

“And It Was Good”?:  
Contemporary American Modern Orthodox (Jewish) Engagement with Darwinism

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(Draft for Venice Summer School on Science and Religion, “Science & Values”)  
May 2010

I. Introduction:

Modern Orthodox Judaism (MOJ) is a social world whose members embrace both the contemporary American as well as traditional Jewish discourses as central to their identity. Regarding Darwinism this is often expressed by their avowed allegiance to both the scientific data describing evolution, as well as the biblical and rabbinic message of a created and guided world. Individuals, however, mediate this union differently, and the following article offers a preliminary mapping of the various strategies employed by members of the community to navigate this complicated interface.

MOJ is a peripheral actor in the contemporary “creation-evolution debate”, but a view to the periphery can often be instructive regarding the center as well. Indeed looking at MOJ cannot be separated from analyzing how this group relates to the central players in the debate, as well as how they are related to by the key parties. One of the main themes that emerges from these interactions relates to the joining or separating of science and values. For instance, many MOJ theologians contend that their acceptance of Darwinian evolution has no bearing on their view of Jewish morality, while some do worry about this intersection. Still others argue that their hesitations regarding Darwinism have nothing to do with questions regarding values; while some always include their moral critiques of Darwinism along with their

scientific attacks. The following article will discuss examples that illustrate all of these reactions.

## II. “Across the board”

The complex place that American Jews hold in the story of the evolution/creation controversy has recently attracted scholarly attention (Cherry 2001, 2003; Cantor and Swetlitz 2006; Loike and Tendler, 2006; Robinson, 2007; Shatz, 2009). While initial nineteenth and early twentieth century reactions to Darwin’s theory were generally positive from Modern Orthodox Rabbis (e.g. Samson Rephael Hirsh, Abraham Isaac Kook, and Joseph B. Soloveitchik)<sup>1</sup> and one might have expected this clear theistic

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<sup>1</sup> R. Kook’s (1865-1935) enthusiastic views are famously expressed in *Orot HaKodesh* (1938:559, 565; also quoted in *Challenge*, 2000:135-138)—“The evolutionary way of thinking so popular as a result of scientific studies, has caused considerable upheaval among many people whose thought is wont to run in certain regular well-defined paths. Not so however for the hard-thinking few who have always seen a gradual, evolutionary development in the worlds most intimate spiritual essence...”-- and Hirsch’s (1808-1888) views are recorded in his *Collected Writings* (1986: 263-264, also found excerpted at <http://reilly.nd.edu/Reports.aspx?id=1103>; although Klinghoffer, to be discussed below, contests that Hirsch should be listed among those who accepted Darwinism’s compatibility with Judaism). Interestingly, out of the seven nineteenth century European Rabbis and intellectuals thus far studied regarding their engagement with Darwinism, the only one to reject evolution was the leading Reform Rabbi Abraham Geiger (1810-1874), who appealed to the “moral and rational gap between humans and animals, the harmony evident in organic nature, and the apparent incapacity of natural forces to produce new species” as rationales for his rejection (Cantor and Swetlitz, 2006: 12). A colorful response is documented from a “Modern Orthodox” Polish Jew who had immigrated to England, Rabbi Naphtali Lewy, who in 1876 sent Darwin a copy of his essay “*Toldot Adam*,” which had been published two years earlier, along with a cover letter that addressed Darwin as “the Lord, the Prince...the Investigator of the generation, the ‘bright son of the morning’ (Isa. 14:12), Charles Darwin, long may he live!” (Dodson, 2000; also Cherry, 2001 reviews Geiger and Levy). The German Rabbi Israel Lipschitz, (1782-1860) (discussed for instance in Tendler 1988; Shuchat 2005: 23-26; Feit 2006: 222-223) is often quoted for his positive engagement with the paleoanthropological finds of his day even though his works predate the publishing of *The Origin Of The Species*. Other late nineteenth/early twentieth century Orthodox Rabbis who expressed a tentatively positive view towards evolution discussed in Schuchat (2005), as well as some in Slifkin (2006) and Cherry (2001) and referenced in Shatz (2009), include Rabbi David Tzvi Hoffmann (1843-1921), Azriel Hildesheimer’s successor as the rector of the Rabbinical Seminary of Berlin, and Rabbi Isaac Halevi Herzog (1889-1959), Rabbi Kook’s successor as the Chief Rabbi of Israel, as well as the Italian Rabbi and philosopher Elija Benamozegh (1822-1900) and the Ukrainian born Rabbi Shem Tov Gefen (1856-1933). Elsewhere, (e.g., 2007:7; Cherry 2001) the views of other nineteenth century Rabbis regarding creation are discussed in the context of evolution such as Rabbi Mier Liebusch ben Yecheil Michal Wieser known as Malbim (1809- 1879), who according to Cherry contended that creation evolved freely on day five and six of the Genesis narrative and that God’s act of the creating the Sabbath was to arrest the process of evolution, as well as Rabbi Vittorio Hayim Castiglioni (1840-1911) from Trieste Italy who wrote the *Pe’er Haadam* in 1892 in which he also concurred that day six could represent prehistoric man, but that by day

