

Judaism in Culture: Beyond the Bifurcation of *Torah* and *Madda*

Alan Brill

Abstract: This essay attempts to reformulate the questions concerning the relationship of Judaism and culture, arguing for a need to rethink the bifurcation of Torah and secular studies. The limits of prior analysis of Torah and *Madda* are pointed out through describing various ideological forms of the bifurcation and their theoretical underpinnings. The paper does not critique actual practice, rather their formulations. It concludes with some suggestions for starting the discussion of new formulations.

Biography: Rabbi Dr. Alan Brill teaches at Yeshiva University and *Yeshivat Chovevei Torah*. He is also the Founder and Director of *Kavvanah*: Center for Jewish Thought and the author of *Thinking God: The Mysticism of R. Zadok of Lublin*.



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In the nineteenth century, culture was identified with the high culture of Europe, comprising Enlightenment values combined with the influence of science and humanism. For a peasant or non-European immigrant to become cultured meant to acquire this high culture through embourgeoisement by entering the middle class. Most contemporary theories of *Torah u-Madda* draw upon this definition to explain the integration of Judaism with general culture in both the present and the pre-nineteenth century past. In these theories, Torah exists outside of culture, and *Madda* relates to the values of the Enlightenment and European high culture. However, as early as the nineteen thirties, social scientists had already rejected defining culture as high culture and used the term "culture" to cover the entire functioning of a society. Current theories of culture, relying largely on Clifford Geertz's interpretation, apply the term universally to all societies, defining culture as the systems of meaning inherent in every action, which create order, purpose, and reason.¹ In these theories, culture encompasses all of human existence. From the standpoint of this scheme of conceptualization, much of the literature on *Torah u-Madda* becomes outdated, in so far as it issues from a narrower understanding of culture. Using the analysis of these theories, *Torah* and *Madda* together form part of a unified construction of modern Orthodox culture. Both aspects are inherent in every action.

Torah u-Madda ideology therefore needs to engage the implications of the current understandings, updating its self-presentation from the nineteenth century debates to current theories. While we should not be beholden to contemporary thought solely because of its newness, this essay will show the usefulness and relevance of these late twentieth-century categories for appreciating the topic of *Torah u-Madda*, offering a richer and more self-conscious understanding. Asking the right questions will help us effectively determine the type of culture that we want; to analyze the continuities, dynamics, and ruptures from past cultures, and enhance the potential for a meaningful construction within our spirituality.

I will begin with a definition of religion as embedded within culture and then survey three theological approaches to the issue of cultural analysis, using historical data and personal experience to make the case for the inadequacy of the current conceptualization. The three approaches are: (1) particularism, the apparent rejection of culture, (2) bifurcation, the separation of Torah from culture, (3) handmaiden, the selective acknowledgement of culture. I will then present openings for a cultural understanding of *Torah u-Madda* based on my experiences in education within the community, I will conclude by offering several suggestions about means to overcome the bifurcation through embracing our situation within culture and understanding our constructions.

¹ Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books, 1973). Thirty years later the following works are indicative of current thinking on the subject: James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1988); James Clifford, & George E. Marcus, *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986). Adam Kuper, *Culture: The Anthropologists' Account* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999). Current critics point out that Geertz does not give consideration to the political-economic realm and that he treats culture, symbols, and the observer status as static entities. Bearing these criticisms in mind, my goal in this essay is to move the discussion from nineteenth- to twentieth-century categories.

Religion and Culture

According to Clifford Geertz's *Interpretation of Cultures* (1973), culture refers to the webs of significance or meaning that man has constructed for his actions, including both the action and the significance of the action. Culture is the pattern of meanings or ideas, carried in symbols, through which people pass along their knowledge and express their attitudes toward life. Given the diverse attitudes and different forms of knowledge to be passed on, different "cultural systems" are required to carry them. Since everything is part of culture, what does it mean to call religion a cultural system? According to Geertz, religion is:

(1) a system of symbols which acts to (2) establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by (3) formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and (4) clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that (5) the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic.²

Ideas and meanings are embedded within our worldview or ethos, and this general order is responsible for determining the mood and motivation of an action. To modify an example used by Geertz, had the Vilna Ga'on seen a typical American Sabbath meal of unlimited quantities of food, especially meat, he would have felt a strong negative reaction, an aversion to the consumption of food in such quantities, because attachments to food weigh him down in his struggle for a redemptive connection to contemplating Torah. On the other hand, an American Modern Orthodox Jew would not feel any aversion to eating meat, just as he would not view speaking English or entering a profession as a cultural embracement of Americanization. The Vilna Ga'on and the Modern Orthodox American Jew are embedded, according to

Geertz, in two different cultural constructions.

In Geertz's method, the understanding of divergent culture seeks to capture the implicit web of cultural meanings. Within a traditional Jewish culture one finds divergent elements interwoven into a single whole; they include profession, lifestyle, the use of rabbinic texts, ideologies, eating habits, spirituality, and family structure. Describing the differences between the cultural worlds of the Vilna Ga'on and of Modern Orthodoxy requires the ability to offer a "thick description" of the cultural weave. In contrast, Geertz notes several types of "thin description" that operate without a cultural understanding, which are especially relevant to conceptualizing *Torah u-Madda* culture.

Examples of "thin description" characteristics that do not offer cultural understanding include: a failure to recognize that a legal "code does not determine conduct," that a theological, *a priori weltanschauung* imagines a reality that cannot be found, and that neo-Kantians accept symbols and ideal types as identical with their reality.³ In each of these cases, one confuses a theoretical statement with the actual cultural dynamics. Similarly, theoretical *halakhah* or philosophies of *Torah u-Madda* do not automatically correspond to any reality of lived practice. Ideologies are themselves embedded in a web of cultural meanings, even though neo-Kantians spoke of ideal types. Actual practice is embedded in culture. Cultural analysis does not only ask what the person intends, but how the action is embedded in culture. For example, an ideology of a halakhic or Modern Orthodox community needs to be treated as only an ideology or theoretical statement; the statement itself is not reflective of the cultural construct, nor does it offer a "thick description" of

² Geertz, *Interpretation of Cultures*, 90.

³ *Id.*, 18, 20, 92.

the community. At the same time that Geertz was developing his reconceptualization, Peter Berger, in his now classic work, *The Sacred Canopy* (1967), characterized culture as embracing all human activity including marriage, family life, professions, culinary traditions, lifestyle, worldview, material objects, and attitudes towards daily activities. According to Berger, religion is always embedded in culture and functionally serves as the sacred canopy, offering meaning in the construction of a cultural life. Theological questions, ritual patterns, and religious worldviews give meaning to marginal situations and maintain the world building cultural enterprise. Berger writes that culture is created through a three-part process of externalization (identification of a problem that needs to be answered), objectification (the creation of the cultural solution), and internalization (the acceptance of the culture by the society). One internalizes culture because it is functionally needed to answer a question or it fits into the "plausibility structure" of the society.⁴

Religion is always embedded in culture and functionally serves as the sacred canopy, offering meaning in the construction of life.

Despite widespread acceptance in college-educated circles of Peter Berger's functional (and Clifford Geertz's interpretive) cultural framework, theories of *Torah u-Madda* continue to use nineteenth century understandings. For example, a recent work of Modern Orthodox historical theology is entitled *Judaism's Encounter with Other Cultures: Rejection or Integration*.⁵ The book assumes that culture is produced by the surrounding non-Jewish society: non-Jews produce culture whether philosophy, medicine, literature, or entertainment, and Jews can decide to accept or reject it. The book does not assume that

Judaism itself exists within, arises from, and can produce culture. *Goyim* have the cultural problems that need to be solved, and therefore they create philosophy, social structure, healing techniques, professional achievements, or poetics. Jews on the other hand, are acceptors or rejecters of this culture: Jews can only choose whether or not to internalize this external knowledge; they are not among the producers.⁶

However, in actuality non-Jews have neither a monopoly nor even a temporary proprietary right over culture. Peter Berger's model nicely explains the medieval, early modern, and contemporary (excluding the limited, and liminal, period of modernity) formations of Jewish culture in which Jews externalized their problems and created their own religious and secular culture. The medicine of Maimonides differs from Galen's on medical grounds; but, nevertheless, the medicine is the creation of Maimonides the Jew for the Arabic speaking world. Similarly, the astronomy and logic of Gersonides, the political clout of Rashba, the translations of the Ibn Tibbons, and Isaac Abarbanel's philosophy were creators of the culture of their own time, even for non-Jews. Jews have an internal cultural life and have created philosophy, poetry, science, and politics for their own purposes. The poetics of Moses Ibn Ezra and Todros Abulafia, the theology of Hasdai Crescas, the political theory of Abarbanel, and the philosophy of Narboni were all creators of culture to answer internal Jewish needs. When Moses Ibn Ezra used Arabic poetics, or Crescas relied on Christian thought, their goal was to produce cultural products for the Jewish community. Internal Jewish culture even includes the cultural production of gainful employment, whether as a tailor, physician, or philosopher. Furthermore, at the beginning of the Middle Ages, Jews were heirs to the civilization of late antiquity, while

⁴ Peter Berger, *The Sacred Canopy* (Garden City, N.Y., Doubleday, 1967).

⁵ Jacob J. Schachter, ed., *Judaism's Encounter with Other Cultures: Rejection or Integration?* (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, 1997).

⁶ Several of the essays have statements, which seem to transcend the stated model and accept the role of Jews in an open and vibrant cultural sphere or the role of material culture and folklore upon Judaism, but they do not substantively change the volume (see pages 4, 63, 146). Defining culture and civilization as the gentile society is typified in Cecil Roth's slim volume, *The Jewish Contribution to Civilization* (London, East and West Library, 1956), where he lists the places in which Jews contributed to Western Christian culture.

the northern Christians and Arabic tribes were the groups newly affected by Mediterranean culture. If there was influence, at the end of late antiquity, it was from Jews to non-Jews, and not vice-versa.

Culture is not outside of Judaism but is the very plane into which Judaism is manifest. There is no pristine autonomous essence of Judaism outside of culture. If we consider Hirsch's model of Torah and general culture, in which culture is outside Judaism, we find that his theory was only reflective of a specific moment in history, during which Jews submitted to Western culture and formulated a nineteenth-century form of Judaism, in which the Torah is considered outside culture (unlike the integrated forms of medieval Jewish culture). However, rejecting philosophy and culture is itself a cultural decision, not an outside-culture decision. A religion of faith without culture is a nineteenth-century Protestant vision of religion, in which the secular reason of modern culture is opposed to a salvation through a faith that rejects culture. The nineteenth century theological vision rejecting culture was not historically accurate concerning sixteenth century Protestants⁷ and certainly it was not true for Jewish cultures before the nineteenth century. They projected this dichotomy onto the birth of sixteenth century Protestantism and claimed that Protestant faith was always against culture.

