

# A Polydox Philosophy Of Religious Education

A polydox philosophy of religious education sets forth the nature and purpose of religious education as viewed from the polydox perspective. Necessary to this exposition is an inquiry into fundamental questions pertaining to five sets of relationships: 1) The relationship regarding religious education between parents and their minor children ("minors" are here defined as "persons whose parents, or those standing *in locus parentis*, make their religious decisions for them"); 2) The relationship between adults ("adults" are here defined as "persons who make their own religious education decisions") and their religious communities; 3) The relationship between adults and their religious communities' educational institutions (e.g., all organized educational activities of a religious community, from schools and camps for youngsters to study groups and retreats for adults); 4) The relationship between parents and their religious communities whose educational institutions their minor children attend; 5) The relationship between minor students and the religious educational institutions they attend.

## The Traditional Perspective – A “Natal Obligation” Philosophy of Religious Education

As a useful starting place for dealing with the complex subject of relationships in a polydox educational philosophy, we will begin with an analysis of relationships in what may be termed the "natal obligation" philosophy of religious education. There are two reasons for using the natal obligation philosophy of religious education as a starting place despite the fact that it is by and large contrary to the polydox educational philosophy. The first is that the natal obligation philosophy is widely subscribed to, although generally unconsciously, by the religions of the Western world, notably by Orthodox Judaism, Roman Catholicism, Fundamentalist Protestantism and Sunni Islam, and it is important, therefore, to see how Polydox philosophy differs.

The second, and more important reason, is that the natal obligation philosophy of religious education possesses a simplicity that throws into bold relief the fundamental issues with which a polydox educational philosophy must deal.

Philosophies of religious education are ultimately based upon the principles of the religions whose doctrines it is their purpose to communicate. In this sense all philosophies of religious education are derivative. Thus natal obligation philosophy of religious education is based upon the principles of natal obligation religion. The classic statement of natal obligation religion in Western religion appears in the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Bible (Torah). The pentateuchal formulation of natal obligation religion was either incorporated into subsequent religions, as was the case in Orthodox Judaism, or its influence imparted to them a natal obligation essence, as happened in the Christian and Muslim natal obligation religions. Seeing that the Pentateuch represents the original statement of natal obligation religion, the pentateuchal formulation will be used to illustrate the basic principles that underlie all natal obligation philosophies of religious education.

The pentateuchal covenant:  
The original formulation of natal obligation religion

Natal obligation is embedded in the relationship between the deity Yahveh<sup>1</sup> and the Israelites, a relationship that is at the heart of the pentateuchal religious system. In the beginning, according to the Pentateuch, Yahveh created the universe and all its creatures, including the human species. After the creation, Yahveh revealed to the human species commandments they were obligated to obey, rewarding obedience and punishing disobedience. In the course of time, a community of humans called Hebrews, whose founder was Abraham, arose. Yahveh chose to enter into a special covenantal (contractual) relationship with the Hebrews. This covenant was made first in general terms with Abraham, and then, in greatly expanded and much more detailed form, reconfirmed with Moses and the Hebrews (now also called Israelites) at Sinai. This covenant will be referred to as the "pentateuchal covenant." In the pentateuchal covenant, Yahveh promised to provide special care and protection to the Israelites above that given to all other humans in return for their binding promise to acknowledge Yahveh as God, and obey his commandments (*mitzvot*) that were revealed to Moses at Sinai and in subsequent revelations. Among the commandments were included such edicts as: prohibition of all work on the Sabbath and the execution of violators; the execution of adulterers; the sanctioning and legitimization of slavery; and the execution of all those who said Yahveh was not God (whether they were theists or not).

Four features of the pentateuchal covenant constitute the specific foundations upon which the natal obligation philosophy of religious education is based:

1. The pentateuchal covenant was binding not only upon the generation of Israelites that was present at Sinai and entered into it, but remained binding upon their descendants in perpetuity. Accordingly, even though a descendant of the Israelites who were present at Sinai should choose not to enter into the pentateuchal covenant, the person is nevertheless a party to it by virtue of birth and is, consequently, obligated to obey its commandments or be punished.
2. The pentateuchal covenant is binding upon a person who is party to it for the person's entire lifetime, from birth to death, no matter what the person does. There is no way, so far as the Pentateuch is concerned, for persons born into the covenant to withdraw from it, repudiate it, or otherwise disassociate themselves from it. Neither renunciation of the covenant nor conversion to another religion is recognized by the Pentateuch as releasing a person born to the covenant from the duty to obey its commandments. Hence, from the Pentateuch's standpoint, persons born into the

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<sup>1</sup> The Hebrew term in the Bible that is transliterated into English as YHVH or Yahveh is mistranslated (for questionable reasons of piety) as "Lord." "Adonai" is the Hebrew term for "Lord", "Yahveh" is the name of a particular god. Accordingly, a biblical phrase that is translated in English versions of the Bible as "the Lord God says" should actually be translated "Yahveh the God says." Owing to the greater precision that results from referring to the biblical deity as Yahveh, the Bible's own usage, Yahveh is the term that will be employed here.

covenant can never be lawfully or morally free of its requirements, they can only violate them.

