

# Open Letter to Rabbi Slifkin

From Toriah.com

BS"D: 14 Kislev, 5767 (by Dr. Yoel Ostroff; work in progress)

See Science Headlines.

## Contents

- 1 Background to the Letter
  - 1.1 Meta-Natural Creation
  - 1.2 Is there "Compelling" Evidence for Naturalistic Evolution?
  - 1.3 Caveats
- 2 Methodological Naturalism
  - 2.1 The Global Scientific Community
  - 2.2 The Primacy of Torah
  - 2.3 Rabbi Slifkin, Darwin and Modified Monkeys
- 3 Rabbi Slifkin's book fundamentally misrepresents the Rambam on core principles
- 4 Three Examples of the Poor Science in Challenge
  - 4.1 The Panda's Thumb (see "Panda's Thumb" for details)
  - 4.2 The Fraud of Haeckel's Embryos
  - 4.3 No Detailed Testable Darwinian Pathways
- 5 The Fossil record - Bad news for Darwin
- 6 What frightens a Naturalist? Answer: The meta-natural
- 7 R. Slifkin refuses to discuss the scientific errors in his books
- 8 R. Slifkin unresponsive to attempts at dialogue before the Ban
- 9 Open Letter to Rabbi Slifkin
- 10 History
- 11 Responses to Rabbi Slifkin by FKM
  - 11.1 Rabbi Slifkin's reponse to an offer
- 12 References
- 13 Links

## Background to the Letter

On 11 September 2006, Rabbi Nathan Slifkin emailed me with 12 questions for Rav Shlomo Miller *shlita*, an eminent Rosh Kollel in Toronto (see "The Slifkin Affair" and "Slifkin - Coffer Debate" at [toriah.com/wiki](http://toriah.com/wiki)).

In his email, Rabbi Slifkin asked why Rav Miller regards his books as compromising core Torah principles.

Rabbi Slifkin also asked how the six day creation week described in the first few chapters of the Torah can be reconciled with the scientific evidence for evolution such as the fossil record.

It is a core truth of Torah that the mature universe was created directly by Divine fiat, and not through the system of nature currently operating. Rabbi Slifkin disagrees with this core principle. This is the issue of **agency**. What is the **agency** of creation? Rabbi Slifkin believes that the agent was **naturalistic** Darwinian evolution, i.e. he believes that we are modified monkeys that evolved via chance natural mechanisms such as random mutation and natural selection - mechanisms that are supposedly still operating and that can account, somehow, for complex organs such as wings, eyes and the mammalian brain.

It is the **naturalistic content** in Rabbi Slifkin's books that is fundamentally at odds with the Torah (more than the specifics such as the length of the actual creation time period). While Rabbi Slifkin believes that the evidence for his position is "compelling", we will see that his approach has no basis in empirical science and is a metaphysical falsehood. To put it as succinctly as possible, we make *kiddush* on *Shabbos* to commemorate the direct creation of the universe by Divine fiat – not the evolution of modified monkeys via the random forces of nature.

Currently, the most influential intellectuals do not believe in G-d, whereas Rabbi Slifkin does. However, Rabbi Slifkin concedes to the evolutionary materialists that the "randomness of Darwinian evolution" is the "ideal means" for explaining the marvels of life.

Darwinian Naturalism	Rabbi Slifkin's books (emphasis added)
<p><b>Charles Darwin:</b> If I were convinced that I required such additions to the theory of natural selection, I would reject it as <b>rubbish</b>. ... I would give nothing for the theory of natural selection, if it requires <b>miraculous</b> additions at any one stage of descent.</p> <p><b>Richard Dawkins</b> (University of Oxford) in <b>The Blind Watchmaker:</b> In Darwin’s view the whole point of the theory of evolution by natural selection was that it provided a non-miraculous account of the existence of complex adaptations. ... For <b>Darwin</b>, any evolution that had to be <b>helped over the jumps by God</b> was not evolution at all.<small>[&lt;cite_link_label_group-&gt;</small></p>	<p><b>Rabbi Slifkin:</b> “Naturalistic Darwinian evolution is fully compatible with religion” (<i>Challenge of Creation</i>, pg. 294). “[Darwin's] blind-watchmaker thesis need not be incompatible with God” (<i>Science of Torah</i>, pg. 193; <i>Challenge of Creation</i> pg. 297).</p> <p><b>Rabbi Slifkin:</b> "It is abundantly clear from all this that the <b>randomness of Darwinian evolution</b> poses no theological problem whatsoever. Judaism has no problem with processes that appear to be random, and in fact it sees them as an <b>ideal means</b> via which God dynamically exerts His will." (<i>Challenge</i>, p293).</p> <p><b>Rabbi Slifkin:</b> "Rabbi Simcha Zissel Ze’ev ... argued that Rabbi Salanter was such a refined human being that nobody who encountered him could have entertained the idea that he <b>evolved from a monkey</b>. But those who have studied biology and anthropology – the science of human origins – find <b>compelling</b> reason to believe this." (<i>Challenge of</i></p>

Creation, 2006, p317).

Consider the following question:

How did the Cosmos and life within it originate?

Rabbi Slifkin and the evolutionists believe that any explanation for the origin of life must appeal solely to (a) chance and (b) natural processes currently operating. According to the evolutionists one may never appeal **directly** to the **meta-natural** (i.e. G-d).

In his books, Rabbi Slifkin states that it is actually preferable to say that life originated naturalistically and he ridicules the straightforward account in the Genesis text by saying (rather inelegantly) that "zapping" things into being is not reasonable.<sup>[Cite error: Ran out of custom link labels for group "". Define more in the [[MediaWiki:cite\_link\_label\_group-]] message.]</sup> Rabbi Slifkin says this all without being able to produce **any** detailed testable Darwinian pathways (see later). This is why Rabbi Slifkin adopts Darwin's Blind Watchmaker thesis and this is why he believes that the first man was a "modified monkey" produced by the random forces of nature.

## Meta-Natural Creation

So Rabbi Slifkin is committed to Naturalism, i.e. the hypothesis that the combination of (a) chance and (b) natural mechanisms can account for the marvels of life. The only alternative is something that is neither chance nor nature but transcends both. I call the alternative to nature and chance **meta-natural creation**. This kind of explanation for the origin of the marvels of life involves the plan and purpose of a transcendental Creator as described in the first chapter of the Torah.

### Rambam on meta-natural creation (MN 1;67):

רמב"ם מ"נ א: וינח ביום השביעי [שמות כ] ... אמרו חכמים ז"ל: וינח לעולמו ביום השביעי [בראשית רבה פרשה י פסקא יב] כלומר: פסקה הבריאה בו. ויהיה עניינו הניח או התמיד את המציאות במצב שהיא בו ביום השביעי. כלומר: כי בכל יום מן הששה היו מתחדשים בו חדשות מחוץ לטבע הזה היציב המצוי עתה במציאות בכללותה, וביום השביעי התמיד הדבר ונתייצב כפי שהוא עתה.

On **each day** of the six day creation week, novel entities were formed **outside of the system of nature currently in operation** and, on the seventh day (*Shabbos*), the state of the world became lasting and established just as it is at present.

### Maharal (Be'er haGola, p83, second column, last paragraph)

מהר"ל באר הגולה באר הרביעי דף פ"ג דע כי הוא יתברך הוציא את הנמצאים כולם לפעל המציאות בששת ימי בראשית בעצמו ובכבודו, לא ע"י שליח הוא הטבע. כמו שהיה אחר ששת ימי בראשית שהש"י

מנהיג את עולמו ע"י השליח והוא הטבע.

Know that He, may His name be blessed, caused all of reality to materialize into existence during the six days of creation Himself, in His own Glory (b'chvodo u'veatzmo) **and not through the agency of nature**, as opposed to the period which ensues after the six days of creation in which Hashem, may His name be blessed, governs his creation via the intermediary of nature.

Contra Rabbi Slifkin, and according to the Rambam, it is a core truth of Torah that our mature universe (not just the fundamental constituents of matter) originated **meta-naturally**, i.e. the universe was not brought into being through the intermediary of nature. Rather, the currently operating system of nature was itself brought into being directly by Divine decree. The novel creative process (חידוש העולם) lasted for a period of six days and then ceased on the seventh (see sequel for further development of this idea). These ideas permeate the account of creation in the Torah, *Chazal* and the *Rishonim*.

**Note:** It's as simple as that. Either you believe that we are here, somehow, by apparently unguided random naturalistic mechanisms (Rabbi Slifkin)<sup>[Cite error: Ran out of custom link labels for group "". Define more in the [[MediaWiki:cite\_link\_label\_group-]] message.]</sup> or you believe that the marvels of life are best accounted for by plan-and-purpose meta-natural creation solely by Divine decree (the first chapter of the Torah).

Many of the negative aspects of the "The Slifkin Affair" follow from Rabbi Slifkin's reliance on Darwin over the primacy of Torah. It is because Rabbi Slifkin believes that there is "compelling" evidence for naturalistic evolution that his approach involves the following elements and consequences.

- Rabbi Slifkin dismisses the first chapter of the Torah as a total allegory (<http://www.toriah.org/misc/RNS/topics/challenge-quotes.htm>) .
- Rabbi Slifkin is forced to allegorize creation because the first chapter of the Torah is an openly meta-natural account of the historical creation solely via Divine decree which conflicts with the Darwinian account. They cannot both be true and Rabbi Slifkin opts for Darwin.
- Rabbi Slifkin believes that we are "modified monkeys". Thus he is forced to treat allegorically those verses (Gen. 1.26 and 2.7) which describe the meta-natural creation in the image of G-d of the first couple (*Adam* and *Chava*) who are the ancestors of all mankind.
- Obviously some kind of warrant is needed for such a dramatic and total departure from our authentic *mesorah*.
- In his book *Challenge* (see "About The Book"), Rabbi Slifkin puts the Rambam front and center as the warrant for his approach.
- However, Rabbi Slifkin has fundamentally misrepresented the Rambam. The Rambam upholds meta-natural creation as a fundamental principle of Torah encoded in the *mitzvah* of *Shabbos*.
- There are thus good reasons why leading Torah authorities (<http://toriah.org/misc/RNS/topics/rabbis.htm>) have pointed out that Rabbi Slifkin's attempt to reconcile the first chapter of the Torah to Darwin tampers with our mesorah and compromises core Jewish beliefs. *Chumash Bereishis* is elegant testimony to the

meta-natural creation of the universe by Divine decree over the six day creation week as described in the the Torah.

## Is there "Compelling" Evidence for Naturalistic Evolution?

It is Rabbi's Slifkin's beliefs about the nature of the evidence that must now be assessed. Is the evidence truly compelling or not?

In an attempt to engage Rabbi Slifkin on the issue of the evidence, I selected three scientific topics in his books where the science in his book is deeply problematic (see sequel). The problems that I identify are not just my private opinion. I back it up with detailed citations from the **published scientific literature**. Each problem raised is not just of minor interest. Rather, the problems raised strike at the very heart of the naturalistic enterprise. Rabbi Slifkin's response was to refuse any further discussion of the scientific errors in his books (see sequel).

