Responses to Darwin in the Religious Traditions

with John Hedley Brooke, "Intrepreting the Word and the World"; Ernan McMullin, "Darwin and the Other Christian Tradition"; Shai Cherry, "Judaism, Darwinism, and the Typology of Suffering"; Marwa Elshakry, "Muslim Hermeneutics and Arabic Views of Evolution"; David L. Gosling, "Darwin and the Hindu Tradition: 'Does What Goes around, Come around?'"; and Christopher Southgate, "Re-reading Genesis, John, and Job: A Christian Response to Darwinism"

JUDAISM, DARWINISM, AND THE TYPOLOGY OF SUFFERING

by Shai Cherry

Abstract. Darwinism has attracted proportionately less attention from Jewish thinkers than from Christian thinkers. One significant reason for the disparity is that the theodicies created by Jews to contend with the catastrophes which punctuated Jewish history are equally suited to address the massive extinctions which characterize natural history. Theologies of divine hiddenness, restraint, and radical immanence, coming together in the sixteenth-century mystical cosmogony of Isaac Luria, have been rehabilitated and reworked by modern Jewish thinkers in the post-Darwin era.

Keywords: Eliezer Berkovits; Darwinism; divine self-restraint; evolution; exile; Abraham Joshua Heschel; hiding of God's face; immanence; Hans Jonas; post-Holocaust theology; suffering; theodicy; typology; *zimzum*

In June of 2009, at Cairo University, President Barack Obama touched on the issue of Jewish suffering. "The aspiration for a Jewish homeland," he averred, "is rooted in a tragic history that cannot be denied." President Obama then went on to reference the Holocaust and those ignorant, malicious voices who deny its occurrence.

England certainly has its own Holocaust deniers. The British know better than most, however, that the aspiration for a Jewish homeland well predates the catastrophe that resulted in the deaths of two out of every three European Jews in the first half of the 1940s. From the Declaration

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of Lord Balfour endorsing a national home for the Jewish people, to General Allenby dismounting from his steed to enter Jerusalem, British participation in the aspiration for a Jewish homeland goes back to 1917.

Before that was the First Zionist Conference in Switzerland in 1897. Indeed, if we trace back the aspiration for a Jewish homeland we end up in the Hebrew Bible. The legislation found therein suggests that one purpose of the Mosaic legal system, perhaps the primary purpose, is to ensure that the Israelites will long endure on the land that the Lord, their God, is giving to them (e.g., Exodus 20:12). Aspirations for a Jewish homeland *are* rooted in a tragic history, as President Obama noted, but that history reaches back to Jewish memories of slavery in Egypt, the location of the President's address. While historians and archaeologists might challenge the historicity of those memories, the subsequent destruction of Jerusalem and exile to Babylonia in 586 BCE precipitated a theological crisis of confidence whose literary remains became the foundations for future Jewish theodicies. What could possibly explain why those aspirations to long endure in Israel's national home were dashed?

Biblical Divine Hiddenness and Rabbinic Self-Restraint

"But I; I'll *hide my face* on that day," (Deuteronomy 31:18, Friedman 2001, 663) declares the Lord of Deuteronomy. Why? Because the Israelites will have turned to other gods, and the Lord will punish Israel by both cloaking the divine presence and withdrawing providential care. For the Deuteronomist, when God hides his face, it is punitive and results in the world following its natural course without divine protection. It is a reaction, I am tempted to say a natural consequence, to the Israelites breaking the covenant. But in certain sections of the Book of Isaiah (45:15) and Psalms (44:25), the hiding of the divine face is not punitive, it is just who God is. It is constitutive (Berkovits 1973, 86–113).

In fact, a contemporary Bible scholar, Richard Elliot Friedman, has shown that divine hiddenness is not merely a theological claim of specific authors of the Hebrew Bible, but one of its principle literary motifs (Friedman 1995). God, literarily, disappears as a character as one reads through the sequence of books according to the Jewish canon. The Book of Esther, one of the final books of the Jewish Bible, contains no mention of God's name. And by the time Ezra initiates the second coming of the Jews into their Land, the climax of Jewish Scriptures and the fulfillment of that aspiration for a homeland, when the text says that the Israelites bowed *to the Lord*, the narrator tells us they were bowing *to the Torah*, the embodiment of God's will (Nehemiah 8:6–8). God's face is hidden from the Judeans *and* from the readers of their redemptive drama.

