



COVENANT AND PROCESS:  
AN ANALYSIS AND CRITIQUE OF  
EUGENE B. BOROWITZ'S COVENANT THEOLOGY  
AND  
ALVIN J. REINES'S HYLOTHEISM

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To My Teachers

## DIGEST

"Covenant and Process" is a summary of the theologies of two contemporary Reform Jewish theologians. It explores Covenant theology as articulated by Eugene B. Borowitz and hylotheism, the theology of Alvin J. Reines.

The first section introduces the current need for a coherent Jewish theology, and it explores the changing God of Israel.

The second section is on Borowitz and offers an explanation of his frame-of-reference, postmodernism. It is followed by an analysis of Covenant theology, including its derivation, and its core terms, God, Israel and Torah, and their interdependence. The section concludes with a critique of Covenant theology.

The third section is on Reines and offers an overview of his understanding of Reform Judaism as a Polydoxy. It provides an explanation of Reines's mode of philosophical analysis of Jewish theology, rational empiricism. This explanation is followed by a presentation of process theology and a critique of partial process theologies. The section next offers an analysis of the God of hylotheism, the enduring possibility of being and concludes with a critique of it.

The fourth section offers an epilogue which addresses the profound crises of contemporary life. It suggests that this work might serve as a guide for others seeking to further develop the theologies presented here. Additionally, this work contains biographical notes on both Borowitz and Reines.



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## INTRODUCTION

In seeking a personal view of God there are numerous paths upon which one may travel. Not every individual may be aware of this quest. Not only are there many people who do not explore the variety of views which have been offered to humanity throughout its history, there are many individuals who have no awareness of the choices available to them, and consequently they "choose" what others dictate to them.

In every period of Jewish history there has been a constant process of old forms giving way to new forms. Engaged in this ongoing change, Judaism -- both its people and its God -- has taken on many diverse forms in its five millenia history. As the Enlightenment brought new conditions which challenged ideas of a previous age, our religious leaders were met with the new conditions of that era. They responded to those new needs which were foisted upon them, altering in a meaningful way both Jewish practice and ideology. Even as crises arose which demanded innovation on the part of our actions, so too did innovations occur in regard to our name. Yet all such changes were ordered to continually provide our people with a meaningful response to life. Thus Hebrews evolved into Israelites, and, later, Jews evolved into the Reform community. It has remained for Reform Judaism, however, to offer a response to the existential crises that now confront

our world.

For well over a century, Reform Judaism in America has carried the major responsibility of creating new modes of Jewish identity. Reform Judaism, however, has slowly been deteriorating under the weight of contemporary society. In recent years, Reform Jewish institutions have begun to show alarming signs that they can no longer retain their membership. Various explanations have been put forth regarding the reasons for this decline. Perhaps this loss of membership is due in part to Reform Judaism's failure to confront the changing nature of the world in which Reform Jews live. Or, more specifically, perhaps this diminution of its adherents is due to Reform's not having provided its people with a tenable theology, the groundwork upon which every Jewish religious system has stood. The task has fallen upon contemporary Reform Jewish thinkers to present to the Reform Jewish community a foundation upon which it might endure into the next century.

There exists no problem more profound than the definition of deity.<sup>1</sup> The responsibility of the theologian in present-day Reform Judaism, then, is a great one. In whatever manner one defines deity in Reform Judaism, it is evident that the definition must be comprehensible to its members. Whereas Biblical Judaism did not engage in a detailed theological analysis, and whereas there remain

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<sup>1</sup>To suggest that defining deity is a problem is not to suggest that such definition necessarily entails placing limits upon deity. Definition suggests only characterization.

today committed thinkers who reject theology's philosophical analysis, such analysis will provide the language of this work. One can lament that there is no neutral language in which to discuss theology. I hope that my readers will bear this in mind. I present the thoughts of Dr. Eugene B. Borowitz and Dr. Alvin J. Reines, two contemporary Reform Jewish thinkers.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>Whereas Alvin Reines refers to his theology as an authentic Reform theology, Eugene Borowitz makes plain that his theology is not specifically Reform so much as it is non-Orthodox.

## CHAPTER ONE

## GOD IN TIME

The history of the Jewish people spans several millennia, encompassing diverse groups from the ancient Hebrews, idealized by the figure of Abraham, to Moses and the Prophets; from the Tannaitic and Amoraic Sages to the *poskim* of the second through eighteenth centuries and even to this day. It can be argued that our heritage is one that emerged not from the minds of fallible human beings, but rather from the revelation of a theistic deity (as is characterized by the literature).<sup>3</sup> Yet, a difficulty emerges as different views of deity have been put forth by Jews in different periods of time. Thus, if we are to remain consistent with the texts of our tradition, we must either formulate our conception of deity in some manner which would be collateral with all the written traditions, providing we somehow integrate the realities of a passage of time which indicates the changing nature of humanity but, again through the writings, also indicates the immutability of divinity who is in relationship with that changing world; or we must resolve ourselves to accept the possibility of a changing deity. Should either be the case, one must realize

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<sup>3</sup>Theism signifies belief in one God (theos) who is (a)personal, (b)worthy of adoration, and (c)separate from the world (transcendent) but (d)continuously active in it (immanent). Theism would also posit that this God was the creator of the world, omnipotent, omnibenevolent, exercised providence, and revealed a will. (The Encyclopedia of Philosophy (New York: Macmillan Company & The Free Press, 1967), pp. 97-98.)

that given the constraints of human reasoning, and the limits which that places on the ability to have certain awareness of the immediate environment, there can be no assurances concerning the nature of deity.

