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Jewish Survival, Divine Supervision, and the Existence of God

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In this paper, I discuss an argument for the existence of God known as “The Argument from the Survival of the Jews.” This argument has the form of an Inference to the Best Explanation (IBE). It proceeds from the phenomenon of Jewish survival to the existence of God as the best explanation for this phenomenon. I will argue that, even if we grant that Jewish survival is a remarkable occurrence that demands an explanation, and even if we gloss over the difficulties in defining the terms “Jewish” and “survive,” the argument ultimately fails as an argument for the existence of God. It fails because it postulates divine supervision in order to explain Jewish endurance, but it doesn’t provide any clues as to what might be the underlying mechanism at work.

1. The Argument from the Survival of the Jews

In *Permission to Believe*, Rabbi Lawrence Kelemen discusses what he calls “The Jewish History Approach to God’s Existence.” He raises the following question: “How did the Jews survive to enjoy the success they have?”¹ He claims that this is a question that has perplexed historians. He also claims that the usual explanations offered as responses to this question are inadequate. He then argues that the best explanation for Jewish endurance is divine supervision. That is to say, the Jews survived hardships and endured for so long, unlike other ancient peoples, because God is protecting them. As Kelemen writes:

¹Lawrence Kelemen, *Permission to Believe: Four Rational Approaches to God’s Existence* (Southfield, Michigan: Targum Press, 1990; Third Revised Edition 1991), p. 70, original emphasis. Rabbi Kelemen is a Professor of Education at Neve Yerushalayim, the Jerusalem College for Jewish Women’s Studies. For more information about Kelemen, see his website <http://www.lawrencekelemen.com>.

We feebly struggle to explain Jewish survival in secular terms: Maybe it is because they were poor? Maybe it is because they were rich? Maybe it is because they were pacifists? Maybe it is because they fought back? Maybe it is because they were concentrated? Maybe it is because they were scattered? But we know that other peoples shared these characteristics and are gone. The question stands: Why did only the Jews survive? The theological solution is attractive.²

The “theological solution,” according to Kelemen is divine supervision.

A similar sense of puzzlement can be found in Mark Twain’s “Concerning the Jews.” According to Twain:

[The Jew] has made a marvelous fight in this world, in all the ages; and has done it with his hands tied behind him. He could be vain of himself, and be excused for it. The Egyptian, the Babylonian, and the Persian rose, filled the planet with sound and splendor, then faded to dream-stuff and passed away; the Greek and the Roman followed, and made a vast noise, and they are gone; other peoples have sprung up and held their torch high for a time, but it burned out, and they sit in twilight now, or have vanished. The Jew saw them all, beat them all, and is now what he always was, exhibiting no decadence, no infirmities of age, no weakening of his parts, no slowing of his energies, no dulling of his alert and aggressive mind. All things are mortal but the Jew; all other forces pass, but he remains. What is the secret of his immortality?³

For Kelemen, then, given that divine supervision is the best explanation of Jewish survival, this provides one with a good reason to believe in the existence of God.⁴

In this paper, I am concerned with this argument for the existence of God rather than with Kelemen himself or his theology. However, since Kelemen may not be well known in academic circles, perhaps another, more recent example of a scholar who discusses a similar argument would be useful. In *36 Arguments for the Existence of God: A Work of Fiction*, Rebecca Goldstein discusses an argument she calls “The Argument from the Survival of the Jews.” Although this is a work of fiction, as the title says, Goldstein offers the following reconstruction in the Appendix:

1. The Jews introduced the world to the idea of the one God, with his universal moral code.

²Kelemen, *Permission to Believe*, p. 84.

³Mark Twain, “Concerning the Jews,” *Harper’s Magazine* (1898). Available at <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/1898twain-jews.html>.

⁴See also I. Jakobovits, “Faith, Ethics, and the Holocaust: Some Personal Theological and Religious Responses to the Holocaust,” *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, Vol. 3 (1988): 371–381.