It is not just naive fundamentalists who find Rabbi Slifkin's quoted "proofs" for evolution less than "compelling". Mathematician (and agnostic) David Berlinski puts it like this:

**Mathematician David Berlinski:**"The suggestion that Darwin's theory of evolution is like theories in the serious sciences – quantum electrodynamics, say – is grotesque. Quantum electrodynamics is accurate to thirteen unyielding decimal places. Darwin's theory makes no tight quantitative predictions at all. ... The astonishing and irreducible complexity of various cellular structures has not yet successfully been described, let alone explained. ... A great many species enter the fossil record trailing no obvious ancestors and depart for Valhalla leaving no obvious descendants. ... Tens of thousands of fruit flies have come and gone in laboratory experiments, and every last one of them has remained a fruit fly to the end, all efforts to see the miracle of speciation unavailing. (Excerpts from "All Those Darwinian Doubts (<http://www.toriah.org/science/evolution/berlinski-darwinian-doubts.htm>) ", Wichita Eagle, March 9, 2005)

As Berkeley law professor Phillip Johnson has said, Evolutionists need to constantly proclaim to the public and an uncritical press that "evolution is a fact". They have to do that. Change that to "evolution is a philosophy" and the game is over.

## Caveats

A few caveats are in order before proceeding. I quote atheistic evolutionists and intelligent design theorists. The quotes from these sources are for their empirical scientific content not for their theological views (whether atheistic or creationist). Hopefully the distinction will be clear from the context.

Almost all the authorities that I cite are evolutionists who do not agree with my views on creation. However, I quote these sources in order to establish the empirical facts of the matter independently of the *interpretations* given by these authorities to the *facts*. I do this to show that the actual empirical data can be interpreted as well

or better within a meta-natural framework. I document the precise source of the quotation so that readers can examine these references for themselves. For each quote provided there are many more that could have been provided to establish the facts of the matter. For brevity, I provide just one or two quotes to indicate that what I assert is not just my personal opinion but is to be found in the published scientific literature.

I do not question the uniformity and invariance of the basic laws of physics. I merely state that these laws have been in full operation only since the **end of the creation period**. At the end of the account of the creation week, the Torah describes how the Creator brought the universe to its destined conclusion. Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch explains that one meaning of the word **ויכלו** is **תכלית (purpose)**:

**Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch, Chumash Bereishis 2:1:** ויכלו השמים והארץ וכל צבאם. This verse is the concluding statement of the history of Creation, and it parallels the opening statement. The opening of the Creation history shows us heaven and earth, and proclaims of them: **בראשית!** From the very beginning God created these! Now the conclusion again shows us heaven and earth, and proclaims of them: **ויכלו!** Heaven and earth were brought to this completion! They had not always existed, but, rather, were brought into existence. And before they were brought into existence, they existed as an intention in the thought of their Creator. The heaven and the earth and all their host, were, at one time, merely a thought in the mind of their Creator, and the actualization of this thought was the purpose of their creation. The **cause** of the existence of heaven and earth **does not lie in themselves**; they are not the cause of their having come into existence – a view that is self-contradictory, irrational and absurd! The cause of their existence lies outside of themselves; and they are **not the result of some force working blindly**, but the **creative work of a lone Creator, Who created them with intention and purpose, ויכלו!**

The Sages define this concept in greater clarity: **המעשים היו מותחין והולכים** (Bereishis Rabbah 10:5), the matter and forces which had been called into existence were in a state of continuous development – until God called out **ויכלו!** and set a limit to their development. He acted as **שקי** – i.e., **שאמר לעולמו די**; He called out to His world **די** (Enough!). **שאלמלא אמר לשמים וארץ די עד עכשיו היו מותחין והולכין**. “Had He not said to heaven and earth: ‘Enough!’ they would still today be in a state of continuous development” (ibid. 46:2). (**כלה** is also synonymous with **כלא**, and means “to stop, restrain, fence in,” as in **לא יכלה ממך** (below, 23:6); **ואת בניהם כלו בבית** (Shmuel I, 6:10). These are all different nuances of the same concept: to set a limit.)

The **ending** of creation, the **cessation of formation of new creations** – in a word: the present Sabbath of creation – is a greater revelation of the Creator than the very existence of heaven and earth. If, as the **materialistic outlook on the world** has taught throughout the ages, the origin of the world was due to physical causes not founded on thought and free will; if the world originated from forces of nature that are inherent in the world – why, then, has there been a Sabbath in creation for thousands of years? **Why have these forces ceased to function and to produce with great power new creations?** Why has the cause – which still exists – ceased producing the effect? **What has put an end to its creative power?** We see that for generations upon generations creation has ceased, and Sabbath has reigned in the world. This teaches us that the present Sabbath was preceded by purposeful, all-powerful creative activity, and that the universe is **not** a physical result of **blind forces of nature**, but a moral work of a Creator endowed with supreme wisdom, free will, and unlimited power.

To extrapolate the laws and constants that we observe today backwards to an open-ended and unobserved past, without being able to test the assumption of invariance, is to depart from the domain of the empirical to that of wishful speculation in support of a materialistic philosophy. All the more so when such extrapolations are plagued by the need to invent untestable hypothetical entities in order to avoid serious anomalies in the data.

A final caveat is that nothing that is said should be seen as a criticism of Rabbi Slifkin's person. If I am critical of his views it is only because he has offered his views to the public as an authentic Jewish response on fundamental issues. It is those views that I question.

I provide (below) an introduction for the benefit of the general reader as well as a response to Rabbi Slifkin's latest letter (which we will update should there be any significant new developments). Rabbi Slifkin is welcome to respond at his website [zootorah.org](http://zootorah.org).

## Methodological Naturalism

Naturalism is an untested assumption about the way in which the world originated. It is the doctrine adopted by evolutionists that matter and energy is all that exists. Defenders of Naturalism usually add the adjective "methodological" to distinguish methodological naturalism from "ontological" naturalism (the doctrine that G-d does not exist, the only existing entity being the material universe). The distinction is empty. It is just a politically correct way of preventing the alienation of believers who are open to theistic evolution. But, for the practice of science, it is a distinction without much of a difference.

Rabbi Slifkin follows evolutionary Naturalism in this respect. Consider the question: "How did the Cosmos and life within it originate? The evolutionists will answer that any explanation for the origin of life must be by purely random naturalistic mechanisms. One may never appeal **directly** to the meta-natural (i.e. G-d). This is why Rabbi Slifkin adopts Darwin's Blind Watchmaker thesis (as we saw).

However, the assumption that random naturalistic forces can account for the origin of the marvels of life such as the wing, the eye or the mammalian brain is an untested presupposition. This is why evolution is a philosophy and not empirical science.

What is being critiqued here is not all of science. The **operational sciences** (e.g. that get us to the moon and map the human genome) are responsible for some impressive technological triumphs. Post-creation, it makes sense to rely on the invariance of the laws of nature; in fact, it is the Creator who guarantees the objectivity and rationality of nature (post-creation) that makes Scientific discovery possible in the first place.

Mapping the human genome (operational science) is one thing. Claiming that we know how the rich information structures in the human genome arose naturalistically (Origin Sciences) is something else. Such claims are wishful thinking as admitted by the most committed evolutionists (see sequel).

## The Global Scientific Community

In his email discussion with me (see earlier quotes) Rabbi Slifkin appeals to the authority of the global scientific community for the reliability of the presentation of the science in his books.

It is indeed true that the vast majority of scientists accept the Darwinian theory of evolution. However, one would like to think that Science is not a matter of belief established by authority, but a matter of evidence that can be subjected to the test of observation and objective reasoning.

Stephen Jay Gould once called David Raup "the world's most brilliant paleontologist". Raup is a committed evolutionist and a firm believer in evolution. This makes the following statement in the journal **Science** (1981) quite startling:

**David Raup:** "A large number of well-trained scientists outside of evolutionary biology and paleontology have unfortunately gotten the idea that the fossil record is far more Darwinian than it is. This probably comes from the **oversimplification** inevitable in secondary sources: low-level textbooks, semi-popular articles, and so on. Also, there is probably some **wishful thinking** involved. In the years after Darwin, his advocates hoped to find predictable progressions. In general these have not been found yet the optimism has died hard, and some **pure fantasy** has crept into textbooks." (Letter by David Raup, Field Museum of Natural History Chicago, in **Science**, v213, 17 July 1981, p.289, emphasis added)

The appeal to the global scientific community does not work if that community is not itself aware of the evidence and bases its views on wishful thinking and text-book distortions (of the type that occur, unwittingly, in Rabbi Slifkin's books).

Naturalistic origin theories are widely advertised to be a fact, as firmly established as the shape of the earth. Defenders of these theories insist that there is no scientific controversy over these facts. Those who criticize the naturalistic origin theories are typically accused of being ignorant or naive fundamentalists. But, once we investigate the technical writings of the evolutionists themselves a little more carefully, the truth turns out to be vastly different (see sequel). In his famous work on the philosophy of science, Karl Popper wrote:

**Karl Popper:** "Science does not rest on solid bedrock. The bold structure of its theories rises, as it were, above a swamp. It is like a building erected on piles. The piles are driven down from above into the swamp, but not down to any natural or "given" base; and if we stop driving the piles deeper, it is not because we have reached firm ground. We simply stop when we are satisfied that the piles are firm enough to carry the structure, at least for the time being." (Karl Popper, *The Logic of Scientific Discovery*, Routledge Classics, 1959, reprinted 2000, p111)

## The Primacy of Torah

If what Popper writes is true about the foundation of all science, then his point holds even more clearly in the case of the naturalistic origin sciences which are often based on "wishful thinking" and "pure fantasy" (see the Raup quote).

Materialists have difficulty explaining why the cosmos is rational and fine-tuned for life and discovery in an empty, random and godless world. They have to commit to untested presuppositions such as their belief in the **open-ended** invariance of natural laws to a distant and unobserved past. Such presuppositions are assumptions that have no empirical support.

It is the primacy of the blueprint for the universe - Torah - that better accounts for the presuppositions we are forced to adopt when doing science. A Torah individual sees in the primacy of Torah full epistemological and ontological support for his engagement with the operational sciences.

As the late Richard Weaver (University of Chicago) pointed out, laymen like myself will not usually want to question the facts assembled by qualified scientists (although what constitutes a fact is itself debatable). However, as he points out, if we are to be convinced that we are byproducts of Darwin's blind watchmaker thesis, then we have the right to ask about the connection between the factual evidence and the conclusion, especially when that connection is not apparent and does not follow the necessary laws of thought. We have the right to ask questions about the way in which the facts have been handled and whether all the relevant facts have been taken into consideration.<sup>[Cite error: Ran out of custom link labels for group "". Define more in the [[MediaWiki:cite\_link\_label\_group-]] message.]</sup> These questions are never raised, let alone answered, by Rabbi Slifkin.