3. Authority to enforce the individual's obligation to observe the covenant's commandments is vested by Yahveh in the Israelite community as a whole and in its religious leaders. Accordingly, the Israelite community possesses rights in individual Israelites born into the covenant superior to their own rights in themselves. Should an Israelite, therefore, choose to repudiate the pentateuchal covenant or reject one of its commandments, the Israelite community and its religious leaders have the right to overrule the individual's own religious choice and force compliance with the covenant's demands or exact the prescribed punishment. In political situations where the Israelite community and its religious leaders do not possess the power to exact punishment, as, for example, happens in a country where there is a separation of church and state, the Israelite community administers whatever punishment it can, such as excommunication, and leaves the remainder of the punishment to Yahveh to exact.
4. The Israelite community's rights in minor children born into the covenant are superior to their parents' rights in them. Consequently, the parents of Israelite minor children do not have the right to teach their own children doctrines that are contrary to those prescribed by the covenant and the community. Israelite parents, in other words, are forbidden to give their children a religious upbringing of the parents' own choice if that choice is contrary to the dictates of the Pentateuch.

A religion such as the pentateuchal system, in which persons born to parents who are adherents of the religion are considered by the religion as forever obligated to follow its beliefs and practices, is termed a "natal obligation" religion. The beliefs of a natal obligation religion that those born into it are required to accept are termed "natal dogmas."<sup>2</sup> The Pentateuch, accordingly, presents a natal obligation religion in which, after Sinai, no descendant of an Israelite ancestor is ever again born religiously free, that is, born with the right to religious self-determination. The classical formulation of the natal obligation character of pentateuchal religion is found in the following passages:

Observe, therefore, the words of this covenant, and do them, that you may succeed in everything you undertake. You are standing today all of you before Yahveh your God, the heads of your tribes, your elders, and your officers, and even all the men of Israel, together with your children, your wives, and the aliens in your employ who are living in your camps, both your wood-gatherers and your water-drawers, that you may enter into the covenant of Yahveh your God and the solemn compact which Yahveh your God is making with you today, that he may today make you his own people, and that he may be your God, as he promised you, and as he swore to your fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. It is not with you alone that I am making this covenant and solemn compact, but with those who are here with us today, standing before Yahveh our God,

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<sup>2</sup> See the authors article, "Birth Dogma and Philosophic Religious Faith," Hebrew Union College Annual, Vol. XLVI, 1975, for the original discussion of the subject of birth dogma. The term "birth dogma" is synonymous with the term "natal dogma" which is employed in this essay.

and with those who are not here with us today [that is, with your unborn descendents]... lest there should be among you man, woman, family, or tribe, whose heart this day might turn from Yahveh our God to go and serve the gods of those nations; lest there should be among you a root [that is, an ancestor] bearing poison and wormwood [that is, bearing a wicked and disobedient descendant], and then upon hearing the terms of this sacred compact he [that is, the wicked and disobedient descendant] should flatter himself by saying "I shall be safe, even though I persist in my stubbornness of mind," to the destruction of moist and dry alike. Yahveh would never consent to forgive him, but instead, the anger and resentment of Yahveh would burn against such a man; every curse recorded in this book would settle on him; Yahveh would blot out his very name from under the heavens; and Yahveh would single him out from all the tribes of Israel for doom, by all the curses of the covenant recorded in this book of the law. (Deut. 29: 8-14, 17-20.)

### Endoctrining

Having described the features of the pentateuchal covenant that lay down the foundations of the natal obligation philosophy of religious education, we come to the philosophy itself. This philosophy of religious education, as pointed out earlier, has been followed essentially by Orthodox Judaism, Roman Catholicism, Protestant Fundamentalism, and Sunni Islam, all of which are natal obligation religions. It will, therefore, be described in general terms so that it is applicable not only to pentateuchal religion but to these other natal obligation religions as well. The fundamental principle of natal obligation educational philosophy is that the primary goal of religious education is to train persons from infancy on in such a way that throughout their lives they will follow the beliefs and practices commanded by the natal obligation religion. The general method that has been employed historically by natal obligation religious communities will be termed "endoctrining." Endoctrining is defined as *a method of education that serves to deprive students, whether minor or adult, of the ability to determine in a fully informed, objective, and independent manner the truth of that which is taught, while attempting, at the same time, to force students to accept what is taught by exerting upon them psychological or other pressures and influences that have no relation to the truth of the teaching.*<sup>3</sup> Endoctrining prevents students from deciding the truth of a belief on its own merits and in an authentic manner, namely, after examining and evaluating all the knowledge and evidence that are available pertaining to the truth of the belief, and on the basis of the students' own personal, internal, and independent truth-determining capacity.