2. The survival of the Jews, living for millennia without a country of their own, and facing a multitude of enemies that sought to destroy not only their religion but all remnants of the race, is a historical unlikelihood.
3. The Jews have survived against vast odds (from 2).
4. There is no natural explanation for so unlikely an event as the survival of the Jews (from 3).
5. The best explanation is that they have some transcendent purpose to play in human destiny (from 1 and 4).
6. Only God could have assigned a transcendent destiny to the Jews.
7. God exists.⁵

Like Kelemen's argument from Jewish history, this argument is also an Inference to the Best Explanation (IBE). In what follows, then, I will evaluate the Argument from the Survival of the Jews based on criteria of selection commonly accepted in the case of IBE. I will argue that the Argument from the Survival of the Jews ultimately fails as an argument for the existence of God, but for reasons that may not be so obvious.

In addition to the intellectual merits of discussing arguments for and against the existence of God, I think there is another reason why the Argument from the Survival of the Jews deserves close examination. It seems to me that understanding divine providence is crucial for making sense of two basic tenets of Judaism.⁶ The first is that a special relationship between God and the Jewish people was established at the moment God chose them as his treasured people.⁷ The second is that divine supervision is operative not only at the level of the collective, i.e., the Jewish people, but also at the level of the individual. This is known as *Hashgacha pratit* or divine supervision of the individual.⁸ To make sense of these two tenets, it seems to me, we have to be able to make

⁵Rebecca N. Goldstein, *36 Arguments for the Existence of God: A Work of Fiction* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2010), p. 383.

⁶According to M. Kellner, *Must a Jew Believe Anything?* (Oxford: Littman Library of Jewish Studies, 1999), chap. 1, the Torah teaches to believe in God and in divine providence.

⁷See, e.g., Deuteronomy 14:2. "For thou art a holy people unto the Lord thy God, and the Lord hath chosen thee to be His own treasure out of all peoples that are upon the face of the earth."

⁸See, e.g., Proverbs 3:26. "For the Lord shall be at your side, he will keep your foot from capture." Quoted in P. B. Overland, "Shoah in the World of the Sages," *Shofar: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Jewish Studies*, Vol. 23 (2005): 9–18.

sense of the mechanism of divine supervision at work. I will argue that we don't have a clear sense of what that mechanism might be at the collective level. If this is correct, then there seems to be no reason to think that we have a clearer sense of what that mechanism might be at the individual level.⁹

Before I begin, however, it is important to note that Goldstein does not endorse the Argument from the Survival of the Jews. Indeed, Goldstein points out the following flaw in the argument:

The fact that Jews, after the destruction of the Second Temple by the Romans, had no country of their own, made it *more* likely, rather than less likely, that they would survive as a people. If they had been concentrated in one country, they would surely have been conquered by one of history's great empires, as happened to other vanished tribes. But a people dispersed across a vast diaspora is more resilient, which is why other stateless peoples, like the Parsis and Roma (Gypsies), have also survived for millennia, often against harrowing odds. Moreover, the Jews encouraged cultural traits—such as literacy, urban living, specialization in middleman occupations, and an extensive legal code to govern their internal affairs—that gave them further resilience against the vicissitudes of historical change. The survival of the Jews, therefore, is not a miraculous improbability.¹⁰

And then she adds the following comment:

The persecution of the Jews need not be seen as part of a cosmic moral drama. The unique role that Judaism played in disseminating monotheism, mostly through the organs of its two far more popular monotheistic offshoots, Christianity and Islam, has bequeathed to its adherents an unusual amount of attention, mostly negative, from adherents of those other monotheistic religions.¹¹

I will revisit these comments below, although I will point to other reasons why the Argument from the Survival of the Jews ultimately fails as an argument for the existence of God, reasons having to do with the fact that it is supposed to be an Inference to the Best Explanation (IBE). So, first, I will say a few words about the structure of IBE.

⁹In addition, one often hears a version of the Argument from the Survival of the Jews used by rabbis, such as Amnon Yitzchak and others, in “spiritual improvement and repentance seminars” (*baal teshuva*), especially in Israel. So it is important to evaluate this argument in order to see how successful it really is.

¹⁰Goldstein, *36 Arguments*, p. 383, emphasis in original.

¹¹Goldstein, *36 Arguments*, p. 384.

2. Inference to the Best Explanation

It seems that the Argument from the Survival of the Jews is intended to be an Inference to the Best Explanation (IBE). Gilbert Harman defines this form of non-deductive reasoning as inference “from the premise that a given hypothesis would provide a ‘better’ explanation for the evidence than would any other hypothesis, to the conclusion that the given hypothesis is true.”¹² The form of IBE, then, is the following:

- (IBE) Phenomenon *P*.
 The best explanation for *P* is *E*.
 Therefore, (probably) *E*.