One might also question the assumptions of the historicity of the literature. Such authority has led to the centralization of Jewish belief as regards the boundaries of tradition, ritual, theology, and various other realms of behavior characterizing a community. It is altogether absurd to consider the writings of any culture as defining that culture. Indeed, it is probable that such ideas contained within the writings do reflect attitudes present at their composition. But these same texts neither indicate that the ideas were prevalent nor held by anyone, exclusive of a class capable of preserving such attitudes.<sup>4</sup> Accordingly, the range of beliefs throughout our history has been inclusive of numerous ideas, some considered heretical by the ruling powers, and some ultimately gaining authority.

The range of beliefs throughout our history have contributed in some part to the diverse beliefs now held by members of the Reform Jewish community. However, some of these beliefs are rejected by other members of the Reform community as untenable. Therefore, I would suggest that a more acceptable system than either of the polar extremes -- the construction of Judaism as set forth by the soterial

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<sup>4</sup>Rivkin, Ellis, A Hidden Revolution: The Pharisees' Search for the Kingdom Within (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1978), pp. 183-190.

system of atheistic Humanist Judaism or the construction of Judaism as set forth by the soterial system of theistic absolutism -- is available in Alvin J. Reines's hylotheism.

The challenge for today's Reform Jews, then, is to explore the possibilities which only hylotheism offers. In meeting this challenge, we could preserve our Jewish identity, and all the while develop a communal structure that offers to life's present unknowns answers which give credible justification to being.



CHAPTER TWO  
POSTMODERN JEWISH THEOLOGY

Judaism, asserts Eugene B. Borowitz, though embracing God, places equivalent significance upon the relationship between God and God's created world. Jewish theology, then, as an orderly reflection about Jewish beliefs,<sup>5</sup> must focus not only on God, but on those relationships, as well; it must endeavor to understand the connection between God and the people Israel. This endeavor is the focus of Borowitz's theological inquiry. In exploring this relationship he responds to that question which has remained central to Jews living in a free society: What is to be the value of particular Jewish identity for one living in a society which emphasizes universal truths? In seeking his answer to this question Borowitz has directed his thought toward that which binds God to the individual Jew: Covenant. In articulating his understanding of Covenant, Borowitz offers a theology for the members of a contemporary Jewish community; a theology for individuals confronting their responsibilities as persons-in-general and as Jews.

Borowitz understands Judaism not from a perspective which studies religion, nor from a perspective which seeks to analyze its beliefs from a secular philosophical approach. Rather (and I believe this to be a central theme

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<sup>5</sup>Borowitz, Eugene B., Renewing the Covenant: A Theology for the Postmodern Jew (New York: The Jewish Publication Society, 1991), p. x.

of his), Borowitz suggests that Judaism must be understood from within its own context, from within its own history and from within its own philosophical, textual and cultural frames. An authentic look at Judaism, he notes, can be had only when one sees Judaism as functioning apart from the general culture, yet in dialogue with it.<sup>6</sup>

In observing the general culture, Borowitz refers to our contemporaries not as modern, but as postmodern, acknowledging what he describes as a necessary paradigmatic shift in how we respond to our world.<sup>7</sup> Borowitz asserts that there has been and remains a dissatisfaction with the modernist ideals of rationalism. Those espousing these modernist beliefs claimed as unique to rationalism a means by which humanity might resolve its problems. Whereas modernist thinkers asserted the existence of a rationally derivable universal truth, he rejects these secular ideas.

Though Postmodern Jewish theology emerged in 1961 with Covenant Theology, recent reviews (Peter Ochs, Edyth Wyschograd) of Renewing the Covenant have elicited responses which take issue with Borowitz's use of the term "postmodern." I submit that he has the authority to utilize

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<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 1.