Endoctrining embraces a variety of techniques. The major techniques can generally be classified (although there may be some overlapping) in the following way: 1) restricting information; 2) isolation; 3) inducing blind acceptance; 4) denigrating human cognitive (knowing) ability; 5) inculcating the feeling of hubris; 6) inducing submission to the religious

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<sup>3</sup> In order to describe in as detailed and accurate a way as possible the method employed by natal obligation educational institutions, the term "endoctrining" is employed here as a technical term and given a precise new meaning. This meaning is similar in a general way to one sense of the term "indoctrination," which is, however, too loose for the exacting use required here. To the author's knowledge, this is the first time that the natal obligation philosophy of religious education has ever been explicitly stated.

leader; 7) instilling the guilt of sin; 8) instilling the guilt of family and community disloyalty. The point should be noted that not every technique listed here is used by all the religious communities that employ the method of indoctrining in their educational institutions. Some communities use all the techniques, others emphasize certain techniques and not others. Use of the method of indoctrining does not require that every indoctrining technique possible always be employed. Accordingly, whether religious communities and their educational institutions use all the indoctrining techniques or only some, the end result remains that their general educational method is indoctrining. In the discussion that follows, the major indoctrining techniques listed above are examined and described.

1. Restricting information: This technique consists primarily in the natal obligation educational institution presenting to the student (minor or adult) only one viewpoint, that of the natal obligation community. If other religious viewpoints are presented at all, they are either distorted, characterized as erroneous, or denounced as blasphemous, immoral, and sinful. In this way, students are kept from unbiased information regarding religious alternatives and options, and so prevented from comparing the natal obligation religion's viewpoint with other positions. Such comparisons are understandably perceived as threats by natal obligation religions. For one thing, they bring to a student's attention religious concepts possibly more satisfying than those of the natal obligation religion; and for another, they may occasion serious doubts and questions regarding the truth and validity of the natal obligation religion's beliefs and practices.
2. Isolation: This technique reinforces that of restricting information by significantly reducing the opportunity of students attending natal obligation educational institutions from acquiring information about other religions' beliefs and practice. Isolation may be partial or complete. An example of partial isolation is provided by the parochial school where students' information regarding other religions is restricted. Complete isolation is achieved by confining the natal obligation community and its educational institutions to a separate geographic area, such as a ghetto, which is physically insulated from other religions, values, and cultures. Historically, an important part of the technique of isolation has been the banning or burning of books that present ideas at variance with the natal obligation community's viewpoint.
3. Inducing blind acceptance: This technique aims to inculcate in students attending natal obligation educational institutions the belief or feeling that the proper attitude to take toward its technique is one of blind acceptance. By blind acceptance is meant that students should follow the beliefs and practices of the natal obligation religious community simply because they are told to do so, without questioning, critical examination, or similar other efforts at independent, personal thought. (This technique is often combined with techniques 4, 5, and 6 described below.)
4. Denigrating human cognitive ability: This technique consists in denigrating the ability of the students in particular, and of humankind in general, to examine, evaluate, and pass judgment on the truth and validity of the doctrines and practices

taught by the natal obligation educational institution. The corollary of this technique is the implication that neither the students nor any other humans are able without the natal obligation religion's teachings to attain soteria (ultimate meaningful human existence).

5. Inculcating the feeling of *hubris*: This technique serves to implant in students' consciences the sentiment that it is *hubris* - sinful and arrogant pride - for them to rely on their own thinking and judgment in evaluating the natal obligation religion. (This natal obligation attack on self-reliance is implicit in techniques 6 and 7, below.)
6. Inducing submission to the religious leader: This technique communicates to students the attitude that they are intellectually and morally inferior to the natal obligation community's religious leader or leaders, and that the students, therefore, should subordinate themselves and obey whatever commands such leaders issue. Particularly emphasized is the inferiority of the students compared to such leaders of the past (depending upon the religious community) as Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad.
7. Instilling the guilt of sin: This technique transmits to students the belief and feeling that they violate the commandments of a creator God, such as the biblical Yahveh, if they reject the beliefs and practices prescribed by the natal obligation community. Such violations constitute sin, and those who commit them are taught they deserve and will receive punishment either from the creator God, the natal obligation community, or both. Accordingly, this technique imparts to the students a sense of guilt that includes fear of impending punishment as well.
8. Instilling the guilt of family and community disloyalty: This technique implants in students the feeling that refusal to surrender their right to autonomy and personal religious freedom to the natal obligation community, or repudiation of its doctrines, is a betrayal of their communities and even of their families. In the natal obligation community, a person's primary loyalty is conceived not as being to one's own authenticity and perception of truth, but to the doctrines and observances of the natal obligation community.