## Rabbi Slifkin, Darwin and Modified Monkeys

The first page of Rabbi Slifkin's book *Challenge* has an enthusiastic approbation by the prominent pro-Darwinist Michael Ruse (Florida State University). Ruse praises Rabbi Slifkin for "his absolute devotion to the faith of his fathers". This is undoubtedly so. But, Ruse's beliefs are antithetical to Torah. Elsewhere, Ruse has written:

**Michael Ruse:** "The time has come to take seriously the fact that we humans are **modified monkeys**, not the favored Creation of a Benevolent God on the Sixth Day."<sup>[Cite error: Ran out of custom link labels for group "". Define more in the [[MediaWiki:cite\_link\_label\_group-]] message.]</sup>

"As evolutionists, we see that no justification [for ethical behavior] of the traditional kind is possible. Morality, or more strictly our belief in morality, is merely an adaptation put in place to further our reproductive ends. Hence the basis of ethics does not lie in God's will. ... In an important sense, **ethics as we understand it is an illusion fobbed off on us by our genes** to get us to cooperate. It is without external grounding. Like Macbeth's dagger, it serves a powerful purpose without existing in substance."<sup>[Cite error: Ran</sup>

out of custom link labels for group "". Define more in the [[MediaWiki:cite\_link\_label\_group-]] message.]

**Rabbi Slifkin:** "Rabbi Simcha Zissel Ze'ev ... argued that Rabbi Salanter was such a refined human being that nobody who encountered him could have entertained the idea that he **evolved** from a **monkey**. But those who have studied biology and anthropology – the science of human origins – find **compelling** reason to believe this." (*Challenge of Creation*, 2006, p317, emphasis added).

The placement of the Ruse quotes together with the Slifkin quote is not an attempt at guilt by association. Ruse obviously has his own agenda in endorsing the book. My question is: Why does a Darwinian like Ruse have such high praise for Rabbi Slifkin's religiosity? Despite the disagreements between Ruse and Rabbi Slifkin, the areas of agreement are enormous and important to our thesis. Contra Ruse's atheistic formulations (see "Moral Darwinism (<http://toriah.org/misc/RNS/topics/darwin-and-genocide.htm>)"), Rabbi Slifkin struggles to argue that there is a G-d behind evolution's random processes, vestigial organs, embryological debris (such as Haeckel's embryos) and the poorly designed Panda's thumb (more on Haeckel and the Panda's thumb later).

Rabbi Slifkin's naturalistic approach forces him into theological conundrums. It is glaringly difficult to see how Darwin's blind watchmaker thesis ("we are here as the result of **unguided** processes that did not have us in mind") can be squared with Biblical creation (which, if nothing else, describes a **guided** process that did have us in mind).

## Rabbi Slifkin's book fundamentally misrepresents the Rambam on core principles

For the Rambam, חידוש העולם (i.e. meta-natural creation solely by Divine fiat) happens all six days of the Creation Week. Consider the following prooftexts:

### **Rabbi Slifkin:**

“According to the Rambam most of the account of *Adam* in Genesis is not a historical account of an individual but instead a portrayal of the role of man in the world” (*Challenge* p339). [In particular, Slifkin allegorizes Gen. 1.26 and Gen. 2.7].

“Thus [according to Rambam] the first three chapters of Genesis are for the most part speaking about the archetypal nature of man and his life in this world rather than a historical account of a particular person's life” (*Challenge* p342).

### **Rambam**

**Rambam on meta-natural creation** (MN 1;67): רמב"ם מ"נ א:סז בכל יום מן הששה היו מתחדשים בו חידושות מחוץ לטבע הזה המצוי עתה בכללותה, וביום השביעי התמיד הדבר ונתיצב כפי שהוא עתה  
On each day of the six day creation week, novel entities were formed **outside of the system of nature**

currently in operation and, on the seventh day (Shabbos), the state of the world become lasting and established just as it is at present.

**Rambam MN 2.30:** The account of the six days of creation contains, in reference to the creation of man, the statement: “Male and female created he them” (1:27), and concludes with the words: “Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them” (2:1), and yet the portion which follows describes the creation of Chava from Adam, the tree of life, and the tree of knowledge, the history of the serpent and the events connected therewith, and all this as having taken place after Adam had been placed in the Garden of Eden. **All our Sages agree that this took place on the sixth day, and that nothing new was created after the close of the six days.** None of the things mentioned above is therefore impossible, **because the laws of Nature were then not yet permanently fixed.**

**Abarbanel**, Commentary to Beresishis p86, with reference to MN 2:30: Thus it is clearly evident from the aforementioned statements that the opinion of the Rav [Rambam] was ... that all which is mentioned **regarding the activity of the six days**, from the creation of the heavens and the earth, and all of their phenomena, and the creation of Adam and his wife, up until [the passage of] va'yechulu **posses no allegory whatsoever for everything was understood by him as literal** [אין בהם משל כלל כי היה אצלו הכל] [כפשוטו]. Therefore, you see that the Rav has ... made a concerted effort to support the principle of absolute creation [חידוש המוחלט] and accepted all of the verses literally.

**Rambam MN 2.31:** רמב"ם מ"נ ב:לא ולפיכך נצטוינו בקידוש היום הזה כדי שיתבסס יסוד חידוש העולם ... וכאשר ישאלו מה טעם הדבר, תהיה התשובה כי ששת ימים עשה ה'

Therefore, we are commanded in the sanctification of this day (Shabbos) in order to establish the **foundational principle of novel [meta-natural] creation** ... if it is asked what is the the cause [for our resting on Shabbos] the answer is “for in six days Hashem made [heavens and earth](Ex. 20:11).

**Abarbanel** to MN II:31: “And the Rav (Rambam) with this, elaborates what he stated at the end of chapter 29 and chapter 30 of this section [section II of *Moreh Nevuchim*], which is that the true *chiddush* [i.e. meta-natural creation] is what is described in the verses regarding the **six days of creation** ... and it is meant entirely literally and therefore the seventh day is the day of rest to demonstrate that after all was completed on the sixth day, nothing more was created ... and in order to testify to this great thing, **Shabbos** was established as the seventh day to hint at and make known that absolutely nothing was created **after the sixth day.**

Contra Rabbi Slifkin, and according to the Rambam, it is a core truth of Torah (יסוד חידוש העולם) that our mature universe (not just the fundamental constituents of matter) originated **meta-naturally**:

- i.e. the universe was not brought into being through the intermediary of nature. Rather, the currently operating system of nature was itself brought into being directly by Divine decree.
- The novel creative process (חידוש העולם) lasted for a period of six days and then ceased on the seventh.
- The first man and woman (*Adam* and *Chava*) – the ancestors of all mankind – were created meta-naturally on the sixth day in the image of G-d. The mitzvah of Shabbos, every seventh day, commemorates the

fundamental principle of the historical meta-natural creation week described in the Torah.

- The laws of nature that prevail today were themselves in the process of formation during the six day creation week. Hence we are unable to use the currently observed laws to extrapolate back into the creation period (Moreh Nevuchim II:17).

**Note:** Given the forgoing analysis of the Rambam we see why the major thrust of Rabbi Slifkin's book *Challenge* has been fundamentally undermined as a metaphysical falsehood. When Rabbi Slifkin promotes the idea that man is a modified monkey, or when he writes that "Naturalistic Darwinian evolution is fully compatible with religion" (*Challenge of Creation*, 2006, p294) or that "the blind-watchmaker thesis need not be incompatible with G-d" (*Challenge of Creation* pg. 297) he has thereby undermined the *mitzvah* of *Shabbos*.

For a more detailed presentation, see the "Slifkin - Coffer Debate" where Rabbi Slifkin's reaction to these problems is posted and discussed.

I brought some of the prooftexts from the Rambam to Rabbi Slifkin's attention over two years ago (e.g see "Rambam MN III:50 (<http://toriah.org/misc/RNS/aishdas-avodah/2006-09-06-v13n091-03.htm>) "). It is a great pity that Rabbi Slifkin has been unresponsive to these concerns.

## Three Examples of the Poor Science in *Challenge*

We saw above that Rabbi Slifkin thinks the evidence for his "modified monkeys" thesis to be "compelling". I chose three examples to illustrate why this is not so and brought these examples to Rabbi Slifkin's attention. In fact there are many more scientific errors in his books, but Rabbi Slifkin has refused to discuss them.

All three examples are matters (a) mentioned in his book and (b) the published scientific literature has either shown these evidences to be wishful thinking or even fraudulent. Rather than thanking me for showing him these errors (errors which will cause his readers to be misled on important Torah principles) Rabbi Slifkin's response has been to avoid getting into the details of the challenge by appealing to the authority of the global scientific community as discussed above.

**The Panda's Thumb** (see "**Panda's Thumb** (<http://www.toriah.org/misc/RNS/topics/Challenge-303-Panda.htm>) " for details)

Following the late Steven J. Gould (Harvard) in his book "The Panda's Thumb" (1980), Rabbi Slifkin writes in *Challenge* that the Panda's thumb is an inefficient, poorly designed organ, showing the chance tinkering of evolution at work.

However, 19 years after Gould's book, scientists writing in **Nature** (1999) show that the Panda's thumb is a well-designed "**extraordinary manipulation system**". It thus took 19 years before Gould's wishful thinking masquerading as fact was exposed (which also serves as a warning to be cautious about other supposed

examples of poor design).

This is an important example. Steven J. Gould used the Panda's Thumb as one of three major evidences for common ancestry (the so-called "fact" of evolution). The supposedly poor design and imperfection of the thumb indicates (in Gould's opinion) that there was no Creator at work. Gould wrote:

"I have tried to weld these essays into an integrated whole by organizing them into eight sections. The first on pandas, turtles and anglerfish, illustrates why we can be **confident** that evolution occurred. [Prologue to "Panda's Thumb", page 12-13, emphasis added].

Gould attempted to show that nature is an "an excellent tinkerer, not a divine artificer", i.e. he was trying to show that nature has the power to create contrivances such as the Panda's Thumb without the need for the Creator. It's a pity that the late Steven J. Gould (both Jewish and a kohen) could be so profoundly wrong.

### The Fraud of Haeckel's Embryos

I wrote to Rabbi Slifkin as follows (November 20, 2006):

Dear R. Nossen ... For example, in your book *Science of Torah* (p151-152) you quote Futuyama (who bases himself on Haeckel's embryos) as evidence for the evolution of a human from a fish. As you point out this example is supposedly solid evidence for common ancestry. In fact, until recently, Haeckel's embryos were a classic textbook proof for common ancestry and Darwin considered the embryological evidence the very best evidence for common ancestry.

However, an international team of embryologists exposed this fraud (as reported in "**Haeckel's Embryos: Fraud Rediscovered**", **Science**, 1997). Likewise, the late Steven J. Gould (a prominent evolutionist at Harvard University) wrote in March 2000 that "Haeckel had exaggerated the similarities by idealization and omissions ... in a procedure that can only be called fraudulent".