<sup>7</sup>Borowitz seems to be suggesting that a rejection of the ability of pure rationalism to resolve the world's fundamental problems is a postmodern idea. Yet, Philo, HaLevi, Kabbalists and others rejected the messianism of pure rationalism generations prior to the onset of postmodernism. Perhaps Borowitz intends to reject rational empiricism instead, finding non-rational "faith" to be his best guide to truth. This, however, runs counter to the methodology by which the Pentateuch derives truth. See my footnote on *emuna* in Chapter Five.

this term in whatever fashion he finds appropriate. In using it as he has, Borowitz may have specified his usage as one which is temporal in description rather than ideational, as the event determining the onset of postmodernity is the Holocaust. Yet I do not find that his usage relies exclusively upon the temporal nature of the Holocaust, but rather upon the significance it has had in demanding an alternative Absolute. Borowitz has throughout his opus emphasized that it has been his experience that rationalism conceived as an Absolute in itself cannot satisfactorily respond to the crises of contemporary existence. The Holocaust merely serves as his prime example of the failure of rationalism to resolve the fundamental problems of existence and offer a tenable basis for his theology. Such a view of Post-Enlightenment thought he terms postmodern. In so doing, he may have expanded the usage of this term. As no individual can claim ownership of the term "postmodern", his use is legitimate.\*

Furthermore, Borowitz rejects the nihilistic views which assert that there are no objective values; no truths knowable rationally or otherwise. Borowitz severely criticizes these modernist views and their accompanying rationalism for betraying the faith of those holding such quixotic ideologies.<sup>9</sup> Having rejected these modernist ideas, Borowitz concludes that optimistic rationalism has

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\*Borowitz, "Religious Discourse as a Translation Problem", 1992, p. 3-5.

<sup>9</sup>Borowitz, Renewing., p. 76.

proven itself incapable of meeting the challenges faced by contemporary society: the quest for an enduring ground of values.

While this analysis holds true for both Jews and non-Jews, Borowitz does not focus his theology on the methods or structures with which the world ought proceed. His emphasis is placed solely on the Jewish world, qua recovering victims of the Holocaust.<sup>10</sup> The modern Jew, he claims, is thus differentiated from the current postmodern Jew in that the latter is keenly aware of the failed hope in the "messianism" of post-Enlightenment rationalist thinking which gave unbridled confidence to the human capabilities of reason. "[If modern Jews] worshipped anything," he states, "it was an enlightened humanity. This...is the most realistic candidate for the 'God' who died at Auschwitz."<sup>11</sup> Dr. Borowitz remarks on the effects this failed modernism had upon liberal religion:

Liberal religion, which had as good as deified the self, ascribing to human consciousness or ethics a certainty it denied to God and revelation, lost much of its credibility as the self became discredited as its own savior. After all we have seen of human failure, individual and social, its optimistic humanism seemed shallow compared with the old religious paradigms of reality. They, at least, had unambiguous, worthy standards by which persons, families, communities and nations could

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<sup>10</sup>In noting the factors that shape his theology, Eugene Borowitz makes frequent reference to the Holocaust. Whatever disproportionate emphasis he does give to the Holocaust, he rejects its ability to offer substantive values in a religious system which demands, particularly with the immense destruction of the Holocaust in mind, ethical behavior.

<sup>11</sup>Borowitz, Renewing, p. 79.

direct their randy freedom, whereas the liberals had such openness and tolerance that they could hardly ever tell us when we must say no to a new possibility. For all their talk of human fulfillment, they provided little specific guidance as to how to attain it, for they had nothing beyond the human to serve as a lasting qualitative standard.<sup>12</sup>

Borowitz maintains that human rationalism did not and could not with any measure of satisfaction resolve the world's fundamental questions. Now, postmodern Jews are seeking solutions with a renewed standard of value, one which is not humanocentric. They are returning to the previously rejected values of tradition and embracing a renewed Jewish ideology; they are replacing the false god of rationalism and reasserting as real that which had previously functioned as the ground of values throughout our history, the living God of Israel.<sup>13</sup> This renewal of a non-humanocentric ground of value is what Borowitz terms postliberal theology. It is his postliberal theology to which I will now turn.

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<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 24.

<sup>13</sup>This return to a "lost wisdom" in the pre-Haskalah tradition by survivors of the Holocaust has been noted, independently, by French philosopher Emmanuel Levinas, in A l'heure des nations (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1988), p. 140.



### CHAPTER THREE

#### COVENANT THEOLOGY

For the past several decades Borowitz has sought a coherent expression for his Jewish theology. Whereas modernity initially encouraged such ideas as ethical monotheism, expressing a relationship between God and all of humankind, it later moved to deny that any such universal values could be asserted as true. In light of such atrocities as the Holocaust, Borowitz repudiated the failed "messianism" of modernity. He asserted that there must exist an enduring ground of values. This ground of values, he maintained, lying beyond the human person, is found with God.

Rather than posit a theology of universal relevance, Borowitz responded to theological questions in an altogether different manner. Professing that Judaism alone can offer him a meaningful ground of values, he currently asserts a theology of postmodern particularism, emphasizing the Covenant out of which the special relationship between God and the Jewish people was born.<sup>14</sup> In giving expression to this God, Borowitz's describes how, in Covenant<sup>15</sup> with Israel and in covenant with humankind, God functions as the

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<sup>14</sup>Borowitz, Renewing, p. 5.