By the time the Romans destroyed the second Temple in Jerusalem in 70 CE, the new leaders of the Jewish community were forced, once again, to deal with the question of theodicy. How, after all, could God again allow his home to be destroyed by pagans and his people exiled and enslaved? Liturgically, the canonized answer is that the Jews were exiled for their sins. Although harsh, this theodicy preserves several elements of traditional religion. God is intelligible. We sinned, and we were punished. I may not like it, but I understand it. Once God's actions are intelligible, there is hope that we can redeem ourselves. If God punishes, God also rewards. And just as God redeemed the Israelites in the past, so too will God redeem the Jews in the future once we mend our wicked ways. The silver lining of divine punishment is the transparency of divine presence. An angry God is an unhidden God.

In marketing terms, I would say that the theology of the liturgy—that we are punished for our sins—is for public consumption. The liturgy needs to be intelligible to the masses for it is they who are the intended audience. Yet, in the Talmud, that cacophonous canvas of rabbinic jousting, there are other voices that speak of a God less intelligible. If for the liturgy, God's actions are punitive, then for another group of rabbis, God's inaction is constitutive and even virtuous. In a Talmudic discussion, the rabbis ask where was God's great might during the Temple's destruction that had been so transparently manifest at the time of Moses and the Egyptians (Babylonian Talmud Yoma 69b). They answer that God's might is now to be experienced in God's self-restraint. Who else could be strong enough to tolerate such evil? Divine omnipotence has been transvalued as impulse control.

God's expression of strength then becomes a model for Rabbinic Judaism. The earliest rabbinic sages ask, "Who is mighty? He who can control his impulses" (Mishnah Avot 4:1). The God of the Bible had a temper problem. The God of the rabbis got it under control and in so doing tamped down messianic speculation. Most rabbis were anxious not to repeat the catastrophes of the Great Revolt (66–70) and the Bar Kochba Revolt (132–135) by provoking the Romans yet again. Just as God is long suffering of our transgressions, we should be long suffering of the Roman occupation (Babylonian Talmud Ketubot 111a). *Imitatio dei* became a tool for accommodationist politics.

But the price of anger management is steep. It means that God is no longer intelligible or discernible. God might still give each his just desserts, but not necessarily in this world. Recompense may await the coming world. Thus, in this world, there is no necessary connection between the morality of one's deeds and one's desserts. Indeed, in a rabbinic pun that highlights divine silence in this world, the school of Rabbi Ishmael asserts that God is unique among the gods (*elim*) precisely because of his ability to remain mute (*ilem*) while his children suffer (Babylonian Talmud Gittin 56b).

The common denominator between biblical divine hiddenness and rabbinic divine self-restraint is that in both cases God's presence is obscured and his strength seemingly nullified. *Functionally*, from the human perspective, God is absent and/or impotent. Whether God is hiding or holding back, the Jewish community awaits the outstretched arm. These images and metaphors then served as the religious reservoir from which Isaac Luria, in the wake of the Spanish exile of 1492, composed his kabbalistic cosmogony in the northern hills of the Land of Israel in the early 1500s.

Kabbalistic Cosmogony and the Anxiety of Exile

Luria envisions that the infinite God, *Eyn Sof* , had to withdraw, to contract into itself to make a place for that which is not divine. God had to exile God's very self as a precondition of creation. Divinity, however, remains present in our world from the residue of that withdrawal, like oil from an emptied vessel. Divinity is also present from the divine sparks of a subsequent, but flawed, process of emanation into the evacuated region. Although incapable of initiating independent action, the divine presence is nevertheless the ongoing source of all vitality. Luria calls God's exilic movement *zimzum*. In terms of theodicy, evil happens because God is not present in this world in a fashion capable of thwarting the evil designs of humans. It is only through Israel's deeds, observing the commandments, that the world can progress on the road of messianic redemption (Scholem 1978, 128–140; Tishby 1942, 105f.). In the pre-messianic moment in which we currently live, God is in a state of radical latency that drives biblical divine hiddenness and rabbinic divine self-restraint back to the very Origin.

A group of young scholars published a series of essays in 2002 claiming that it is possible to discern a single trope that wends its way through Jewish literature, namely, the anxiety of exile. Shaul Magid, like Gershom Scholem before him, understands that Isaac Luria's mystical vision of creation is informed by a consciousness seared by the exiles and displacements of Iberian Jewry, from Spain in 1492, Portugal in 1497, and Navarre in 1498. The aspiration for a Jewish homeland, in which Luria is living while the Jewish nation is still in exile, becomes projected onto the kabbalistic godhead. As Magid says, "Israel's experience of exile is an act of collective *imitatio dei*" (2002, 170; cf. Idel 1988, 264ff.)