Haeckel's embryos, like so many other textbook icons of evolution, misrepresent the truth. Berkeley law professor Phillip Johnson wrote in the Wall Street Journal (1999) that: "When our leading scientists have to resort to the sort of distortions that would land stock promoters in jail, you know they are in trouble". Evolutionists constantly proclaim to the public and an uncritical press that "evolution is a fact". They have to do this. Change that to "evolution is a philosophy" and the game is over. ...

So, your evidence of Haeckel's embryos (in the Futuyama quote in your book) for common ancestry turns out to be based on a fraud.

Rabbi Slifkin wrote back (also on November 20, 2006):

Presumably because one fraud does not mean that the entire proposal is false. Just as there are fraudulent "proofs" of the Torah's divine origins - I don't think that you would accept that these frauds show that Torah is not divine. Sincerely, Natan Slifkin.

True! At face value. But then we would have to look at the remaining evidence, and this Rabbi Slifkin has refused to do. It is nice to see, however, that he acknowledges that Darwin's greatest proof for evolution is a fraud. So what other "proofs" are there?

However, there is another point to be made that I raised with Rabbi Slifkin that makes Haeckel's embryos worse than a normal proof that fails. At the 1995 Dover trial, the molecular biologist Michael Behe pointed out the following (in section 3.2 of his deposition).

### **Michael Behe - The problem of falsification - Expert Witness Dover Trial 2005**

There are other major difficulties and problems for Darwin's theory as well. One is the great difficulty in falsifying it. That is, in finding a fact of nature that would be taken by Darwinists as evidence against their theory. For example, for many years in biology textbooks students were shown drawings of vertebrate embryos that looked remarkably similar. The embryos were drawn by the 19th century embryologist Ernst Haeckel, an admirer of Darwin. The striking similarity was thought to strongly support Darwin's theory, that the different classes of vertebrates descended by natural selection from a common ancestor. The rationale for thinking so was given in the widely-used, college-level textbook *Molecular Biology of the Cell*, where president of the *National Academy of Sciences* Bruce Alberts and other co-authors [one a Nobel Prize Winner] wrote that:

Early developmental stages of animals whose adult forms appear radically different are often surprisingly similar... Such observations are not difficult to understand.... The early cells of an embryo are like cards at the bottom of a house of cards—a great deal depends on them, and even small changes in their properties are likely to result in disaster.

In other words, evolution would be expected to conserve the structure of the early embryos, inherited from a common ancestor. Natural selection would not be expected to change such a "locked-in", fundamental structure.

However, in 1997 an international team led by the British embryologist Michael Richardson showed that Haeckel's drawing were very misleading, and that there were significant differences between the embryos. A story entitled "Haeckel's Embryos: Fraud Rediscovered" in the journal *Science* put it this way:

Not only did Haeckel add or omit features ... but he also fudges the scale to exaggerate similarities among species, even when there were 10-fold differences in size. Haeckel further blurred differences by neglecting to name the species in most cases, as if one representative was accurate for an entire group of animals. In reality ... even closely related embryos such as those of fish vary quite a bit.

Nonetheless, the discovery that the embryos looked very different from what they were pictured in textbooks did not at all cause Bruce Alberts or other scientists to question Darwinian theory. Yet if a theory is equally compatible with one result (nearly identical embryos) and its opposite (variable embryos) than how can it be rigorously tested? If Darwinian theory is compatible with false data, such as the original drawings of Haeckel, then how can we know if the theory is wrong? A story from the *New York Times*, "Biology Text Illustrations More Fiction Than Fact" (which is a sidebar in the longer story "Darwin vs. Design: Evolutionists' New Battle"), concerning the case of Haeckel's embryos is included as Exhibit 6.46

### **No Detailed Testable Darwinian Pathways**

In his books Rabbi Slifkin admits that there is controversy over the mechanism of evolution. Nevertheless, Rabbi Slifkin remains confident that non-controversial naturalistic explanations will be found. Such an approach significantly understates the problem. The problem is so large that it threatens to undermine the whole Darwinian structure including the so-called "fact" of evolution ("common descent").

For example, evolutionists routinely proclaim that common ancestry is a fact as certain as the sphericity of the earth. However, without a detailed testable Darwinian pathway, how do we know that there is a naturalistic mechanism that can get us (step by step) from a fish to a philosopher?

Consider the following statement by molecular biologist Franklin M. Harold about marvelous machines such as the bacterial flagellum.

"Today, 150 years later and despite many efforts, there are still no **detailed testable Darwinian pathways**, only wishful speculations. We should reject, as a matter of principle, the substitution of intelligent design for the dialogue of chance and necessity (Behe 1996); but we must concede that there are presently no detailed Darwinian accounts of the evolution of **any** biochemical system, only a variety of **wishful speculations**." (Franklin M. Harold, *The Way of the Cell: Molecules, Organisms, and the Order of Life*, Oxford University Press, 2001, emphasis added.)

Likewise microbiologist James Shapiro of the University of Chicago declared in *National Review* that:

"In fact, there are **no detailed Darwinian accounts** for the evolution of any fundamental biochemical or cellular system, only a variety of **wishful speculations**. It is remarkable that Darwinism is accepted as a satisfactory explanation for such a vast subject – evolution – with so little rigorous examination of how well its basic theses work in illuminating specific instances of biological adaptation or diversity." (James Shapiro, *Book Review: Darwin's Black Box: The Biochemical Challenge to Evolution*, National Review, 16, p62-65, September, 1996).

In his book, Rabbi Slifkin makes fun of intelligent design theorists for seeing G-d only in the bacterial flagellum. Of course, this is a misrepresentation of intelligent design (see "Can Torah be reconciled with Darwin?" and "Religious Darwinist - an Oxymoron?"). However, Rabbi Slifkin appears to be blissfully unaware of the extent and range of the problems for evolutionists:

"It is my scientific opinion that the primary problem with Darwin's theory of evolution is the lack of detailed, testable, rigorous explanations for the origin of new, complex, biological features. ...

It should be strongly emphasized that under this broad category of difficulties lies much of the structure and development of life, including: the existence of the genetic code; transcription of DNA; translation of mRNA; the structure and function of the ribosome; the structure of the cytoskeleton; nucleosome structure; the development of new protein-protein interactions; the existence of the proteasome; the existence of the endoplasmic reticulum; the existence of motility organelles such as the bacterial flagellum and the eukaryotic cilium; the development of the pathways for the construction of the cilium and flagellum; the existence of the defensive apparatus such as the immune system and blood clotting system; and much else. The existence of such unresolved difficulties for Darwinian theory at the molecular level of life makes it reasonable to wonder if a Darwinian framework is the right way to approach such questions. It also makes it reasonable to wonder if Darwinian processes explain major new features of life at higher levels, such as the level of organs and organisms. (Expert Witness, Intelligent Design Theorist, Michael Behe, Professor of Biological Sciences, Lehigh University, Submission to Kitzmiller vs. Dover, 2005)

## The Fossil record - Bad news for Darwin

Evolutionists are only able to adduce evidence for Evolution from (a) the fossil record and (b) an examination of currently living organisms and their development.

As pointed out in an earlier quote by Raup, Darwin expected to find innumerable transitional fossils connecting an amoeba to a fish and a fish to a philosopher. However, it turns out that this prediction of the theory of Evolution is now falsified. More than that, one of the strongest proponents of Darwinian Evolution is forced to admit that the fossil record better supports Creation than Evolution.

In order to enjoy the quote from this proponent of Darwin, I refer the reader to a description of a recent forum at the Salk Institute for Biological Studies in November 2006:

Maybe the pivotal moment came when Steven Weinberg, a Nobel laureate in physics, warned that "the world needs to wake up from its long nightmare of religious belief," or when a Nobelist in chemistry, Sir Harold Kroto, called for the John Templeton Foundation to give its next \$1.5 million prize for "progress in spiritual discoveries" to an atheist — **Richard Dawkins**, the Oxford evolutionary biologist whose book **The God Delusion** is a bestseller. ... Somewhere along the way, a forum this month at the Salk Institute for Biological Studies in La Jolla, Calif., which might have been one more polite dialogue between science and religion, began to resemble the founding convention for a political party built on a single plank: In a world dangerously charged with ideology, science needs to take on an evangelical role, vying with religion as teller of the greatest story ever told. (George Johnson, "Natural Evangelism", Toronto Star, November 2006).

It is one thing to promote atheism. It is an entirely different matter when we must deal with the actual scientific evidence. What does the fossil record actually show?

**Richard Dawkins:** Before we come to the sort of sudden bursts that they [Eldredge and Gould] had in mind, there are some conceivable meanings of ‘sudden bursts’ that they most definitely did not have in mind. These must be cleared out of the way because they have been the subject of serious misunderstandings. Eldredge and Gould certainly would agree that some very important gaps really are due to imperfections in the fossil record. Very big gaps, too. For example the Cambrian strata of rocks, vintage about 600 million years, are the oldest ones in which we find most of the major invertebrate groups. And we find many of them **already in an advanced state of evolution, the very first time they appear.**

It is as though they **were just planted there, without any evolutionary history.** Needless to say, this **appearance of sudden planting has delighted creationists.** Evolutionists of all stripes believe, however, that this really does represent a very large gap in the fossil record, a gap that is simply due to the fact that, for some reason, very few fossils have lasted from periods before about 600 million years ago. One good reason might be that many of these animals had only soft parts to their bodies: no shells or bones to fossilize. If you are a creationist you may think that this is **special pleading** [RYO: because many soft parts have been found in the Cambrian record].

My point here is that, when we are talking about gaps of this magnitude, there is no difference whatever in the interpretations of ‘punctuacionists’ and ‘gradualists’. Both schools of thought **despise** so-called scientific creationists equally, and both agree that the major gaps are real, that they are true imperfections in the fossil record. Both schools of thought agree that the only **alternative explanation** of the sudden appearance of so many complex animal types in the Cambrian era is **divine creation**, and both would reject this alternative. (Richard Dawkins, *The Blind Watchmaker: Why the Evidence of Evolution Reveals a Universe without Design* Richard Dawkins, Norton, New York, 1986, p229-230.)

Needless to say, quotes of this type do not appear in Rabbi Slifkin's books.

**Most of the animal phyla** that are represented in the fossil record **first appear, ‘fully formed’** and identifiable as to their phylum in the Cambrian some 550 million years ago. These include such advanced anatomically complex types as trilobites, echinoderms, brachiopods, and mollusks. ... The fossil record is therefore of no help with respect to the origin and early diversification of the various animal phyla ...

(R.S.K. Barnes, et al., *The Invertebrates: A New Synthesis*, pg. 10-11, 2nd ed. Blackwell Scientific, 1993, emphasis added).