Modern Orthodoxy has adopted a Protestant division between faith and culture. This modern dualism is projected by nineteenth-century Jewish ideology onto the past of Jewish history, postulating that obedience to Judaism stemmed from uncultured simple Jews following a mimetic tradition, while philosophic understandings of Judaism, including those of Maimonides, grew out of alien influence of a foreign culture. However, Aristotelian philosophy is not outside Judaism; in fact, according to

Maimonides' own self-understanding, specified sections of metaphysics are the essence of Judaism.

Rather than assuming that Judaism encounters *other* cultures, this essay assumes that the construction of Judaism itself is embedded in culture, which has non-indigenous but not necessarily foreign, elements. This is not a semantic definition of culture, but a substantive one. In Peter Berger's terms, secular culture does not exist; nor does religious culture exist. We live in a single cultural worldview and create as much "sacred canopy" as needed to find meaning in life. The encounter with "western secular culture" was from Berger's perspective not an encounter with an *other* but a breakdown of the older Jewish plausibility structure and a replacement with another Jewish plausibility structure. Berger formulates the Jewish encounter with modernity as the breaking of the Eastern European sacred canopy in the move to America, and the subsequent need to reformulate a new sacred canopy. Yet, both the Eastern European cultural pattern and the new American formulation are Jewish culture. Within the melting pot of America, there are separate Hispanic, Afro-American, Jewish, Southern Baptist sub-cultures and enclaves consisting of a certain integrated construction of Americanism and sacred canopy. The acceptance of secular studies or "other cultures" by Modern Orthodoxy is part of the very definition of their sacred canopy of Judaism.

Clifford Geertz's method involves a "thick description" of these elements, asking how each Jewish cultural construction works, the meaning of the cultural elements within their own context, and the changes between various cultural constructions. Instead, the ideology of the Modern Orthodox book, *Judaism's Encounter with Other Cultures*, uses a "thin description" question and projects the nineteenth-century model of Judaism confronting

⁷ Ernest Troelesch, *Protestantism and Progress: A Historical Study of the Relation of Protestantism to the Modern World* (Boston: Beacon Press 1958); Heiko Augustinus Oberman, *The Reformation: Roots and Ramifications* (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans 1994); *Idem*, *The Harvest of Medieval Theology. Gabriel Biel Late Medieval Nominalism* (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans 1967).

secular studies, onto the cultural constructions of prior centuries. However, each time and place needs its own questions and definitions of what the culture is and where the boundaries are located. Asking nineteenth century questions about other eras is unproductive. For Maimonides, philosophy was not other cultures but part of Mosaic prophecy; for others in the Judeo-Islamic worldview, philosophy was part of our tradition (*mesorah*); it was neither secular nor an outside influence.

Rather than pointing to the rejection of culture by an autonomous Judaism, current thinking about the Maimonidean controversy finds the opponents of the Maimonideans debating *power*, *paideia*, theology, laity, *qabalah*, Church relations, and regional autonomy.⁸ On the other hand if we consider Ashkenazi Jewry, knowledge outside the rabbinic corpus was so much an "other", that they even considered Latin characters as embedded within Christian society. Yet, a non-reflective isolationist position of a simple Ashkenazi would not be intelligible to a Jewish financier in Aragon or Castile engaged in daily commerce using his knowledge of Arabic, Castilian, arithmetic, and geometry or to a Provençal physician attending lectures at University of Montpellier. Some Jewish cultures such as Renaissance Italian Jewish culture even included many secular elements within the internal understanding of the community.

If religion is embedded in culture, then religion is not solely a particularistic element, nor an internal feeling, an act of obedience, or the study of the *halakhah*, in opposition to outside culture. Ernest Troeltsch (1865-1923) already drew attention to the construction of religion as outside of culture, which postulates a simple non-reflec-

tive religion of folk culture. Troeltsch rejected this image of simple religion without culture and with apathy towards philosophy and science, suggesting it creates a mockery of religion, consisting of hollow sentimentalism or clericalism and formalism. To be taken seriously, religion uses philosophy, science, poetry, and the other elements of culture.⁹ Many of the classic expositions of modern Jewish history tacitly assume, based on Graetz, that the traditional Judaism of the last two thousand years was based on the faith of the simple Jew and that all intellectuals, philosophers, and Qabbalists ruptured the tradition. However, if we assume that these great thinkers were the bearers of the tradition, then we accept their judgment to look askance at the laity and require education. Even the mild rationalism combined with *halakhah* and piety that emanated from the Catalonian circle of R. Solomon ben Abraham Adret (Rashba, 1235-1310), including R. Yom-Tov ben Abraham Ishbili, (ca. 1270-ca. 1342) and R. Pinhas Ha-Levi, (the author of the *Sefer Ha-Hinukh*), and the alternate formulations from Provençals such as R. Menahem ben Solomon Meiri (1249-1306) were due to their cultural embeddedness.¹⁰

The theological essay in the volume *Judaism's Encounter with Other Cultures* written by R. Aharon Lichtenstein relies on the nineteenth century theories of Matthew Arnold, Henry Cardinal Newman, and Edmund Burke, and thus formulates the question of Torah and general culture as ideological and needing a conscious confrontation. However, according to Geertz and Berger, the majority of cultural issues and historical events are not conscious and are based on unarticulated problems whose externalization and objectification occurs without ideology. Indicative of this approach of situating culture

⁸ For representative examples of current scholarship on the Maimonidean controversy, see footnote 10 below and Ram Ben-Shalom, "The Ban Placed by the Community of Barcelona on the Study of Philosophy and Allegorical Preaching—A New Study" *REJ* (2001) 387-404; Harvey Hames, *The Art of Conversion* (Leiden: Brill, 2000); Dov Schwartz, "Greek Science" [Hebrew] *Sinai* 104 (1989) 148-153. On the new approach of Jewish cultural history, see *Cultures of the Jews. A New History*, editor David Biale, (Berkeley: University of California, 2002).

⁹ Ernst Troeltsch, *Religion in History* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991). By the end of this essay, I will assume that religion is integrated in all aspects of culture and not just high culture.

¹⁰ Moshe Halbertal, *Between Torah and Wisdom. Rabbi Menahem ha-Meiri and the Maimonidean Halakhists in Provence* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 2000); *Sefer ha-Hinukh* (Jerusalem: Mosad ha-Rav Kook, 1990) (ascribed to Aaron ha-Levi, of Barcelona; actually by Pinhas (brother of Aaron), ha-Levi, of Barcelona; Dov Schwartz, "Between Conservatism and Intellectualism: The Intellectual Doctrine of the Rashba's School" [Hebrew] *Da`at* 32-33 (1994) 143-182.

outside of Judaism, R. Lichtenstein assumes that Judaism is nearly cultureless compared to Western literature:

But should we indeed seek first-rate poetry, we shall have to look elsewhere. Our moral and religious lights did not address themselves with equal vigor to every area of spiritual endeavor. *Hazal* engaged little in systematic theology or philosophy and their legacy includes no poetic corpus. Their *haskafah* was undoubtedly anchored in a comprehensive, if partly intuited, *Weltanschauung* and their inner experience surely reflected profound and passionate sensibility. However, the record with respect to these areas is almost bare. That patent fact may constitute a cogent argument pursuing such directions, although Rav Saadya Gaon—as both his *Treatise of Beliefs and Opinions* and his great *bakkashot* attest—the Rambam and the Maharal clearly thought otherwise. But be that as it may, for those who do acknowledge the merits of such pursuits, it is preposterous to pretend to find in our own tradition that which, at a given level and with a certain range, simply is not there. (252)

Openly opposed to Saadyah, Maimonides, and Maharal, whose Judaisms are embedded in culture, R. Lichtenstein's essay, following nineteenth century thinking, assumes no tradition of Jewish culture except for the few texts he cites—without noting the irony—to justify the reading of modern Western secular culture.

Yet, from an empirical standpoint the range of Jewish culture simply does exist, including poetry, prose, philosophy, theology, moral theory, science, and psychology. Within this range of cultural products, however, it is pre-

posterous to expect to find the literary and philosophic values of mid-twentieth-century secular American culture. Later in the essay, R. Lichtenstein singles out the need to add an imaginative element through literature to the moral statements of *Hazal*, without taking into account the gamut of literary and pietistic works produced within Jewish culture. Surprisingly, he chooses to use as an exemplar to prove the lack of theology in Judaism, the lack of religious literature describing religious experience:

Assuredly, many aspiring *talmidei hakhamim* have experienced religious moments profounder than Petrarch's ascent to Mont Ventoux. But how many have sent their rebbi a descriptive account... An account of Rabbi Akiva's spiritual odyssey could no doubt eclipse Augustine's. But his confessions have been discreetly muted (253).

But what of R. Akiva's journey to paradise richly described in the *Heikhalot*? And what of the spiritual descriptions found in the Zohar, Karo, Cordovero, Vital, Komarno, R. Nahman, Rav Kook, or even those of the Vilna Gaon, which rival anything in the Christian writings? Even, if he is rejecting them because they do not meet the literary standards of modern literary theory, they are still descriptive, profound, and record the Jewish inner experience. According to the literary standards of 1960's New Criticism, one would deem the Talmud and *halakhah* literary failures, yet we read *halakhah*. His position is so embedded in its twentieth century Western perspective that he is blinded to many parts of Judaism. Without cultural analysis, one does not see one's own foreignness and oneself as an other.

However, a more profound issue is at stake in relegating imagination and morality exclusively to secular literature. Valuing Christian texts over Jewish ones mutes the Jewish experience. The classic texts of Jewish mysticism—not to mention theology, philosophy, literature, and science—have different theological perspectives from modern and Christian perspectives. Jewish texts as products of Jewish culture were created to respond to Jewish agendas. Secular experience may diverge from traditional Jewish descriptions. Internalization of the cultural products of other people does not necessarily answer Jewish needs, nor are such products necessarily in agreement with Jewish thought or with the cultural constructions of prior Jewish cultures.¹¹

Against High Culture: Theory and Practice

In Geertz's and Berger's definitions of culture, Torah does not exist outside of culture; Torah is always embedded in culture. The question becomes, what is the culture in which Torah is embedded? The modern era has witnessed Jewish cultural construction taking two divergent turns. The modernists (both liberal and Orthodox) relinquished much of Jewish culture, including spirituality, political autonomy, and sectarianism, in order to enter the foreign high culture of Europe. Another group, adhering to a *yeshivah* ideology, set itself up in opposition to modernity and created an abstraction of Torah outside of culture in order to oppose the spread of the foreign European culture. Nevertheless, both groups had a common premise of denying prior ages of synthesis.¹²

The following narrative presents, as a start of a thick

description of *Torah u-Madda*, three models of *Madda* within Modern Orthodoxy. I am using history and anecdotal observation solely for the purpose of delineating Modern Orthodox ideology, and not as an independent historical or sociological study of Orthodoxy. I understand that the actual history of the acceptance of secular studies within Orthodoxy is more complex than the following models, yet I think the current applications of these historical precedents fall within three broad models. Furthermore, these observations are limited to my exposure to Modern Orthodox communities and their constructions of Judaism. I am not offering comment about any other segment of Orthodoxy.