Since *imitatio dei* is usually *conscious* imitation of divine *virtue*, the phenomenon to which Magid is pointing might be better described as typology or fugue. Jews called this principle *ma'aseh avot siman la'vanim*, literally *the deeds of the fathers are signs for the children*. For example, just as father Abraham went down to Egypt (Genesis 12:10), his descendants, too, go down to Egypt (Exodus 1:1). (The typology is continued in the

Christian Scriptures as Joseph takes his child down to Egypt [Matthew 2:14].) What Luria has done is to make God's exile the archetypal exile that God's children will later recapitulate, beginning in the Garden of Eden. God's actions are a sign or signal for his children's deeds. Luria has extended the exilic arc so that the typology of suffering, the anxiety of exile, reaches back to the Origin of All.

Darwin and Judaism

As we move into the post-Darwinian world, all the elements for Jewish theologies and theodicies are in place. *And that is the remarkable thing.* In good Darwinian fashion, most Jewish respondents to Darwinism simply modify elements of traditional Jewish thought. None of the individual elements is radically innovative. Of course humans are fundamentally related to the rest of the animal kingdom—that's the message of Genesis One which has all land creatures created on the same day as humans! (In Genesis Two, *all* animals, including the human, are created from dust [Genesis 2:7, 9, and 19].) Over 1500 years ago, the rabbis asked the question, "To whom is God speaking when He says 'Let us make man in *our* image' (Genesis 1:26)?" One answer is that God is speaking to the rest of the animal kingdom that God has just created. Humans are in the image of the animals and God (Genesis Rabbah 8:3; Rabbi Moses ben Nachman [Ramban] on Genesis 1:26 as quoted in Cherry 2007, 41–44). Furthermore, just as the creation story of Genesis One depicts a world of increasing order, organization, and progress, many Jewish respondents to evolution relied on the utopian, rather than apocalyptic, version of Jewish messianism. Moreover, just as species improve through modification, so, too, should Judaism modify/reform itself in order to progress toward the messianic era (Cherry 2003; Swetlitz 1995, 1999, 2006). The pace of those reforms was, not surprisingly, a disputed issue between more traditional thinkers, like Samson Raphael Hirsch and Elijah Benamozegh, who advocated for slow and incremental change, and the reformers who favored a quicker clip (Cherry 2001, 190–201).

Jon Roberts has emphasized that Darwinian thinking jarred many Protestant clerics into focusing on divine immanence (1988, 136–145). The widespread acceptance of the Lurianic myth, in some form, meant that immanence was standard theological fare for nineteenth-century rabbis (Magid 2002, esp. 195f., fn. 1). Interestingly, American Reform theologians such as Isaac Mayer Wise and Joseph Krauskopf arrived at similar theologies and theodicies not through the legacy of Kabbalah, then held in contempt by many American-German intellectuals because of its crude myths, but through the philosophies of German idealists (Cherry 2001, 154–201; Moore 1979, 225; Swetlitz, 1999, 221, 233f.; 2006, 51). As one philosophy professor at Boston University opined, "Religiously there is no difference between idealistic theism and immanent theism" (Browne 1909, 286).

Throughout the twentieth century, increasing evidence surfaced that the earth's history had been punctuated by a series of mass extinctions. The statistic most challenging to traditional notions of divine providence is that 99% of all species to have ever existed during the history of the world are now extinct. Why would a good and powerful God have designed a universe that is characterized by such flagrant, wholesale destruction of life?

Suffering in Jewish and Natural History

My claim is that the theodicies developed to address the evils and suffering that have punctuated Jewish history are equally adequate, and inadequate, to address the ostensible evils and suffering in natural history (Lazier 2008, 216, fn. 3). The best illustration of this claim is seen in the case of a philosopher of religion and a philosopher of science whose writings bring together these threads.

In 1961, Hans Jonas gave the Ingersoll Lecture at Harvard University. The following remarks, which I will now cite at length, were offered as metaphysical speculation to account for the scientific facts of natural history and to provide an ontological foundation for ethical behavior—a premise which Jonas's early mentor, Martin Heidegger, explicitly rejected.

