

Cambridge University Press  
978-1-107-10903-2 — Nietzsche, Soloveitchik and Contemporary Jewish Philosophy  
Daniel Rynhold, Michael J. Harris  
Frontmatter  
[More Information](#)

## Nietzsche, Soloveitchik, and Contemporary Jewish Philosophy

What does one do as a Jewish philosopher if one is convinced by much of the Nietzschean critique of religion? Is there a contemporary Jewish philosophical theology that can convince in a post-metaphysical age? The argument of this book is that Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik (1903–1993), the leading twentieth-century exponent of Modern Orthodoxy, presents an interpretation of halakhic Judaism, grounded in traditional sources, that brings a life-affirming Nietzschean sensibility to the religious life. Soloveitchik develops a form of Judaism replete with key Nietzschean ideas, which parries Nietzsche's critique by partially absorbing it. This original study of Soloveitchik's philosophy highlights his unique contribution to Jewish thought for students and scholars in Jewish studies, while also revealing his wider significance for those working more broadly in fields such as philosophy and religious studies.

Daniel Rynhold is Professor of Jewish Philosophy at the Bernard Revel Graduate School of Jewish Studies, Yeshiva University. He has published on various topics in Jewish philosophy, including the problem of evil, Nietzsche and Jewish philosophy, and the thought of Moses Maimonides and Joseph Soloveitchik. He has been published in journals including *Harvard Theological Review* and *Religious Studies*, is the author of *Two Models of Jewish Philosophy: Justifying One's Practices* and *An Introduction to Medieval Jewish Philosophy*, and is co-editor of *Radical Responsibility: Celebrating the Thought of Chief Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks*.

Michael J. Harris is Affiliated Lecturer in the Faculty of Divinity, University of Cambridge, Research Fellow at The London School of Jewish Studies, and Rabbi of The Hampstead Synagogue, London. He is the author of *Divine Command Ethics: Jewish and Christian Perspectives* and *Faith without Fear: Unresolved Issues in Modern Orthodoxy*. He co-edited *Radical Responsibility: Celebrating the Thought of Chief Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks* and has published at the interface of philosophy and Jewish thought in journals including the *Harvard Theological Review*, *Religious Studies*, and *The Torah U-Madda Journal*.

Cambridge University Press  
978-1-107-10903-2 — Nietzsche, Soloveitchik and Contemporary Jewish Philosophy  
Daniel Rynhold , Michael J. Harris  
Frontmatter  
[More Information](#)

---

# Nietzsche, Soloveitchik, and Contemporary Jewish Philosophy

**DANIEL RYNHOLD**

*Professor of Jewish Philosophy, Bernard Revel Graduate School of  
Jewish Studies, Yeshiva University, New York*

**MICHAEL J. HARRIS**

*Affiliated Lecturer, Faculty of Divinity, University of Cambridge*



**CAMBRIDGE**  
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge University Press  
978-1-107-10903-2 — Nietzsche, Soloveitchik and Contemporary Jewish Philosophy  
Daniel Rynhold, Michael J. Harris  
Frontmatter  
[More Information](#)

## CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

University Printing House, Cambridge CB2 8BS, United Kingdom  
One Liberty Plaza, 20th Floor, New York, NY 10006, USA  
477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia  
314-321, 3rd Floor, Plot 3, Splendor Forum, Jasola District Centre,  
New Delhi - 110025, India  
79 Anson Road, #06-04/06, Singapore 079906

Cambridge University Press is part of the University of Cambridge.

It furthers the University's mission by disseminating knowledge in the pursuit of education, learning and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

[www.cambridge.org](http://www.cambridge.org)

Information on this title: [www.cambridge.org/9781107109032](http://www.cambridge.org/9781107109032)

DOI: 10.1017/9781316266212

© Daniel Rynhold and Michael J. Harris 2018

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements, no reproduction of any part may take place without the written permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 2018

Printed in the United States of America by Sheridan Books, Inc.

*A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library*

*Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication data*

Names: Rynhold, Daniel and Harris, Michael J., author.

