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An Analysis of an Exclusivist Religious Upbringing Regarding a Child's Right to an Open  
Future in a Democratic Society: A Search for Truth

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For years, children were thought not to have rights; they were simply counted as their parents' property. More recently, this view has changed to a realization that children not only possess rights in their present status but also possess *future* rights, rights that they presently have but cannot exercise until they mature into their *future* adult state. Since these future rights are neither well-known nor well-understood by most people, these rights can be easily violated; and, in particular, parents regularly *do* violate them. One of these future right violations that have been the subject of a considerable amount of debate is parents raising their children within a particular religious upbringing, in an exclusivist belief system. This paper contends that although an exclusivist religious upbringing (ERU) commonly violates a child's future right to choose his own religion, parents strongly believing in an exclusivist religion can impart their beliefs on their child *without* violating his future right of religious choice.

First, this essay reviews the origin and importance of a child's future rights. It then continues to examine the arguments for and against the claim that an ERU often violates a child's future right to religious choice. Finally, this paper attempts to demonstrate how some particular exclusivist religions enable parents to fulfill their desire to pass on their religious beliefs to their child, while still satisfying their child's desire and the democratic state's desire for the child to be capable of legitimately and autonomously examining alternative religious and non-religious belief systems.

Origin and Explanation of Children's Future Rights from Feinberg's Essay

There are certain freedoms that have been analyzed, written about, and discussed by scholars and philosophers for centuries. In many countries, experts have agreed that these freedoms are basic and necessary for every individual in their societies. These freedoms are known as human rights. As was mentioned in the introduction, these rights recently were recognized to be inclusive of children. However, the problematic area of child rights arises when children possess rights but are incapable of exercising them due to not yet having developed the physical, cognitive, or emotional abilities their future self will have. These are described as a child's future rights, and Joel Feinberg (1980) grouped this area of child rights into a child's "right to an open future" (Feinberg, p.126). This portion of the paper discusses the origin of Joel Feinberg's famous child rights essay on a child's "right to an open future", and it seeks to define his innovative concept and explain its importance.

In the United States, the government requires children to attend some form of schooling, and it expects the children's parents to ensure their children's attendance. The laws determining to what age the children must attend school vary from state to state, but this variance is minimal, and all children must go at least up to that age the state deems necessary. Although this mandatory attendance is nearly always maintained, an exception occurred in 1972 in the state of Wisconsin. In the case *Wisconsin v. Yoder*, a Supreme Court judge's ruling created a precedent that exempted the entire Amish culture from enforcing the state's eighth grade education requirement on their children (Reich, 2003, p.445). This decision was made based on the reasoning that forcing the Amish children to go to public school against their parents' wishes would be a violation of the parents' right to freely exercise their religion. Moreover, because the Amish religion forbids Amish parents from allowing their children to be exposed to the world

and its negative influences on Amish culture, the judge ruled that their right to free exercise of religion was in violation. Accordingly, the Yoder's children were exempted from the Wisconsin law requiring two more years of schooling (Reich, 2003, p. 445).

Drawing upon this case and its implications on children's future choices, a child rights expert named Joel Feinberg (1980) wrote a now famous essay in child rights philosophy entitled "The Child's Right to an Open Future." In his memorable essay, Feinberg introduced the idea of children possessing "rights-in-trust" (Feinberg, p.125).

These child "rights-in-trust" he spoke of are equivalent to the rights adults exercise; however, children lack the understanding or ability to exercise them, due to their inadequate cognitive skills, physical skills, or undeveloped personal values and opinions (Feinberg, 1980, p.125). For example, one such right would be a child's right to exercise a religion of his choosing. Since most children do not understand the deep meaning and beliefs associated with most religions, most children cannot truly exercise their right to freedom of religious choice *until* they gain the knowledge and desire to do so. It is a "right-in-trust." A second example of a right-in-trust is a child's right to choose whatever career he wishes. Obviously, he can in no way effectively evaluate a career choice or engage in one as a child, because he typically lacks the reasoning, physical, and independence requirements that all careers have. Therefore, both of these examples would qualify as *future* rights of the child, rights-in-trust. Feinberg collectively termed all rights-in-trust, rights that a child cannot *yet* exercise but potentially will be able to in his future self, as the child's "right to an open future" (Feinberg, 1980, p.126).