evolutionary trend to only deepen when Modern Orthodox Jews planted firm roots in American soil, this is not the case.<sup>2</sup> In fact American Modern Orthodox writing in the 1950's-80's (Carmel and Domb eds., 1976; Tandler, 1988), as one individual put it, "ranges from condescending dismissal to indignant derision" of Darwinism (Serman, 1994).<sup>3</sup> By the 1990's, however, a few Modern Orthodox Rabbis began writing strongly

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seven modern man had emerged. Rabbi Mordichai Joseph Leiner from Izhbetz, known as the Mei HaShelohah, (1802-1854), although again preceding the publishing of the Origin could also have been influenced by evolutionary thinking when he contended that God, in creating humans, turned to **the animals** and said "Let us make man;" explaining: "And the Holy One told the creations that all of them give of their power to contribute to the creation of man, so that man will have a part of all of them (as quoted in Robinson, 2006:85)." Regarding Rabbi Dr. Joseph Ber Soloveitchik (1903-1993), the person most often considered to be the leader of American Modern Orthodoxy in the later half of the twentieth century, a manuscript was recently published posthumously, The Ethical Emergence of Man, (2005, as part of a series coordinated by Wolowelsky and Shatz ). And see the introduction there, written by the volume editor M. Berger, for Soloveitchik's expressed interest in the "virgin territory" of religious anthropological inquiry, seemingly especially in the wake of Darwinian understandings of nature, and the editor's assessment that the work "is revolutionary in that it breaks with the traditional metaphysical categories that are the warp and woof of medieval Jewish commentary and philosophy, and instead bases its analysis purely on the categories of the natural and social sciences. In grounding the halachik tradition in that alternative nexus, the Rav enables orthodoxy to take deep and firm root in the intellectual milieu of the modern period (xxi)." This manuscript was likely written in the 1950's.

<sup>2</sup> Alternatively, perhaps one would expect that a religious pro-evolution stance would run into problems at this period, as the inflammation of anti-Darwin sentiment at specific times has been plotted in the American context by historians of science (e.g.. Numbers 1992, 1998); and the 1960's pin-pointed as a particular resurgence of such anti-evolution ferment in the wake of the "evolutionary constriction" that squeezed theological evolutionary views out of biological discourse "making belief in Darwinism the functional equivalent of atheism" (Numbers, 1998:4).