Both modernists and yeshivah ideologies had the common premise of denying prior ages of synthesis.

The *yeshivah* ideology of encouraging every male to learn only Torah is of recent origin. Originally, only those within the small class of *lomdim*, supported by their family connections to the ruling Jewish oligarchy, felt the need for life-long study.¹³ The vast majority of Jews, almost the equivalent of everyone, went out to work. The rise of the Lithuanian *yeshivah* movement in the nineteenth century allowed those not from the ruling families to learn, and thereby enter the society of *lomdim*. Later, in order to provide a few extra years of learning for a few elite individuals without funds, the first *kolel* was created in Kovno in

¹¹ We have to assume that R. Lichtenstein is willing to accept secular culture as culture for Jews or he accepts an unarticulated Jewish culture, which is the literal meaning of *weltanschauung*, an unarticulated worldview. If the latter, then the *Torah u-Madda* question is not conscious and ideological but unconscious and unarticulated. On the unconscious acceptance of worldviews see, Wilhelm Dilthey, *Introduction to the Human Sciences. Selected works / Wilhelm Dilthey; vol. 1* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, c1989). Herbert Arthur Hodges, *The Philosophy of Wilhelm Dilthey*, (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1974); Rudolf A. Makkreel, *Dilthey. Philosopher of the Human Studies* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, c1992).

¹² Modern Islam displays a similar process of ignoring prior ages of synthesis; see Clifford Geertz, *Islam Observed* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1968).

¹³ Jacob Katz, *Tradition and Crisis* (New York: NYU Press, 1993) states that "The notion that society was composed of various "orders," each of which had a different level of obligation with regard to Torah study, was widely accepted," p. 284, note 39. In order to determine who was expected to learn, a helpful study could start with a history of the exegesis of *Josh. 1:8* and *Ps. 1:3* and the applications of Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah Hilkhos Talmud Torah 1:8*.

1880. Anyone who continued to learn beyond his early twenties, either in Lithuania or Israel, remained as part of the identified small groups of *lomdim*—"learners." During the 1880s and 1890s, the *yeshivot* avoided modernity, and, therefore, more observant Jews were studying in gymnasium than in *yeshivot*.¹⁴ During this same period, the Mizrahi movement, following the cultural changes of the Zionists, advocated as a response to modernity a creation of new Jewish culture based not on Talmud but on Hebrew, Bible, secular studies, and productive labor.¹⁵

However, after World War I, when the full onslaught of modernity confronted Lithuania, the *yeshiva* world, which prior to the war had been an elite bastion far removed from the cultural lives of millions of Eastern European Jews, became even more isolated. In response to modernity, the Hafetz Hayyim, R. Elhanan Wasserman, and R. Baruch Ber Leibowitz issued pronouncements on the need to continuously learn Torah. During the inter-war period, their audience was the small group that was willing to swim against the tide by continuing to learn. The only way to preserve Torah in what they perceived as an anti-Torah world was to forbid secular studies and advocate a life of continuous Torah study.¹⁶ From their perspective, they assumed that theirs was the true position, and they would certainly continue

to defend it today.

But just as they deemed Hirsch's Torah and *Derekh Erets* approach as applicable only to his generation, we can assume that their position was specifically meant for a generation under siege. Currently, the *yeshiva* ideology, which exhorts all capable men to spend their lives learning, finds fertile ground as an ideology in the wealth of post-war America and Israel. But the ideology goes against the tradition and history; our *mesorah* always assumed that the elite would learn full time and that the masses would be part of the world.¹⁷

Despite the newness of the ideology, the ideal of studying only Torah is widely accepted as the tradition in Orthodoxy, even in Modern Orthodoxy. However, it is accepted only as an ideal, not in practice; and it is accepted as an ideal for practical reasons, not ideological ones.

Turning to contemporary cultural theory, Pierre Bourdieu, the renowned contemporary sociologist, points out that ideal and reality are two separate things; we are not always doing what we claim to be doing.¹⁸ Actual practices are based on a person's ingrained behavior regularities, which he calls *habitas*. *Habitas* includes "systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as

¹⁴ Israel Klausner, *Vilna, Yerushalayim de-Lita, (Lohamei ha-Geta'ot- ha-Kibuts ha-meuhad, 1983)*.

¹⁵ On Mizrahi and its differences from the world of the *yeshivot*, see Ehud Luz, *Parallels Meet: Religion and Nationalism in the Early Zionist Movement(1882-1904)* (Philadelphia: J. P. S., 1988); Judah Leib Maimon, *Toldot ha-Mizrahi*. (Jerusalem: 1927); id, *Yovel ha-Mizrahi: kovets torani, madai, sifrut le-yovel ha-hamishim*. (Jerusalem: Mosad ha-Rav Kook, 1952). Moshe Avigdor Amiel, *ha-Yesodot ha-ideologyim shel ha-Mizrahi: hartsaah beha-veidah ha-olamit shel ha-Mizrahi be-Krakah*, (Warsaw: Histadrut ha-Mizrahi, 1934).

¹⁶ R. Leibowitz, "Teshuvah leRav Ehad..." *Birkhat Shmuel Kiddushin* #27; R. Elhanan Wasserman, "Teshuvah le-Shoel me-Medinah Yeduah" *Sefer Kovetz Shiurim* II (Tel Aviv: 1963) #47, 75-8.

Whom it applied to in the 1920's is a separate question. Current readings of these proclamations assume that they were addressed to everyone and wanted universal Torah learning. The cultural world of inter-war Poland, however, with its emigrations, persecutions, penury, and mass illiteracy, may imply otherwise. Since most Jews were not connected to the world of the yeshiva, there may not be any reason to assume that they expected a universal following.

¹⁷ In many places, the Talmud glorifies manual labor and accepts that there are two classes the learners and the workers. Meir Ayali, *Maamado shel ha-Poel ha-sakhir ve-Yahase ovadim u-maavidim be-sifrut ha-Talmud vaha-Midrash* (Jerusalem: Hebrew University, 1980). However, when addressing the concerns of the rabbinic class, *Berakhot* 35b gives two paradigms: R. Shimon bar Yohai, who devoted himself only to Torah study, and R. Yishmael, who advocated a life of Torah combined with *derekh erets*. R. Hayyim of Volozhin wrote that the majority of Jews would follow the path of R. Yishmael and only a few worthy individuals could follow the path of R. Shimon bar Yohai See also the analysis of Hayyim of Volozhin, *Nefesh Ha-Hayyim* 1:8; this passage has been airbrushed out of many recent editions.

structuring structures, that is, as principles of the generation and structuring of practices."¹⁹ The actual structures of our lives consist of practical structures not necessarily based on our ideologies and that our practice decisions create more enduring changes. Not that contemporary Jews are falling short from the ideal of Torah or *Torah u-Madda*, but the very logic of the practice is far removed from the ideology. The logic of Modern Orthodox practice consists of a set of responses allowing one to combine professional advancement and suburban home life with Torah. Secular studies play a role in professional advancement, but the cultural discourse of the suburban home life does not need the secular studies. Bourdieu would consider the cultural and social capital of the community as based on Torah, and the economic capital as based on professional life, but secular studies do not offer any cultural capital to those who possess them.²⁰

The logic of practice in which secular studies do not offer a person cultural capital causes many in Modern Orthodoxy, even those who accept in principle the ideology of *Torah u-Madda*, to accept that the ideal is to lead a life of a *ben Torah* dedicated to Talmudic study, and to eschew all non-Torah thoughts and activities beyond making an income. Many discussions of *Torah u-Madda* are predicated on addressing the ideology of Torah without secular studies. Rather than looking at the ideology, if we look at the practice, we find that Modern Orthodoxy does not perform what it claims to do. In practice, Talmud is the major intellectual concern of an elite group for only a few years of their lives. The demands of ordinary life—the practice of law, medicine, or accounting, maintaining a house, raising many children according to middle class values—leave little room for Talmud. *Madda*

is not taking time from Torah, but the needs to mow the lawn, clean up the attic, fix the mini-van, visit Disneyworld, and attend parent-teacher conferences, consume great amounts of time. In the little time that remains, most people are too tired to do much else than watch television or read popular magazines. Those truly virtuous souls who have time for Torah learn daf-yomi, or print-outs from the Web, or at best have once a week *havrutot*.²¹

Modern Orthodoxy is a community whose worldview is drawn from the its embeddedness in American culture.

The decision to enter the professions and move to the suburbs is defining of the structures of their lives. What remains is a community that predominately does not value secular studies, without professional value, above the high school level, and which does not study Torah either. The community may affirm the ideology of *Torah u-Madda* (or an ideology of Torah only), but its logic of practice, its granting of cultural capital, and its natural responses point to a cultural embeddedness in their suburban lives. For most Modern Orthodox Jews, discussions of *Torah u-Madda* should start with the assumption that we are producing suburbanites, and our questions and goals should address their need for *Madda* and their need for Torah. I am not critiquing their practices of Torah or of *Madda*, I am critiquing the contemporary theoretical understandings of *Torah u-Madda* that avoids cultural theory.

The Orthodox community is completely embedded in American culture and contributes to the creation of American culture itself.²² Modern Orthodoxy is not a

¹⁸ Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1989). He noticed that ideally Moroccan Berbers were expected to marry their cousins. In practice he found that it occurred only 3% of all cases. The marriage ideal expressed Berber ideas of kinship with cousins, but the logic of practice was that everyone assumed they could marry anyone that they wanted.

¹⁹ Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977) 72.

²⁰ Natalie Zemon Davis wrote a wonderful piece showing how eighteenth century Ashkenaz culture had a cultural weave integrating Torah, economics, honor, and family pedigree. Natalie Zemon Davis, "Religion and Capitalism Once Again? Jewish Merchant Culture in the Seventeenth Century" *The Fate of Culture. Geertz and Beyond* edited by Sherry B. Ortner (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999) 56-85.

²¹ This essay is not attempting to define the sociology of the community or even creating a genealogy of the origins of these phenomena. A quantified survey would first be needed to start the process of analysis.