<sup>15</sup>To avoid confusion, Borowitz distinguishes between "Covenant," utilizing a capital "C", and "covenant," utilizing a lower-case "c". The former refers exclusively to the Covenant between God and the Jewish people. The latter refers to the covenant between God and humankind.

sole legitimate ground of value.

Seeking a term which best described his view of God, in 1961 he coined the term "Covenant theology".<sup>16</sup> Since then, Covenant theology has been explored by several other individuals who have offered their own responses to Borowitz's original ideas. While the ideas of these other Covenant theologians<sup>17</sup> have contributed to the development of this theological stance, the purpose of this work is to explore exclusively Eugene Borowitz's current thoughts on Covenant theology.

Borowitz has authored several volumes reflective of his theology, yet it is in his latest work that he offers a comprehensive presentation of his thoughts on Covenant theology. Thus, in presenting his theology, I have relied primarily on his most recent publication, Renewing the Covenant: A Theology for the Postmodern Jew, as well as several unpublished manuscripts which Dr. Borowitz has made available to me.

In his book, Borowitz offers a substantial history of Jewish thought. He presents various attempts to grasp an understanding of the God of Jewish history. Borowitz, however, expresses dissatisfaction with the theologies of several prominent Jewish thinkers, most notably those of

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<sup>16</sup>Borowitz originated the term in 1961 in his article "Crisis Theology and the Jewish Community."

<sup>17</sup>See Lawrence Kushner "In search of a 'Modern Presence of the Ancient God': Covenant Theology" (Unpublished Rabbinic Thesis, Hebrew Union College - Jewish Institute of Religion, 1969).

Heschel, Cohen, Baeck, Kaplan and Buber. His own theology emerges to describe the God of Israel only after he has exhausted the failures of previous generations. He does, however, glean insights from their thoughts, particularly those of Martin Buber, in arriving at his own understanding of Jewish identity and its necessary relation to God.

#### FAITH AND REASON

Prior to any exposition on God, one must ascertain one's authority for doing so. Borowitz recalls that tradition was such that it made room for a continued search, even while it provided a path along which one might surely go.<sup>18</sup> Borowitz suggests that Classical Judaism operated out of a certainty of God and the absolute nature of that command. It was not certain to the Jews of the past, however, that their views on reason and religious speculation were as true. Accordingly, within the hierarchy of the relationship between reason and faith, faith was placed above the realm of reason. Borowitz continues to operate utilizing this hierarchy. His disillusionment with rationalism has turned him back to embrace a faith which he claims holds greater authority than does rationalism. Faith alone offers him truth about ultimate reality; truth which reason alone cannot grasp; truth which is surely real; truth which finds utterance in the existence of the living God. The authority to define the parameters of Jewish theology is

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<sup>18</sup>Borowitz, Renewing, p. 57.



therefore claimed by Borowitz as a result of his faith that what he experiences corresponds to reality.

Borowitz would assert that not only is faith an element in theology, but, he would maintain, faith is an element for assent to any and all truths. In his article, "Faith and Method in Modern Jewish Theology," Eugene Borowitz states that "[reason] may prepare the way. It may be necessary for clarification afterward, but reason itself does not lead us to the conclusion that there really is a God. The only way to get to Judaism's position is by faith."<sup>19</sup>

It is clear, then, that his stance is against the ability of reason alone to provide knowledge of God, as faith is a prerequisite to that knowledge. However, inasmuch as faith provides Borowitz with certainty about God, it can be argued that faith is sufficient to posit the truth of any God-view. While Borowitz would assert that his view arises out of his experience of its truth, he would also argue that it is true regardless of his assent to it. Borowitz states:

I believe God has objective reality.... I likewise believe that...Judaism is true regardless of my accepting it or not, that it would still be true and make rightful claims upon Jews even were I to come to deny all or any part of it. I proclaim the truth of the Covenant between God and the Jewish people, but I know I can only speak from my own premises and perspective even as other people must do from theirs.... At any given moment it is ultimately I who must determine what to make of God's demands and Israel's practice, tradition, and aspiration as I, personally, seek to live the

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<sup>19</sup>"Faith and Method in Modern Jewish Theology," CCAR Yearbook, 1963, p. 216.

life of Torah in Covenantal faithfulness.<sup>20</sup>

Inasmuch as Borowitz asserts that his own practices or beliefs bear little relation to an objective reality of this God, he nevertheless finds it necessary to assert that within this objective reality there is room for a subjective, individualized theology.