<sup>3</sup> Published in *Tradition* 29:1 (the quarterly journal of the RCA), the article can also be accessed at [http://www.lookstein.org/articles/judaism\\_and\\_darwin.htm#fndw4](http://www.lookstein.org/articles/judaism_and_darwin.htm#fndw4); Perhaps the quintessential opponent to Darwinism has been presented as R. Menachem Schneerson, leader of the Lubavitcher hassidim until his death in 1994. His 1962 letter to a student printed in Challenge (138), and in it he states: "If you are still troubled by the theory of evolution, I can tell you without fear of contradiction that it has not a shred of evidence to support it." Rabbi Schneerson also seems to state that fossils may be viewed as a test of faith (*ibid.*:142), a notion originally thought to have been proposed in a Christian context by the 19<sup>th</sup> century naturalist P.H. Gosse in his book Omphalos. Serman also quotes "the great advocate of harmony between Science and Torah, Prof. Leo Levi" as "deriding" evolution, saying: "Looking at this theory [Darwinian evolution] as an attempt at a scientific formulation, it is very unconvincing, to say the least. Despite the beautiful and convincing descriptions in popular science books and high school texts, with their persuasive pictures, not only is the theory of evolution totally unproven, it is practically disproven." In Serman's estimation six out of the eight essays devoted to evolution in Challenge "attempt to disprove the theory." Tandler, 1988, seems to present similar sentiments as Levi et al. Also relevant is Rabbi Moshe Feinstein's 1969 responsa (Igrot Moshe, Yoreh Daeh, v 3: response 73, 1982:323) that advised tearing out pages of science textbooks with "matters of heresy." Although both Feinstein and Schneerson could be considered "Ultra-Orthodox" their views also impacted MOJ. It is interesting, and perhaps significant, that the tenor of the "students panel" in the 1976 Challenge anthology is different from many of the other articles. It references Christian philosophers of science seems quite unique and its insistence on the acceptance of Darwinism could be seen to foreshadow the view espoused by writers in the 1990's.

against the “second class treatment” evolutionary science had received, stating that one can not accept modern science without embracing evolution (Feit, 1990; Landa, 1991; Sterman, 1994; Wolowelsky, 1997).

An illustration of the current general acceptance of evolution as “certified kosher” by American Modern Orthodoxy is the official stance adopted by the nation-wide Rabbinic organization of MOJ, known as the Rabbinical Council of America (or the RCA). Their statement, entitled “Evolution, Creation, and Intelligent Design”, was issued on December 27<sup>th</sup> 2005-- one week after the precedent setting verdict against the Dover Pennsylvania school board for its presentation of Intelligent Design (ID) as a viable scientific alternative to evolution. In this very brief declaration,<sup>4</sup> the RCA endorsed the Federal Court’s “pro-evolution” decision as being more in-line with traditional Jewish theology than ID, as it implies that ID wrongly “rest(s) on the purported weakness of Evolutionary Theory, and ...gaps in scientific knowledge.” No potential conflict between evolution and Jewish values is raised.

In addition to its institutional approbation, this unproblematic embrace of evolution is a view that has also been promoted by individuals such as the current head of the biology department at Yeshiva University, (Rabbi) Dr. Carl Feit,<sup>5</sup> as well as by pulpit Rabbis, such as Haskel Lookstein who presides over one of New York City’s largest

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<sup>4</sup> The statement can be found at <http://www.rabbis.org/news/article.cfm?id=100635>.

<sup>5</sup> In addition to his own articles on the matter (Feit, 1990, 2006), Dr. Feit has been quoted in the Wall Street Journal representing Yeshiva University’s position (<http://www.opinionjournal.com/taste/?id=110010274>). Also in an interview with the author Dr. Feit stated that his commitment to this issue is such that he has made the offer to fly to any Jewish community in the U.S. to lecture on the matter at his own expense (interview October 2009).