Yiddish-speaking Jewish culture encountering a foreign gentile culture, but a community whose worldview is drawn from its embeddedness in American culture. Most of the community already knows American values better than Torah. Our question should be: Now that the majority of American Jews have a midbrow education, how much of the elite's Torah curriculum should be required of them? And since they now are saturated with American culture, from nursery rhymes in the cradle to reading a daily newspaper to the enrichment classes of retirement villages, do we want to raise their level?²³ How many of our *ba`alei-batim* spend more time learning Torah than watching TV or movies? How many among our adults are aspiring *talmidei hakhamim*? How many in large Modern Orthodox communities worry about wasting valuable Torah study time (*bittul-zeman*)?²⁴ A motto for the community might be "Torah and popular culture;" Torah is combined with Dougies, the NCAA playoffs,

and Blockbuster movies.²⁵ The community works with an ideology of Torah combined with a suburban logic of practice. (On those committed to an intellectual *Torah u-Madda*, of Torah and secular studies, see the discussion in later sections.)²⁶

I accept this as the cultural construction of many in the community and think that the practices described respond to the needs of the community. However, if one did want to change actual practice, one needs to change the practice of everyday lives within the cultural construction. Ann Swidler, critiquing both Weber and Geertz, assumes that most activities are embedded in a logic of practice and do not have an ideological element. For most people during stable periods, culture is a set of skills, habits, styles, and stratagems that teach one how to succeed in the community. Only during unsettled periods

²² A big issue beyond the scope of this paper is the viability of continuing to use the language of accommodation, acculturation, and assimilation to the Jewish community as if it were still an immigrant community. Jewish suburbia is entirely embedded within general suburban trends and can better be described by general works on America such as Robert Wuthnow, *After Heaven. Spirituality in America Since the 1950's* (Berkeley: University of California, 1998) and Christian Smith, *American Evangelicalism. Embattled and Thriving* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

²³ Once in 1981, R. Yehudah Parnes put down his students by praising them for their *mesirat nefesh* in studying Torah. How they put in amazingly long hours, even sometimes greater than *yeshivah* students, despite not being *yeshivah* students but only aspiring *ba`alei batim*. The class was naturally disturbed and defended their status as aspiring *yeshivah* students. However, he was correct. We expect the community to spend their entire lives working—and then come home to be normal Americans and at the end of a workday and spend time with their families, watch television, and read the paper. Whom are we kidding about a Torah-only lifestyle?

²⁴ On the prohibition of wasting time see Katz, *Tradition and Crisis*, pp. 136-7.

²⁵ See the advertisement that was part of The New York Times Abuzz! Campaign "Madison Ave's Hot New Models: Jews" (Aug. 11, 00) in which Orthodoxy's modernity was characterized as technology, politics, baseball, bad movies, family restaurants and hip-hop. The Agudah's response was David Zwiebel, "Getting Beyond Misleading Labels" (Aug 18, 00), in which he stated that the spectrum of the modernity of Hirsch's Torah combined with secular studies ranges from indiscriminate casting off of Jewish religious law to the right wing world's doctors, lawyers, and academics. He also encouraged the youth "to spend less time checking out the latest rap offering or the gross-out flick *de jour*, and more time pursuing the eternal moral truths of his religious heritage."

²⁶ The Hatam Sofer's sectarian rejection of Western culture through forbidding the changing of names, the speaking of the vernacular, and the changing from Jewish garb may have shown a better understanding of the issues. His rejection of sitting in cafes, sports, and most forms of middle class leisure offers an greater realization of the role of culture within Judaism. In Yair Sheleg's book, *Ha-Datiyim ha-Hadashim* (Jerusalem: Keter, 2000) he notes how the *aliyah* from the American Haredi world (of Lakewood and Boro Park) steeped in this-worldly pleasures of America is changing the nature of the ascetic, other-worldly Israeli Haredi society. The use of cell phones, corporate management, baseball, and computers is integrated into the Haredi society, along with the waning of the traditional Haredi concepts of *bittul Torah*, *hukkat hagoyim*, and living life solely to get reward in the world-to-come. Also, see Sylvia Barack Fishman, "Negotiating Both Sides of the Hyphen: Coalescence, Compartmentalization, and American-Jewish Values" *University of Cincinnati, Judaic Studies Program. Occasional Papers* 6 (1996), where she argues that even the uniquely Jewish in American-Judaism is embedded in Americanism.

of tension and transition do values and ideology play a significant role. Generally, when ideology does play a role in American life, it is used in fragmentary and contradictory ways, and used as part of a toolbox for situating daily life. Ideals have symbolic value, and there is real competition between them, but their actual application remains ambiguous and piecemeal without conscious considerations.²⁷ Theory generally does not change the logic of practice during stable eras. Human life is lived based on mastering the rules of daily life and not on autonomous ideological choices. Contemporary social theory shows how we follow teachers and institutions though an immanent experience of practice presumed to be similar to that of our role models and confirmed through our daily practice of cultural life. Modern Orthodox Jews are not falling from any ideal of *Torah u-Madda* or muddling through without a theory, since theory does not play a role in their logic of practice. The practice of Modern Orthodoxy, for those not concerned with ideology, consists of a variety of skills, styles, and stratagems needed to live within the community.

The practice of the ideological elements of Modern Orthodoxy is similar to the practice of a basketball coach or dentist who may teach meditation as a practical technique without any need for a theory or recognition of its oriental philosophy. So, too, the suburban Modern Orthodox lifestyle does not need an ideology of change as much as practical changes in the current set of skills, habits, styles, and stratagems. For most people, *Madda* does not have any meaning without a pragmatic value. Therefore, if one wanted to change the situation, one would need to change the necessary and pragmatic elements of their everyday lives, not their ideology.²⁸ As Ann Swidler, points out, ideology plays a stronger role when needed at several crucial points, but not in everyday

life. For Modern Orthodoxy, ideology plays a greater role in the choice of schools for one's children, one's reading on Jewish holidays, and one's reaction to a guest lecturer in synagogue, than in support of secular homework, use of time on the holiday, and daily expectations of one's rabbi. Another important consideration for an ideologist of *Torah u-Madda* to ponder is that popular knowledge functions in as fickle a way as any other consumer product, transformed into usable sound bites far from the original theoretical exposition.²⁹

Practical change would also come from beginning to acknowledge the distance of the traditional other-worldliness of rabbinic and *yeshivah* values from suburban values. In order to preserve these values of Torah study, spirituality, and ethical perfection for the few, we should start to consider the implications of the rise of a literate laity and to develop a theory for the religiosity of the laity. Currently, halakhic literature offers a great deal of insight for those considered the elite, but there is no Jewish theology of suburban culture for the laity.

For those interested in changing the ideology of the community through education, accepting the idea that religion is always embedded in culture changes the question that one needs to ask. The question is how much *Madda* to accept, not whether to study *Madda*. Does Orthodoxy want to be identified with the reaction against culture of the Evangelical Christian communities? Evangelicals generally support science and rationality, but only with an eighteenth-century Francis Bacon, common-sense realism. Therefore, they accept engineering, medicine, and accounting as value neutral and based on a common sense point of view. They question, however, any science or knowledge based on theory, humanities, or interpretation.³⁰ Do we want to be a community that advocates

²⁷Ann Swidler, "Culture in Action: Symbols and Strategies," *American Sociological Review* 51 (1986): 273-286; id., *Talk of Love. How Culture Matters* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001).

²⁸ Ann Swidler "What Anchors Cultural Practices" *The Practice Turn in Contemporary Theory* edited by Theodore R. Schatzki, Karin Knorr Cetina and Eike von Savigny (London: Routledge, 2001) 74-92.

²⁹ John Fiske, *Understanding Popular Culture* (London: Routledge, 1989); Michel de Certeau, *Culture in the Plural* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997).

tenth-grade high school common sense over university theory?

When observers of the Modern Orthodox community point out that the community has turned away from secular studies, this does not imply that the community has turned against college or has rejected modernity and turned toward a sectarian rejection of modernity. It does, imply, however, that the role of secular studies is increasingly limited to the pragmatic, common sense, and professional. Anti-intellectualism is part of the modern American cultural climate, and the turn to the right within Orthodoxy is part of its Americanism. Now that every American Hasid or sectarian Orthodox Jew knows more secular studies than the *Haskalah* was originally asking to be taught, (because he knows arithmetic, geography, and can functionally read the vernacular of the country), the effect and innovation of lower levels of *Madda* seem invisible. Within the American community, these levels of knowledge fall below any sense of aspiration, so for most Americans these acculturations are against culture.³¹

Bifurcation with Ideology

The Hirschian model is the standard Neo-Orthodox and Modern Orthodox combination of halakhic observance with a secular life.³² A person has two realms: Torah as a source of religion, values, ethics, and spirituality, and *derekh erets* as a full acceptance of the social elements of modernity with a circumscribed study of Western science and humanities. This approach can claim the best of both worlds, bifurcating culture through limiting Judaism to one circumscribed part of life. Hirsch and his followers have created a Judaism that supports middle-class values

and secular studies and the need to look to Torah for ethical values. However, neither side is a stable entity. As soon as one scrutinizes the texts of Torah, one sees that the rabbinic texts of the *beit-midrash* do not support middle class values; if one takes the conclusions of humanities and social sciences seriously, they impinge on one's Torah.

In terms of the Torah part of the Hirschian way, it is naïve to assume that the Hirschian world can continue as it existed in 1870 or 1970. In those years, much of the Neo-Orthodox world was without *gemara*, and today the world has turned toward greater knowledge of *gemara*. The cultural world of the *gemara*, especially through the eyes of the *aharonim*, is anti-modern. Jacob Katz described the lack of modern values in the traditional *aharonim* and the sea-change of Neo-Orthodoxy that introduced into Orthodoxy nineteenth-century modern values. Yet the changes of Neo-Orthodoxy tended to be added on as *ad-hoc* decisions within the community, without a hermeneutic or rereading of the rabbinic texts. We, therefore, do not have responsa that offer compelling halakhic arguments for working for the common good, accepting the responsibilities of citizenship, striving for middle-class values, or gaining tolerance for others that cannot be overturned based on the overwhelming amount of counter positions. After two years in Israel, even students in the liberal *yeshivot* find themselves back at the pre-modernity of R. Yonatan Eybeschutz or R. Yehezkel Landau. These eighteenth-century rabbinic leaders accepted life in the modern business world, acquaintance with *Madda*,³³ scientific changes, and materialistic values among their congregants, but their values

³⁰ George M. Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism*, (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans, c1991), Idem, *Fundamentalism and American culture. the shaping of twentieth century Evangelicalism, 1870-1925* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980).

³¹ The Modern Orthodox habit of actually assessing *Madda* based on the limitations of studying Greek wisdom, except for those close to government, does not mean much to a community that everyday lives embedded in and as part of the Greek Wisdom of American culture. The community masters huge amounts of the Greek wisdom of medical journals, legal briefs, and computer manuals.

³² On the term neo-orthodoxy to cover those adapting to modernity in Germany, see Mordechai Breuer, *Modernity within Tradition* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992) 15-23. I will reserve the term Modern Orthodoxy for the innovations of the American community.