## What frightens a Naturalist? Answer: The meta-natural

Richard Lewontin (Alexander Agassiz Professor of Zoology at Harvard) is refreshing in his forthrightness. He writes:

**Richard Lewontin:** Our willingness to accept scientific claims that are against common sense is the key to an understanding of the real struggle between science and the supernatural. We take the side of science in spite of the patent absurdity of some of its constructs, in spite of its failure to fulfill many of its extravagant promises of health and life, in spite of the tolerance of the scientific community for unsubstantiated just-so stories, because we have a prior commitment, a commitment to materialism. (Richard Lewontin, “Billions and Billions of Demons”, New York Review of Books, Vol. 44, 1997)

Why must the evolutionary naturalist adopt a zero concession policy to the meta-natural – something that transcends nature? Why accept “absurd” constructs and unsubstantiated “just so” stories for the origin of and development of life rather than supra-natural creation by a transcendent Creator? Lewontin expresses his fear of the meta-natural as follows:

**Richard Lewontin:** It is not that the methods and institutions of science somehow compel us to accept a material explanation of the phenomenal world, but, on the contrary, that we are forced by our a priori adherence to material causes to create an apparatus of investigation and a set of concepts that produce material explanations, no matter how counter-intuitive, no matter how mystifying to the uninitiated. Moreover, that materialism is absolute, for we cannot allow a Divine Foot in the door. The eminent Kant scholar Lewis Beck used to say that anyone who could believe in God could believe in anything. To appeal to an omnipotent deity is to allow that at any moment the regularities of nature may be ruptured, that miracles may happen.

## R. Slifkin refuses to discuss the scientific errors in his books

Rabbi Slifkin has always claimed that he stands ready to discuss substantive issues. However, when challenged, his response was that "I not interested in arguing about the science with you".

Rabbi Slifkin in the <i>Canadian Jewish News</i>	Subsequent communication
<p>"Rabbi Slifkin added that he stopped his online communication with Ostroff 'when the pressures of the ban began.' ... <b>I have absolutely no idea what Dr. Ostroff means when he says that I don't want to discuss substantive issues.</b> I have done nothing else for the last few years!"                      (CJN August 31, 2006, emphasis added                      (<a href="http://www.cjnews.com/viewarticle.asp?">http://www.cjnews.com/viewarticle.asp?</a></p>	<p>Dear Dr. Ostroff ... I am aware that you consider the various lines of evidence for common ancestry that I bring to be entirely inadequate. Obviously, I disagree. <b>However, for the umpteenth time, let me reiterate that I am not interested in arguing about the science with you.</b> ... Natan Slifkin" (21 November 2006, emphasis added).</p>

id=10016&s=1) [Cite error: Ran out of custom link labels for group "". Define more in the [[MediaWiki:cite\_link\_label\_group-]] message.]

"I have no idea why you think it necessary for ME to prove to YOU that evolution works in order for ME to accept that it is compatible with Torah and for ME to point out that it has mainstream acceptance in the scientific community." (Rabbi Slifkin, November 20, 2006, emphasis in the original.)

What makes Rabbi Slifkin's response even more surprising is that it was Rabbi Slifkin who initiated this round of discussion by asking how Rav Miller reconciles creation with the science.

How are we supposed to understand Rabbi Slifkin's refusal to discuss the flawed presentation of the science in his book? On the one hand Rabbi Slifkin presents material now known to be false to his unsuspecting readers on issues fundamental to core Jewish principles. It is precisely the naturalistic content of Rabbi Slifkin's views on creation that is in dispute. Yet, Rabbi Slifkin's response is to avoid all further debate on the science in his book. This, despite the fact that Rabbi Slifkin was the one to raise the issue of the science such as the fossil record in the first place.

## R. Slifkin unresponsive to attempts at dialogue before the Ban

A courteous participant in my email discussion with Rabbi Slifkin writes as follows:

"While I have little interest in the technical subject matter of this discussion (I am more inclined to consider the related hashgafick and the surrounding sociological issues, rather than the "scientific" realm which I admittedly have no background whatsoever), I am intrigued by the civil tone of the discussion that you are currently having with R. Slifkin. Why could this discussion not have taken place in such a manner to begin with (and before the ban)? The exchange between you and Rav Slifkin is something that even the "hamon am" may benefit from, so why in your opinion did this have to come to a ban of his books and to such recriminations?

Even if there may have been kefira in the works of Rav Slifkin (which I do not for one moment admit), would a discussion of this nature not have drawn it out for all to see and understand? Would we not all have been better off in such an event? Instead, we are, with few exceptions, left with the strong impression that certain matters do not merit open discussion and debate, but instead must be dealt with by a heavy and unreasonable hand. ... (October 3, 2006)

However, this participant was apparently unaware that I (and Rav Miller) have been entirely open to discuss the merits of the issue with Rabbi Slifkin many months before the official ban in December 2004. In September 2004, I emailed Rabbi Slifkin inviting him to contact me during his pending trip to New York so that we could discuss the issues further. Further, as can be seen from the earlier presentation, it is Rabbi Slifkin who now refuses to discuss the science in his book.

Here is a brief record of my interactions with Rabbi Slifkin:

- In the summer of 2004, I entered into a discussion with Rabbi Slifkin on the online *Avodah* discussion group at which time I became concerned about his approach and expressed my detailed concerns forcefully and openly.
- Before the first ban on his books (and months before the official ban) I informed Rabbi Slifkin (on September 18, 2004) that Rav Miller considered his books problematic, requested in Rav Miller's name that he reconsider his approach and invited him to contact me to discuss the matter further. Rabbi Slifkin never responded, thus losing the benefit of this feedback.
- Likewise, well before the ban, Rav Sholem Kamenetsky informed Rabbi Slifkin that (contrary to Rabbi Slifkin's claim) his allegorization of the first three chapters of the Torah did not have Rav Kamenetsky's approbation.
- Thus Rabbi Slifkin was aware before the first ban and months before the official ban (in December 2004) that both Rav Miller and Rav Kamenetsky had expressed serious reservations about his book. Rabbi Slifkin's account omits these details and starts with what happened, as he sees it, on September 21, 2004. (See "#Rabbi Slifkin Unresponsive to Concerns before the Ban" below).

## Open Letter to Rabbi Slifkin

BS"D 12 Kislev 5767 (December 3, 2006)

Dear Rabbi Slifkin:

I have summarized (see above) some of the matters you and I have recently discussed. I provide below my response to your most recent email. RNS will stand for your email (Rabbi Nossen Slifkin) and RYO is where you quote me (Yoel Ostroff). You write:

From: Rabbi Nathan Slifkin, 22 November 2006  
Dear Dr. Ostroff,

**RYO:** If Darwin says it is "unsatisfactory" without a mechanism -- then it's unsatisfactory.

**RNS:** I do not believe that he [Darwin] is saying what you claim he is saying,

Here is the Darwin quote:

**Darwin:** In considering the origin of species, it is quite conceivable that a **naturalist**, reflecting on the mutual affinities of organic beings, on their embryological relations [e.g. Haeckel's embryos], their geographical distribution, geological succession [e.g. the fossil record in the sedimentary layers], and other such facts, might come to the **conclusion** that **species have not been independently created** [i.e. meta-natural creation], but had **descended**, like varieties, from other species [i.e. one might believe in common descent]. Nevertheless, **such a conclusion** [i.e. common ancestry], even if well founded, **would be unsatisfactory, until it could be shown** how the innumerable species inhabiting this world have been

modified, so as to acquire that perfection of structure and coadaptation which justly excites our admiration. ... It is, therefore, of the highest importance to gain a clear insight into the **means of modification** and coadaptation. (Origin, 6th Edition, Pages 2-3), emphasis added.)

Darwin clearly says that even if common ancestry is well-founded on other grounds it is nevertheless "unsatisfactory" without the required naturalistic mechanisms (i.e. a "means of modification") that get us from say a fish to a philosopher. The point is rather obvious. Darwin needs to eliminate special creation (which does not need a naturalistic mechanism) as an explanation for the marvels of life. As he correctly states, to eliminate special creation [i.e. G-d] the burden proof is upon him to produce the required mechanism.

**RNS:** and even if he [Darwin] were to be saying that, it is irrelevant, as per LamedZayin's point.

Lamedzain appears to say that we are not beholden to Darwin. I quite agree except where Darwin's point can be sustained on independent grounds. But the independent grounds clearly exist. The alchemist who claims that he has a cheap way to produce gold from lead surely needs to back his claim empirically with the required conversion mechanism. This is why today, evolutionists are prepared to admit that everything is cast in doubt without a mechanism:

For others, a major weakness remained, **casting all else in doubt**. Their unanswered question was whether random change and shuffling of DNA could **ever** lead to highly complex and wonderfully adaptive innovations in anatomy and physiology such as the eye, the brain, or even the peacock's tail. The Reverend Mr. Paley's skepticism, **shared by some scientists** as well as by many laypeople, might not be satisfied by a theory of evolution that rested solely on a theory of selection and a theory of the inheritance of random DNA changes. [*The Plausibility of Life: Resolving Darwin's Dilemma*, Marc W. Kirschner (Harvard) and John C. Gerhart (Berkley), Yale University Press, 2005]

The book by Kirschner and Gerhart is all about finding a naturalistic mechanism (we can discuss their solution if you like), given the seriousness of the problem. Their concern is that, without a naturalistic mechanism, the good Rev. Payley's meta-natural solution to the origin of the eye becomes more credible and his skepticism to **naturalistic** common ancestry would be "shared by some scientists".

Two eminent biologists tackle and provide exhilarating new answers to what they argue **is the central, unresolved question of evolution**. In the 150 years since Darwin, the field of evolutionary biology has left a **glaring gap** in understanding how animals developed their astounding variety and complexity. The standard answer has been that small genetic mutations accumulate over time to produce wondrous innovations such as eyes and wings. Drawing on cutting-edge research across the spectrum of modern biology, Marc Kirschner and John Gerhart **demonstrate how this stock answer is woefully inadequate**. (From the blurb on the dustjacket: *The Plausibility of Life: Resolving Darwin's Dilemma*, Marc W. Kirschner (Harvard) and

John C. Gerhart (Berkley), Yale University Press, 2005.)

Of course, evolutionists only tend to admit to the problems in the first place when they feel they have a solution. So I am not surprised that you missed "the central unresolved question of evolution".

**RYO:** Darwin desperately needed a naturalistic mechanism. This is why much of *Origins* is a search for mechanism. Without a naturalistic mechanism (random variation and natural selection) common ancestry is "unsatisfactory" because you have nothing to link a fish to a philosopher.

**RNS:** Again, I disagree; I believe that the evidence for common ancestry is sufficient and stands independently of whether we can discover the mechanism that caused such changes. If I place a tadpole in an aquarium, and return the next day to see a frog, I would legitimately conclude that the tadpole turned into the frog even though I have no understanding of exactly how that took place.

The analogy is specious because tadpole to frog unfolding is metamorphosis in action not evolution. Tadpoles are the offspring of fully functioning frogs, complete with all the genes for legs and the structures needed to use them. The tadpole is just a juvenile frog in the same way that a human embryo is a juvenile human. Of course, you can observe the metamorphosis in action so this is hardly like the hypothetical mechanisms proposed by evolutionists.

Now, in some stories, one hears about a Frog that turns into a Prince. Frogs do not have the genes for the human vocal apparatus or the upright posture of a Prince. So I would suggest that if we left a Frog in the aquarium and then returned to see a Prince we could dismiss it as a fairy tale (with thanks to Rabbi Avigdor Miller zt"l).