Accordingly, the Argument from the Survival of the Jews can be reconstructed as follows:

- (J1) The Jewish people survived numerous hardships.
 (J2) The best explanation for (J1) is that the Jews enjoy special divine supervision.
 (J3) Therefore, (probably) the Jews are protected by God.

As in any other argument of the form IBE, the obvious question is what makes the explanation offered the “best” explanation? What are the criteria by which we judge one explanation to be better than all the rest? For present purposes, then, the question is what makes divine supervision the best explanation for Jewish survival. In other words, the crucial premise in the Argument from the Survival of the Jews is premise (J2) or premise (5) in Goldstein’s reconstruction.

Arguing for the existence of God as the best explanation for a certain phenomenon may not be novel or original. One might reasonably construe Descartes’ argument for the existence of God in the *Meditations on First Philosophy* (1641), for instance, as an inference to the best explanation. In the *Third Meditation*, Descartes seems to argue as follows:

- (D1) He has an idea of God, where God is understood as “a certain substance that is infinite, independent, supremely intelligent and supremely powerful, that created [him] along with everything else that exists.”¹³

¹²Gilbert H. Harman, “The Inference to the Best Explanation,” *The Philosophical Review*, Vol. 74 (1965): 89.

¹³René Descartes, *Philosophical Essays and Correspondence*, ed. Roger Ariew (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 2000), p. 175.

(D2) The best (perhaps even the only) explanation for the existence of this idea is that it is ultimately caused by God himself.

(D3) Therefore, God is the cause of his idea of God.¹⁴

If this reconstruction of Descartes' argument for the existence of God in the *Third Meditation* is correct, then perhaps the Argument from the Survival of the Jews is not original in its form. But its content, on the other hand, introduces a unique remarkable phenomenon, i.e., the survival of the Jewish people, which requires an explanation that invokes the divine.

Accordingly, one might wonder whether or not the survival of the Jewish people is indeed a remarkable occurrence that demands such an explanation. It seems that one might reasonably ask why the survival of the Jewish people is more remarkable than that of, say, the Zoroastrians. This, in turn, points to another question about the way in which the term "Jewish" is used in this argument. What makes a person Jewish? This is, of course, a difficult question that is well beyond the scope of this paper.¹⁵ But notice that if by "Jewish" we mean "a person who is practicing Judaism (i.e., the religion)," then the survival of the Jewish people might seem no more remarkable, and hence no more in need of explanation, let alone a supernatural explanation, than the survival of practitioners of Zoroastrianism. Arguably, the religious persecution of Zoroastrians was just as significant to the formation of their group identity as that of the Jews.

Another, related problem with the Argument from the Survival of the Jews is that it is not clear what is meant by "survival," and who or what survives exactly. This problem becomes especially acute if "Jew" is interpreted as "a practitioner of Judaism." For, in that case, it doesn't seem very remarkable, and hence in need of explanation, that Jewish practices, customs, and beliefs have survived for so long. Throughout history, various practices and beliefs have been abandoned and then taken up again by later generations. If premise (J1)—or premise (3) in Goldstein's reconstruction—is the claim that the Jewish religion has survived, then that doesn't seem like a riddle or a miraculous improbability that needs to be explained by invoking the divine, at least no more than the survival of Zoroastrianism does.

¹⁴For a similar reconstruction, see L. Bonjour, *Epistemology: Classic Problems and Contemporary Responses* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2002), pp. 17–18.

¹⁵See, e.g., M. N. Kertzer, *What is a Jew?*, revised by Lawrence A. Hoffman (New York: Touchstone, 1996) and J. Kugel, *On Being a Jew* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998).