³³ See the praise for *Torah u-Madda*, using the phrase *Torah u-Madda*, in R. Yonatan Eybeschutz, *Yaarot Devash* (Jerusalem: 1984) in at least sixteen places.

were in keeping with the traditional Judaism of the rabbinic texts.³⁴

Nor are secular studies value-neutral; they impinge on faith. Many of the values in the arts and sciences go against traditional halakhic values. Much of the canons of literature, history, and psychology are products of a nineteenth or twentieth-century worldview and reflect its values. Even science is not value neutral, but driven by human interests and in contrast with traditional Jewish cosmologies.³⁵ Furthermore, from Hirsch's age until recently, Jews were desperate to jettison their peasant status and assimilate into Judaism the positive values of Western middle-class life. However, in the current intellectual climate in America (both Jewish and Christian), religion tends to portray itself as a moral bulwark against the immorality of the liberal academy. Hence, many religious leaders advocate that the secular arts and sciences be scrutinized against the backdrop of one's faith.

The Modern Orthodox strategy of limiting Judaism to only *halakhah* precludes appeals to the canon of Jewish spirituality. It also precludes all Jewish thought or values that are not part of the Modern Orthodox world. Modern Orthodoxy downplays, ignores, or denies the diverse value statements and spirituality in the *Aggadah*, Maimonides, Nahmanides, *Mussar*, or *Hasidut*. As Ludwig Wittgenstein observed regarding the inability of logical positivism to verify its own premises because they are not subject to logical analysis and falsification, a pan-halakhic approach to Judaism is unable even to discuss coherently

its own conceptual premises. The very bifurcation of Modern Orthodoxy into Torah as *halakhah* and *Madda* as liberal arts and sciences renders it incapable of answering non-halakhic questions about Judaism. Creating a curriculum of Judaism without Jewish theology, history, spirituality or literature and simultaneously creating a secular curriculum without acknowledging its implicit values has not given Modern Orthodox Jews even the tools to ask theological questions.³⁶ As a basis for making decisions about cultural issues, halakhic thinking condensed the vast fields of literature, philosophy, science, history, politics, and art into three categories: those forbidden, those forbidden by some, and those accepted. These pronouncements are offered with few criteria for determining which works are forbidden literature and which are permitted wisdom. Is all didactic literature or philosophy acceptable if it does fall into the wisdom category? Can one determine from the following three short halakhic statements which works of the vast fields of literature, philosophy, science, history, politics, and art, are permitted?³⁷

307: 16 Secular Poetry and parables, erotic literature such as *Sefer Immanuel*, and books of wars are forbidden to read on the Sabbath. Even on weekdays they are forbidden because [they are considered] a place of scoffers, and one violates not consciously turning to their idols, and [concerning] the erotic literature there is a further

³⁴ To respond to the texts of the *Aharonim* by quoting Rav Soloveitchik stories is not enough of a hermeneutic. In order to defend against the return to the eighteenth-century opinions, and against the new rejection of Neo-Orthodoxy, one needs to formulate the difficult issues in the very discourse of the commentaries on the *gemara*. The more yeshivish elements are willing to call Neo-Orthodox attempts to combine American ideology with Torah a forgery of the Torah, "*ziyuf hatorah*." Yet, even though they reject the ideological elements, they accept the full range of American material culture and family values.

³⁵ Even those who defend rationality, such as Habermas, have accepted that scientific knowledge is laden with human interest. See Jurgen Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interest* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1967). Even if we accept one of the current formulations of the complete objectivity of the halakhic process, the very claim of objectivity is modern and has implicit values. We cannot just ignore the values of these modern Western ideas.

³⁶ Independent study of non-halakhic parts of Judaism during a night *sefer*, from autodidactic interest, or even through a single class in Jewish thought does not give one the tools, rigor and erudition needed to evaluate statements in Jewish thought. Also, the casual study tends to select passages out of context and avoids statements critical of Modern Orthodox values. Many in the community actually think that Maimonides, Nahmanides, and even Hasidut are in agreement with Modern Orthodoxy.

³⁷ *Shulhan Arukh, Orach Hayyim, 307:16-18.*

decree of [following] the evil inclination. Those who write them, and copy them, and needless to say those who publish them cause the public to sin;

Note [of Rama]: There is to distinguish, that it is only forbidden to read secular and military matters in the vernacular, but in Hebrew they are permitted.

307:17: It is forbidden to learn on Shabbat and Yom Tov except Torah, even books of wisdom are forbidden. There are those who permit it [works of wisdom]. Based on their reasoning it would also be permitted to look in an astrolabe on the Sabbath.

307:18: One can inquire from a demon those things permitted on weekdays.

Following the logic of practice, these halakhic statements, despite their binding legal status, do not describe the current practice in Modern Orthodoxy. Does Rama's accepting works in Hebrew mean that anything that has been accepted already into the community is permitted? The only halakhic context for cultural decisions concerns what is permitted to do with one's Sabbath leisure time.³⁸ Notice *halakhah* eighteen, about demons, which links demonology with reading books of wisdom. This linkage or taxonomy provides the original cultural context for the discussion and shows that all thinking about culture is itself imbedded in culture. Ultimately, with a cultural description of Judaism, elements of the weave cannot be isolated from each other. We cannot treat either our *halakhah* or our secular life as autonomous; both terms Torah and wisdom in the rabbinic binary pair are part of a single theoretical construct similar to any rabbinic binary pair are part of a single theoretical con-

struct similar to any rabbinic binary pair of forbidden and permitted.

Furthermore, even in accepting the nineteenth century categories, in order to examine the relationship between Judaism and culture we need to view more possibilities than just rejection or integration. H. Richard Niebuhr, in his work, *Christ and Culture*, describes five types of relationships or integration between the secular and the religious, each one non-continuous with or contradictory to the next one.³⁹ The first is rejection of secular culture, and the second is the total acceptance of culture as religion. To these he adds three more types: those who seek to create a harmonious synthesis between the religion and culture, those who see the two in paradox and tension, and, finally, those who seek to transform the general culture through religion. As general examples, Maimonides' philosophy represents the third model of synthesis, Abarbanel's tension between philosophy and Judaism represents the fourth paradox model, and Nahmanides' vision of ascetic spiritual life represents the fifth transformative model. Niebuhr notes that ideologies that integrate religion and culture into two static realms tend to be unable to acknowledge historical change because their predetermined definition of synthesis assumes the eternal truth of the synthesis. This criticism certainly applies to the Modern Orthodox perspective on history, which does not distinguish between types of synthesis and tends to assume that eternal issues are repeated in many eras without any substantive changes between eras.

A liberal variant of Hirsch's position allows a secularization of Orthodoxy, in which the culture of the *aharonim* is openly rejected and secular studies are pursued for their own sake; but such a culture did not develop. Had it succeeded, it would be treated as its own model, but it functions only as the extreme of the bifurcation model.

³⁸ The laws of *huqqat ha-goyim* also provide a context for these discussions but the law has many functional leniencies that denude it of its sting; see *Yoreh De'ah* 178.

³⁹ Richard H. Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (New York: Harper, 1956, c1951).

Niebuhr associates this model, his second model, with liberal readings of Schleiermacher, in which religion is completely identified with culture. Considering the study of *madda* as a religious requirement would have created a Judaism of culture, in which the general culture *derekh erets* is given religious significance.⁴⁰ Just as nineteenth century Christians had to ask themselves whether to sanctify the secular domain by considering the religious compositions of the secular Mozart as religious, Jews had to ask if there is value to secular studies. While nineteenth century Christian theologians tend to answer in the negative, the twentieth century Christian theologian Karl Barth answered in the affirmative and provided a role model even within Orthodox Judaism: the secular can be considered as an understanding of the human experience before religious commitment as shown in the case of Mozart, who expresses the universal struggles of humanity.⁴¹

From Barth's wholesale acceptance of the universal as the human experience, it would be a small step to following the advice of Senator Edward Kennedy. In a story that circulates at Yeshiva University, Kennedy, in a visit to the college, had suggested that the institution go the way of his alma mater and most other religiously founded colleges and become secular. Yeshiva University rejected the universal approach and adheres to its parochial course, leaving the purpose of religion in a secular college in a problematic state. On the other hand, William F. Buckley warned most Catholics, excluding brilliant exceptions like him, against secular colleges because of the dangers of implicit liberalism and anti-religion bias within the liberal arts and sciences. However, unlike Buckley, Yeshiva University continues to maintain the value neutrality of secular studies. Recently, a third option was proposed by George Marsden, a leading Evangelical aca-

ademic, who believes there is a need to create Christian arts and sciences. Christians must be active in creating their own agenda, pointing out questionable aspect of liberal culture. Marsden advocates bringing the Christian message into the academy. Yeshiva University avoids this approach too.⁴²

Intellectual Handmaiden: *Torah u-Madda* as an Autonomous Culture

The most prevalent approach to *Torah u-Madda* education is to treat secular studies as generally value-neutral and *Torah u-Madda* as a means of formulating more sophisticated opinions in Torah; either as window dressing, as a handmaiden, as a philosophy of halakhah, as individual expression, or as a faith strengthened. For those who articulate *Torah u-Madda* as an explicit ideology, and part company with those who reject high culture, we nevertheless still find a strong logic of practice, reified static terms, and a failure to accept the cultural embeddedness of their ideology. In treating *Madda* as a handmaiden to Torah, *Torah u-Madda* yields a sensibility, accessible only to another "*Torah u-Madda* person," without discussing the *Madda* or Torah themselves.

Generally, this approach is self-referential to the work of others of the same sensibility. Instead of dealing with any of the issues of an age, or having to respond to the challenges of the humanities, this approach filters all information and converts it into a new entity called *Torah u-Madda*, relevant only to those of the sub-community looking for something interesting to read or to those seeking to be known as a *Torah u-Madda* person. It is of culture and not of culture at the same time. The *Madda* combined with Torah consists of whatever is at hand; one could combine Aristotle and *gemara*, Locke and *gemara*, Gandhi and *gemara*, Paul A. Samuelson and *gemara*, or John Grisham and *gemara*.

⁴⁰ Norman Lamm, *Torah Umadda* (Northvale, N.J.: J. Aronson, c1990).

⁴¹ Karl Barth, *Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart* (Grand rapids, MI: W. B. Eerdmans, 1986).

⁴² William F. Buckley, *God and Man at Yale* (Chicago, Regnery, 1951). George Marsden, *The Outrageous Idea of Christian Scholarship* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

Consciously or not, as long as the piece of Torah and *Madda* produces an interesting exposition of Judaism, then it does not matter if the material is out of date, idiosyncratic, or misread.