Title: Nietzsche, Soloveitchik, and contemporary Jewish philosophy / Daniel Rynhold, Yeshiva University, New York, Michael J. Harris, University of Cambridge.

Description: New York : Cambridge University Press, 2018. | Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2017058271 | ISBN 9781107109032

Subjects: LCSH: Soloveitchik, Joseph Dov. | Nietzsche, Friedrich Wilhelm, 1844-1900 – Influence.

Classification: LCC BM755.S6144 R96 2018 | DDC 296.3092 – dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2017058271>

ISBN 978-1-107-10903-2 Hardback

Cambridge University Press has no responsibility for the persistence or accuracy of URLs for external or third-party internet websites referred to in this publication, and does not guarantee that any content on such websites is, or will remain, accurate or appropriate.

Cambridge University Press  
978-1-107-10903-2 — Nietzsche, Soloveitchik and Contemporary Jewish Philosophy  
Daniel Rynhold, Michael J. Harris  
Frontmatter  
[More Information](#)

---

*For Philip Stockman – my Uncle Fishel  
And in memory of David Dudley Saul  
D.R.*

*For Yehudit and Simi, Nechama and Joel, Yoni,  
and Tal, who make life worth affirming  
M.J.H.*

Cambridge University Press  
978-1-107-10903-2 — Nietzsche, Soloveitchik and Contemporary Jewish Philosophy  
Daniel Rynhold , Michael J. Harris  
Frontmatter  
[More Information](#)

---

## Contents

<i>Preface</i>	<i>page</i> ix
<i>List of Abbreviations</i>	xiii
Introduction	I
1 Nietzsche and Soloveitchik on Knowledge and Truth: Why We Know So Much	27
2 Nietzsche and Soloveitchik on Morality: Why We Are So Good	67
3 Nietzsche and Soloveitchik on Asceticism and the Passions: Why We Are So Life-Affirming	117
4 Nietzsche and Soloveitchik on Law and Creativity: Why We Are So Law-Abiding	146
5 Nietzsche and Soloveitchik on Repentance: Why We Are So Sorry	183
6 Nietzsche and Soloveitchik on Suffering: Why We Are So Profound	225
7 Nietzsche and Soloveitchik on Elitism: Why We Are the Best	252
<i>Bibliography</i>	293
<i>Index</i>	311

Cambridge University Press  
978-1-107-10903-2 — Nietzsche, Soloveitchik and Contemporary Jewish Philosophy  
Daniel Rynhold , Michael J. Harris  
Frontmatter  
[More Information](#)

---

## Preface

There is barely a subject or discipline left untouched by the influence of the great nineteenth-century German thinker Friedrich Nietzsche. Whether being appropriated by fascists, castigated by feminists, or for that matter championed by the latter and derided by the former, his power simultaneously to seduce and shock, amuse and annoy – and often the very same reader – ensures the continued appeal of his philosophical legacy. Given his ubiquitous presence, we probably ought briefly to say something about why we are setting out on what, in his eyes, would doubtless amount to yet another inevitable falsification of his thought (although given that falsification is a condition of life for Nietzsche, presumably that cannot in itself constitute an objection).

It is true that serendipity played a role in the genesis of this project. If we may be permitted a brief autobiographical digression, the conceptual jolt to our systems on our (independent) first encounters with the works of Nietzsche as philosophy undergraduates was less a result of the dissonance between his way of doing philosophy and that of the regnant analytic tradition to which we were being exposed, and more a result of finding ourselves deeply challenged and even, over time, in sympathy with many of his key critical claims. And of course, there was the sheer power of his literary style. On the other hand, there were radical discontinuities between Nietzsche's thought and the religious Jewish tradition in which we were raised and with which we continue to deeply identify.