Though the child cannot yet exercise his right to an open future until he develops the capacity to in his future self, Feinberg asserted that any of these future rights of his can be

violated by others *before* he ever develops the ability to use them (Feinberg, 1980, p.126). Usually, these violations occur imprecisely, in the form of extreme *hindrances* or *inhibitions* to the child's right to his personal future choice (Marples, 2005, p. 139-140). For the sake of explanation, a grossly exaggerated example would be a parent raising his child to believe there is only possible career choice. The parent might teach his child that being a car mechanic is his only career option by home-schooling the child, working as a car mechanic out of his own home, and never permitting his child to come in contact with human or media sources that would "enlighten" the child to his vast array of potential career choices. This example seems preposterous, but a softer version of it could entail a parent incessantly informing his child that he is only "good enough to be a car mechanic", that "all of your ancestors were car mechanics", and that "I'll only be happy with you if you become a car mechanic." Roger Marples (2005) noted in his child rights article that if used enough times, these parental instructions unquestionably can form large psychological and emotional hindrances on a child's future right to choose whatever career he wishes (Marples, p.140). Theoretically, the child still has the choice to whatever career he wishes. However, even if some other strong influences happen to show the child that his parents' wishes for his life do not *have* to be followed (which may happen), his chance to exercise his future career right to become something other than a car mechanic has been effectively limited. This limitation certainly would be said to amount to a violation, though the child in principle can still make his own choice. Thus, a child can have his right to an open future violated or *severely hindered* before he even possesses the ability to exercise it.

Furthermore, understanding the severe hindrance certain parental actions can have on a child's right to an open future gives a fresh perspective on the case of *Wisconsin v. Yoder*. The judge's ruling in the case created a precedent which carried crucial implications not only for the Amish community but also for the Amish children and their futures (Feinberg, 1972, p. 134-135). Through their parents' choices, the Amish children were exempted from two years of schooling and whatever opportunities that schooling held for them. Though unlikely, it was *possible* that one or more Amish children could have gained certain knowledge, interests, or values during those two years of schooling that could have relieved him of certain inhibitions imposed on him by the Amish community, allowing him to consider the choice of a potentially desirable future apart from the segregated Amish culture.

However doubtful it was that those two years of schooling would have had any significant affect in this particular example, an important consideration was excluded by the Supreme Court's decision. The idea behind a child's right to an open future focuses on the interests of the child's future self, but the child's right to an open future also indirectly includes their *current* self's interests. As Jeffery Morgan (2005) observed, a child's current interests are of utmost importance, for from his *current* interests his future interests will develop (Morgan, p.371-372). Nicholas Dixon (2007) agreed, and he went on to write that the role of parents is "to *promote* our children's interests" (Dixon, p.147, italics added). Hence, a child's right to an open future protects a child's *future* rights while taking into account his *present* interests and values. The case failed to effectively address the current preferences of the children and whether they would have preferred to remain in the public school (Reich, 2002, p. 445, 457).

In summary, the case *Wisconsin v. Yoder* helped spark Feinberg's innovative concept of a child's "right to an open future" and its subsequent articulation through his well-known child rights essay. Child rights scholars agree with Feinberg's concept of defending children's future interests in conjunction with recognizing and cultivating their current interests. They recognize it as a right that every child should have— the right to an open future.

### The Liberal Argument: An ERU Regularly Violates a Child's Right to an Open Future

Since Feinberg's conception of a child's right to an open future, perhaps the most controversial issue surrounding the aforementioned right is that of the parents' raising their children in a specific, exclusivist religion. Though the traditional line of thought concerning a religious upbringing typically asserts that parents have the right to raise their children however they see fit, this type of upbringing may prove actually to be a violation of a child's right to an open future. An exclusivist religious upbringing especially has this potential to violate the child's open future right, since believers of exclusivist religions *strongly* believe their religion and their way to God is the *only* true way, and they of course desire their children to find this one true way as well. The Amish and Christian ultra-fundamentalists are two notable examples. Because an exclusivist religious upbringing often inhibits a child's future religious choice, this portion of the paper seeks to answer the question of whether an exclusivist religious upbringing habitually violates a child's right to an open future.

First, an exclusivist religious upbringing often violates a child's open future right by indoctrinating a child to assume its foundational religious beliefs are unquestionable *facts*. Warren Nord (1995) defined indoctrination as "the uncritical initiation of students into some particular ideology or worldview" (Nord, p.188). The key words in Nord's definition are

“uncritical initiation.” Those two words mean that a child is raised to believe something is true without ever given the opportunity to consider that it could potentially be false. This potential falsehood is particularly applicable to religion. As Morgan (2005, p.377) proposed, no religion has sufficient evidence to establish itself as the absolute, undeniable true religion. Because of this potential fallibility, parents should not portray their religion to their children as infallible.

However, since exclusivist religions believe that they are the one true way to their god (Morgan, 2005, p.377), parents who legitimately and completely believe in such a religion obviously are very susceptible to informing their children that whatever sacred text or god they and their religion *believes* is a definite, unquestionable *fact*.