A variant of an urbane *Torah and Madda* would use *Madda* to add to the life of the *beit-midrash* elements of moral sensitivity, common sense, decency, and human values. One needs secular literature for moral imagination, because, this approach assumes, a diet of only *halakhah* lacks moral imagination. However, as stated earlier in this essay, Judaism does have its own spiritual ethical literature. Both of these approaches are, ultimately, all-Torah approaches, in which secular studies are only part of the logic of practice of the *Torah u-Madda* personality.

The most prevalent approach to Torah u-Madda education is to treat secular studies as generally value-neutral.

Recently, when a rabbi thought that he needed to go back to school to be trained in contemporary philosophy, his colleague asked, "Why? He can read widely already in anything he wants and he is a creative speaker able to apply his knowledge." This reaction shows that there is little sense in the community that *Madda* needed to be professionally mastered in academic disciplines or that issues need to be answered. Once one has the sensibility of letting literature and philosophies enrich one's Torah, then any form of exposure would be enough for

this synthesis.⁴³ At its worst, and I limit these remarks to the worst forms, *Torah u-Madda* is a form of kitsch, which "transforms the stupidity of accepted opinions to the language of beauty and feeling."⁴⁴ In this approach the *Torah u-Madda* community is decorating its spiritual world with everything published, spoken, or felt, without criteria for the construction of that culture.

This concept of Torah as outside of culture, but using culture at the same time, paradoxically receives aid from the tremendous, third hand influence of Karl Barth, through the writings of Rav Soloveitchik, within the Modern Orthodox community. For Barth, faith and commitment is outside of the cultural realms of church and religion. One has an orthodox acceptance of the divine imperatives, which remain independent of sociology or history. Within the Jewish context, this Barthian position assumes that there is a fixed autonomous halakhic realm, in which only the *Madda* or the socio-economic reality varies. To prove the fixed nature of Torah, adherents of the handmaiden theory assume an autonomous Jewish philosophy solely from the sources of the *halakhah* based on citations from selected medieval texts that have an implicit ethic or philosophy. However, their own presentations of an autonomous *halakhah* are based on the assimilation of Karl Barth's position within Modern Orthodoxy, and their reading of the medieval authorities (*rishonim*) as autonomous ignores the influence on the medievals of Aristotelian and Neoplatonic ethics, and the general cultural embeddedness within the piety and rationality of Andalusian culture.⁴⁵

⁴³ Rav Kook is a variant of this. He is not real *Madda*, just a modernist sensibility. The bigger issue is the lack of *Madda* within the *Madda*. Unlike the Catholics, there is little in all the "YU Studies" that has any basis in the academy.

⁴⁴ Laurence J. Silberstein, *The Postzionism Debates: Knowledge and Power in Israeli Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 135.

⁴⁵ While the Hazon Ish formulated a similar autonomy of *halakhah*, the Modern Orthodox version seems more indebted to Barth. On the Hazon Ish's version, see his work Avraham Yeshayahu Karelitz, *Sefer Emunah VeBitahon* (reprinted Jerusalem: 1997).

One astute reader of this essay commented that I underestimate the blindness of some elements of the current *Torah u-Madda* reading of Jewish texts, which reads texts outside of any context. The acceptance of a pristine *halakhah* outside of culture allows problematic texts to be easily dismissed as not normative *halakhah* and thereby excluded from the *halakhah* itself. At the same time, any comment of a text that rubs against the grain of current values is ignored because the eternal halakhah is outside of any past Jewish culture. My cultural analysis assumes that one is willing to view the idea of an autonomous *halakhah* as similar to a modernist Barthian position and that one is willing to read Medieval Jewish texts in their medieval context. But an intellectual diet of using *Madda* only as part of a process of bifurcation or handmaiden precludes these comparisons. Additionally, the same reader notes, the Modern Orthodox community has psychological and social needs to consider one's religion as a safe haven of values from the ravages of American culture, which creates a strong need for the bifurcation approach of an autonomous realm of *halakhah* outside of any culture.

However, Peter Berger, in his book, *Heretical Imperative*, assumed that in an information age we know that many historical options exist and that we are making (or we would now say, constructing) one's choices. Based on choice inherent in modernity, he sharply criticized as incorrect the Barthian position of rejecting knowledge, culture, history and secular life. The general Modern Orthodox position has been to reject this as a stereotype of the Barthian position and to show that even after one makes what Rav Soloveitchik calls a "redemptive sacrificial act" through accepting the *halakhah*, one still uses general knowledge, and one can and should subject one's faith commitment to philosophical scrutiny. But ultimately, Peter Berger is correct: A Barthian cannot subject primary faith commitment to cultural analysis. One cannot, according to this approach, acknowledge that one's definition of Judaism/*halakhah*/faith is only one option from those presented in history. In the autonomous culture of

Torah u-Madda, one can analyze one's existential faith commitment to Judaism, but not one's Judaism that is outside of culture. Hence, Peter Berger sees as the only intellectually viable option the Troeltsch reading of Schleiermacher, in which one can and should accept that one's religion is embedded in culture. I agree with Peter Berger on the intellectual cogency of his position, but as my astute reader pointed out, my position would not affect dealing with the needs of the majority of the Modern Orthodox community who reject ideology. And my position would distance Orthodoxy from its current practical need to have an autonomous halakhah and keep Judaism outside of culture.

The passage from what the halakhic "ought to be" to what actually "is" occurs through a cultural process.

In order to facilitate analyzing Judaism as embedded in culture, one needs to remember Geertz's characterization of religious acts as only understood when one can avoid ideal types and provide the "thick description" of the implicit web of cultural meanings. Any logic of practice, even an intellectual handmaiden theory, would be a "thin description," if it uses anachronistic and universalizing comparisons. As stated above, this Modern Orthodox handmaiden position displays several types of "thin description," including the failure to recognize that legal "code does not determine conduct," that theological *a priori weltanschauungen* imagine a reality that cannot be found, and that neo-Kantians accept symbols and ideal types as identical with their reality.⁴⁶ In our case of *Torah u-Madda*, the individual decision making process of *halakhah* is not the same thing as understanding the entire halakhic process or the cultural problematic of *Torah u-Madda*. The passage from what the halakhic "ought to be" to what actually "is" occurs through a cultural process.

⁴⁶ Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, 18, 20, 92.

Towards a Cultural Theory of *Torah u-Madda*

In order to properly engage the implications of the current understandings of culture, and update the self-presentation of *Torah u-Madda*, it is not enough merely to acknowledge Geertz. We need to go beyond the older opinions of Peter Berger, Clifford Geertz, and Richard Niebuhr written decades ago. Culture is not automatically the opposite of religion, as thinkers of the nineteenth century assumed. Yet, the lines of relationship are not as clear as Peter Berger presents them, or as essential and filled with meaning as Geertz presented them.

Kathryn Tanner, in her book, *Theories of Culture* (1997), notes that, currently, "Nothing is decided by the simple fact that... practices have figured in the wider culture; everything depends on the theological judgments covering the particulars."⁴⁷ Judaism's relationship with culture and other cultures can shape itself into a variety of responses based on the particulars of a given era. The following six activities—playing (or even watching) sports, speaking English, studying philosophy, practicing and seeking medical treatment, wearing gentile clothes, and performing *kapparot* before Yom Kippur—have all been considered gentile ways (*huqqat ha-goyim*) at various points. No clear boundaries exist between gentile practice and general culture. Moreover, the gentile side of

the boundary has at different times been considered as neutral, forbidden, frowned upon, accepted under certain circumstances, and, at times, even, mandated.

Furthermore, specific elites, Jewish or non-Jewish, do not rule culture. What are the roles of minority opinions, counter-cultures, and rejected opinions? How do we conceptualize cosmopolitan situations, in which one city may have several customs and people from many locations? In order to understand these relationships, we need to examine the specific dividing lines and cultural problems of the specific age under discussion:

The development of a given into a question, this transformation of a group of difficulties and obstacles into problems to which the diverse solutions will attempt to produce a response, this is what constitutes the point of problematization and the specific work of thought... It is a question of critical analysis in which one tries to see how the different solutions to a problem have been constructed; but also how these different solutions result from a specific form of problematization.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Kathryn Tanner, *Theories of Culture. A New Agenda for Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), especially p. 119.

⁴⁸ Michel Foucault, *The Foucault Reader* editor Paul Rainbow (New York: Pantheon, 1984) 389.

Further issues need to be explored in order to define Judaism itself. Can we treat the tradition as autonomous? Is perceived autonomy of tradition due to an act of reification? Is the definition of a cultural construction of Judaism found at a center (e.g. do not eat pork, study Torah, keep Qabbalistic customs) or at a boundary (doctors working on Shabbat, outreach to the unaffiliated, or attitude towards non-Jews)? Are there non-autonomous elements that are treated as part of the autonomous tradition? How is autonomy maintained—by the elites, by the community, or at margins? Do we define participation in a given Jewish community by specific observances or attitudes towards the outside world?

Our definition of Torah is also crucial. At various times, Torah has included natural sciences, astronomy, philosophy, *qabbalah*, philology, poetry, *hasidut*, and *midrash*. Similarly, approaches to the study of Torah have varied over the centuries. In some eras, Torah study involved the rote memorization of texts or daily act of recitation of texts. At other times, Torah study required the creation of new interpretations by a *talmid hakham*, and sometimes Torah study required developing an understanding of the surface narrative of the text. In the transmission of Jewish culture, what is the role of the canon, and the process of exclusion, domination, and omission? How is the transmission perceived? Is it an organic growth, an idea applied for a specific time and place, a hermeneutic of texts, or a rupture? What is the role of creativity or, conversely, of misunderstanding? What is the role of literacy in the construction of Torah? The texts of Torah have always been expressed in the oral and written idioms of the culture. If so, can one separate the cultural presentation of a text from the text itself?

The conjunction of *Torah u-Madda* was created by contact of the Neo-Orthodox Jewish discourse with Enlightenment ideas; European liberalism and conservatism; the *Kulturkampf* between Catholics and the state; Kantian, Hegelian, and Protestant thought; Russian socialism, nationalism, and popularism; American democracy, pragmatism, and anti-intellectualism; the opening of the liberal imagination to immigrant Jews; and the critiques of religion produced by modernity. Articulations of Orthodoxy occurred at the points of contact with Western culture, creating inherent conflicts over meaning and significance of the terms *Torah* and *Madda*. Each position of Orthodoxy tried to portray itself as true, commonsensical, natural, and in conformity with the past.