> In the beginning, for unknowable reasons, the ground of being, or the Divine, chose to give itself over to chance and risk and endless variety of becoming. And wholly so: entering into the adventure of space and time, the deity held nothing back of itself: no uncommitted or unimpaired part remained to direct, correct, and ultimately guarantee the devious working-out of its destiny in creation. On this unconditional immanence the modern temper insists. . .. Rather, in order that the world might be and be for itself, God renounced his own being, divesting himself of his deity—to receive it back from the Odyssey of time weighted with the chance harvest of unforeseeable temporal experience: transfigured or possibly even disfigured by it. In such self-forfeiture of divine integrity for the sake of unprejudiced becoming, no other foreknowledge can be admitted than that of possibilities which cosmic being offers in its own terms: to these, God committed his cause in effacing himself for the world. . ..
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> And then he trembles as the thrust of evolution, carried by its own momentum, passes the threshold where innocence ceases and an entirely new criterion of success and failure takes hold of the divine stake. The advent of man means the advent of knowledge and freedom, and with this supremely double-edged gift the innocence of the mere subject of self-fulfilling life has given way to the charge of responsibility under the disjunction of good and evil. To the promise and risk of this agency the divine cause, revealed at last, henceforth finds itself committed; and its issue trembles in the balance. The image of God, haltingly begun by the universe, for so long worked upon—and left undecided in the wide and then narrowing spirals of prehuman life—passes with this last twist, and with a dramatic quickening of the movement, into man's precarious trust, to be completed, saved, or spoiled by what he will do to himself and the world. And in this awesome impact of his deeds

on God's destiny, on the very complexion of eternal being, lies the immortality of man. (Jonas 1996, 125–127)

Jonas gave this address in 1961 in a lecture entitled, "Immortality and the Modern Temper." Seven years later, in a lecture on post-Holocaust theology, he had occasion to repeat his myth. He acknowledged then that not until *after* his 1961 lecture on natural history had he become conscious of the similarities between his myth and that of Isaac Luria (Ibid., 136). Therein lies my point. What applies to Darwinian evolution applies to human evil, and vice versa. In other words, *zimzum*, a theodicy originally designed to account for evil in Jewish history serves equally as a theodicy for evil in natural history. If God has renounced His capacity to guide history, after providing the original cosmogonical impulse and ballast (what Jonas calls "cosmogonic eros"), then the particularities of neither natural history nor human history are direct products of the divine will (Berkovits 1973, 106). God can be held accountable for possibilities only.

Jonas contended that his myth extended Luria's. "The [Divine] contraction is total as far as power is concerned; as a whole the Infinite ceded his power to the finite and thereby wholly delivered his cause into its hands" (Jonas 1996, 142). Although some scholars of Jonas's thought have taken his statement in isolation and at face value, there is reason to qualify Jonas's assertion (Lazier 2008, 61; Margolin 2008, 241).[1] By using the term "cosmogonic eros" to describe the divine presence within nature, Jonas's God, while not interventionist, is opportunistic. "The exploitation of this opportunity for life shows that more than a neutral accident is at work. Life is its own purpose, i.e., an end actively willing itself and pursuing itself" (Jonas 1996, 173, see also 91).

Christian Wiese, who himself accepts Jonas's evaluation of his own myth in relation to Luria's, nevertheless acknowledges that Jonas was not an expert in the history of Jewish thought (Wiese 2008, 449f. and 459). Jonas's myth, in relation to theodicy and divine capacity, is a simpler, more explicit version of the Lurianic myth; *zimzum* is a radical recontextualization of the rabbinic conception of divine self-restraint, which in turn is related to the biblical notion of the hiding of God's face (Birnbaum 1989, 63 and 139f.). Taken at face value, Luria's myth limits God's actions in the world subsequent to the moment of creation. Luria's God does not have the autonomy to operate independently in this world, a world dominated by evil forces (Tishby 1942, 63f.). In the classical Kabbalah of the thirteenth-century *Zohar*, divine blessings and curses are supernal *reactions* to human deeds (Matt 1994). Luria had inherited a multitude of kabbalistic and rabbinic images pointing to a similar theological conclusion (Idel 1988, 156–172). Neither Luria's nor Jonas's God is an autonomous agent.