If parents teach their children to believe a certain religion is absolute fact, they are establishing a supposed “factual” religious perspective from which their children will view the world and make decisions. Nord (1995) noted that when children accept any worldview as fact, they are resigned to use this viewpoint as their basis for all their thoughts and opinions (Nord, p.188). The children are then unable to reflect on the worldview that their parents imposed upon them, because the children’s only means of evaluation originates *from* their worldview, which they were taught was factual. Consequently, if a child is taught to believe a religious worldview is factual when in reality it is not unquestionably so, he will not critically examine his religious worldview that he uses to make decisions. Thus, his open future right to choose whatever religion he reasons best will have been undermined by indoctrination of his parents’ exclusivist religious beliefs.

Another way an exclusivist religious upbringing regularly violates a child’s open future right is by inflicting a substantial *emotional* hindrance to a child’s choice of religious beliefs.

Morgan (2005) mentioned that family attachments can cause a child to not choose alternative beliefs (Morgan, p.369). For example, Claudia Mills (2003) specifically spoke of the widely known practice of shunning that the Amish community practices. This shunning is an indisputable emotional hindrance for most Amish children's future right to choice of religion (Mills, p.503-504). Most of them would obviously prefer not to be ostracized from their family, friends, and entire community; however, they face this disjuncting once they choose an alternative religious belief. Although family attachments are definitely important, regard for one's family should not be the major reason for any individual choosing what *he* truly believes concerning something as important as religion.

Roger Marples (2005, p.140) further discussed the idea of an emotional hindrance parents place upon their children who wish to reject the religion their parents raised them to believe. When a child matures to a level where he can understand the religion his parents have introduced him to and either does not completely agree with or totally rejects it, he very well may experience feelings of guilt or fear of having to face his parents with his decision (Marples, 2005, p.140). The child feels guilty because he is disappointing his parents who emphatically endorse his agreement with their own beliefs, which they have instilled in him. If the child has matured and made a decision at an age where he still lives in his parents' house, he may fear possible parental anger in response to his decision and perhaps even punishment. Accordingly, these feelings of guilt or fear may be sufficient to cause a child or adult to reject what religious beliefs he has determined to be true in order to maintain a good relationship with his parents.

Additionally, the emotional hindrance that regularly is imposed by parents with strong, exclusivist religious beliefs on a child can prove to distort the child's future self's ability to

accept his own reasoning about religion. Eamonn Callan (2002, p. 129) narrated a fictional story he expanded on from the true biography of a man named Nicholas Wolterstorff. In his expansion of the story, Callan told how “Wolterstorff II” (as he termed the adapted person) had thoroughly examined his religious upbringing and beliefs and determined that they were false. However, he was unable to renounce his beliefs because of the inconsistency between his rational thought and his feelings (Callan, 2002, p. 132). Wolterstorff II’s feelings originated not from any form of reasoning but from simple repetition, the repetition of his childhood’s uncritical religious instruction (Callan, 2002, p. 132). Marples agreed with Callan’s synopsis and asserted that “restrictions on the capacity for autonomous decision-making exist where there is a mismatch between feelings and beliefs” (Marples, 2005, p.140). Thus, the emotional hindrance caused by childhood *feelings* can inhibit matured adults from rejecting the beliefs of their religious upbringing, though their *rational reflection* has shown them to be false. Whether the emotional hindrance to a child’s future choice of religion comes in the form of family attachments, feelings of guilt and fear, or inhibitions to rational thought, any one of these emotional hindrances caused by an exclusivist religious upbringing is a violation of a child’s open future right.

Finally, an exclusivist religious upbringing frequently violates a child’s open future right by strictly limiting the child’s access to alternative religious and non-religious belief systems. Religious exclusivism, as explained by J. Morgan (2005), is the belief that an individual’s certain religion is the *only* way to God or salvation (Morgan, p.377). Because of this absolute certainty concerning the correctness of their religious beliefs, individuals strongly believing in an exclusivist religion commonly abstain from open-minded dialogue with other religions and non-

religious worldviews, because the exclusivist individuals simply have nothing new to learn about their beliefs. Jonathan Adler (2004) insisted that open-mindedness is necessary for individuals to be able to strengthen their beliefs and eliminate any errors by engaging in meaningful discussion with persons holding other viewpoints (Adler, p.127, 131). If an individual is close-minded to other points of view, Robert Noggle (2002, p.114) observed that he is “unable to reflect” on his belief system. Hence, exclusivist believers many times desist from open-mindedness because they believe they have no need to reflect on and revise their current religious beliefs.