But, more seriously, it is precisely the genetic information that a frog lacks and a human has that needs to be accounted for. It is for this reason that the lack of **any** detailed testable Darwinian pathways fatally undermines Evolution.

**RNS:** I would, however, like to present you with an additional line of argument that I did not use in the book. You claim that if there is no conceivable mechanism for explaining how one species changes into another, then we should not accept that such a thing happened. But I don't believe that you really feel that way. The Talmud (Bava Kama 16a) states that after seven years, a hyena changes into a bat. Surely you accept that as true, even though there is no known mechanism that could accomplish that?

This is undoubtedly an unusual Gemora. But we must consult the commentaries on *Aggadata* to understand its true meaning (see Rambam on *Aggadata* for general principles). So, for example, the *Ben Yehoyada* explains that when a hyena dies, the worms which infest its rotting carcass are similar in shape to a bat. See also *Iyun Yaakov*. There are, of course, deeper meanings to this *Aggadata* (sources available on request).

However, if only in order to humour your intent, let's take this example in its straightforward sense. It would then be a very poor and strange example of evolution. It is more like your tadpole to frog case of growth and metamorphosis in the same entity (not evolutionary descent with modification in its offspring).

**RNS:** One opinion in the Talmud (Shabbos 92a) also states that the Levites were 15 feet tall, which would of course require numerous physiological modifications in terms of bone structure, blood pressure, and so on, that would have rendered them far more different from ordinary humans than a panda is different from its proposed ancestor. Yet, we and the Levites evolved from a common ancestor. There is no known mechanism that could accomplish such changes - do you deny that such changes happened?

Do you deny that Golyas (Goliath) was 6 *amos* high or that according to most commentaries Og's bed was 9 *amos*? You have allegorized the first few chapters of the Torah and the account of the global flood. Will these accounts in Tanach now also have to be allegorized?

But, then how do we account for the opinion that you quote (assuming that we do not hold of the competing position in the Talmud)? What this means is that the earlier generations had genetic capabilities that we have subsequently lost (think about the long ages and extraordinary fertility of the antediluvian world reported in the Torah) or that remain hidden waiting to be turned on perhaps via the new science of epigenetics. Consider for example the following quote:

*Key to zebrafish heart regeneration uncovered* (Eureka.com, Nov 2, 2006)

“Interestingly, some species have the ability to regenerate appendages, while even fairly closely related species do not,” Poss added. “This leads us to believe that during the course of evolution, **regeneration is something that has been lost by some species, rather than an ability that has been gained by other species**. The key is to find a way to ‘turn on’ this regenerative ability.” (see the accompanying journal article in *Cell*, Nov. 3, 2006, Alexandra Lepilina, M.D., and Ashley Coonin and Poss.)

Lee Spetner has some good technical information in his book on information loss and the *Meshech Chochma* (Devarim 3:11) takes these indications of great size naturalistically as lost functionality as in the case of the zebrafish.

Of course, you are a Darwinian. You believe that our ancestors were knuckle dragging apes who could hardly walk upright let alone soar to 10 *amos* in height. So for you it is difficult. How would the genetic capability evolve to support such immense size. We, who believe that we are descended from the יציר כפיו of Hashem (i.e. we descend from *Adam HaRishon*) understand that loss of capability (devolution) is quite normal.

Is this a good example of naturalistic evolution? If Moses was 10 *amos* high, he was nevertheless a normal human being quite able to marry and bear normal children. So, we are not talking about *macro-evolution* but

built-in variation within the same kind. Even within your own naturalistic worldview, we see that there are great variations in height between a pygmy and an NBA center. Although scientists believe that there are limits to growth I have not seen convincing demonstrations of just where the precise limits are (perhaps you can supply me with the journal articles you have in mind). Although I claim no expertise, you can try a few back-of-the-envelope calculations for yourself. After the age of 20 there is virtually no further bone growth. Now, consider a 20 year old weighing 120 pounds who subsequently doubles his weight by the age of 50. The load bearing capacity of the femur (say) is roughly proportional to its cross-sectional area, i.e.

$$\text{loadbearing} \approx D^2$$

At age 50 he would require bone expansion by a factor of

$$\sqrt{2} * D$$

Thus at age 50 the bone diameter of the femoral neck diamond (where most fractures occur) would have to be larger by a factor of over 40% for the increased load. Well we presumably don't see that, do we?. Why not? Note that the tensile strength of bone is quite phenomenal (and a great puzzle to evolutionists). So it is quite possible that it is over-engineered like a highway which is able to support speeds faster than the posted limits. Again, even if the current genome could not support greater size, there is no proof that the earlier generations did not have the potential for it.

**RYO:** You started this conversation by asking me what Rav Miller's view on the science (such as the fossil record) is!

**RNS:** Yes, not because I am interested in arguing the science with him, but because I was curious to find out his views. It was claimed that he is a "scientific genius" and that he certainly has a consistent and well-worked out approach to these issues, from a scientific perspective. I was therefore curious to know how he would address basic questions such as how to explain the distinct eras of animal life that we find in the fossil record, and whether he believed that dinosaurs only lived for a day or for a long time. As it turned out, he had nothing to say about these issues at all, which disproved the claims about him.

In that case I suggest that your request was not genuine. You can hardly be disparaging of others when you refuse to discuss the faulty science in your books (see earlier background discussion).

**RYO:** Amazingly you say that you do not want to discuss the science. Quite frankly, I take that as an admission of defeat on your part. It is precisely the speculative nature of your Darwinian approach that is at stake.

**RNS:** Take it that way if you want. Again, there are two issues here. One is the antiquity of the earth and common ancestry, which I regard as well accepted in the scientific community, and which I have no wish to discuss with you in the same way as I have no wish to discuss with certain people whether the moon landing was a **hoax** [emphasis added]. The second issue is Darwinian mechanisms of evolution, which I

explicitly state in the book to be a contested issue and which I take no side on.

You may perhaps not have noticed it, but in your book you quoted Haeckel's fraudulent embryos [a **hoax**] as solid evidence for common ancestry and Darwin considered this type of embryological fraud the very best evidence for his theory. And, as Behe pointed out (see "Background to this letter") the president of the *National Academy of Sciences* and a Nobel Prize Winner stated in their textbook that common ancestry would predict this fraud! Thus, this hoax pretty much falsifies Darwin's theory of common ancestry.

Likewise, Gould, the textbooks and yourself (<http://www.toriah.org/misc/RNS/topics/Challenge-303-Panda.htm>) use the Panda's thumb as evidence for the so-called "fact" of evolution (i.e. common ancestry). So it seems that common ancestry is well on its way to deconstruction. Likewise, I would be happy to discuss each "proof" in your book for dating methods. Undoubtedly, the same pattern will emerge once we consult the published scientific literature.

However, you are once again avoiding the main problem which is the **naturalistic content** of your Darwinian approach that is fundamentally at odds with Torah (please see "Background Discussion"). You concede to the evolutionary materialists that the "randomness of Darwinian evolution" is the "ideal means" for explaining the marvels of life. Yet you are unable to provide even one detailed testable Darwinian pathway for any complex organelle, organ or organism.

**RNS:** Incidentally, I attempted to discuss the topic of Torah and science with several of the Rabbis that signed on the ban against my books, but they were unwilling to do so. Do you take that as an admission of defeat on their part?

I was not privy to those discussions and so am unable to tell what your approach was. Your approach to me has not been promising (as you said, "for the umpteenth time let me reiterate that I am not interested in arguing the science with you"). If a butcher shop sells *trefa* meat, the Rav Hamachshir has the right to warn customers not to buy the meat, no matter what the justifications of the owner are (the owner may, in fact, be entirely blameless). It is possible that the Rabbis who signed the ban felt the same way about your book and did not feel that your attitude was sufficiently open to a productive discussion.

However, Rav Miller (who did not sign the ban) was and still is open to meeting with you. This is why I wrote the letter to you before the ban inviting you to contact me. It was your choice not to respond.

**RNS:** You keep on repeating the same point about the panda's thumb, again and again and again. I won't bother repeating my response, which is the same as it was in my prior emails.

That's fine with me. You are not open to discussing the known errors (and there are many more) in your book. I believe that this is your loss.

**RYO:** That's correct. I repeat it because I have not yet heard you says the words "I was wrong on the panda's thumb".

**RNS:** See above, and previous emails. I never claimed that science has discovered a viable explanation for how panda's thumbs evolved. What I said was that there are examples in the natural world of things that indicate gradual evolution rather than direct design. I noted that Gould offers the panda's thumb as an example. Maybe he was wrong on that; it makes no difference, as there are plenty of other examples. If you like, I will point this out in a footnote in the next edition.

I appreciate the admission of error. But as I said, there are many more such scientific errors in your books.

**RYO:** I am challenging the science in your book because it is demonstrably wrong. Not because I say it is wrong but because the published scientific literature admits that it is wrong.

**RNS:** And as I said, the published scientific literature may admit that the panda's thumb is not an example of poor design, but there are other things that are. And the published scientific literature may admit that we do not understand how it evolved, but I never claimed that we do. The published scientific literature does claim, however, that the universe is much more than 5767 years old, and that your approach is **ridiculous** [emphasis added]. This is much more fundamental.

I see that you consider our mesorah to be "ridiculous". It is rather unwise to make such claims while refusing to debate it. You thought Haeckel's embryos solid evidence for common ancestry. Well, you found out that your evidence was "ridiculous". You followed Gould on the Panda's thumb - well that also turned out to be "ridiculous".

Again you are avoiding the main issue. Here is what I wrote: "It is the naturalistic content in Rabbi Slifkin's books that is fundamentally at odds with the Torah (more than the specifics such as the length of the actual creation time period)."

The meta-natural critique strikes deep into the heart of naturalistic territory (such as Big Bang Cosmology, and Chemical and Biological Evolution). I would like to take you through the science in your book issue by issue and item by item in the same way that we have done with the three examples I brought to your attention (see above). Here is what I expect to find based on the published scientific literature. Naturalistic origin sciences are unable to provide detailed empirically tested demonstrations (rather than "wishful speculations") as to how the mature universe originated and evolved.

- We will find committed evolutionary experts who acknowledge in the published scientific literature that, despite the increasing precision and range of observations, we are unable to provide a compelling demonstration of how the universe (fine-tuned for life and discovery) originated solely via chance and naturalistic processes;
- likewise, we are unable to demonstrate how galaxies of stars formed, naturalistically;
- we are unable to demonstrate how our solar system of sun and planets originated, naturalistically;

- we are unable to demonstrate how the first life emerged, naturalistically,
- we are unable to demonstrate how life evolved via chance and naturalistic processes into a dizzying array of phyla, genera and species.

**RNS:** I look forward in particular to your response regarding Talmudic accounts of species evolving with no known mechanism. ...

See above.

Sincerely

Natan Slifkin [www.zootorah.com](http://www.zootorah.com)

In my earlier email I mentioned that I would prefer to meet face to face rather than pursue this via writing.