Once the community accepts a cultural formulation, Orthodoxy views other positions, even those of prior rabbinic cultures—Talmudic, late antiquity, medieval or early modern eras— with a pejorative connotation and places them in opposition to the new positions. Since the formulation of the tradition varies, the tradition is more of a cultural dialogue than an answer. If people believe different things at different times, then we need to overcome the habit of confining ideas to the safe patterns of specific times and places. We need to acknowledge contradictions, even learn to openly reject opinions. The study of Jewish history shows that opposing ideals have existed within Judaism. Can past traditions still be viable options? Why are we not following the piety of *Hasidei Ashkenaz* or halakhic decisions of the *ge'onim*? Orthodoxy produces what Foucault calls a "regime of truth"—a set of codes, practices, apparatuses, and discursive processes that have the effect of rendering the knowledge that it produces as true. Terms such as *Torah* are taken as ontological categories and not as produced discourse.⁴⁹

⁴⁹ *Foucault Reader*, 74

The discourse of these terms is then framed within a dichotomy of "*Torah/Madda*," without the dichotomy itself being considered problematic. Is *Madda* viewed through the gaze of *Torah*, creating an understanding of *Madda* from the outside, as an "other?" Or is it something into which we acculturate, or are we willy-nilly part of it? Is *Madda* allowed to gaze at *Torah* and view it as an "other" or does it have to sit politely in its place? What are the irresolvable tensions between the two discourses?

Torah u-Madda has generally been defined in terms of individual education (*bildung*), but what are its political implications? Does *Madda* exist in the realm of ideology, or is it only in the professions? Do we need to consider the inherent middle-class values inherent in the word "profession"? While *Madda* is perceived as secular, we need to acknowledge that we do not live in a secular country. Americans are religious and are to the right of the academy, media, and liberal establishment.⁵⁰ Modern Orthodoxy is itself reflective of the evangelical culture of America, which, for the sake of preserving religion, limits knowledge.

What are the spatial dimensions of *Torah u-Madda*? What are the implications of separating the *beit midrash* from the library? Of separating or connecting college to the *yeshiva*? Or of separating graduate schools from the *yeshiva*? What are the cultural implications of Yeshiva University's current situation as an island in a Latino neighborhood?

A Jewish cultural history has yet to be written; in the interim we are obliged to avoid generalizing from the present.

Beyond Bifurcation

The following discussion offers suggestions for over-

coming the practical bifurcation of *Torah u-Madda* within the ideological self-understanding of the community. I am not assuming that any of these suggestions would have broad sociological appeal, or as theory alone would be able to change any of the three preceding logics of practice. My analysis consists of a theoretical change that would treat *Torah u-Madda* as a unified cultural model consisting of totality of actions and meanings, which create a moral order and worldview and do not treat *Torah* and *Madda* as bifurcated separate entities. I am not giving a different answer to the question of what is the relationship of *Torah* and *Madda*. Rather, I am reformulating the question. How to formulate our unified cultural construct called *Torah u-Madda*? How can we overcome the inherent bifurcation in the current model through the concept called culture?

I advocate a synthetic approach, giving the texts of *Torah* axiological priority without bowing to Western culture, while preserving the transformations, values, paradox, criticisms and rejections of the Enlightenment project. The approach seeks to account for differences in discourses, communities, disciplines, and historical ages. Unlike some eras, which presumed fixed bodies of knowledge called *Torah* or *Madda*, pre-set methods for analysis, and recognized arbiters of knowledge that could be reorganized to produce a Maimonidean, Thomistic, or Soloveitchik synthesis, the current approaches to culture do not find clear definitions of *Torah* or *Madda*, pre-set methods, recognized arbiters of knowledge or the ability to produce a dynamic synthesis incorporating all of culture. We do need to engage in self-scrutiny in order to acknowledge our American status, the role of the Jewish tradition, and the problem of the synthesis.

⁵⁰ Christian Smith, *American Evangelicalism: Embattled and Thriving* (Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 1998). Current trends view the modern city as offering support for intensified religious commitment.

In order to overcome this bifurcation, we need first to accept that from a cultural point of view, other parts of Judaism besides *halakhah*—including theology, *qabbalah*, science, poetry, exegesis, folklore, and philosophy—are part of the tradition (*mesorah*). Torah includes wisdom (*hokhmah*); as Yediyah Penini, the thirteenth century poet wrote, "Philosophy is part of our *mesorah*!" Judaism contains both legal and theological elements.⁵¹ There are traditions of the seven wisdoms, of the *hakham ha-kollel*, and of a medieval philosophic religion. Many medievals aspired to the *hakham ha-kollel* model through mastery of Torah and the seven wisdoms; many rabbis from twelfth-century Provence until the twentieth-century had diverse values and diverse courses of study.⁵² It is not that Judaism always had the construction of *Torah u-Madda* or that we follow the Maimonideans and study philosophy. Each age had its own constructions of Judaism. Simha Assaf's *Megorot le-Toledot ha-Hinnukh be-Yisra'el* has documented a wide variety of alternative curricula that differ from the current options, ranging from geonic educations that are indebted to Islamic models to Italian Renaissance models that include the arts, to eastern European anti-cultural models.⁵³ Not all of these historical manifestations of Jewish culture are normative, but some, based on our current needs, are still normative while others are to be rejected based on articulated standards of arbitrating and exclusion.

⁵¹ For a contemporary work of essays by Orthodox thinkers that seeks to integrate theological elements into a halakhic Judaism, see Amichai Berholtz, *The Quest for Halakhah* [Hebrew] (Tel Aviv: Beit Morasha- Yediot Aharonot, 2003). Especially noteworthy for the concerns of this essay are the articles by Rav Yuval Sharlo on the pros and cons of integrating theology into halakhah, Rav Yehudah Brandes on the theology of the Halakhah, Prof. Avinoam Rosenak on the philosophic methods of integration of the realms, and Prof. Shai Wozner on closed and open-ended types of commitment to Judaism.

⁵² Dov Rappel, *Sheva ha-Hokhmot: ha-vikuah al limude hol be-sifrut ha-hinukh ha-Yehudit ad Reshit ha-Haskalah* (Jerusalem: *Misrad Ha-Hinukh v'ha-Tarbut*, 1990).

⁵³ Assaf, *Megorot le-Toldot Hahinnukh be-Yisrael*, 4 Volumes (Tel Aviv: Devir, 1930-1954).

⁵⁴ Maimonides rejected the *aggadah* on messianic age as non-halakhic and not being based on a tradition to Moses (*mesorah*). But the *aggadah* itself by virtue of its place in the Talmud is part of the Jewish tradition. In many places, Maimonides himself makes extensive use of *midrash* in formulating his own philosophic thought, and other rishonim, including R. Meir Abulafia and Nahmanides, made extensive use of *aggadah*.

⁵⁵ Furthermore, the meta-*halakhah* does not always quietly stay in its place. Occasionally it breaks forth; letting out a roar that shakes the *halakhah*. Examples of the autonomous powers of messianism are numerous. A similar point could be made, albeit with crucial distinctions, with regard to considering as part of the tradition discussions of the reasons for the commandments, Biblical exegesis, *aggadic* and kabbalistic theology, lay devotions, ethical and pietistic literature, and the social worlds reflected in the responsa literature.

While the *ge'onim* noted that there is no tradition (*mesorah*) to the *aggadah*, meaning that it is not binding as doctrine, they would not approve of the opposite extreme of ignoring the midrashic literature and replacing it with the culture of secular humanism, American family values, or contemporary religious ideologies. Many in the contemporary Modern Orthodoxy community, even rabbinic scholars, know more about secular studies, with their Christian and atheistic overtones, than about Jewish thought.

One might adopt a pan-halakhic approach through formulating *midrash*, Maimonides, and Netziv as *halakhah*, or meta-*halakhah*, but that would be a case of the tail wagging the dog. These texts are all independent fields that require years of study and a conscious endeavor to master them for their own sake. The diverse texts of *midrash*, Rashi, Sa'adyah, Rambam, Ramban, Maharal, Zohar, Hasidut, Musar, and Neo-Orthodoxy each offer a unique theological vision and give moral direction. For example, belief in the messiah and working toward the messianic age are halakhic mandates,⁵⁴ nevertheless, the literature on the concept of messianism requires its own course of study and includes the diverse opinions of *Sefer Zerubavel*, Maharal, Abarbanel, *Zohar*, and Rav Kook.⁵⁵

Most of these proposals for overcoming bifurcation place an emphasis on texts, intellectual products, and elite groups only because of my own interests and inclinations. *Torah u-Madda*, however, also includes economics, political power, food, clothes, home, family life, and leisure time as part of the construction. We tend to ignore the economic power and political structure inherent in Jewish life. Currently, the study of halakhic texts has little to say about most activities within current suburban lifestyles. If we consider the older term Yiddishkeit as used by Dubnow and Aham Haam to define all aspects of Jewish life, we find that they used the term to reject rabbinic texts as a basis for a modernist Jewish culture, and thereby replace Rabbinics with a popularist, modern, and politically engaged Jewish culture.⁵⁶ In contrast, I seek to create a broader rabbinic culture, or to return to the broader rabbinic cultures of other centuries. We should look to the many broad and creative rabbinic cultures such as Provence, Catalonia, Northern Italy, Prague and Amsterdam, rather than using for the start of discussions the narrow, besieged rabbinic culture of turn-of-the-century Russia and Poland.

Second, we need to take into account the full range of humanities and social sciences and feel comfortable enough in the community's commitment to Judaism to deal with the problematic aspects of these disciplines. Maimonides wrote, "accept the truth from whoever states it," a philosophy that allowed him to read Farabi, Aristotle, and others without considering the reading of their works heresy.⁵⁷ However we need to go beyond the mere reading of works of secular studies and start asking the questions raised by confronting the methods and tools of analysis. The *Madda* should be up to date and not be confined to after-the-fact apologetic demands of modernity. Our selection of *Madda* is our

own cultural construction and the creation of the canvass of our social world. The narrower the selection, the narrower our cultural canvass. We should embrace art, music, poetry, and dance, not for an intellectual aesthetic appreciation, but for a full life.

Torah includes hokhmah; as Yedidyah Penini wrote, "Philosophy is part of our mesorah".

A student asked me how Yeshiva University could ignore the critiques of religion implicit in historicism, literary approaches, and psychology as real problems to synthesis. We discussed Rav Yehudah Parnes's holding that all these disciplines are heresy,⁵⁸ which is a legitimate position, but we also need to examine what others assume. Most Modern Orthodox students accept the synthesis achieved by *Yavneh Review* and the generation of the late fifties and early sixties who created the intellectual space in which to peruse history, literature, and psychology through ignoring their problematic elements. Since there are problematic elements, which elude easy resolution, we need to consider that while we may not be able to live with the tension of R. Shmuel Ha-Nagid, (who earned the characterization as torn and compunctious) by writing both halakhic tracts and secular poetry as an end in itself, not all questions of secular studies are simple just because Torah claims axiological priority.⁵⁹

Third, we need to undo the ahistoricism of Hirsch, who assumed that Judaism was univocally eternal. We must accept the plurality of Jewish voices raised by Saadyah, Maimonides, R. Yehudah haHasid, Nahmanides, Maharal, Vilna Gaon, Ramhal, and R Hayyim ben Attar that differ with Modern Orthodoxy on many issues and offer a hermeneutic by which to read these alternative

⁵⁶ On yiddishkeit and the creation of modern Jewish culture, see Eliezer Schweid, *Likrat Tarbut Yehudit Modernit* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1995); David H. Weinberg, *Between Tradition and Modernity: Haim Zhitlowski, Simon Dubnow, Ahad Ha-Am, and the Shaping of Modern Jewish Identity* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1996).