Although these believers most definitely have the right not to engage in open-minded conversation with alternative views if they do not wish to, they do *not* have the right to impede *their children* from open-mindedly considering other alternative views. Mianna Lotz (2006, p.541) stated that Feinberg’s open future right imposed “negative duties” on the parents as well as “positive duties.” The negative duty Lotz stressed that parents must fulfill means that parents should not interfere with alternative views. In religion, this would translate into parents having the obligation not to restrict their children from learning of alternative religious or non-religious views. In contrast to the negative duty, the positive duty which Lotz contended parents have means that parents must actually *provide* some exposure to other views (Lotz, 2006, p.544-545). Religiously exclusivist parents quite often prohibit their children from contacting other worldviews and usually fail to expose their children to alternate belief systems. As Marples (2005) so candidly stated about strong exclusivist religious parents, “...getting children to critically evaluate different ways of life is tantamount to heresy” (Marples, p.140).

What makes the parents’ restriction of a child’s access to alternate religious and non-religious views a violation of the child’s open future right is the inhibition of his choice. The

definition of Feinberg's open future right is the accessibility of future *choices*. Having only one option to consider is obviously not a choice, and the fewer the options the child has the less the less freedom he has. If the parent decides to eliminate a number of these choices, as strong exclusivist believers tend to do, they have severely hindered their child's right as an adult to choose his own religion. Therefore, exclusivist religious upbringings repeatedly violate a child's open future right through their considerable restriction on a child's evaluation of alternative religious and non-religious worldviews.

### The Religious Argument

Although the argument<sup>1</sup> that exclusivist religions very regularly violate a child's right to an open future is substantial, the religious argument contains several points concerning the liberal claim that also merit consideration.

What the liberal argument rightfully holds dear is the opportunity for a child to be able to evaluate and revise his religious beliefs whenever he so wishes. However, a child *must* have an *initial* set of values from which to evaluate. David Archard (2002, p.157) and Robert Noggle (2002, p.113) agreed in their respective articles when they spoke of the necessity of a beginning set of values and beliefs for children, in order to have a foundation from which to make choices and assess value. While the liberal argument would favor some form of critical initiation of values by parents, for nearly all young children this is simply impossible in any meaningful way. This is what Nord (1995, p.187) asserted, speaking of an uncritical initiation of values, "...with

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<sup>1</sup> The argument that an exclusivist argument violates a child's right to an open future will be referred to as "the liberal argument" for the rest of this paper, and the liberal argument's counter-argument will be termed "the religious argument."

small children there may be no alternative.” Although Morgan (2005) disagreed with Nord that the initial installation of foundational values in children may have to be uncritical, he concluded his writing without providing any solution to this problem (Morgan, p.384-385.) Thus, in a child’s early years, parents do not have sufficient reason to refrain from instilling their exclusivist religious values in him *initially*, due to the fact that an uncritical initiation of values is apparently inescapable.

Another important point regarding the liberal argument is its occasional paradoxical position concerning the indoctrination of a worldview in children. As was stated earlier, Nord’s definition of indoctrination was “the uncritical initiation of students into some particular ideology or worldview” (Nord, 1995, p.188). Although indoctrination is typically only thought in its association with religion, this simply is not true. Nord (1995, p.188) pointed out that *any* upbringing that precludes consideration of alternative worldviews, is indoctrination. For example, upbringings based *solely* on science or logic also would be forms of indoctrination. He observed that any person can be “rational” *inside* a particular worldview, but that most people are not “reasonable” *about* that worldview (Nord, 1995, p.188). Though science obviously has more observable, explainable facts than religion does, this fact does not mean that science is the only possible truthful worldview. Not everything is entirely explained by science, and only the presence of alternative worldviews, most notably religious, can allow children and all other people to truly, critically evaluate their world. They must objectively evaluate *whichever* worldview they hold and not just accept it simply because it is so pervasive or because they were “raised that way.” However, both dogmatic positions of this argument are inconsistent with their assertions in this case; the religious and liberal arguments are often guilty of uncritical behavior.

Both of them in turn should take steps to critically evaluate it and not simply insist that “since the other does it; then it is permissible.” More moderate views do exist in both liberal and religious camps, and in the interest of discovering the unbiased truth about each of these and all other worldviews, both sides would benefit from securing a more critical stance of themselves.

Finally, a third point about the religious argument would like to make is that an exclusivist upbringing does cultivate a child’s ability to hold onto truly valuable beliefs and to not simply accept whatever belief system society has most readily available at the time. Eamonn Callan (2002, p.135) suggested that an autonomous fortitude is invaluable because of what awaits a person who is free from preconceived notions of beliefs about what composes a good life. Callan claimed that what currently awaits a person who is freed from any childhood beliefs about a good life is what he termed a “consumer hermeneutic” (Callan, 2002, p.135).