Reb Nossen, this is an invitation (again) to spend some time with us in Toronto (bringing along with you experts of your choice and at your convenience) under no pressure to accept what we have to say. We will likewise listen with an open mind to your proposals. An open but vigorous discussion of the issues will undoubtedly be productive.

Sincerely,

Yoel Ostroff

## History

### Still under construction.

RNS P.S. I am still waiting to see the email where I allegedly cut off the dialogue with Dr. Ostroff.

RSC You are probably referring to the report in the Canadian Jewish News (August 31, 2006) which states:

*Ostroff stressed that there is a difference between disagreeing with someone, and hating or looking down on them. "We object to his views, not to him as a person," Ostroff said. In fact, he said, when Rabbi Slifkin came to Toronto to speak at the Torah in Motion event, he was invited to speak to Rabbi Miller and Ostroff, but was "unresponsive."*

*"We would still be willing to talk to him anytime," Ostroff said.*

*He added that, for a time, he was involved in dialogue with Rabbi Slifkin, both via the Internet and*

*other means. "I wanted to continue the dialogue, but he cut it off. I don't believe he wants to discuss substantive issues."*

*When contacted by The CJN, Rabbi Slifkin said he had been advised by two Canadian rabbis against meeting with Rabbi Miller, because the rabbis felt the purpose of the meeting would be to try to change his views and not to have an open discussion of the issues.*

*Rabbi Slifkin added that he stopped his online communication with Ostroff "when the pressures of the ban began." He said that at that time, his posts on an online discussion group were being passed on "to non-participants in order to stir up opposition to me. I have absolutely no idea what Dr. Ostroff means when he says that I don't want to discuss substantive issues. I have done nothing else for the last few years!"*

What Dr. Ostroff says is "I wanted to continue the dialogue, but he cut it off". This appears to be the case because the CJN says: "*Rabbi Slifkin added that he stopped his online communication with Ostroff 'when the pressures of the ban began.'*"

I had occasion to speak with Dr. Ostroff today and I brought up your issue with him. Here's what I understand from his response.

You and he maintained a dialogue on the Aishdas/Avodah website in the Summer of 2004 (about the appropriateness of your approach) prior to the ban on your books. You made a claim (<http://www.aishdas.org/avodah/vol13/v13n099.shtml#10>) regarding a haskama you received from Rabbi Sholom Kamenetsky:

*Avodah (vol. 13 no. 99): "My specific allegory in my sefer has askamos from Rav Aryeh Carmell, Rav Sholom Kamenetzky, and Rav Mordechai Kornfeld, shlita".*

which prompted Dr. Ostroff to post the following letter (<http://www.aishdas.org/avodah/vol13/v13n101.shtml#03>) from Rabbi Kamenetsky (Vol 13 no 101, September 13, 2004).

*Dear R' Yoel,*

*Thank you for the note. My name does appear in his book and a careful reading of the askomo will show that I gave no askomo on the content. What impressed me about the book is its science. The uninitiated unlettered Jew often finds that the responses he gets when he questions the seeming incompatibility between science and Torah (l'havdil) are lacking.*

*The science in the book is impressive, but I do not agree with the positions he takes in the Torah. True, he has "unconventional" sources that would lend some credibility to the theories he proposes, but I see these as "suggestions" (based on somewhat spurious understandings of unconventional sources) that are to allow the uninitiated to feel that he can begin learning Torah, and see for himself that the issues are irrelevant. More than anything else, RNS should be lauded for trying his best to defend the Torah against a group of apikorsim that are bent on mocking Torah and disseminating science as the "proof" that Torah is false, Rachmono litzlan. But to say that these theories have credibility as Torah positions was not my intent in my letter of approbation. I agree with Rabbi Bechofer and there is no such thing as scientific evidence which is "incontrovertible".*

*Respectfully,  
Sholom Kamenetsky*

Subsequently, you wrote Dr. Ostroff as follows:

*Likewise, I believe you may have caused me some personal harm by publicizing the letter from Rav Sholom shlita. You might wonder what could possibly be wrong with doing so. Of this I will say no more at this point, but if you think about the potential circumstances under which he wrote it, you might think of reasons why it was inappropriate.*

*You may feel that you want to make some sort of public apology for either or both of these errors. Unfortunately this could even make things worse, by drawing more attention to the entire matter. The problem with this matter, as one Rosh Yeshivah told me privately, is that there are zealots who tend to overreact when it is discussed, and therefore it must be handled with great care.*

To which Dr. Ostroff responded (on 18, September 2004) as follows

*I would have thought that the onus would be on you to retract your statement that your allegories had the *haskama* of Rabbi Kamenetsky, now that we see that he disagrees with your representation of his position.*

*Since you accuse me of wronging you and "adam karov leatzmo", I consulted with my Rav (Rabbi Shlomo Miller Shlita) who is the Rosh Kollel of the Lakewood Kollel here in Toronto.*

*Rabbi Miller told me to tell you in his name that it was a mitzva to publicize Rabbi Sholom Kamenetsky's letter. The Tanna Rabbi Shimon Haamsoni retracted on all his derashos when he came to "es Hashem Elokecha tira" and he stated that just as he received reward for darshening so he will be rewarded for retracting. As Rabbi Kamenetsky writes, there are some good things in your books, but he cannot agree with the positions you have taken on the Torah.*

*If you would like to speak this over in more detail by phone, or when you visit NY after Succos, please be in touch.*

*With friendship .... Jonathan*

The concerns were known before the ban

**RSC** Thus, before the ban you already knew that both Rabbi Kamenetsky and Rabbi Miller had serious concerns with your approach. None of this is reported on your website (which starts with different events that occurred four days later).

Subsequent to the aforesaid interchange, Dr. Ostroff has not received any communication from you regarding this matter. In fact, I understand you dropped off the Avodah forum entirely after his aforementioned post to Aishdas.

Furthermore, I understand that Rabbi Jacoby, of JEP Toronto, approached you when you were here and offered to broker a meeting between you and Rabbi Miller (including Dr. Ostroff) and you were unresponsive. You claim on your site that you were advised by "two Canadian rabbis who had prior experience with Rabbi Jacoby and/or Rabbi Miller that the agenda would be anything but dialogue.

Instead, they warned, the goal of the meeting would undoubtedly be to browbeat me into submission rather than an open discussion to try to resolve our differences constructively. According to them, this is what had transpired in the past. They both strongly advised me against the meeting. Since at the time I was very emotionally overwrought by the controversy, I took their advice...”[Cite error: Ran out of custom link labels for group ""] .

**Define more in the [[MediaWiki:cite\_link\_label\_group-]] message.]**

Well, as you write, you “took their advice” which means that you chose to refuse communication with your Torontonians critics. I imagine the above is a pretty clear explanation of Dr. Ostroff’s claim that you cut off dialogue with him.

## Responses to Rabbi Slifkin by FKM

[FKM (<http://fkmaniac.blogspot.com/2007/04/two-or-more-kofrim-dont-equal-maamin.html>) ] responds to Rabbi Slifkin as follows:

This is a follow-up to the previous two posts. I quote again from Rabbi Slifkin's (RNS) response to Dr. Ostroff (with editorial additions of Toriah in square brackets):

It should also be noted that according to Dr. Ostroff's definition of "core principles of Judaism," I am far from the only one to have been teaching heresy. Dr. Ostroff is not merely opposing my own personal way of reconciling Genesis with science, but any way of doing so that accepts such things as the scientific explanation of how the sun and moon developed. Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan, Feldheim's "Challenge" and "Torah and Science," Aish HaTorah and other outreach organizations, all explain at least some aspects of the universe's development in naturalistic terms, which according to Dr. Ostroff is heresy. Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch and Rabbi Dovid Tzvi Hoffman likewise legitimized such naturalistic explanation. In fact, as far as I am aware, this definition of "core truths of Judaism" is a completely new invention."

This takes us right back to Rav Shlomo Zalman's [essay (<http://toriah.org/Torah/RSZA/Better%20Let%20Rav%20Shlomo%20Zalman%20Auerbach%20Say%20It.pdf>) ] about the heretical notions of creation that leave out a meaningful understanding of Hashem's cessation from the six days of creation. RNS is completely correct in dragging along with him various Orthodox Jewish scientists who were unaware of the heretical elements in their understanding of creation. This only increases the tragedy for many contemporary Orthodox scientists instead of mitigate it for RNS. How selfish it seems to use these names as human shields. [As argued by Rabbi Elias in the Jewish Observer, and contra RNS, Rabbi Hirsch in no way supports the Darwinian blind watch maker thesis].

The fact that RNS got onto the radar of the Gedolim who are far more authoritative on theology than R. Marc Shapiro, was his *mazal*. Attributing all kinds of personal motives and vendettas to those who exposed him has only served to raise the rhetoric and tellingly avoid dealing with the uncomfortable reality: that a large segment of Jewry were simply raised with heretical illusions about theological reconciliation with modern cosmology and origin science.

[FKM (<http://fkmaniac.blogspot.com/2007/04/r-slifkin-misses-point-again-and-again.html>) ] also writes:

I will discuss below some points raised in a recent response of Rabbi Slifkin (henceforth: RNS) to Dr. Ostroff's open letter against his approach. The response is found [[here](http://www.zootorah.org/controversy/creationists.html) (<http://www.zootorah.org/controversy/creationists.html>) ].

Dr. Ostroff is eminently capable of responding on his website, so I won't go through every issue. Here are many that I found particularly noteworthy and worth commenting on:

[RNS] he has a passionate religious belief that his soul will suffer for all eternity if he were to believe these things. In light of that belief, an objective evaluation of the scientific evidence is simply impossible and is ruled out from the outset. Any pretense of such an objective evaluation is false and misleading."

This really amounts to a complete dismissal of any defense of religion against the skeptic. According to Rabbi Slifkin's logic, the skeptic can always get out of a jam when cornered by claiming, "I don't have a response to your reasoning, but I can be assured that one will eventually be found simply based on the fact that you aren't capable of objective evaluation and therefore your arguments must ipso-facto be flawed." [In addition, Rabbi Slifkin claims that somebody who does not believe in the fundamental principles of Torah such as *creation ex nihilo* is a heretic; does this mean that Rabbi Slifkin has a passionate religious belief that his soul will burn for all eternity? Obviously, the discussion should be based on the issues and the evidence not on the unstated and irrelevant personal beliefs of the participants].

[RNS] A common error made by Dr. Ostroff and other creationists is to use quotations from scientists out of context. By "out of context, "I mean that they use it to convey a different message than was intended by the author of the statement."

This is a hypocritical objection against Dr. Ostroff since the last 2 thirds of Rabbi Slifkin's new book "Challenge of Creation" suffers precisely from this flaw. The liberties he takes in mounting "conceptual support" for his theology are becoming legendary.