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<sup>20</sup>Borowitz, Renewing., p. 293.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### TERMS OF THE COVENANT

In Covenant theology, even as God, Israel, and Torah are interdependent upon one another, God is the central figure. As God is the ground of all existence, so then God is the author of the Covenant with the people Israel and the author of the covenant with all humankind. Living in Covenantal relationship with this God becomes the central focus of Jewish life. While there are Jews who have an awareness of their Covenantal responsibilities, they disturb the appropriate balance obligated by the Covenant and emphasize in false proportions the Noahidic covenant over and above the Israelite Covenant, according to Borowitz.<sup>21</sup> In order for the Jew to maintain an equilibrium between the particularism of Israel and the universalism of a person-in-general, Borowitz outlines several characteristics of God and the Covenant; thus those who choose to engage in a life of Covenantal responsibility may do so with an awareness of those responsibilities.<sup>22</sup>

### GOD

In seeking a term for the God of Covenant, Borowitz found that "Absolute," although appropriate in that it

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<sup>21</sup>Ibid., p. 204.

<sup>22</sup>See my critique on the authoritativeness of either C/covenant.

suggests the existence of a standard against which humankind is to regard its behavior, does not sufficiently reflect self-determinism. As part of his rejection of Orthodoxy, which viewed revelation as the will of an Absolute, God must also be sufficiently weak, thus allowing for human self-determination.<sup>23</sup> Hence, in asserting a position midway between the unyielding God of Orthodoxy and the nihilism of modern secularism, Borowitz finds God best indicated by the expression "weak Absolute."

This "weak-Absolute," Borowitz suggests, is "an Immanent Reality that is also transcendent...."<sup>24</sup> Borowitz asserts that God would have to be immanent in order to be accessible to the human person. But such a "weak-Absolute" would also necessarily be transcendent in order to authorize duty. A purely immanent God could not provide a truth that was not contingent upon the emotions or reasoning of a potentially faulty society. As God is the "Ground of all grounds,"<sup>25</sup> transcendence would be the guarantee for ultimate truth. In giving specificity to this God, Judaism utilizes symbols which, while inadequate, "[point] beyond themselves to the Ineffable."<sup>26</sup> That Borowitz cannot be more specific as to the nature of God does not diminish his awareness of its truth, as his faith gives him the necessary

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<sup>23</sup>Borowitz, Renewing, p. 77.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., p. 91.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., pp. 91-98.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., p. 92.

certainty which he does, nonetheless, require.

As the Transcendent is the Ground of all grounds, such a God gives authenticity to what Borowitz terms a necessary ground of values. Recalling the failure of modernity's rationalism to provide a suitable ground of value or even some objective truth, Borowitz, in reclaiming the centrality of God in Jewish life, understands such a God to provide that eternal truth or ground of value. What must not be forgotten, however, is that while value resides in God, the Transcendent, its manifestation is experienced as the Immanent. Such unqualified value is required in a theology wherein God conserves the distinction between the victims of the atrocities of the Holocaust and their perpetrators.<sup>27</sup>

While the existence of universal values has not directed all of humanity toward them, Covenant theology would maintain that there is a progress toward messianism. God possesses redemptive power, Borowitz claims, as evidenced in the Exodus, the civil rights struggle, the Six Day War and the liberation of Communist Europe. While asserting an escatology of Messiah, Borowitz also indicates that humankind will be a part of that final climax. He expresses uncertainty as to how this will be, yet, given his faith, he is assured of its imminence and the arrival of the World-to-Come.<sup>28</sup> On this Borowitz notes, "My trust in God for life after death relieves me of the punishing burden of

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<sup>27</sup>Ibid., p. 42.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., pp. 150-152.

requiring everything to be settled here."<sup>29</sup>

Borowitz additionally notes that while the Transcendent God conserves the universal Good, God's justice is not an Absolute. Borowitz explains:

"...With God's justice premised on human freedom (and, hence, responsibility), God's justice cannot be perfect but must be rough.... If God wishes people to be meaningfully free,... God's reward and punishment cannot be mechanical."<sup>30</sup>

Accordingly, there exists the possibility for evil in the world. Such evil is not the will of a malevolent God, but results from the freedom granted to the individual who must chose to resist such desire for evil. Accordingly, God's retributive power will one day offer justice and mercy to all. Until that day, however, evil will be present.

#### TORAH

In Renewing the Covenant, Borowitz states three criteria that the God of Covenant ordains: mandating Jewish duty, shaping sacred community, and validating a commanding piety.<sup>31</sup> Mandating Jewish duty refers to the individual's Covenantal responsibility to live a life of Torah. "A Jewishly adequate idea of God would move Jews to do this by indicating the cosmic authority behind the Torah life and thus the ultimate significance of its required acts."<sup>32</sup> As

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<sup>29</sup>Ibid., p. 149.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., p. 148.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., p. 57-61.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., p. 58.