Hermeneutic relates to the interpretation of something; in our case it refers to a consumer interpretation as a worldview. Callan’s point is that the pervasive belief in much of contemporary society is that whatever each individual can obtain for himself is the majority of individuals’ beliefs about what makes a good belief and subsequent life! Obviously not everybody acts according to this sort of ethical egoism, but Callan fears that this is often the case to the person who has been educated through high school that only he can find out the best life for himself and that he should go seek it (Callan, 2002, p.135-136). That individual typically does *not* begin critically searching for the true good life; instead he just does whatever he wants to do. Religious upbringings help instill a kind of autonomous fortitude towards something besides sheer self-interest that naturally arises in humans. William Galston (1998, p.478) succinctly stated the main problem in our society when he wrote “...the greatest threat to children in modern liberal

societies is not that they will believe in something too deeply, but that they will believe in nothing very deeply at all.” Galston continued to question how an individual can find what a true good life is if he possesses no important core values to use as an accurate, comparative measuring stick (1998, p.478). A religious upbringing often provides one of the only alternate worldviews to the pervasive consumer worldview that Callan warns against, and if a child matures and reasons his beliefs to be false, the lack of knowledge about what the truth *really* is ultimately *does* stimulate critical inquiry. The best solution would be an upbringing containing a balance between both critical inquiry and fortitude. This balance would ensure that individuals who are not interested in critically searching for the truth do not simply fall victim to a “consumer hermeneutic” or whatever other worldview their society is prepared to present them.

In summary, the liberal argument and the religious argument each have excellent reasons supporting their respective claims. The liberal argument insists that an exclusivist religious upbringing routinely violates a child’s “right to an open future” by restricting his ability to independently choose his own religious or non-religious beliefs as an adult. The liberal argument claims that this restriction is caused by an indoctrination of foundational religious beliefs, by an imposition of emotional hindrances to a child’s reason, and by limiting the child’s access to alternative worldviews. On the other hand, the religious argument maintains that an exclusivist religious upbringing is not in breach of a child’s open future right. The religious argument declares that a child’s initial values must be instilled before the child has values to evaluate *from*, and clearly these values must be uncritical. Additionally, a liberal upbringing as well as a religious upbringing must hold themselves to critically evaluating their respective worldviews and not simply *from* their respective views. Finally, the religious argument asserts that REUs are

effective ways to instill in an individual a desire for a truly meaningful life, a true good life, and ultimately *promotes* critical inquiry.

Although the potential is there for children to actively pursue critical inquiry about the truth of religion once they understand the unproveable nature of their own, many simply accept their childhood beliefs as satisfactory for them and focus on other aspects of their lives. All three points from the religious argument are applicable, but they are not sufficient to overcome the facts that Feinberg's open future right is all about the child's future choice, and that ERUS habitually operate in a way that inhibits the child's choice. Therefore, an exclusivist religious upbringing *does* routinely violate a child's right to an open future, as this paper set out to determine.

Having determined that an ERU regularly violates a child's open future right, some sort of reconciliation must be provided to show why these upbringings should still be allowed in our democratic society.

In this portion of the paper, I will endeavor to provide a solution to this apparent conflict of interests among a child, his parents, and the democratic state in which they live. I will begin by emphasizing the potential psychological and emotional consequences of a child's open future right violation. Next, I will observe how the religious argument presented only a partial definition of indoctrination; subsequently, I will discuss how the recognition of indoctrination occurring varies according to each of the three interested parties' perspectives. Following this, I will present a stirring example of an adamant religious exclusivist parent who believes that his own child's meaningful choice about his religion is indispensable; consequently, I will assert the claim that only this type of ERU is acceptable to our democratic state and both the parents and

the children residing within it. Finally, I will stress the necessity of the fundamental condition my reconciliation requires.

Importance of not Violating a Child's Open Future Right: Psychological and Emotional  
Consequences

Although some of the consequences stemming from parents' violating a child's open future right concerning religion have been mentioned briefly, the extensive impact these consequences can have psychologically and emotionally warrants further emphasis. Earlier, I mentioned the Amish practice of shunning as an emotional hindrance on a child's religious choice. Possibly worse than the child's restricted future choice is the emotional impairment which shunning causes. Obviously, shunning is one extreme example, but even a reduced parents-child relationship because of a child's religious choice can be emotionally harmful. As Eamonn Callan (2002, p.122) sadly noted, a child's reconsideration of religion "...raises the spectre of love's withdrawal or at least provokes the disappointment and anxiety of those whose love one craves." The child's fear of disappointing his parents and weakening their bond of love through his choice of religion can impose a harmful emotional burden on him. Any emotional hindrance parents intentionally or unintentionally inflict on their children's religious choice could result in a drawn out emotional scar on their child. Accordingly, every normal, loving parent would have to agree that such an emotional grievance in their children's lives should be avoided.