In addition, the scientists who present the raw data in their books don't "own" their research. The critical reader is entitled to draw divergent conclusions from the same set of information based on the greater merit of other considerations not appreciated by the author of the book. It is a sign of confidence, creativity and ingenuity that a reader can discern fact from theory and construct a competing explanation to account for all the data under discussion. RNS may very well have reservations in accepting Dr. Ostroff's conclusions over the scientists, but his sloven subordination to the published word of the scientists is a fatal weakness in his attempt to understand the truth about the world. [If an evolutionists states a fact that militates against his theory, what problem is there in quoting such a fact; surely it is germane to know that evolutionists themselves testify to the weaknesses of their theories].

[RNS] Probably the most common error made by Dr. Ostroff and other creationists is to present statements from scientists to give the impression that the scientists support the creationist case."

Once again, RNS fails to distinguish between the support of the scientist as an individual making his own professional or biased assessment of the data, and the statement in which the scientist is merely **PRESENTING THE RAW DATA**.

Now I skip around and consolidate some of the redundant points in this letter which make it look more impressive than it is. (This may not have been RNS' intention.)

[RNS Point 9] However, there are many lines of evidence that the laws of science have remained largely constant for billions of years, as I present in my book.

As I explained in my original critique of Science of Torah, ALL of his lines of evidence simply beg the question. Once you entertain the possibility of non-scientific physical creation, all these lines lack any objective basis.

[RNS] Furthermore, Dr. Ostroff's approach is certainly not based on empirical evidence, nor is it testable! Dr. Ostroff repeatedly insists that science should and does not conform to various requirements, yet he does not show that Torah addresses these requirements.

Um, Hello!

RNS seems to be oblivious to the fact that there are methodological constraints to the scientific method that prevent it from making any definitive assessment of events that are not observed. He also seems oblivious to the fact that the explicit ideological bias of the professional scientist is to factor out any irregularities that defy natural law. These combined impediments to truth-seeking is what will leave any strictly scientific account of creation fatally flawed.

God help us if we force the truth of the Torah to conform to these artificial extraneous requirements as RNS does in all his banned books. Rav Solovetchik aptly labelled this imposition from without as symptomatic of a religious inferiority complex. Now on to point 13 which is a re-statement of point 9:

[RNS] Dr. Ostroff frequently claims that he has support from "expert published scientific literature." However, the expert published scientists believe that he has no support at all and that his case is absurd. Of course, many of these scientists possess a secular bias. But there are many religious scientists, both Jewish and Christian, all of whom likewise consider his case to be absurd. Even the scientists of the Intelligent Design movement accept the antiquity of the universe and the common ancestry of species.

Curious that RNS never has actually address the support from the literature cited by Dr. Osroff. He seems only capable of noting that the beliefs of the quoted scientists do not accommodate the interference of the super-natural in physical reality. Well, that's really a no-brainer there.

As explained above, Dr.Osrtoff, a secure confidently believing Jew, is simply showing that there is no coherent self-consistent scientific account of creation. This is precisely what gives his meta-natural approach rational credibility! How obtuse of RNS to assume that Dr. Ostroff claims to limit himself to the very naturalistic constraints that he is militating against! Is he so locked into world-view of scientism as to not comprehend that there is another approach to reality?

Again, Hello? Here is more re-statement of point 9 in point 14 but now with some subtle word manipulations to make a straw-man. Note the qualification on the first sentence "via naturalistic mechanisms" is dropped in the second sentence:

[RNS] Dr. Ostroff considers it absurd to accept that life could arise via naturalistic mechanisms (note: in

my book I state that in the opinion of most scientists, we have yet to come with a viable explanation for this.) He also considers it absurd to accept that one species could evolve into another. Yet he believes that mice can grow from dirt (because the Talmud makes such a claim, and he rejects Rav Hirsch's approach that the Sages accepted the beliefs of their era concerning the natural world). Of course, believing that a mouse can grow from dirt is vastly more far-fetched than believing that a microbe can develop from primordial soup, or that a mouse can develop from a reptile. This makes Dr. Ostroff's purported "scientific objections" to evolution into a joke.

I don't believe Dr. Ostroff ever claimed that mice growing from dirt was due to any strictly "naturalistic mechanism". [Editorial comment: Dr. Ostroff did not indicate what he believed, but offered to discuss it in person with Rabbi Slifkin; see below]. (Ever heard of nishtaneh hateva? RNS' principled resistance to this possibility is due to his strict adherence to scientism.) As RNS pointed out, the acceptance of the existence of this creature is based solely on eye-witness testimony of Chazal. (See Avi Shafran's excellent piece recently in Cross-Currents, contra RNS) I imagine if evolution would be observed the way these mice were observed, Dr. Ostroff would accept it as fact despite its apparent scientific absurdity as we do with many discoveries.

Thus this point, as with most points on his list, is moot. Time and time again, he simply fails to comprehend the opposing point-of-view.

posted by FKM

## **Rabbi Slifkin's reponse to an offer**

In Chapter 19 of his book *Challenge of Creation* Rabbi Slifkin states that some scientists admit they do not know how life originated via naturalistic processes but that other scientists feel that "there is a viable naturalistic explanation" for the origin of life. He then uses this as a springboard for his false naturalistic Darwinian ideology as explained and quoted earlier.

I [Yoel Ostroff] challenged Rabbi Slifkin to produce even one recent article in the published scientific literature with a detailed naturalistic pathway. Rabbi Slifkin repeatedly tried to avoid answering the question by diverting the discussion to a different topic (viz. how the Talmud could claim that certain creatures arose via spontaneous generation, thus supposedly proving evolution).

I wrote to the participants in the discussion and Rabbi Slifkin as follows on Tuesday, January 09, 2007:

We saw a long sequence of diversionary tactics [on the part of RNS] in response to Question #1 [where are the journal articles for naturalistic pathways for the origin of life] in which Rabbi Slifkin claimed at various times that there are "many" scientists who feel that there are viable explanations for the origin of first life, or that if I would look in un-named sources I would find support for his claims, or Rabbi Slifkin provided 47 irrelevant references (but not any actual quotes) copied and pasted from a Panda's thumb style internet site, or that scientists at the very least have the "rudiments" of an explanation for the coded chemistry of the replicating cell etc. etc.

In the end it turns out that all Rabbi Slifkin's false and misleading claims are based on an outdated 1982 text that does not even sketch the most rudimentary pathway for the molecular machinery of the coded chemistry of the first replicating cell. ...

After some more interexchange, Rabbi Slifkin wrote back on January 10, 2007 as follows:

Dr. Ostroff, ... While I am comfortable with the idea that there is no way of explaining how DNA arose from primordial soup, ...

Now of course this undermines both the science and theology of Chapter 19 of Rabbi Slifkin's book.

I responded on January 11, 2007 as follows:

You [Rabbi Slifkin] have become, perhaps, a meta-naturalist. If so, congratulations (this is meant sincerely).

I believe that you and Rabbi Coffe are in the middle of discussing the other question you posed. As you know, the origin sciences have failed to provide detailed testable pathways both for the origin of the coded chemistry of the cell as well as for its development via chance natural processes into fish and philosophers. But in truth, we meta-naturalists are not limited to chance natural processes and thus we have no problems with God creating (meta-naturally) any creature He chooses to produce.

Take the sugya of kinnim/Shabbos [the topic, supposedly, of spontaneous generation in the Talmud] that you refer to, for example. I have taught it in a variety of forums including to scientifically informed audiences. **Here again is my sincere offer to learn this *sugya* [topic] with you in person bechavrusa.**

...

Sincerely, Yoel Ostroff

Rabbi Slifkin's reponse was a flat refusal to take me up on the offer.

[Rabbi Slifkin, January 11, 2007] ...**I have no desire to learn with you bechavrusa** - I have been greatly unimpressed with your various distortions of my positions, habit of going off on tangents, refusal to address the points that I raise, and propensity for inciteful statements.

Sincerely, Natan Slifkin

Likewise Rabbi Slifkin refused another offer that I made to him to come to Toronto to discuss these matters in an open fashion. Rabbi Slifkin could bring along any authorities of his choice (like Michael Ruse). All this was rejected with a flat no. That is the last interaction I had with Rabbi Slifkin.

## References

- ↑ Charles Darwin, in a letter to C. Lyell, October 11, 1859, in Darwin, F., ed., *The Life and Letters of Charles Darwin*, Vol. II (Basic Books: New York, 1959), 6-7. Richard Dawkins, *The Blind Watchmaker: Why the Evidence of Evolution Reveals a Universe without Design* Richard Dawkins, Norton, New York, 1986. Emphasis added
- ↑ "Even from a religious perspective, there are strong grounds for arguing that it is most reasonable that God created new creatures - somehow - from the already existing creatures, rather than zapping them into

existence out of thin air, as making them from existing creatures is much more within the realm of natural law. God chooses to work **within the system of natural law** – not because He has to, but because He wants to (*Science of Torah*, p153)

3. ↑ "It is abundantly clear from all this that the randomness of Darwinian evolution poses no theological problem whatsoever. Judaism has no problem with processes that **appear** to be random, and in fact it sees them as an **ideal means** via which God dynamically exerts His will. While the evolutionary process may well appear to be random from our perspective, it can simultaneously be directed from God's perspective. (*Challenge*, p293)
4. ↑ Richard Weaver, *Visions of Order: The Cultural Crisis of Our Time*, Louisiana State University, 1964
5. ↑ Michael Ruse, "Evolutionary Ethics: A Defense." *Biology, Ethics, and the Origins of Life*. ed. Holmes Rolston, III, 1995, p89-112. Boston: Jones & Bartlett Publishers, see pages 93 and 101, emphasis added
6. ↑ Michael Ruse and E. O. Wilson, "The Evolution of Ethics," in *Religion and the Natural Sciences: The Range of Engagement*, ed. J. E. Hutchingson, Orlando, Fl.:Harcourt and Brace, 1991, emphasis added.
7. ↑ Rabbi Slifkin wrote that the CJN misquoted him. He actually wrote: "In response to your question - I don't know what he's talking about. Dr. Ostroff and myself had an exchange on the Avodah list that went back-and-forth many, many times. I dropped out of Avodah when the pressures of the ban began, at which time it also became apparent that certain Avodah subscribers were passing on my posts to non-participants in order to stir up opposition to me. I have absolutely no idea what Dr. Ostroff means when he says that I don't want to discuss substantive issues, I have done nothing else for the last few years!."
8. ↑ See account (<http://zootorah.org/controversy/account.html>) (accessed 27 Oct. 2006)(local copy (<http://www.toriah.com/kodesh-refs/RNS/RNS-account-of-events.pdf>) ). As at the current date, Rabbi Slifkin's account omits these details and starts with what happened, as he sees it, on September 21, 2004

## Links

- Rabbi Zvi Lampel, Our Sages on the Days of Creation (<http://toriah.org/Torah/RZL/Our-Sages-on-Days-of-Creation.htm>) .
- Rabbi Slifkin's response (<http://www.zootorah.com/controversy/creationists.html>)

Retrieved from "[http://toriah.com/wiki/index.php?title=Open\\_Letter\\_to\\_Rabbi\\_Slifkin](http://toriah.com/wiki/index.php?title=Open_Letter_to_Rabbi_Slifkin)"

---

- This page was last modified on 25 October 2009, at 03:05.