the Written Torah is revelation,<sup>33</sup> Borowitz explains, it "directs us to our duty as participants in the Covenant."<sup>34</sup> He does, however, grant that "...changes in history validate changes in practice...."<sup>35</sup> Inasmuch as *halakhah* represents Orthodox Jewish duty, a theology of Covenant "...rejects that authentic Jewish continuity requires the halakhic process."<sup>36</sup> Thus while Torah unequivocally mandated Jewish duty in the past, in contemporary society the specific practices and beliefs it instructs must not be adhered to when they conflict with our sense of what is right. Nonetheless, Borowitz argues, "whatever language a Jew uses to speak of God the communication needs to make God sufficiently real that 'commandment' results and energizes a Jewish life that deserves to be associated with the term 'Torah'".<sup>37</sup> "Torah," then, refers to the substance of our ongoing Jewish religious experience.<sup>38</sup> A valid Jewish theology, Borowitz avers, must include not only a particular set of ideals as expressed by both our history and our present, but must include a command to uphold them.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>33</sup>See Renewing, pp. 250-253, for a more detailed account of Borowitz's view of revelation. Borowitz attempts to make clear that he holds to a "more humanist theory of revelation." Also, see my critique of this view.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., p. 283.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., pp. 58-9.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., p. 281.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., p. 117.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., p. 56.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., p. 291.



To the extent that commandment results from Covenant, Borowitz acknowledges that the *halakhic* process of Rabbinic times must be reformulated for a postmodern setting:

We cannot expect formal similarity to the past to empower even a responsive Jewish legal system without a convincing theory of authority to persuade us we ought sacrifice our autonomy to it -- and if we do not, it is merely wise counsel, not law. A modernized halakhic process could have considerable Jewish value, but we shall know what constitutes authentic "flexibility" only when we have theologically established its meta-*halakhah*. And only when we have been personally persuaded of the validity of its theory of Jewish decision making are we likely to make its rulings our law.<sup>40</sup>

What Borowitz attempts to clarify, then, is that while Torah is a core term of relation in the Covenant, implying duty, it is the individual as a member of corporate Israel who, in relationship with all Israel, arrives at the particulars of its content.

### ISRAEL

The second criterion of Jewish duty Borowitz outlines is shaping sacred community.<sup>41</sup> In shaping this sacred community, the God of Covenant mandates that Jews live not as individuals, but in community with one another. To emphasize this point, Borowitz refers to the individual Jew as "Israel/self", thereby expressing the corporate nature of Israel which has preserved her. God made Covenant not with individuals, Borowitz asserts, but with the whole community

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<sup>40</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 287.

<sup>41</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 59-60.



of Israel. Accordingly, in fulfillment of the Covenant, there must remain a sense of sacred community. This community achieves corporate authenticity by its response to several questions Borowitz posits:

We will initially assess the Jewish authenticity of their demands upon our institutions by asking how they have met their obligations to our people. What do they know of the tradition they have brought into judgement? What sacrifices of self have they made for Judaism's continuity? What place does the people Israel have in their personal vision of the proper service of God? Does their individual version of Judaism give promise of continuing Israel in faithful corporate service to God until the Messiah comes?<sup>42</sup>

Added to this list of inquiries for the authentic Jew shaping sacred community are the necessary appurtenances of land and language. Accordingly, *aliya* becomes an integral activity in shaping sacred community,<sup>43</sup> as does acquiring proficiency in Hebrew.<sup>44</sup> Also intrinsic to this Covenant, Borowitz suggests, is the criterion of procreation, thereby ensuring the preservation of such a sacred community.<sup>45</sup>

In referring to Israel, Borowitz makes plain that Israel is not to be understood as chosen by God and hence superior to other people. Rather, Israel must be understood to be in special Covenantal relationship with God such that certain sacred consequences fall upon Israel. Borowitz enumerates them and categorizes them as shaping Jewish life

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<sup>42</sup>Ibid., p. 226.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., pp. 200-202.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., p. 260.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., p. 298.

both intracommunally and extracommunally:

Intracommunally, chosenness first founds Jewish existence on the consciousness that the one God of the universe gave the Torah to the Jews alone. Therefore, and second, a Jew should do *mitzvot* as an individual and as part of the Jewish people's corporate service of God. Third, living this way makes Jewish life holy, distinguished from profane existence, and suffused with a sense of contact with God. Fourth, because of this alliance with God, Jews know that their people will survive every historical vicissitude and one day be vindicated when God fully redeems them and all humankind because of them.<sup>46</sup>

Extracommunally, Borowitz enumerates separation from other groups and service or activism, setting "a high example of personal conduct before humanity."<sup>47</sup>

While Borowitz understands these responsibilities in a postmodern sense, he does not shirk from their valid claim on Israel. Still, such duties in shaping sacred community are not foisted upon Israel/self. Were all human freedom denied by God, only an Orthodoxy would have legitimacy. Accordingly, Borowitz must reject such orthodoxy. In so doing, however, he does not characterize his theology as representative of Reform, Conservative or Reconstructionist Judaism. What Borowitz does assert is the place of Covenant theology among non-Orthodox Judaism.

Orthodoxy is distinguished from non-Orthodoxy, Borowitz claims, when one places one's reference of truth in the "general culture" rather than in traditional Judaism. He notes:

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<sup>46</sup>Ibid., p. 195.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid., p. 196.