As is readily apparent, the method of indoctrining used in natal obligation educational institutions employs techniques that manipulate and intimidate students, adults as well as minors, into following the beliefs and practices of the natal obligation community. Controlling and restricting access to information, implanting and playing upon feelings of guilt, threatening and meting out punishment, all serve to cripple or destroy the ability of students to arrive at religious choices that genuinely express what they truly believe. A question of ethics, therefore, immediately arises regarding indoctrining as an educational method. Can a religious community's use of indoctrining, which takes religious freedom from persons without their consent and keeps them from authentic religious choices, be morally justified? The answer, from the viewpoint of the natal obligation religion, is that indoctrining can be justified. This justification must be carefully examined, for it is of

fundamental importance not only for understanding natal obligation educational philosophy but polydox educational philosophy as well.

### The authority to indoctrinate

The justification of indoctrinating in natal obligation educational philosophy is to be found in four basic principles that are explicit or implicit in natal obligation religion itself. They are: infallibility; obligatory obedience from birth; community right and duty to enforce obligatory obedience; and benevolent precautionary paternalism.

1. **The principle of *infallibility***: This principle states that the natal obligation religion of the natal obligation community is absolutely true, and that the community possesses an inerrant revelation from the creator God that proves this is so. The principle of infallibility is the foundation stone of the natal obligation religion's justification of the use of indoctrinating as the general educational method in its educational institutions, for if it is rejected then none of the other principles necessary to justify the use of indoctrinating can be maintained. Indoctrinating would then have to be rejected on moral grounds. The reason is that the only argument that can be given to justify morally the use of indoctrinating is that there exists a creator God of the universe who has given to the natal obligation religion the right to use indoctrinating as the method of instruction in its educational institutions. A god who has created the universe and all its creatures, human and otherwise, can conceivably be said to own humankind, and can, therefore, do with them as he wishes, which includes granting a religious leader or community authority to use indoctrinating in its educational institutions. We may take it as evident that no person or human community has the right on the basis of its own subjective and fallible assertion of authority to use indoctrinating, an educational method that deprives students of freedom and authentic religiousness by employing such techniques as managing information and manipulating guilt feelings. Accordingly, if a religious community does not possess a certified infallible revelation that proves it has received from a God who has created the universe the right to use indoctrinating on its students, then it lacks the evidence necessary to morally justify its use of indoctrinating. For without such infallibly revealed divine sanction, a religious educational institution's use of indoctrinating is based entirely upon human authority, and it is self-evident that no human possesses moral justification to deprive another human of religious freedom and religious authenticity. Educators and teachers who use indoctrinating as a method of instruction without the authority to do so having been transmitted to them through a certified revelation from a creator God are usurping their students' inherent right to religious autonomy.
2. **The principle of *obligatory obedience from birth***: This principle is in substance the cornerstone of natal obligation religion as earlier described. It states that children of parents who belong to the natal obligation community are born with a lifelong obligation to follow the religion of the community, which the community claims to have been revealed by a God who has created the universe, such as the pentateuchal Yahveh.

3. **The principle of *community right and duty to enforce obligatory obedience***: This principle states that the creator God has transferred to the natal obligation community from his own absolute authority over all humankind the right to compel persons born to members of the natal obligation community to obey the community's religion. The natal obligation community claims that the actions the deity has given them the right to take in order to force member obedience are described in their Bibles: these include threats, inducing guilt, and psychic or physical punishment in this world or the next. Moreover, the natal obligation community claims it not only has a divine right to compel persons born to members of the community to obey its religion and to punish them if they do not, but a divine duty. For the community is held responsible by the deity for the actions of its members' children. Inasmuch as the natal obligation educational institution is an agent that represents the natal obligation community, it possesses the same powers of compulsion and punishment as those of the community to enforce fulfillment of their students' natal obligation.
  
4. **The principle of *benevolent precautionary paternalism***: This principle, a logical extension of the first two, states that the natal obligation educational institution has the right to take all precautions necessary to keep individuals born of parents belonging to the natal obligation community from all information, behavior, and other influences that may tempt or seduce them from observing the religion of their parents. The reason underlying the principle of benevolent precautionary paternalism is evident. Inasmuch as the natal obligation community, as seen above, believes it has a right and duty to punish those who violate their natal obligation religion, and if it does not punish them the creator God will, then it is an act of benevolence and responsibility to keep persons from experiences and opportunities that may lead them astray.

It is regrettable to see that unjustifiable indoctrining is widespread among the educational institutions of the various so-called "liberal" religions of the Western world. The only communities whose beliefs morally justify indoctrining are orthodoxies claiming possession of an infallible revelation. However, such communities as Reform Judaism and those of liberal Protestantism, which reject orthodox claims to an infallible revelation, and can show none of their own, routinely indoctrinate their students. Tragically, they are all engaged in usurping their students' rights to religious autonomy and self-determination with the unproductive and even disastrous results that such an immoral, authoritarian educational procedure ultimately produces in the modern world.