David Biale has noted that Luria's metaphysics have an element of determinism at their very core. "This creation is not willed by God, but is instead determined by laws over which he seemingly has no control" (Biale

1984, 324; Tishby 1942, 57; see also Scholem 1978, 137). Ironically, given Jonas' appreciation of myth, he has demythologized Luria in an attempt to distinguish his own myth from that of Luria. In the process, he diluted the strength of Luria's myth. Indeed, according to both Isaiah Tishby and Biale, *zimzum* itself was not the consequence of divine volition, whereas in Jonas's myth, it is. At least according to these readings, Luria was more radical than Jonas who explicitly acknowledges the divine will "in the beginning"![2]

One need not be a medieval kabbalist to share their understanding of a divine presence in this world which, nevertheless, lacks potency. The Hassidic tradition has preserved that theology, and one scholar has described the parallels between Jonas's myth and the writings of Rabbi Kalonimos Kalmish Shapira, a twentieth-century Hassidic master (Margolin 2008, 251f.). Abraham Joshua Heschel, himself an heir of the Hassidic masters, retrojects a similar theology in his treatment of the biblical prophets (Ronen 2009). He describes prophetic religion as *a theology of pathos* and *a religion of sympathy* (Heschel 1955, 223–228 and 313–323; Heschel 1962; Jonas describes a similar "secret sympathy," 1996, 129f.). The roots of Judaism, according to Heschel's reading, reveal religious personalities who so deeply sympathize with God's suffering that they demand of others to help God. The very nature of the bilateral covenant is that we have it in our power to ameliorate divine suffering through our acts of justice and loving kindness. God is in search of humans, to update the title of Heschel's English *magnum opus*, because God has needs that only we can fulfill (Green 2009). Autarky and impassibility, the concepts that God is self-sufficient and unaffected by human actions, are terminally Greek. The medieval myth of Kabbalah, drawing on biblical and rabbinic antecedents, posits that through the performance of the commandments Jews unite the fractured godhead and allow divine blessing to flow into this world. Alternatively, transgressions cause a trickle down, multiplier effect of evil and that explains anti-Semitic riots and expulsions. Since the Jews didn't have power in the political and physical world, their myths empowered them in the metaphysical realms (Matt 1994, 397).

Jewish Responses to Evolution

Relative to the ongoing uproar that Darwinism has generated in segments of the Christian world, the responses to Darwinism by Jewish thinkers have been proportionately fewer, less focused, and more conciliatory. Indeed, not a single Jewish theologian wrote a book-length response to Darwinism in the twentieth century. Surely, the explanation certainly does not lie with the ignorance of or indifference to science among Jewish leadership. Jews represented over 20% of the biochemistry faculties in American universities

from 1950–1970, and 80% of college-age Jews were enrolled in college in the early 1970s (Lipset and Ladd 1971, 95 and 99).

One explanation for the difference between Jewish and Protestant reactions to evolution might be the Jewish tradition of cognitive autonomy. To paraphrase Louis Ginzberg's quip about Moses Mendelssohn: eat Kosher, think Darwin. David Ruderman has characterized the relationship between Judaism and science in early modern Europe as one of independence. Jews tended to compartmentalize or separate these two independent spheres of truth (Ruderman 1995, 370). This approach to separating science and religion was endorsed by Immanuel Kant and proved to be very influential in German philosophical and religious circles.

Another part of the explanation is surely the smug satisfaction that evolution is a Christian problem. Roughly 85% of American Modern Orthodox Jews want their children to learn about evolution in school. The percentage is even higher for non-Orthodox Jews (Cherry 2006, 185f.; Heilman and Cohen 1989, 158f.). In contrast, for the past 25 years, the percentage of Americans who reject both evolution *and* deep time (the notion that the world is older than 10,000 years) has hovered consistently around 44%. Protestants, of course, have a "tradition" of *sola scriptura*. Jews, on the other hand, have a 2000-year-old commitment to midrash, a process of reinterpreting and recontextualizing the Bible—and specifically the creation story (Mishnah Hagigah 2:1). As Yeshayahu Leibowitz says, with Protestants in mind, "Jews are not bibliolaters!" (Leibowitz 1992, 11; Cherry 2003, 286).

