, “Talmud and Ma’aseh in Pirke Avot.” My claim, on the other hand, is that as there is an identity of cognition and love, a lack of “love” necessarily involves a lack of cognition. This claim is defended at length in a forthcoming paper on the identity of cognition and love. See note 50.

58. Emphasis added.
59. What is the dispositional state of the ecstatic cognition of a dissenting opinion, or of an irresolvable dispute where the cognizer does not take sides, but merely analyzes the nature of the dispute? In the latter, halakhic man would have clashing dispositions, similar to feeling contradictory emotions or impulses. This is certainly possible, unlike having a belief that A and a belief that not-A. See Ronald de Sousa, The Rationality of Emotion (Cambridge, MA, 1987), 26. Alternatively, recall that dispositional states are not always triggered—they work in conjunction with other mental states and relevant circumstances—to cause overt actions. Here, halakhic man contains dispositional states to act on the basis of a dissenting opinion or on the basis of either of the two sides of a theoretical dispute if circumstances warrant it, that is, if either position should prove to become the normative Ha’alah in the eyes of the halakhist. If this condition is not met, the dispositions to act are not triggered.
with the norm, but if circumstances in the concrete world do not warrant the realization of the norm, halakhic man does not despair, for when conditions warrant it and circumstances change, halakhic man’s entire being will leap into action like a lion in order to actualize the norm. “The most fervent desire of halakhic man is to behold the replenishment of the deficiency in creation, when the real world will conform to the ideal world…and the ideal Halakhah, will be actualized in its midst.”60 This deepest desire of halakhic man is not only consistent with his primary activity of cognition, but, as I have argued, it is an essential aspect of it. In the ecstatic cognition of halakhic man, wherein knowledge, love and action “blend together beautifully,” we are afforded a fleeting glimpse of the most fundamental unity of all, the unity of God Himself.

60. Halakhic Man, 99. With respect to the dialectic between cognition of the law and its actualization, there is one final step that the Rav takes, and it is the move beyond halakhic man, to the realm of the prophet, for the highest type of person according to the Rav, is not halakhic man, however remarkable his personality may be, but the prophet: “The most exalted creation of all is the personality of the prophet” (Halakhic Man, 128). While halakhic man longs for the implementation of the Halakhah, and is sometimes able to realize that longing, he is content to be disposed to act when conditions warrant it. If the real world does not conform to the ideal world, he does not despair; he simply continues cognizing, all the while knowing that one day the Halakhah will be implemented in its full glory and majesty. But the prophet is not content with dispositions. “When a person actualizes the ideal Halakhah in the very midst of the concrete world, he approaches the level of that godly man, the prophet, the creator of worlds” (Ibid., 90). The prophet is the one who changes the conditions, who transforms the concrete world, its institutions, its structures and societies, in order for the ideal Halakhah to be realized in the midst of the concrete world. The prophet is not just disposed to act when circumstances warrant such action; the prophet actually transforms the circumstances and realizes the glory and splendor of the Halakhah in this world. Beyond halakhic man lies the prophet, that godly figure who transforms the world in accordance with the ideal Halakhah. In the end, the Rav asserts that the actualization of the Halakhah is the highest activity of the highest type of person, the prophet: “When a person reaches the ultimate peak—prophecy—he has fulfilled his task as a creator” (Ibid., 130). I do not think this point has been sufficiently appreciated.