⁵⁷ *Shemonah Perakim*, ed. by Y Shailat (Jerusalem:1996).

⁵⁸ Rabbi Yehudah Parnes, "Torah U-Madda and the Freedom of Inquiry," *The Torah U-Madda Journal* I (1989) 68-71.

⁵⁹ Ross Brann, *The Compunctious Poet: Cultural Ambiguity and Hebrew poetry in Muslim Spain* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, c1991). Compare the Church fathers who were worried about wasting time on *paideia*, and nevertheless expanded the virtues of the community and created a cultural synthesis, see Werner W. Jaeger, *Early Christianity and Greek Paideia*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1961).

texts. When do we differ and when do we accept them? The past offers many models for revitalization and reformulation of modern assumptions.⁶⁰ Since we cannot simply live as if we are still in the thirteenth century, we need to create a sophisticated hermeneutic by which to understand our theological tradition in modern terms. This can only be done by the renewed study of these texts and integration of contemporary humanities and social sciences within theological activity, but without seeking to start creating new dogmas, or legally decide (*paskan*) issues of theology.

Torah u-Madda still exists in a world in which there is no historical distance from the text; scholars from the earlier centuries are asking and answering modern questions. Any place where tension of an alternate value exists in a Jewish text, it tends to be pushed to the margins of Judaism. The *gemara*, in Modern Orthodox discourse, is conveniently, but anachronistically, in dialogue with Freud, supply-side economics, new criticism, and American democracy. Historicist understandings through conceding Greco-Roman, medieval, and early modern contexts do not play a role in the reading of the text.⁶¹

If we consider Maimonides, Nahmanides, and *Mitnagdut* as three significant influences on Modern Orthodoxy, we find that through a contextual reading, they are not automatically in dialogue with modern positions. Maimonides is an elite Neoplatonist (or Aristotelian) who would consider much of Modern Orthodox theology about God as idolatry.⁶² He advocates contemplation of the Divine, and asserts that our knowledge of God is proportional to our turn from physicality. We

should acknowledge that the writing style of the *Mishneh Torah* shows philosophical sophistication in its organization, logical presentation, and rationalist understanding of the *halakhah*. And we should accept that we do not follow Maimonides' views on politics, family life, the role of intellect in life, and table manners. Nahmanides advocates an elite extra-halakhic imperative based on the verse "You shall be holy," an ascetic transcending of the world modeled after the Biblical figures of Enoch and Elijah, and he asserts that a virtuous individual should avoid physicians. He also expects a mystical cleaving to the Divine, and states that some mizvot are performed for the theurgic benefit of the Divine. *Mitnagdut* is filled with anti-family, ascetic, non-democratic, and anti-bourgeois statements. There are no shortages of *mitnaged* texts that affirm the need to avoid physical pleasure, ignore the masses, live only for the world-to-come, or "use the rod so as not to spoil the child." The Vilna Gaon holds that personal petitionary prayer is to be avoided; R. Hayyim of Volozhin reiterates this position in his *Nefesh Hahayyim*, defining petitionary prayer as what the masses think. The Gaon's method of study combined *Tanakh*, *Midrash*, Talmud, and *Qabbalah* into a single pattern, and the Gaon's religious life included angelic visitors, prophetic dreams, and experiences of the Divine.⁶³ We have to admit that we are constructing, and there is no given of Torah.

Fourth, we have to embrace new methods and approaches and accept creativity as a live option, while recognizing that creativity is interest driven and can yield varied results. Torah needs to be subject to the humanities and social sciences in a creative way for the cultural needs of the age. However, sometimes creativity pro-

⁶⁰ On formulating an Orthodox theology of historicity within tradition see my forthcoming essay on the topic.

⁶¹ In these discussions it does not matter whether one accepts these anachronistic reads or rejects them by calling them *ziuf ha-torah* and returns to a pre-modern reading, but neither side uses any historicist hermeneutic of the text. At best, chronology and memory are mistaken for history.

⁶² For examples of defective ideas of the Divine, see *Guide of the Perplexed*, I:51, 59.

⁶³ The literature on Maimonides is too enormous to begin to give suggestions. On the world of Nahmanides, see Haviva Pedaya, *ha-Ramban (Am Oved)* (Tel Aviv: 2003); Jonathan Feldman, "The power of the Soul over the Body : Corporeal Transformation and Attitudes towards the Body in the Thought of Nahmanides" (Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, NYU: 1999). On the world of *Mitnagdut*, see Immanuel Etkes, *The Gaon of Vilna: The Man and His Image* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002); Allen Nadler, *The Faith of the Mithnagdim* (Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 1997); H.H. Ben Sasson "Personality of Elijah, Gaon of Vilna and his Historical Influence" [Heb.] *Zion*, 31 (1966) pp. 39-86, 197-216; Shaul Stampfer, *Ha-Yeshivah ha-Lita'it be-hithavutah* (Jerusalem: Merkaz Zalman Shazar, 1995).

duces useful outcomes and sometimes it does not—sometimes high culture and sometimes low culture, sometimes rabbinic and halakhic and sometimes not. Rav Soloveitchik's neo-Kantianism assumed that creativity was value neutral and driven by great intellects. Today, most philosophers will deny both. The process of synthesis needs to be dynamic, and ready to incorporate as needed new trends into the reading of old texts. Yet we should be cautious not to feel the need to be trendy, to reject what works, or to ignore our own pragmatic and theoretical constants. In this century, *Torah u-Madda* has flirted with Existentialism and Freudianism, while passing over most other movements; these limitations have yielded datedness, ahistorism, and general anti-intellectualism. In order to be culturally creative, we need to embrace the freedom and self-interest of the intellectual projects and engage in the full range of linguistic, hermeneutical, and phenomenological resources available. However, most of our cultural choices are not conscious, volitional, or rational. We consume intellectual products and ideologies in the same fickle ways that we choose our soft drinks. When the community chooses to be anti-intellectual, it does so as consumers of the anti-intellectual climate in secular and Christian America. And if the community were to deal with historicism, it would be as consumers of an academic product.

We have to admit that we are constructing, and there is no given of Torah.

Fifth, in order to acknowledge dynamic definitions of Torah and *Madda* and overcome the static bifurcation, we should scrutinize how *Torah u-Madda* accepted many modern positions, even when elements of certain constructions of Torah are not in agreement with the modern values. Torah, despite the unexamined Modern Orthodox position, may be in conflict with modern val-

ues and sometimes will reject parts of other disciplines. Not only should we not adopt the liberal position of always identifying Judaism with the general culture; in many cases we should use Torah to analyze or reject the liberal position. The modern liberal fields of history, literature, biology, physics, or political science contain many problematic elements from a religious perspective.

Marsden presented a case for scholarship as shaped by orthodox religion within the liberal pragmatic academy. He noted that maintaining integrity in both realms may seem schizophrenic because one moves naturally back and forth between realms, but ultimately it can produce a unified and self-proclaimed Christian political science, ethics, and psychology. Liberalism is not value neutral; it contains implicit positivism and atheism. The human quest and the story of civilization can be presented as being concerned with values, religion, and the spirit, or about science, atheism, and natural forces.⁶⁴ From Marsden's perspective, there is even a Christian view of biology. As an example of rewriting the liberal academy from a religious perspective, he offers the revision by Evangelicalist scholars of Perry Miller's classic work on the Puritans. Miller presented Puritanism as a secular faith in the power of the human mind, intellectual ideas, and political America; the evangelical revisionists find the Puritan virtues of religious faith, theology, and a society centered on the Church.

If we were to apply Marsden's approach to Judaism, we would certainly have a comparable case in the requisite rewritings needed of Bible, Talmud, Maimonides, *Qabbalah*, and eastern European Jewish life. We can criticize Romanticism as having values against the Torah.⁶⁵ Jews need the creation of Jewish psychology, education, philosophy, political science, and sociology similar to the works produced by Protestants, Catholics, and Muslims. Does the Torah accept modern psychological premises?

⁶⁴ John Milbank, *Radical Orthodoxy: A New Theology* (New York: Routledge, 1999).

⁶⁵ Roger Lundin, *The Culture of Interpretation: Christian Faith and the Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, 1993).

We need to find a way to connect the many fragmented parts of our post-modern existence back to spirituality and a sense of the Divine.

Is the rationality of the Enlightenment project acceptable to a reader of Sa`adyah and Maimonides?⁶⁶ We should even consider that there is a Jewish science and grapple with the mystical science of Luzzatto and the Vilna Gaon, for whom the natural order, even medicine and mathematics, gives us, based on *Sefer Yezirah*, the secrets of creation.⁶⁷

Finally, in the fabric of our cultural constructs, we need to acknowledge the Divine within the entire weave. We should not limit religion to isolated parts of a bifurcated

existence, finding the Divine only in Torah study, *halakhah*, or leave Him out altogether. One of Geertz's commentators, Gananath Obeyesekere, points out that

Geertz leaves out the activity of God in the production of culture.⁶⁸ We need to find a way to connect the many fragmented parts of our post-modern existence back to spirituality and a sense of the Divine. If we are to overcome the bifurcation of *Torah and Madda*, then we need to embrace our spiritual situation within culture through understanding our constructions, their implicit meanings, and the motivations they generate. We need to see that we are always embedded in culture. Asking the right questions will help us effectively determine the type of culture that we want; to analyze the continuities, dynamics, and ruptures from past cultures, and enhance the potential for a meaningful construction in our creativity and spirituality.

⁶⁶ For the spiritual elements in ancient and medieval philosophy similar to those advocated by Maimonides, see Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life* (Oxford:1995).

⁶⁷ Neither Torah or *Madda* should be replaced with the scientific study of Judaism (*Wissenschaft des Judentums*). Academic Jewish studies is its own historicist field that is not exactly Torah or *Madda*. I do not approve of the liberal approach, which substitutes *Wissenschaft* for beit midrash Torah, or the Modern Orthodox approach, which considers *Wissenschaft* as *Madda* and excludes it from use in the Beit Midrash. *Wissenschaft* has to be both in Beit Midrash as a handmaiden, and in college as humanities. And the academic study of Judaism has to be up-to-date, not a static entity from decades past. However, the narrow philology of *Wissenschaft* alone is not enough as either Torah or *Madda*.

⁶⁸ Gananath Obeyesekere, *The Work of Culture. Symbolic Transformations in Psychoanalysis and Anthropology* (Chicago: University of Chicago: 1990), 285.