In Kelemen's version of the Argument from the Survival of the Jews, the quotations he provides to support his claim that historians are perplexed by the riddle of Jewish survival do not seem to make it any clearer who or what is surviving thanks to God's protection. For example, Kelemen cites Henry Bamford Parkes, who writes:

But while a historical account illuminates the development of Jewish monotheism, it does not wholly explain it; other Near Eastern peoples were confronted by similar problems, but failed to make any comparable response.¹⁶

By "Jewish monotheism," Parkes seems to mean the Jewish faith or religion, whose development can be explained by historical accounts. But then he switches to talking about peoples, rather than religions, and says that other peoples of the region dealt with problems similar to those the Jewish people faced but in different ways. In any case, it seems that Parkes himself is reluctant to endorse a supernatural explanation for the survival of the Jews, for he goes on to say that "[b]y rationalistic standards Jehovah must, of course, be regarded as a projection of the Jewish imagination."¹⁷

3. Alternative Explanations

For the sake of argument, however, let us grant premise (J1)—or premise (3) in Goldstein's reconstruction—and accept that the survival of the Jewish people is an unusual improbability that demands an explanation. Now we can return to the question raised above, namely, are there any alternative explanations for the phenomenon of Jewish survival? That is to say, can we explain why the Jewish people endured for so long without appealing to divine supervision? Kelemen seems to admit that there are alternative explanations in the quotation above, but he doesn't find them satisfactory. In fact, he seems to suggest that secular explanations in general fall short of explaining the riddle of Jewish survival. As Kelemen writes:

The Jews can explain why the Jewish people has suffered; it is now incumbent upon humanity to explain why the Jewish people has survived. And one who feels dissatisfied with the non-religious responses to the riddle of Jewish endurance can certainly find in the history of this unusual people permission to believe.¹⁸

¹⁶Henry Bamford Parkes, *Gods and Men: The Origins of Western Culture* (New York: Vintage Books, 1959), p. 86.

¹⁷Parkes, *Gods and Men*, p. 86.

¹⁸Kelemen, *Permission to Believe*, p. 86.

Similarly, Goldstein's reconstruction of the Argument from the Survival of the Jews includes an explicit claim about the inability of natural explanations to account for the survival of the Jews, i.e., premise (4).

As there are several kinds of explanations, such as nomic and functional explanations, it is important to note that the explanation the Argument from the Survival of the Jews is calling for is supposed to be a causal explanation.¹⁹ That is to say, the statement "The Jews endure because they are protected by God," should be understood as a causal claim. God is the cause of the Jews' survival in a sense that is similar to the one in which a certain virus is a cause for a particular disease. In that respect, there must be a causal mechanism underlying the divine protection of the Jews just as there is a causal mechanism underlying the spread of disease by viruses. We will return to this question in Section Four where we discuss the criteria for selecting the best explanation and whether or not divine supervision meets these criteria as an explanation for the survival of the Jewish people.

Now, if alternative explanations to the riddle of Jewish endurance cannot be eliminated, but rather are rejected as unlikely, then the Argument from the Survival of the Jews is not intended to be what Alexander Bird calls "inference to the only explanation" (IOE).²⁰ In the case of IOE, there is sufficient evidence to refute all explanations except one. According to Bird, IOE has the following structure:

The fact *es* has an explanation.

*h*₁, ..., *h*_{*n*} are the only hypotheses that could explain *es*.

*h*₁, ..., *h*_{*n*-1} have been falsified by the evidence.

Therefore, *h*_{*n*} explains *es*.²¹

The Argument from the Survival of the Jews doesn't seem to have the structure of IOE because the alternative explanations (or hypotheses) for the riddle of Jewish survival were not falsified by the evidence, but rather rejected as unlikely. For example, Kelemen hints at the fact that the Jewish people were scattered in several places around the world as an explanation for their endurance. This is also the explanation Goldstein provides in the comments quoted

¹⁹For a discussion of different kinds of explanation, see A. Bird, *Philosophy of Science* (Montreal: McGill Queen's University Press, 1998).

²⁰A. Bird, "Inference to the Only Explanation," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, Vol. 74 (2007): 424–432. See also A. Bird, "Eliminative Abduction—Examples from Medicine," *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science* (2009).

²¹Bird, "Eliminative Abduction."

above. According to Goldstein, a major flaw in the Argument from the Survival of the Jews is that being stateless and scattered may have actually been conducive rather than detrimental to Jewish survival. This alternative explanation is not falsified by the evidence. That is to say, there is no evidence that refutes this alternative explanation or that would force us to eliminate it from the list of likely explanations.²²

4. The Best Explanation

If the aforementioned considerations are correct, then it seems that the Argument from the Survival of the Jews is supposed to be an IBE, rather than an IOE, and thus we need to be able to say what makes the divine supervision explanation better than all the alternative explanations.