It is understandable and perhaps inevitable that indoctrining, even though unjustifiable, should be so widespread among religious (and value) educational institutions, for it was only with the advent of Polydoxy that the nature and requirements of a new religious (and value) educational method became entirely clear. This is the subject of the polydox philosophy of religious education, to which we now turn.



The Polydox Perspective:  
A “Natal Freedom” Philosophy of Religious Education

The polydox philosophy of religious education, as its name indicates, has its foundations in the religious philosophy of Polydoxy. Seeing that the polydox educational philosophy has its origins in the nature of polydox philosophy itself, it is with the latter that our exposition begins. For the purpose of this discussion, the nature of Polydoxy can be described in the form of three principles: the principle of autonomy; the principle of fallibility; and the principle of the Covenant of Freedom.

1. **The principle of *autonomy*:** This principle states that every person possesses an *inherent* right to ultimate self-authority over her or his psyche and body. Accordingly, every person possesses an ultimate right to determine the religious or philosophic beliefs she or he will accept as true and the moral codes that flow from those beliefs, as well as the observances she or he will keep.

By *inherent* is meant that persons are presumed to possess ultimate authority over themselves unless this presumption is rebutted by convincing evidence to the contrary.

Implicit in the principle of autonomy is **the principle of *natal freedom***, which is here stated explicitly. This principle states that all persons are presumed to be born religiously free, with the right throughout their lives of religious self-determination. Seeing that the principle of natal freedom occupies a central place in the philosophy of polydox religious education, another name that may appropriately be given the latter is "the natal freedom philosophy of religious education." The two names will be used interchangeably from this point on, and both are counterposed to the natal obligation philosophy of religious education.

2. **The principle of *fallibility*:** Simply put, this principle states that there exists no credible evidence to rebut the presumption of autonomy and natal freedom. In other words, there exists no indubitable or irrefutable knowledge that would morally justify the exercise of religious authority by a person or community over other persons or otherwise to deprive other persons of their religious autonomy. Such evidence, as explained earlier, would have to show with absolute certainty that a creator God has given to the person or religious community claiming authority the right to deprive others of their religious freedom. The point is to be emphasized that Polydoxy states not only that it itself does not possess such indubitable and irrefutable knowledge, but that no other persons or religious communities as well can produce credible evidence of possessing such knowledge.

*It is essential that the claim of a person or religious community to the moral right to deprive others of their religious freedom be substantiated by convincing evidence that this right has been granted to them infallibly by a creator God. If no such evidence can be brought, then the claim is invalid and must be rejected, for persons*

*are presumed to possess ultimate authority over themselves unless this presumption is rebutted by convincing evidence to the contrary. One of the cornerstones of Polydoxy is the conclusion, after all the evidence has been examined upon which persons and religious communities have historically based their claim to a moral right to deprive other humans of their religious freedom, that this evidence is incompetent, and without merit. Thus, for example, the morality of the authoritarian claims of Orthodox Judaism, Roman Catholicism, and Fundamentalist Protestantism is, for polydoxians, refuted by Higher Criticism (scientific examination of the Bible) and philosophic analysis.*

3. **The principle of the Covenant of Freedom:** This principle states that the religious community morally appropriate for human persons, inasmuch as they are born religiously free and retain the ultimate right of religious self-determination throughout their lives, is one that defines the basic relations among its members in terms of what is called the Covenant of Freedom. The Covenant of Freedom states that every person in the religious community pledges to affirm the religious freedom of all other members in return for their pledge to affirm her or his own. The corollary of the Covenant of Freedom is that every person's freedom ends where the other person's freedom begins.

In sum, three fundamental features may be said to characterize Polydoxy. First, a polydox religion is one whose adherents possess religious freedom and the right to religious self-determination from birth until death. Second, Polydoxy is a religious system that denies that there exists the infallible knowledge required to substantiate the justification necessary for religious leaders, religious communities, or any other persons morally to deprive adherents, members, or other persons of their right to religious self-determination. Third, a polydox religion is the religion of a community whose fundamental commitment is to the Covenant of Freedom, which affirms every member's individual religious freedom. Such affirmation consists of two aspects, negative and positive. The negative aspect guarantees that no persons whom the community serves may be deprived of their right to religious self-determination. The positive aspect provides those whom the community serves with the practical means whereby they are enabled concretely to realize in their lives their right to religious self-determination. The polydox philosophy of religious education that follows is a significant part of the positive aspect of the Covenant of Freedom.