Of course there are scholars of Judaism and Jewish laypeople – they are probably in the majority – who would dismiss Nietzsche's writings as the rantings of a rabid atheist and vehemently oppose everything that he wrote. But what does one do as a Jewish philosopher if instead one

finds much of the Nietzschean critique of Judeo-Christian religion resonant? Is it possible to formulate a Jewish response to Nietzsche's negative appraisal that does not simply dismiss it? Although it might appear counterintuitive to some, it was ironically as a direct result of our very exposure to the living and textual traditions of Judaism, both classical and contemporary, that we found ourselves intuitively convinced of the possibility of such a conceptual approach to Judaism, one that could incorporate many of Nietzsche's perceptive criticisms. That initial intuition animates what we hope is the more considered project that forms the basis for this book.

Our argument is that there are central areas (central for both Judaism and Nietzsche) in which Nietzsche's ideas resonate strongly with important strands in Jewish thought, in particular, although not exclusively, with significant elements of the thought of Joseph B. Soloveitchik (1903–93), the leading twentieth-century exponent of modern Jewish Orthodoxy (henceforth Modern Orthodoxy).

Though neither of us ever met Rabbi Soloveitchik, our exposure to his ideas has been a most significant influence in our professional lives, and we hope that bringing his thought into conversation with that of Nietzsche in this book will facilitate a deeper appreciation of both thinkers even for those who naturally find themselves drawn to only one at the expense of the other.

There are many people we would like to thank for their role in helping bring this project to fruition. Given the long gestation of this book, a vast number of long-forgotten discussions with friends and colleagues have likely found their way into the work, and we thank everyone who wittingly or unwittingly contributed over the years. More particularly, we would like to acknowledge David Hillel Ruben, who mentored Daniel's 1994 M.A. thesis on some of the themes in this book and subsequently supervised both of us as doctoral candidates, and we thank Shalom Carmy, Jonathan Dauber, Sam Fleischacker, Lawrence Kaplan, Michael Morgan, and Jess Olson, all of whom discussed specific aspects of the work at various stages. In addition, Tamra Wright provided encouragement throughout, and David Conway and Daniel Weiss provided incisive comments on parts of the manuscript. We would especially like to thank Simon May and David Shatz, internationally respected authorities on Nietzsche and Soloveitchik respectively, who each read the entire manuscript and gave us much invaluable feedback that immeasurably improved the final product. We also thank the team from Cambridge University Press for their support and professionalism – Beatrice Rehl, Abigail Neale, Nitesh Srivastav, and our copy editor Elizabeth Budd – as well as Shulamith Berger, the curator of Special Collections and Hebraica-Judaica

at Yeshiva University Library for her help in our search for an appropriate cover image of Rabbi Soloveitchik.

The following two paragraphs convey our individual acknowledgements.

Michael: I would like to express my deep gratitude to the Honorary Officers and members of The Hampstead Synagogue for their interest in and encouragement of my academic work. I gratefully acknowledge my parents who taught me the value of broad intellectual horizons. I thank my wife Judith for her love and support, as well as my children and sons-in-law to whom this book is dedicated.

Daniel: I am grateful to the students at the Bernard Revel Graduate School of Yeshiva University whose questions and criticisms over the past decade, during which I tried out these ideas in numerous settings, contributed greatly to their final formulation. Indeed, one such student, who shall remain anonymous in order not to embarrass him, is now himself making major contributions to Soloveitchik scholarship. His works are discussed at various points of the book. I also wish to thank the late Arthur Hyman, who as Dean of Revel upon my arrival was a constant source of care and scholarly encouragement. The current dean, David Berger, has continued to provide the same combination of kindness and keen scholarly engagement, although with rather worse jokes. I thank my cousin, Jonathan Rynhold, who somehow also ended up in academia and is my most reliable sounding board. Finally I thank my wonderful parents, who still read more than I do; my children, Zack, Chloe, Aimee, and Phoebe, of whom I could not be more proud; and my wife Sharon, my fount of love and support. I dedicate this book to the loving memory of her father, Dudley, and *lehavdil beyn hayyim le-hayyim*, to my uncle, Philip (Fischel) Stockman, in fond recollection of visiting him weekly more than twenty years ago, initially to read together the Hebrew works of Soloveitchik. Uncle Fischel would subsequently introduce me to the writings of Shai Agnon and, ironically, Max Nordau, who saw himself as implacably opposed to Nietzsche. I hope my uncle enjoys the rather different approach to Nietzsche taken in this book.