What makes an explanation “the best”? Philosophers have proposed several criteria of selection. These include the following:

Coherence: As a general rule of thumb, choose the explanation that is consistent with expert judgments within the domain in question.

Power: As a general rule of thumb, choose the explanation that explains the most and leaves the fewest things unexplained.

Simplicity: As a general rule of thumb, choose the least complicated explanation, i.e., the one that posits the least causal sequences and entities, and that goes beyond the evidence the least.

Testability: As a general rule of thumb, choose the explanation that yields predictions that can be tested independently.²³

Judged by these criteria of selection, it might appear as if the divine supervision explanation for Jewish survival fails in terms of testability, as it doesn't seem to yield any predictions that can be tested independently. However, I

²²According to Rabbi Judah Halevi (*The Kuzari: An Argument for the Faith of Israel*, trans. Hartwig Hirschfeld [New York: Schocken Books, 1964], pp. 226–227), on the one hand, the exile and dispersion of the Jews was punishment for their sins. On the other hand, however, it also ensured that Judaism—the true monotheistic faith—would have adherents all over the world. See also M. Walzer, “Nation and Universe,” *The Tanner Lectures on Human Values* (Oxford University, May 1989). Available at <http://www.tannerlectures.utah.edu/lectures/documents/walzer90.pdf>.

²³See, e.g., P. Lipton, *Inference to the Best Explanation*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2004), who talks about explanations in terms of their “loveliness.”

think that the divine supervision explanation can be independently tested, provided that we make a few assumptions about the nature of God.

For example, given certain auxiliary assumptions about the nature of God, which are accepted by Judaism as well as other monotheistic religions, we would expect humans to be created fairly soon after the creation of the universe. It would seem rather odd to create a universe eons before the creation of the species that is supposed to play a central role in it. If humanity does indeed provide the rationale for the existence of the rest of creation, then we would expect humans to arrive on the scene relatively soon after the creation of the universe. But we would also expect some plants and animals to be created before humans. If plants and animals were created for human use, e.g., as a source of food and clothing, then it would be unwise to create humans before creating at least some plants and animals for their use. On the other hand, we would not expect humans to be created very long after the first plants and animals. For, then, what would be the point of having plants and animals for human pleasure, without any humans around to actually make use of them?²⁴ Furthermore, if the Jews are indeed the chosen people, then we would expect them to arrive on the scene early in the history of the world. For what would be the point of creation without God's chosen people?

If it doesn't fail in terms of testability, perhaps the divine supervision explanation for Jewish survival fails in terms of simplicity, for it seems to go beyond the evidence and posits an unobserved (even unobservable) entity to account for an observable phenomenon. Ockham's razor dictates that we must not multiply entities beyond necessity, or so one might argue. However, I think that divine supervision doesn't fail as an explanation in that respect. In other words, it is not guilty of going beyond the evidence and postulating the existence of unobservable entities, at least no more than any other explanation does. To see why, consider an example from science. Alfred Wegener noticed that some coastlines, like those of South America and Africa, look as though they would fit together like puzzle pieces. He also learned that related species, as well as similar fossils, were found on different continents.

In light of this evidence, Wegener proposed that the continents were once attached in a single landmass he called "Pangaea." According to Wegener, the continents were surrounded by one global ocean, but then broke apart and somehow drifted away. Wegener's theory of continental drift seemed to explain the observable evidence: the shape of the continents, the fossil evidence,

²⁴See N. Everitt, *The Non-existence of God* (London: Routledge, 2004), Chap. 11.

the matching rock types and geologic structures, and the evidence of ancient climate patterns. But there was one major problem: Wegener could not come up with an acceptable way to explain how the continents moved.²⁵

As a result, few of Wegener's contemporaries accepted his theory in his lifetime. Only after Wegener's death did Arthur Holmes publish his work on thermal convection in the earth's mantle and how this could be the mechanism that explains how the continents could move. Holmes suggested that the continents were "carried" by larger pieces of the earth's crust. Subsequently, the discovery of the Mid-Ocean Ridge and the work of Harry Hess and others led to the development of plate tectonics. This example illustrates that there is nothing wrong with postulating unobserved entities to explain observable phenomena as such. Wegener postulated the existence of Pangaea and the process of continental drift to explain observable evidence relating to the shape of the continents. Similarly, one might think that a certain phenomenon is so remarkable and improbable that it requires an appeal to the divine for an explanation.