Equally injurious to a child's future self is the psychological trauma that can arise from his indecisiveness about his beliefs, due to the violation of his future right of religious choice. We already know constraining a child from alternative worldviews is a violation exclusivist

parents are likely to engage in, and this constraining is described by Eammon Callan (2002, p.131) as "...psychologically impossible or at best very painful to remove..." However, by the time the child finally *does* mature and comes in full contact with alternative belief systems, his limited exposure to alternative belief systems will have caused his childhood beliefs to become just as painful to remove, and an indefinite period of comparison may ensue. The amount of time it takes him to evaluate and compare his treasured, imbedded childhood beliefs with these alternative beliefs may prove to be significant. Michael Hand (2002, p.556) reasoned that this indecisiveness was because grown children "...are likely to find the process of rejection<sup>2</sup> psychologically disruptive." The more significant the individual had held his beliefs, the longer this assessment may take. Ultimately, the amount of time the child's indecisiveness lasts is equivalent to the amount of time his psychological inconsistency and distress endures as well. Thus, parents should not underestimate the extended psychological duress their children may face once they are finally confronted with evaluating their most fundamental beliefs against potentially legitimate alternatives they have newly discovered. Everything considered, the importance of parents' not violating a child's future religious choice has been shown by uncovering the serious emotional and psychological consequences that can stem from this violation.

#### Indoctrination and Varying Perspectives on the Truth of ERUs' Content

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<sup>2</sup> Although Hand continued to say that individuals choosing to accept religious beliefs once they have appraised them as being correct *also* will experience this psychologically disruption, I doubt this drastic change would amount as much as a harmful disruption than an enlightening, revitalizing transformation (Hand, 2002, p.556).

At this time, I would like to return to Nord's definition of indoctrination in both the liberal and religious arguments and note that his definition was incomplete. Jim Mackenzie (2004) realized the great complexity and controversy surrounding this term, but he reduced the commonly agreed-upon associations of indoctrination to the content of the beliefs being imparted, the intentions of the imparter (in our case, the parent), the methods of the imparter, and the outcome of the beliefs in the individual (the child) receiving them (Mackenzie, p.135-136). Nord's (1995, p.188) definition was simply "...the uncritical initiation of students into some particular ideology or worldview." Although his definition would seem to imply the imparter's intentions and methods to be perniciously calculated towards a desired end, his definition overlooks whether the content of the imparter has strong evidence to support its truth and whether the outcome of the receiver is one that allows him to accurately appraise the content. Much of a child's early education is uncritically imparted; however, this does not mean he has automatically been indoctrinated. As was said in the religious argument, an uncritical initiation of values is inescapable for children. Charlene Tan (2004, p.263) went even further and argued that parents "... for the sake of the well-being of their children they *have a duty to impart to them beliefs that are not rationally grounded.*" If Nord's definition was inclusive, then every child who learned that something was true without understanding how or why could be said to be indoctrinated, for his beliefs would be non-rational. For me, the more salient aspects of indoctrination concern the content and the outcome. If the content a parent is imparting is true, then we know the child cannot be said to be indoctrinated, providing that the truth of the content can be explained to the child. However, if the content is not proven to be true or is confirmed false, then indoctrination has the potential to take place. Equally important is the outcome of the beliefs in the child and whether they end up being held without consideration of legitimate

opposing evidence or argument. Whether temporary or permanent, this outcome of inability to consider alternate views would qualify as indoctrination.

While both an ERU and a more liberal upbringing contain the possibility of indoctrination, the real risk occurs in the religious upbringing, due to its content's lack of universal proof and the outcome that its debatable content may be held irrationally without consideration of opposing evidence. Thus, it seems with our more thorough definition of indoctrination, we now understand that an exclusivist religious upbringing has a very legitimate chance of indoctrination, while other upbringings do not.

Furthermore, after recognizing the importance of the veracity of an upbringing's content to avoid indoctrination and a violation of a child's future religious choice, I am going to discuss how the quality of an ERU's content varies according to the democracy, the parents, and the children's perspectives. First, the democratic state's perspective is that an ERU is typically indoctrination. Because no religion has been proven to be true, the democratic state views the content of a religious upbringing exactly as that: not-known-to-be-true. Now, a liberal democracy such as ours obviously desires to reproduce itself, and it does this by producing good democratic citizens. Areneson and Shapiro (1996, p.403-404) identified one of the key components of democratic citizenship to "... include skills and habits of critical thinking that enable one to participate effectively in democratic deliberation." Jonathan Adler (2004, p.127) agreed and distinguished open-mindedness as a vital democratic value, which he defined as individuals' "... access to a plurality of values and the skills for critically evaluating both those values and their own." Because exclusivist religious parents inhibit rather than foster their child's future religious examination, our democratic state perceives these parents to be failing to provide

their children with the proper autonomous evaluative ability they deserve as citizens.