Empossession: The opposite of indoctrinating

The first task that confronts a polydox or natal freedom philosophy of education is to determine a general method whereby religious information can be communicated to students of polydox educational institutions in accordance with polydox principles. The general method presented here is called "empossession." (Empossess – "to invest with possession, endow *with*." – Oxford English Dictionary) The term empossession aptly fits the method it describes for it gives to students religious freedom and the information necessary to realize this freedom as their own possession to do with as they choose. Empossession is in spirit, intent, and practice the opposite of indoctrinating, the general educational method used by natal obligation educational institutions. *The purpose of*

*endoctrining is to induce students to follow the beliefs and practices of the natal obligation community; the purpose of empossession is to enable students to arrive at beliefs and practices they personally and genuinely consider valid. In other words, the aim of endoctrining is to make the student serve the needs and goals of the religious community; whereas the aim of empossession is to make the religious community serve the needs and goals of the individual.* The techniques primarily employed to carry out the method of empossession are these: concretizing of student religious freedom; truth; optionalizing of religious beliefs and practices; multivalent services and rituals; objective self-explanation.

1. **The technique of concretizing student freedom:** This technique consists of two main parts. First, the students are explicitly informed that they possess the right to religious self-determination, and that the teachings of the educational institution are in no way obligatory upon them. Second, instructional procedures are used that encourage the students to exercise their freedom. Students' opinions regarding the subjects studied are solicited and the propriety of their holding personal opinions is affirmed. Students are explicitly given the right to reject the views of the instructor or of other students. The point is stressed that a student can reject the instructor's and other students' individual religious beliefs and practices and still share with them membership in a polydox community that is based on a Covenant of Freedom. The technique of concretizing student freedom must be used in conjunction with techniques 3 and 4, below, to attain a maximum degree of efficacy.
2. **The technique of truth:** This technique consists in the polydox educational institution making certain that every item of information presented as a fact by its instructors is true to the best of the polydox community's knowledge, which includes its scholars and experts on the subject. Thus, for example, if a polydox instructor states, "Orthodox religion X believes such and such," then that orthodox religion must in fact believe it. And although the reasons polydoxians reject orthodoxy are taught to students, the reasons are presented without disparagement, and restricted to the technical areas of differences in positions regarding truth, evidence, and morality. Moreover, the reasons an orthodoxy may have for rejecting Polydoxy are also presented to the students so that all sides of the issue can be examined. The fundamental reason that orthodoxies can be treated objectively by polydoxians lies in the essentially different official attitudes that orthodox and polydox religions take toward one another. An orthodox religion, by its very nature, regards all other religions, whether orthodox or polydox, to be morally inferior and even sinful. Polydoxy, on the other hand, makes no moral judgment regarding an orthodoxy unless it attempts through political or other means to destroy or usurp the internal freedom of a polydox community or individual polydoxian.

Special mention must be made of the widespread practice in non-polydox educational institutions of teaching students stories that are represented as coming from the Bible when, in fact, these stories amount to fundamental distortions of the biblical narrative, and the claim that they are Bible stories is essentially untrue.

Among the many objections to the practice of misrepresenting the Bible's contents to students, the following are of particular importance. First, it is morally objectionable for any educational institution, particularly religious ones, to deceive trusting students with untruths. Moreover, accurate knowledge of the Bible is vital to a person's ultimate decision whether to accept Orthodoxy or Polydoxy, so that the knowledge necessary to make fundamental existential decisions is kept from students when the Bible is misrepresented. Furthermore, if young students should later discover, as they often do, that their youth and innocence were taken advantage of, they not only lose confidence in the credibility and value of the educational institution, but frequently reject as well the community the institution represents.

3. **The technique of *optionalizing religious concepts*:** This technique teaches students the fundamental positions that exist with respect to such major religious subjects as theology (God), revelation, and the afterlife. In this way, students acquire a knowledge of the various options of belief among which they are free to choose.

A primary way in which optionalization is carried out is by teaching the students typologies. Upon analysis all the major beliefs that may exist with respect to a particular religious subject fall into a relatively few broad categories or typologies. Take, for example, the subject of the afterlife of the individual human person. There are a great many beliefs regarding this subject that vary in details of one sort or another, but they all fall into relatively few major categories when arranged typologically. Thus, for example, a typology of beliefs about personal afterexistence would include: Immortality - a concept of personal afterexistence in which the soul or mind survives the death of the person's body; Resurrection - a concept of personal afterexistence in which the identical mind and body of the person who has died, as originally joined, come to life again some time after the person has died; Sublimation - a concept of personal afterexistence in which a person's mind and body jointly survive death in a transfigured, nobler, more spiritual form. Sublimation can take place after resurrection; i.e., after resurrection, the person dies again and then experiences sublimation. (Resurrection and subsequent sublimation are basic beliefs of Orthodox Judaism and some Orthodox Christianities, such as Roman Catholicism.); transmigration - a concept of personal afterexistence in which the soul passes at death from the body that has perished to another body; Afterexistence Agnosticism - the view that belief about a personal afterexistence is to be withheld on the basis that there does not exist competent evidence upon which to make a judgment; Finitism - the concept that neither the mind nor the body of the human person survives death. Death is the end of individual personal existence. Finitism can include such sentiments as "living on after one's death through one's children or through good deeds or through one's accomplishments," inasmuch as such sentiments do not signify belief in a personal afterexistence.