However, when one proposes a causal explanation of this sort, one must be able to describe the mechanism that underlies the causal sequences. This is why the Wegener example is instructive, for it seems to point to the reason why the divine supervision explanation is ultimately unsatisfactory. As we have seen, Wegener's theory of continental drift was met with skepticism and opposition largely because Wegener didn't have a mechanism by which to explain how the continents move. Lacking such a mechanism, it was difficult for his contemporaries to imagine how the continents could move. The divine supervision explanation, I propose, suffers from the same problem. It's not clear what the mechanism of defense is, as it were, by means of which God protects the Jewish people. Does God put a protective dome over every Jewish person? Does God intervene every time a Jew is in trouble? Perhaps God protects only some of the Jews, but not all of them. In that case, how many Jews should be alive and well at each point in time for God to be satisfied? And if by 'Jewish' we simply mean "a practitioner of Judaism," then what happens when a Jewish person stops practicing Judaism? Does God stop protecting that person? Or what happens when someone converts to Judaism? Does God keep tabs on conversions? If so, how?

²⁵See, H. E. Le Grand, *Drifting Continents and Shifting Theories* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

It seems clear, then, that the divine supervision explanation raises many questions about the mechanism by means of which God is supposed to be protecting the Jewish people. In that respect, this explanation seems to fail in terms of *Power*; it leaves a lot of loose ends, and it raises more questions than it provides answers.

At this point, it might appear as if Goldstein's version of the Argument from the Survival of the Jews is superior to Kelemen's version, for it doesn't seem to require a divine protection mechanism. Instead, it simply says that God has assigned a destiny to the Jews, and thus that the Jews have a purpose to play in human destiny. Although it doesn't explicitly postulate a divine protection mechanism, however, Goldstein's version of the Argument from the Survival of the Jews still needs one. In other words, the postulation of the divine protection mechanism may be implicit in the argument, but it is still there, and the argument would not work without it. To see why, consider the following questions:

Assuming that God assigned a transcendent destiny to the Jews,

- ♦ How does God make sure that the Jews meet their destiny?
- ♦ What does God do when the Jews are not playing their proper role in human destiny?
- ♦ What does God do when the Jews are not fulfilling their purpose?
- ♦ What does God do when this purpose is at risk of not being fulfilled?
- ♦ What does God do when the Jews, and hence their destiny, are in danger?

The point, then, is that for the Jews to act the role assigned to them by God, God has to make sure that they do so and that nothing will prevent the Jews from meeting their destiny. If this is correct, then even in Goldstein's version of the Argument from the Survival of the Jews, one must also postulate a mechanism of divine supervision. And if that's the case, then all the questions about that mechanism mentioned above may still be raised.

5. Conclusion

In this paper, I discussed an argument for the existence of God that deserves attention and careful analysis, or so I think. This argument has the form of an Inference to the Best Explanation (IBE). It proceeds from the phenomenon of Jewish survival to the existence of God as the best explanation for this phenomenon. However, as I argued, even if we grant that Jewish survival is a remarkable occurrence that demands an explanation, and even if we gloss over the difficulties in defining the terms "Jewish" and "survive," it seems that the Argument from the Survival of the Jews ultimately fails as an argument for the existence of God. It fails because it postulates divine supervision in order

to explain Jewish survival, but it doesn't provide any clues as to what might be the underlying mechanism at work.

This failure, however, may not be terminal. For recall that Wegener's theory of continental drift initially raised many questions, including the question about the mechanism of drift. But later researches addressed these questions and proposed such a mechanism. Similarly, it might be possible to articulate a mechanism of divine protection as well. In other words, those who find the divine supervision explanation to be the best explanation for the riddle of Jewish survival must provide answers to the questions about that mechanism mentioned above. Admittedly, it is difficult to imagine evidence that would support this, i.e., evidence that would make answers to these questions plausible or likely rather than merely conceptually coherent. Nevertheless, it seems there is no reason to suppose that these questions cannot be answered *in principle*. Until we have answers to these questions, however, we seem to be justified in suspending judgment just as Wegener's contemporaries were. In other words, the Argument from the Survival of the Jews doesn't seem to give us "permission to believe," at least not in its current form.

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