MOJ congregations.<sup>6</sup> Perhaps most famously, a similar position has been publicized by Rabbi Natan Slifkin (known also as “the Zoo Rabbi” due to his focal interests of “Judaism and wildlife”).<sup>7</sup> Indeed, as much as the RCA statement on “Evolution, Creation and Intelligent Design” seems to be coming in direct response to the Dover trial, it also cannot be separated from the events beginning in September 2004, when three of Rabbi Slifkin’s books were banned by Ultra-Orthodox Rabbis in Jerusalem due, at least in part, to Rabbi Slifkin’s contention that evolution is the method God chose to use in creation.<sup>8</sup>

At the same time, there have been contemporary MOJ responses to Darwinism that accept evolutionary principles but also go on to discuss potential problems that emerge from the evolution and religion intersection. Jewish educator Rabbi Joel Wolowelsky’s 1997 article “Teaching Evolution in Yeshiva High Schools”, which first and foremost defends a strongly “pro-evolution” stance, also states that Genesis is directed against “scientific paganism, which posits that everything proceeds randomly from one step to another.”<sup>9</sup> This tension, between acceptance of evolution and rejection

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<sup>6</sup> Sermon dated October 2007 “Rashi Was Not a Creationist Neither Need We Be,” as well as interview with author (August 2009). R. Lookstein references R. Eliezer Berkowitz (1908-1992) as well as R. Natan Slifkin (who he referred to as a “Haredi Rabbi”). As principle of the Ramaz school, he stated that he strives to speak to 9<sup>th</sup> grade students when they study evolution in biology class regarding the compatibility of Darwin and Judaism. It is also interesting that the assistant Rabbi of his congregation, Rabbi Meir Soloveitchik, is known to have a different view regarding the compatibility of Judaism and Darwinism.

<sup>7</sup> See Rabbi Slifkins website: <http://www.zootorah.com>, as well as his article in The Jerusalem Post entitled “The Problem with Intelligent Design” (November 17, 2006; can be found at <http://www.jpost.com/Home/Article.aspx?id=41414>).

<sup>8</sup> The RCA statement begins: “In light of the ongoing public controversy about Evolution Creationism and Intelligent Design...” The “public controversy” in the MOJ community may well relate to “the Slifkin affair” as well as Dover.

<sup>9</sup> Available at both: <http://daat.ac.il/daat/english/education/evolution-1.htm> and [http://www.lookstein.org/articles/teaching\\_evolution.htm.-](http://www.lookstein.org/articles/teaching_evolution.htm.-)

of “scientific paganism”, is seen by Wolowesky as an essential and creative element of human existence, and indeed as a philosophical bedrock of Modern Orthodox Judaism.<sup>10</sup>

Rabbi Stan Peerless, also a Jewish education professional, is the author of perhaps the only lesson plan widely available that engages Darwin within a class on Genesis developed for Jewish schools.<sup>11</sup> Peerless expresses some similar sentiments to Wolowesky, and states that he is against a perspective that “whitewashes” the differences between Jewish views regarding the origins and meaning of the universe and scientific Darwinian views on the matter.<sup>12</sup> This is not to say that individuals in the first group mentioned above (R. Lookstein and Dr. Feit) would necessarily disagree with the critiques those in the second group (Wolowesky and Peerless) raise regarding science,<sup>13</sup> but it is significant that individuals in this second group emphasize these issues and those in the first grouping do not.

There also exists an element of Darwin-doubting in the MOJ milieu, as has been observed:

Some yeshivah educators find troublesome the section on evolution taught in the regular biology course required for a high school diploma. Convinced that

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<sup>10</sup> Wolowesky critique is not directed specifically at evolution; he states “Modern science has emerged victorious from its encounter with nature because it sacrificed qualitative-metaphysical speculation for the sake of a functional duplication of reality and substituted the *quantus* for the *qualis* question.” Wolowesky uses Rabbi J.B. Soloveitchik’s monograph The Lonely Man of Faith (1965) as the springboard for most of his argument.

<sup>11</sup> Rabbi Peerless’ lesson plan can be viewed at: [http://www.lookstein.org/heterogeneous/hetero\\_instruct\\_bereishit.htm](http://www.lookstein.org/heterogeneous/hetero_instruct_bereishit.htm). Although it was put on the web in approximately 2001, Rabbi Peerless has been teaching the material since the 1980’s when he was a principal of a Jewish community school in Dayton Ohio.