Thus presenting this typology to students satisfies the requirement that the polydox educational institution optionalize concepts of the afterlife. To avoid the possibility, however, that some student may feel that her or his particular opinion was not included or was inadequately represented in the typology presented by the instructor, student opinions are also solicited. Needless to say the technique of optionalizing must be used in conjunction with the technique of concretizing student freedom. If students do not feel free to accept the options set forth, optionalizing becomes an empty intellectual exercise.

4. **The technique of *multivalent rituals and services*:** This technique consists in the educational institution using services and ceremonies that are multivalent. Multivalent refers to services and ceremonies that employ language that has many meanings, values, and uses, and whose literal meaning is undogmatic. Multivalent language, consequently, is open to theological and ideological interpretation by individual readers who determine for themselves the meaning, value and use it has for them personally. By employing multivalent services and ceremonies, polydox educational institutions eschew exploiting communal religious and spiritual occasions as opportunities to indoctrinate students. For multivalent services and ceremonies, being open and undogmatic, permit those who participate in them to mold and shape the language of the services and ceremonies according to the participant's own beliefs and convictions, and within the privacy of their own psyches. Thus multivalent services and ceremonies give those who use them, in addition to personal religious freedom, the opportunity to be active and creative. Such activity and creativity contrasts sharply with the controlled thought, obedience and passivity demanded by the dogmatic services and ceremonies of natal obligation educational institutions and communities. In brief, multivalent services and ceremonies provide a communal religious occasion for a private, creative experience.
5. **The technique of *objective self-explanation*:** The polydox educational institution has an evident obligation to explain to its students its nature and principles, which includes giving them an understanding of the Covenant of Freedom. This is necessary to enable the students in the polydox institution to understand the reason for the freedom they enjoy and its limits with respect to the rights of others. The way in which Polydoxy is taught is in an impartial and dispassionate manner, as the name "objective self-explanation" implies. This technique enables students to accept or reject Polydoxy on its merits, and to avoid feelings of guilt or disloyalty if rejection is their choice. For students in a polydox educational institution have a right to reject Polydoxy equally as they do any other position. Included in the technique of objective self-explanation is the right of polydox teachers to present their personal positions on such subjects as theology (God) and so forth if students request the information, or if such information furthers the instructional program. Needless to say, the teachers' own positions are presented in the same impartial and dispassionate manner as is the Polydox philosophy. *Throughout polydox instruction the point is stressed that the students' primary loyalty is to their own authenticity, and that their primary goal, therefore, is to discover and follow the religious beliefs and practices they personally regard as true and meaningful.*

We have now examined empossession, the general method employed by polydox educational institutions to educate students. The reason polydox educational institutions employ empossession, as has been explained, is that they are committed to the freedom of their students by the Covenant of Freedom, and empossession is an educational method that concretely affirms student freedom. It is clear, consequently, that once students enter a polydox educational institution their freedom is affirmed. The question now to be dealt with is the nature of the process by which students who enter polydox educational institutions may be considered to have entered of their own free will.

### Autonomy and the religious education of minors: Resolving a paradox

The importance of this question lies in the fact that educational institutions, by their very nature, inevitably exercise some degree of authority over their students, and this is true even in a polydox institution where the degree of authority is the minimum possible. It is an act of authority, albeit subtly so, just to make special demands on the time, attention, and behavior of persons, which is necessary, of course, if an organized instructional program is to be carried out. Similarly, it is an act of authority to have the privilege of presenting information and a viewpoint to students. However, the principle of autonomy, and the related principle of natal freedom, make it clear that the only kind of authority a polydox institution can exercise over its members is conditional authority freely granted by the individual.

This presents no problems for adults who enter polydox educational institutions: inasmuch as adult students possess the authority to make their own religious education decisions, they conditionally transfer from their self-authority to the polydox institution the degree of authority over them the institution requires to pursue its religious program. The condition to which the transfer is subject is that the students retain the ultimate right to withdraw at will the authority vested in the institution. The ultimate right of a person to religious self-authority is unalienable in a polydoxy, and can, therefore, under no circumstances be morally obtained or held without the person's consent.

The conditions whereby *minor* students may be considered to have entered a polydox educational institution of their own volition, unlike the adult process, are complex. The reason is that the parents of minors rather than the minors themselves make their religious decisions, among which is included the decision that the minor should attend a religious educational institution. How, then, can this reality be reconciled with the child's ultimate self-authority as guaranteed by the principles of autonomy and natal freedom?<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Parents who do not affirm their minor children's ultimate right to religious self-authority generally fall into one of the following two groups: 1) The first group are adherents of natal obligation religions that do not permit parents to give their children religious freedom. As adherents of natal obligation religions, these parents believe that a creator God possesses ultimate religious authority over their children, and that substantial portions of this right have been delegated to their natal obligation religious community and its hierarchy, which, therefore, have ultimate religious authority on earth over their children. Thus parents of the first group believe that ultimate religious authority over their children resides in a creator God, but that for all practical purposes, it resides in their religious community, its leaders, and its educational institutions. Accordingly, these parents cannot affirm their children's ultimate right to religious freedom even if they wish to for they do not believe they possess the authority to do so. 2) The second group of parents does not affirm