Consequently, this inadequate provision— coupled with the view that the content of the children’s religious upbringing is not-known-to-be-true— provides our liberal democracy with the perspective that this upbringing is indoctrination. Naturally, the democratic state would also view close-mindedness and parental restriction on alternative worldviews as unjustified.

On the other hand, most exclusivist religious parents’ perspective on the upbringing they provide their children is whether it contains indoctrination is ultimately irrelevant, because to them the content they are imparting to their children is *known-to-be-true*. David Aarchard (2002, p.146) explained that parents seek to pass on their beliefs to their children because they believe that their beliefs are *the* definite, true beliefs, not just beliefs they have chosen to value for themselves. Viewing the content of their child’s upbringing as known-to-be-true, some parents feel vindicated in limiting alternative views, using emotional persuasion, and even resorting to indoctrination to convince their children to accept their beliefs. Pasquino (1996, p.29) discerned that “...political order, civil peace, and even the life of individuals can be... reduced to nothing by the preoccupation with salvation...” How could Christian parents raise their children without compelling them in any way possible to accept the true beliefs required for the eternal salvation of their souls? Doubtless, the parents would prefer a rational choice from their child to stay in their religion; however, most parents will sufficiently limit their children’s influences and fail to encourage critical inquiry about alternative beliefs, thus ensuring the only logical choice for them is to stick with their parents’ beliefs. Finally, the child’s perspective on the content of his ERU potentially has two stages. The first is where the child simply accepts the beliefs imparted by his parent as known-to-be-true. Michael Hand (2002, p.553) attributed this initial acceptance to a

child's belief in the "intellectual authority" of his parents concerning all matters, including religion. Once the children have matured to the point to understand the fallibility of their parents, they have entered the second stage where their religious beliefs now become *not-known-to-be-true* (unless they have been so indoctrinated that they never reach this stage). While they might have been subjected to a restriction of alternate beliefs and inculcation of non-provable religious beliefs as young children, the matured children may resist these inhibitions on their choice and proceed to critically evaluate their beliefs and either reject or keep them. Summing up, while the democratic state abhors the indoctrination an ERU can cause, the parents providing this upbringing appear to encourage autonomous religious choice only as long as their children accept their parents beliefs, considering the potential of indoctrination occurring as permissible in order to guarantee their child's acceptance of these beliefs, the only true ones. Meanwhile, the child seems interested in making his own religious choice and avoiding all indoctrination in the process.

#### A Reconciliation between an ERU and the Child's Right to an Open Future

It is true that our democracy state and child's interests appear to be incompatible with the interests of parents desiring to provide their children with an ERU, due to their varied perspectives about the content of this upbringing. Although it appears that providing a reconciliation that satisfies all three parties is an insuperable task, I am going to argue for a resolution that demonstrates critical examination of one's religious beliefs as acceptable to all three interested parties. The democratic state wants parents to encourage their children to critically examine their beliefs because of the not-known-to-be-true nature of them. Eamonn Callan (1985, p.118) insists that parents are loath to do this, because this reconsideration of

beliefs the parents hold as known-to-be true "...may very well destroy loyalty to the faith of their parents." However, if a parent adamantly believes he has found *the* truth, to the point he considers his beliefs as *known-to-be-true*, why would he not want his children to critically compare their beliefs with alternative beliefs, if his children are searching for the truth as well? Only if that parent believed the truth would not necessarily be found when sought by his child. This fear might cause the parent to stifle his child's critical inquiry.

Happily for exclusivist religious parents, a reconciliation exists between their desire for their child's discovery of truth and their fear that critical inquiry that could lead somewhere besides the truth. In my interview with Mike Tarr, assistant pastor at an extremely dogmatic, exclusivist church, Tarr insisted that if when his two young children matured they came to doubt their beliefs and even the existence of God, he believes that they *must* critically study their beliefs and others as well (Tarr interview, Nov. 16, 2008). Tarr discussed the supreme importance of his children being "fully persuaded" in their beliefs, even if this means they must evaluate other beliefs and potentially choose a different faith or no faith at all. Nevertheless, because he *is* fully convinced of the truth of his beliefs, Tarr was resolute that when his children evaluated their own beliefs against others for themselves they *would* end up accepting their parent's beliefs, not through any compelling or hindrance of Tarr, only through the intrinsic truth of the beliefs themselves. Tarr emphasized that true, permanent fulfillment can only be found in beliefs that *are* true, not in beliefs that just *seem* most likely to be true. This true fulfillment will arise only when *the* truth has been found (Tarr interview, Nov. 16, 2008). Thus, this adamant exclusivist religious parent believes he has found the truth so such an extent that he is willing to risk his children's potential rejection of those beliefs through their autonomous, critical inquiry.