<sup>12</sup> Interview with author September 2009. R. Peerless interestingly references many of the same sources as R. Lookstein-- such as the mishna in Hagigah that states that the reason the Torah says that all of humanity came from two individuals is to prevent one human being from claiming that his pedigree is better than anyone else’s—however they have slightly differently ways of introducing, framing, and comparing these Jewish sources to science.

<sup>13</sup> Although they might; Feit, for instance (1990, and personal communication), argues that the “random” aspect of evolution is not properly understood by Jews who find it problematic.

evolutionary biology contradicts basic Torah assumptions, they either omit the section completely continuing a pattern of, say, eliminating all books on dinosaurs from the lower school library and sometimes going so far as to cut out the chapter on evolution from the textbook or they advise their students that what they are learning in biology is but a flimsy "theory" not worthy of serious concern.<sup>14</sup>

Although some part of this reality may be due to reverberations from the hostility to Darwinism expressed by MOJ scientists in the 1970's,<sup>15</sup> it is significant that Challenge (the volume originally printed in 1976 containing the greatest number of Darwin-doubting articles ever concentrated within one MOJ publication) was reprinted in 2000 with no changes implemented regarding content.

In any event, it is not always clear if contemporary MOJ anti-Darwin sentiment relates to the mechanism or the message of evolution. In a certain sense it appears that a form of literalism-- that goes beyond a concern that much of evolutionary thought today is atheistic in orientation and may have trouble including theistic voices—is at play. Cherry (2006) has analyzed MOJ physicists Nathan Aviezer (1990, 2001) and Gerald Schroeder (1990, 1997, 2002, 2009),<sup>16</sup> who both write and lecture on the integration of Genesis and contemporary science, using an approach that Cherry terms “ostensibly literal hermeneutics,” and which he contends designates them as “fundamentalists”-- Modern Orthodox or not.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> From the same article written by Wolowelsky (1997) referenced above.

<sup>15</sup> As perhaps some of the educators of today were themselves educated then.

<sup>16</sup> Both are Americans who moved to Israel after having established their scientific credentials.

<sup>17</sup> MOJ scholar Dr David Shatz (2008) assesses Aviezer and Schroeder to be “bold concordists”, following in the footsteps of the great medieval rational exegetes like Sadya Gaon, Rambam and Ralbag, but not fundamentalists. Shatz (2008:202-3) goes on to contend that the Modern Orthodox community reacts to bold concordist readings “with a mixture of amusement and antipathy”, “skepticism and suspicion”, and asks: “Why this instant, reflex-like, dismissal of concordism on the part of some or many Modern Orthodox Jews?” My experience has led me to the opposite conclusion, with most of the individuals I speak with in the MOJ community referencing Aviezer or Schroeder positively in their responses regarding their view of evolution (although there are certainly individuals who express distaste for disparate reasons, e.g. Rabbi Stan Peerless discussed above was inimical to the approach as he felt it made “Torah subservient to science”). Their anti-Darwinism is fuzzy— e.g. they both (mis)-quote Gould and other proponents of

Perhaps the only MOJ full-fledged proponent of the contemporary mortal enemy of Darwinian evolution in America—Intelligent Design theory—is neither a scientist nor a Rabbi, but rather a journalist. David Klinghoffer, a member of the pro-ID think tank Discovery Institute, writes prolifically on his opposition to Theistic Evolutionary (TE) approaches, and particularly against the MOJ support of this view.<sup>18</sup> Although Klinghoffer contends that “the heart of the (TE vs. ID) debate is scientific”,<sup>19</sup> his arguments against Darwinism almost always also include a moral critique as well. In his forty-one page essay “What’s Wrong with Theistic Evolution”, Klinghoffer writes, among other arguments, that TE is an impossibility because “orthodox neo-Darwinism” precludes it, but also recounts how young Stalin stayed up all night reading The Origin of The Species: “I loved the book so much, Mummy, I couldn’t stop reading,” he explained. He later told a friend that God ‘doesn’t actually exist. We’ve been deceived.’ ‘How can you say such a thing?’ the friend exclaimed, to which the boy, the future Joseph Stalin, replied by handing him a copy of Darwin.”<sup>20</sup>