The decisive element, though, in explaining the difference in number and tone between Jewish and Christian responses to Darwinism lies in Jewish responses to the catastrophes which have punctuated Jewish history. Darwinism presents no new difficulties to Jewish theology; it simply stretches the scale of old ones with which Jewish thought has grappled for thousands of years. Israel conquered (721 BCE), Judeans exiled (586 BCE), the Temples destroyed (586 BCE and 70 CE)—how can one face these historical realities while, simultaneously, holding fast to the propositions of divine omnipotence and providence? God must be hidden and holding back, what Heschel calls "restrained omnipotence" (1955, 377). Functionally, this image domesticates/ emasculates the Bible's warrior God who drowned the Egyptian military in the sea (Exodus 15:3). Following the expulsion from Spain in 1492, these divine characteristics received an etiological explanation through the mystical imagination of Luria. *Zimzum* explains that God is concealed in the divine residue and sparks of our world in which his potency remains unrealized. For Luria, God's omnipotence lies on the other side of the metaphysical *mechitzah*/barrier; while for Jonas, there is nothing other than this world in which and for which God has effaced himself. Jonas was no dualist either anthropologically or metaphysically. He takes the Lurianic *Eyn Sof*, the

divine infinitude "beyond/outside" the creation of this world, and lops it off with a modern flick of Ockham's razor.

Integration of Religion and Science?

To be hidden is both to be imperceptible and to desire to be found. The Bal Shem Tov, the reputed founder of the Hassidic movement around 1760, "revealed" that the Torah hints that there will be a time when the very fact of God's hiddenness will itself be hidden, and people will stop seeking (Ya'akov Yosef of Polnoye, opening homily on *Genesis*). God is garbed in the physicality of this world, and the Hassidic mission is to remind Jews of that fact so they will continue to engage in the search. Yet, if our reality unfolds within God, then our individualized perception of evil and suffering is predicated on our *mis*perception of ourselves as "not God." Interestingly, since 2009 there have been no fewer than five significant contributions by major American Jewish thinkers who invoke versions of this ontology as they grapple with issues of science and nature (Artson 2010; Goodman 2010, 169–171; Green 2010, 18; Michaelson 2009; Samuelson 2009, 168–171). Perhaps these Jewish thinkers were motivated by the recognition that the longer God remains hidden, the more likely people are to stop seeking. To put it less playfully, when 44% of Americans who identify their religion as Jewish describe their outlook as secular or somewhat secular (American Jewish Identity Survey 2001, 35–38), God's hiddenness seems to have been interpreted as absence and irrelevance. These thinkers have come to re-enchant a world that science has so successfully disenchanted (cf. Cherry 2006, 187).

Part of that project entails a shift away from the Kantian separation between religion and science. Although this was the preferred model for the German-American Reform theologians in the nineteenth century, the more mystically influenced theologians were always more amenable to understanding that God worked in and through human history in the same way that God worked in and through natural history (Cherry 2003, 250–263). This approach, involving a robust dialogue between science and religion, is well rooted in early rabbinic sources. Just as God daily renews the act of creation—a near dogma enshrined in the daily liturgy—so, too, does God's revelation from Sinai never cease (Babylonian Talmud Sannhedrin 17a and Rashi on Deuteronomy 5:18). As Berkovits, Jonas, and several contemporary Jewish thinkers understand, integrating science and religion both devalues the exhaustive explanatory claims of science and bestows the compelling credibility of science onto religion.

Recently there have also been several Christian responses to evolutionary theory whose components bear a striking resemblance to elements in traditional Jewish thought. The Hebrew term *zimzum* is being used by

these Christian theologians in a conscious dialogue with Lurianic theology (e.g., Haught 2000, 45–56 and 105–120; Keller 2003, 234; Moltmann 1985, 88). Perhaps this should not be surprising. Jews have had, after all, relatively more motivation than Christians to invest theological energy in issues of providence and theodicy. In our contemporary world, Christian appropriation of Hebrew terms and Jewish theologies is an act of interfaith flattery.

There is, indeed, something prophetic in traditional Jewish thought's capacity to address the theological challenges of evolution. Jewish history, *ma'aseh avot*, has become paradigmatic for humanity, *siman la'vanim*. There is an increasing perception that humanity is a surviving remnant in a dangerous world.[3] We all aspire to protect our homelands from tragedies that would lead to exile and extinction. Jewish theology, for more than 2000 years, has wrestled with that perception and attempted to articulate its religious implications and ethical demands. Under the threat of omnicide, we are all Jews.

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Notes

1. Shoshana Ronen (2009) agrees that Jonas did not appreciate the extent to which the denial of omnipotence is present in traditional Jewish thought.
2. To be sure, there are deep and pervasive differences between Lurianic cosmology and Jonas's myth of natural history. My fundamental point is that functionally, for both Jewish thinkers, the typology of suffering is explicable because of the divine incapacity to ameliorate suffering in our world.
3. This point becomes the focus of Hans Jonas's (1980) essay, "The Heuristics of Fear."

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