We would finally like to acknowledge each other. While in the initial drafting, we split responsibility for chapters according to our respective interests and expertise, with Daniel taking responsibility for the Introduction and Chapters 1, 4, 5, and 7, and Michael for Chapters 2, 3, and 6, we subsequently worked together intensively on the entire manuscript with major input into each other's drafts so as to ensure that the final book would reflect a genuinely collaborative work.

Cambridge University Press  
978-1-107-10903-2 — Nietzsche, Soloveitchik and Contemporary Jewish Philosophy  
Daniel Rynhold , Michael J. Harris  
Frontmatter  
[More Information](#)

---

## Abbreviations

Translations of Nietzsche's works are cited by volume and/or section number and are abbreviated (other than when appearing unbracketed in the body of the text) as follows:

- A*      *The Anti-Christ*, trans. Judith Norman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005)
- BGE*    *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. Judith Norman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009)
- BT*     *The Birth of Tragedy*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1967)
- D*      *Daybreak*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997)
- EH*     *Ecce Homo*, trans. Judith Norman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005)
- GM*     *On the Genealogy of Morality*, trans. Maudemarie Clark and Alan J. Swensen (Indianapolis and Cambridge: Hackett, 1998)
- GS*     *The Gay Science*, trans. Josefine Nauckhoff (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001)
- HH*     *Human, All Too Human*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996)
- TI*     *Twilight of the Idols*, trans. Judith Norman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005)
- WP*     *The Will to Power*, trans. W. Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Vintage Books, 1968)
- Z*      *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, trans. W. Kaufmann in *The Portable Nietzsche* (New York: Penguin Books, 1976)

Works by Joseph B. Soloveitchik are cited by page number and are abbreviated (other than when appearing unbracketed in the body of the text) as follows:

- C “Confrontation,” *Tradition* 6/2 (Spring–Summer 1964), 5–29
- EEM *The Emergence of Ethical Man*, ed. Michael S. Berger (Jersey City, NJ: Ktav/Toras HoRav Foundation, 2005)
- FR *Family Redeemed: Essays on Family Relationships*, eds. David Shatz and Joel B. Wolowelsky (Jersey City, NJ: Ktav, 2000)
- HM *Halakhic Man*, trans. L. Kaplan (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1983)
- HMD *The Halakhic Mind* (New York: Seth Press, 1986)
- HMY *Halakhic Morality: Essays on Ethics and Masorah*, eds. Joel B. Wolowelsky and Reuven Ziegler (New Milford, CT, and Jerusalem: Toras HoRav Foundation/Maggid Books, 2017)
- KDD *Kol Dodi Dofek*, trans. Lawrence Kaplan, as *Fate and Destiny: From the Holocaust to the State of Israel* (Hoboken, NJ: Ktav, 2000)
- LMF *The Lonely Man of Faith* (New York: Doubleday, 2006)
- OR *On Repentance: The Thought and Oral Discourses of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik*, ed. Pinchas H. Peli (Ramsey, NJ: Paulist Press, 1984)
- SP “Sacred and Profane,” in J. Epstein (ed.), *Shiurei Harav* (Hoboken NJ: Ktav, 1974), pp. 4–32
- UM *Uvikkashtem mi-Sham*, trans. Naomi Goldblum, as *And From There You Shall Seek* (New York: Ktav/Toras Horav Foundation, 2008)
- W *Out of the Whirlwind: Essays on Mourning, Suffering and the Human Condition*, eds. David Shatz, Joel B. Wolowelsky, and Reuven Ziegler (Jersey City, NJ: Ktav/Toras Horav Foundation, 2003)

Other works of Nietzsche and Soloveitchik that are cited less frequently are not abbreviated. Details of the editions used are provided in the footnotes.

All translations of biblical, Talmudic, and later Jewish sources are our own except where otherwise indicated.

Regarding transliteration, due to the small amount of transliteration in the book, we do not establish a detailed system but instead follow widespread current usage with an emphasis on comprehensibility and accessibility to both academic and general readers.