The answer is that the polydox parents are presumed to be trustees of their children's religious freedom. This position is a conclusion that evolves from the resolution of a problem inherent in the human condition. Young children are generally incapable of exercising their ultimate right to religious self-authority. (By "young children" is meant those who have not reached the age of preadolescence which occurs approximately between the ages of 9 to 12.) The meaningful exercise of this right requires information, experience, and maturity that young children ordinarily do not possess. Consequently, even if the parents of young children have affirmed their right to religious self-authority, the children are incapable of using that authority. That is to say, young children, owing to a lack of information, experience, and maturity, are incapable of making religious decisions for themselves, or of responsibly transferring authority to others to make these decisions for them.

The problem, then, is how young children can ever be considered to have entered a religious education of their own free choice. The resolution of this problem is awkward from a theoretical standpoint but inevitable from a practical one. In brief, the resolution is for adults to act on behalf of young children in such a way that the action taken can reasonably be construed as the same one that the children themselves would take were they acting in the interest of arriving at the ability to choose freely their own religious beliefs and practices. The action taken on behalf of young children is this. The religious freedom of the young children is placed in trust for them with a trustee who is obligated to act in such a way that the children's religious freedom is nurtured and can be returned to them when they are able to exercise their right to religious self-determination. In placing young children's freedom in trust for them, the assumption is made that if the children were competent to use their religious self-authority for the purpose of attaining the ability to exercise their ultimate right to religious freedom they would delegate authority over their religious education to trustees who would use that authority to make it possible for the children to achieve their goal. In the ordinary course of events, the trustees of young children's religious freedom are their parents. Polydox parents hold their children's religious freedom in trust for them. It is as trustees acting on behalf of their children's religious freedom that parents enter their children into a polydox educational institution. Since the parents' actions as trustees are construed as authorized by their children, the parents' action of entering the children into the polydox educational institution is considered as if it were the children's own.

By the very nature of the trust in which they hold their children's religious freedom, parents who act on behalf of their children must ideally enter them into religious educational institutions that follow the polydox or natal freedom philosophy of religious education. For the children's goal of attaining the ability to exercise their right to religious self-determination is not served by an educational institution that employs indoctrinating. Not that indoctrinating is generally successful in inducing students to follow a natal obligation

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their minor children's ultimate right to religious freedom because these parents feel they possess ultimate religious authority over their children by reason of having procreated them. This view has an instinctual quality about it. Generally, parents who take this view seem not to have thought it through and articulated its rationale to themselves. They appear unaware of the moral issues involved in the position that a person can claim the right to dictate the religious beliefs and practices of other human beings simply on the basis of having procreated them.

religion's beliefs and practices, but indoctrinating can make it difficult for children to exercise the adult right to religious freedom they will acquire without unnecessary confusion, conflict and guilt.

The sole sources of a polydox educational institution's authority to educate minor students are the polydox parents acting as trustees of their children's religious freedom. This contrasts with the view of natal obligation religious educational institutions that they receive their authority from a creator God of the universe. For this reason, natal obligation educational institutions maintain that neither the students nor the students' parents have a fundamental right to question the content these institutions teach and the method of indoctrinating they employ. Polydox educational institutions, however, in sharp contrast to the natal obligation educational institutions, are responsible to the minor students' parents from whom they receive their authority to teach the students, and both parents and institutions are ultimately responsible to their commitment to the principle of autonomy and the Covenant of Freedom.

The trust whereby parents act on behalf of their children's religious freedom is limited to the period of time when the children, for religious purposes, are minors. When these minor children become adults, the trust is dissolved and the power to exercise their right to religious self-determination reverts to them. There appears to be no way to determine with certainty and objectivity the exact time when a particular minor becomes an adult who makes her or his own religious decisions. There are significant differences among individual persons, families, and religious circumstances. Generally, the age at which minor children become capable of making their own religious decisions is somewhere in late preadolescence or early adolescence. Ideally, the exact time when a minor child attains religious adulthood is arrived at by child and parent together after mutual consultation and agreement.

#### Final Thought

Careful analysis of parents' authority over their children's religious life is no mere theoretical exercise in hairsplitting. It is a matter of profound human importance for parents to understand the nature and limits of their religious authority over their children. Among the many reasons for this that can be given, none is more important than the serious conflict that often arises between parents and children when the latter become older and seek to regain from their parents the power to exercise their ultimate right to religious self-determination. Parents who have thought through a religious philosophy and are thereby able to take a consistent and justifiable position regarding the extent of their religious authority over their children are much more likely to deal productively with them in their period of major existential transition from minor child to adult.

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