Our two religious wings differ radically only in the balance they make between revelation and autonomy, between the relative authority they ascribe to human will and God's instruction.<sup>48</sup>

And he also states:

...I proceed more from my Judaism toward the culture than did the modernists, who thought society had the surer truth."<sup>49</sup>

While Borowitz asserts that "authentic" Judaism arises when one responds to the tradition, Orthodoxy assigns authority exclusively to God's Torah, thereby placing it at the center of Jewish identity and denying authority to the individual. Borowitz, as a non-Orthodox Jew, is unwilling to yield to tradition an Absolute authority. He asserts that such ascendancy cannot be given over entirely to the Torah without regard for the individual. While Borowitz seems to be reiterating a modified theistic absolutism, he does not grant that such a God denies personal autonomy. It is this critical difference, he claims, which makes his theology non-Orthodox.

Operating out of a postmodern frame-of-reference, Borowitz contends that "...personal freedom [is] at the center of Jewish existence."<sup>50</sup> Still, in light of the tragedy of the Holocaust, he seeks a less humanocentric value system. For Borowitz, this does not mean unfettered sovereignty, but "substantial self-determination".<sup>51</sup> Such

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<sup>48</sup>Ibid., p. 77.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid., p. 55.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid., p. xii.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid., p. x.

self-determination is indicative of the transformation of modern life which liberal Jews must not deny. Borowitz declares of this self-determining individuality:

The resulting ideals of person and society it projected so enlarged the Jewish soul that they made the pains of Emancipation well worth bearing. We contemporary Jews may have jettisoned the optimism that once sacralized modernization, but the very experience that has made us more realistic has reinforced our steadfast devotion to self-determination. Witnessing the moral failures of orthodoxies, institutions, and collectives has reconfirmed our trust in the self as the best critic of iniquity and our indispensable defense against social tyranny.<sup>52</sup>

#### THE JEWISH SELF

Whereas the God of Israel mandates a sacred community, so, too, it must validate a commanding piety for the individual. Borowitz remarks: "A concept of God that makes direct address to God infantile or denies that God can be of help to us to meet the varied experiences of life stumbles against a theme of divine approachability unbroken in Jewish religious experience over the ages."<sup>53</sup> What is here suggested is that a Jewish idea of God must be such that it places the Jew in relation to a God who is available to the individual as he or she seeks help from that God.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>52</sup>Ibid., p. 285.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid., p. 60.

<sup>54</sup>It must be noted that several Jewish thinkers throughout the ages, most notably Maimonides, Spinoza, and Reines have denied that such a God-idea has validity. While these thinkers differ in their reasoning, they each deny a personal God.

Validating commanding piety, according to Borowitz, does not suggest any particular God-idea other than one which demands of the individual a life of Torah.<sup>55</sup>

While it is true that Borowitz rejects the existentialist stance that authority resides exclusively in the individual self, he does grant to the individual sufficient autonomy to determine the specific terms of the Covenant.<sup>56</sup> This intermediary position is one which, as stated above, attests to a God who is neither an Absolute authority over humankind nor altogether impotent. Whereas this God must be sufficiently weak to provide room for human freedom, Borowitz understands that there are certain characteristics both of this God and of non-Orthodox Judaism which are central to the "life of Torah" -- both mandated by God and realized in the particular experience of this God. Such particular experience is the source of authority for Borowitz's theological expression.

In formulating Covenant theology, Borowitz conceives of the relationship between God, Israel and Torah to be such that all three are defined in terms of each other. What Borowitz effectively achieves is a model of Jewish identity that defines the authentic Jewish self in such a manner that a Jewish identity is intrinsic to a self identity. The Jewish self, then, emerges as the core term signifying a Jewish identity that is expressive of a view of God, Israel

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<sup>55</sup>Borowitz, Renewing, p. 60.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid., p. 17.

and Torah which is:

...more individualistic and pluralistic than Orthodoxy can tolerate, more particularistic than rationalists will find responsible, more theocentric than humanists can allow, more ethnic than personalists find congenial.<sup>57</sup>

As Borowitz suggests in this model, his theology is not to be understood as a view of God alone. Yet, even as each term is built upon the other, it is necessary to begin to understand the particularism, the theocentricity, and the ethnicity of his non-Orthodox view of God.

#### SUMMARY

Arguing against such a move to define the essential nature of terms such as Judaism or religion, Borowitz suggests that his theology cannot be dissected into component parts; rather, it can only be grasped as a relationship between its varying parts.<sup>58</sup> Borowitz understands his role as theologian, then, to be to articulate the core terms of relation and the pattern of their relationships with each other. He writes:

The generative vision which I bring to this work is holistic, a vision of Judaism in which God and the Jewish people stand in an ongoing relationship structured by Torah as record and mandate, and the background of whose practice is God's relationship with all humankind.... We cannot proceed with the doctrine of God alone -- for it is universal -- nor the doctrine of Israel alone -- how will we transcend the particular? -- nor from the doctrine of Torah alone -- who authorizes and who lives it? We must correlate God, Israel, and Torah,

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<sup>57</sup>Ibid., p. 71.