### III. Discussion

So far we have seen that the MOJ community contains multiple positions regarding evolution. The question arises as to the proportional relationship of these

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punctuated equilibrium as a critique of “Darwinian evolution”, while they also both espouse a view they consider to promote “harmony between science and Torah.” Aviezer has recently made an animated film, as part of a curriculum for high school students, which includes a strange attitude towards Darwin ([http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HC8IvomiA6Y&feature=PlayList&p=2E4FB1A53934F1C9&playnext=1&playnext\\_from=PL&index=14](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HC8IvomiA6Y&feature=PlayList&p=2E4FB1A53934F1C9&playnext=1&playnext_from=PL&index=14)), while he has also stated that ID has been proven wrong by evolutionary biology. Schroeder recently appeared in Ben Stein’s film “Expelled”, in addition to making other ID supportive statements (e.g. <http://www.ou.org/pdf/ja/5767/fall67/17-22.pdf>).

<sup>18</sup> Klinghoffer’s blog (<http://blog.beliefnet.com/kingdomofpriests/>) focuses, almost predominantly, on problems with Darwinism. He has also treated the matter in several long essays and is considering a book-length treatment of the subject (personal communication).

<sup>19</sup> In an email to the author dated April 30<sup>th</sup> 2009.

<sup>20</sup> Essay attached to April 30<sup>th</sup> email. In addition to a detailed critique of many Christian TE proponents, such as Kenneth Miller, Francis Collins and Francisco Ayala, Klinghoffer also criticizes Natan Slifkin.

various positions. A recent study by historian of science Dr. Rena Selya (2006:202) gives some indications. Selya, although not claiming that her study is representative of the total MOJ population, found that:

- a) Evolution is taught in biology class at ten out of the twelve MOJ high schools she surveyed.
- b) In eight of these ten schools it is said to be religiously compatible with Judaism.

In other words: in two schools evolution is not taught, and in another two schools where evolution is taught, it is then described as religiously incompatible with Judaism.

However, even in a particularly “open minded” school in which evolution is fully taught and no objection is raised by the faculty that it might be in opposition to Jewish theology, Selya relates that the headmaster has found “that evolution has ‘always [been] an issue for the kids’ throughout his twenty-two years at Ramaz (*ibid*:205).”<sup>21</sup>

To further complicate the matter, it appears that the four groups of views described in the previous section are not entirely discrete, but rather often exist in an intermeshed form. One interesting example of this is the work of Rabbi Dr. Moshe David Tendler on the subject of evolution. As referenced above, R. Tendler has written some pieces critical of evolution (1988), has taken part in a “pro-ID” conference in Miami (2005),<sup>22</sup> and has also co-authored an article “Molecular Genetics, Evolution, and Torah Principles” (2006) that seems to accept, if not take for granted, evolutionary theory.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> The principal (and not the head master) of this school is Rabbi Lookstein referred to above.

<sup>22</sup> For part of the transcript from the conference on “Should a Torah-observant high school teacher teach the origin and diversity of the species?” with panelists Tendler, Dembski, Zeiger, and Hanoka see: <http://www.borhatorah.org/home/conference/conference6program.html>; also for a report from a local newspaper of the event see <http://www.miaminewtimes.com/2005-12-29/news/darwin-this>.

<sup>23</sup> Media reports have also indicated that confusion continues to abound regarding defining the spectrum of Jewish theological positions on evolution, intelligent design, and creation; as can be evidenced, for

What can this view to the periphery also tell us about the core? One reading relates to the place that science has held for minorities in America. Efron (2008) contends that American Jews have expressed an “unflagging” support of science, including a “fundamentalist interpretation of what counts as good science, or science at all,” while also simultaneously personally rejecting, as at the very least “incomplete”, the evolutionary account of creation and generally “secular materialism’s” accompanying crisis of values.<sup>24</sup> Efron explains this “odd state of affairs” in terms of viewing science as a “social philosophy” that enabled the integration of minorities into mainstream American culture. This intensely loaded relationship that American Jews have had with science plays a crucial role in the formulation of their attitude towards Darwinism.