This reconciliation is universally applicable to exclusivist religions<sup>3</sup> that believe that God will unveil the truth to individuals who honestly seek it. In only this case, I believe the parent, the children, and the democratic state's interests can each be adequately addressed. The democracy's desire for the children to critically evaluate their not-known-to-be-true beliefs is satiated; the parent's desire for his known-to-be-true beliefs to be accepted by his children is compatible with their critical search for the truth; the children's desire to autonomously and uninhibitedly discover their beliefs has also been realized.

### The Necessity of a Disinterested Search for the Truth

However, this reconciliation hinges on one unmovable requirement: the child's critical inquiry must be for *the* religious *truth*. Whether the ultimate truth is the faith in which they were raised, another faith they discover in their search, or no faith at all, the search must be for the truth. An ultimate religious truth *is* out there, whether the truth is that one faith is true or that no faiths are true has yet to be proven and might never be. This is why the truth must be found through an individual's subjective evaluation. Sadly, the problem which has arisen from this valorization of subjectivity in our liberal democracy is that the *personal search* for truth has become the search for *personal truth*. James Hunter (2000, p. 21) discussed this misunderstanding in contemporary democratic society:

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<sup>3</sup> These religions would include most Christ-centered faiths that hold the Hebrew Bible as the word of God, which are numerous. For parents in exclusivist religions who do *not* include the belief that their god will assuredly reveal the truth to those who seek it, a sufficient reconciliation between a child's freedom of future religious choice and the salvation of his soul may be unattainable. Future research is necessary concerning reconciliations of other religions whose beliefs do not insist that the truth will necessarily be revealed to those that seek it.

The problem is not subjectivity, for moral life has always required a deep and rich subjective engagement. But subjectivity in our day has given way to *subjectivism*, where the experiences, interests, and sentiments of the autonomous individual are enshrined as the standards defining the height, length, and breadth of moral hope and possibility.

Callan's (1984) statement that alternative worldviews should be studied so that "...children themselves might come to find a *more satisfactory* alternative to their parents' religious convictions" seemed to demonstrate this confusion between subjectivity and subjectivism (Callan, p.117, italics added). Callan's writing seemed to presuppose that either no actual religious truth exists or that people simply do not care, as long as the "truth" they chose proved satisfactory for their lifetime. If the truth *is* that no religions are true, than Callan would be right in judging that the key factor in choosing a religious beliefs would be personal satisfaction. However, the majority of people would be dissatisfied in finding out in retrospect that the "truth" they chose for themselves in life was at odds with the *actual* truth, especially if the actual truth carried consequences for not being chosen, which most religions teach is this case. Even if the truth is that no religion is true, that no afterlife consequences exist, and that we may live as however we choose on this earth, individuals who had lived their life in accordance to religious beliefs they thought were true would also be dissatisfied with their choice of beliefs and the demands these beliefs required being ultimately unnecessary. Regardless of what the actual truth is, individuals have a vested interest and desire to find it, not just validate their own "truth" for themselves. Therefore, this search for the *actual* truth is of deep personal interest to everybody and is essential in order for our ERU reconciliation to succeed.

In conclusion, parents raising their children in an ERU in which they understand its content as known-to-be-true wish to avoid the emotional and psychological trauma a violation of their future religious choice can bring, while still seeing their children come to believe the “known-to-be-true content” of their parents’ religion. Although some parents may feel vindicated in resorting to indoctrination of these beliefs in order to save their children, most parents wish for their child to choose them for himself. Additionally, because the democratic state the parents reside in sees the parents’ beliefs as *not-known-to-be-true*, the democratic state demands the parents allow the child’s free choice, and the children wish to uninhibitedly choose their personal religious beliefs as well. This conflict of interests, due to the alternate perspectives each of the three parties has concerning the ERUs content, is resolved by understanding that parents’ in exclusivist religions who believe *the* religious truth *will* be found when an individual seeks after it will encourage the child’s meaningful, autonomous choice of religion. This reconciliation succeeds only if the individual critically evaluating belief systems is looking for *the true* belief system (which the majority of people have an interest in discovering) and not simply seeking to validate or eliminate any particular belief system, whatever *the true* belief system ultimately proves to be. Optimistically, the exclusivist religions that believe the truth will be made known to those who seek it will prove to be correct; Thomas Paine (1951, p.151) wrote that the very *desire* of the truth is for it to make itself known, “But such is the irresistible nature of truth that all it asks, and all it wants, is the liberty of appearing.”

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