The view to the MOJ periphery also relates to the influence that the legal culture in America has had on other discourses within society. For instance, the discussion of positions that focus on the separation of science and values, on the part of scientists or religious leaders, cannot be removed from the context of the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution and the Public School system of education in

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instance, by the article by J. Mark “No Debate Over ‘Intelligent Design’: Most rabbis have little trouble reconciling God and evolution,” (The Jewish Week, March 25, 2005-  
[http://www.thejewishweek.com/viewArticle/c36\\_a5728/News?New\\_York.html](http://www.thejewishweek.com/viewArticle/c36_a5728/News?New_York.html)) which claims that ID “is exactly what is being taught in every Jewish school in the country, from Reform Hebrew schools to Yeshiva University,” without making any distinction between TE and ID.

<sup>24</sup> Efron’s analysis relates to Modern Orthodox, Conservative, Reform, and Reconstructionist, views as similarly presenting this duality; for instance, he writes: “Reconstructionist Rabbi Joshua Waxman recently wrote that “the concept of intelligent design is central to my understanding of what it means to be Jewish.” However, in the same essay, he insisted that “Jones made exactly the right decision in the Dover School Board case. I.D., which is just creationism by another name, has no place in a public school curriculum.” Likewise, Conservative Rabbi Susan Grossman could begin an essay with a hosanna: “Thank God U.S. District Court Judge John Jones III ruled that intelligent design (ID) is not science and therefore has no place in the classroom.” Only to continue: “I believe in God as creator of the world. But that doesn’t mean I think ID belongs in the classroom. I believe there is a difference between personal piety and communal polity, between being an honest observer of the world while retaining one’s own personal faith and foisting one’s own faith upon others.”

America.<sup>25</sup> The fact that “Intelligent Design theory” would have no entry to the curriculum of American public schools if it was not considered science, as there are no classes on religious thought in the public school system, is of the utmost importance to the general debate. The fact that the MOJ community does not send their children to public schools does not prevent this aspect of the discourse from entering their private communal epistemological discussion.<sup>26</sup>

This preliminary mapping and discussion of a community not usually considered within the evolution-creation debate in America represents the beginning of a larger project. This first stage has hopefully indicated that such an analysis is fruitful and yields provocative insights regarding the specific group under study as well as the larger context. While MOJ do not usually understand most statements in the first chapters of Genesis literally, they almost always understand the refrain “*vayihē tov*”, referring to the ontological goodness of creation, as a given reality. It is the intersection of this fundamental belief with their communal reverence for science that animates all of the disparate MOJ treatments of Darwinism.

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<sup>25</sup> The current position of the “the scientific establishment” in America, such as the National Academy of Sciences or the National Center for Science Education, is “reconciliatory” towards religion in their promotion of the view that: “Science and religion occupy two separate realms of human experience. Demanding that they be combined detracts from the glory of each” (“Science and Creationism”, 1999, which can be found at <http://books.nap.edu/openbook.php?isbn=0309064066&page=R9>; see also <http://ncse.com/religion>). This can be contrasted with earlier statements, such as the 1995 National Association of Biology Teachers position that stressed the “unsupervised and impersonal” nature of evolution (quoted in Giberson and Yerxa, 2002:6). The current emphasis on separation is often credited to paleontologist and public intellectual Stephan Jay Gould (e.g. “Nonoverlapping Magisteria”, 1997), and is clearly still contested by others such as biologist Richard Dawkins and philosopher Daniel Dennett in addition to creationist thinkers.

<sup>26</sup> Perhaps the most repeated phrase in the MOJ discussion of evolution is: “the Torah is not a science book”. The fact that the Bible is described by what it is not by this community requires further study.