<sup>58</sup>Ibid., p. 56.



rendering our Jewish theology holistic."<sup>59</sup>

The relationship which unites God, Torah and Israel is, according to Borowitz, the Covenant. It is in Torah that one can find that Covenant between the Jewish people, Israel, and their God.

Covenant theology, then, attempts to provide the postmodern Jew with a spirituality found through living a "life of Torah" in relationship with God. It endeavors to renew the dignity of believing in that living God. While Borowitz admits that there is a God for all peoples who exist in covenant with God, he, as a Jew, lives in special Covenant to God. While such assertions blatantly express a uniqueness of the Jewish people, Borowitz concedes that only through an awareness of the special nature of the Covenant between God and the Jewish people can the Jew begin to comprehend his or her God more fully, and engage in a life of Covenant.

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<sup>59</sup>Ibid., p. 55.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### A CRITIQUE OF COVENANT THEOLOGY

There is no doubt that Eugene Borowitz provides a fine contribution in his analysis of the history of Jewish thought. His synthesis of historical Jewish theology and contemporary theology provide his reader with new insights into Jewish thought. Yet, despite his analysis of earlier thought and his subsequent presentation of a new theology, Covenant theology remains incoherent.

Borowitz makes the claim that his understanding of Judaism is not to be believed for any reason other than its truth. The ideological justification for such truth is only to be found within his writings. Thus, in attempting to understand Covenant theology in its most complete form, one must regard Renewing the Covenant as a full expression of Borowitz's ideological stance, and little reliance, therefore, will be placed upon philosophical treatises external to this work.

### COVENANT

Inasmuch as Borowitz presents Covenant theology as a non-Orthodox theology, there remain numerous ideas within his presentation that indicate otherwise. Whereas the Orthodox community insists that it possesses a Covenantal relationship with God and is prepared to abide by the terms of the Covenant as it appears in both the Written and Oral



Law,<sup>60</sup> Borowitz claims that there exists an alternative Covenant for the non-Orthodox community. The terms of this Covenant<sup>61</sup> with God are in dynamic tension with this community's view of Torah and the nature of its self-identity as Israel. "Our two religious wings differ radically only in the balance they make between revelation and autonomy, between the relative authority they ascribe to human will and God's instruction," Borowitz states.<sup>62</sup> Such a comment is either false, if the God depicted in the Pentateuch is the God of this C/covenant, or it is meaningless, as the term God is insufficiently defined.

While Borowitz would assert that his definition of God (a being both immanent and transcendent, the ground of all existence and value, the author of C/covenant), must remain sufficiently vague to allow for human freedom, he would equally assert that there are absolute limits to the nature of the Covenant. This is self-contradictory. While he

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<sup>60</sup>It is critical to note that the terms of the Covenant in the Written Torah are not identical to the terms of the Oral Torah. Also, the Written Torah prohibits that one should increase its contents or diminish them. While this may not be problematic for one who rejects a literal reading of the Pentateuch, Borowitz relies upon the literal nature of the Pentateuch is asserting the existence of a Covenant.

<sup>61</sup>Numerous passages in the Pentateuch clearly spell out the nature of the Covenant between God and Israel. These passages leave no room for modification at the whim of an individual asserting autonomy. Such is not the nature of the Pentateuchal Covenant, and there remain no contracts which nullify or even modify the terms as expressed by God in the Torah. Additionally, there exists no other Covenant within the Jewish history that grants to the individual the latitude which Borowitz claims for members of his non-Orthodox community.

<sup>62</sup>Borowitz, Renewing, p. 77.

admits he has no authority to determine the nature of the Covenant for another individual, as he makes clear in asserting the private nature of the relationship with God, he soon contradicts his statement that he has no (moral) right over other Jews in the non-Orthodox community by mandating what they must do to fulfill their obligations as Jews. Borowitz, for example, clearly states that getting married and having children are part of a full Jewish identity.<sup>63</sup> But if he has no authority over fellow non-Orthodox Jews, by what right does he intrude into their private and most intimate relationships? By labelling such behavior as a dereliction of Jewish duty, Borowitz reveals not only an insensitivity to those individuals who do not have children for any number of reasons, but also that his theologically vague Covenant has, illogically enough, severe and authoritarian practical demands. This authoritarianism clearly goes against his earlier statement that Jewish duty is arrived at in consonance with what we as individuals know to be right.<sup>64</sup>

The need for clarification of this Covenant is further seen when it becomes clear that there are forms of non-Orthodox Judaism that do not share the differentiation which Borowitz makes in regard to the nature of the relationship between revelation and autonomy. In making statements which

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<sup>63</sup>Borowitz also asserts that living in Israel and learning Hebrew are Covenantal duties. See Borowitz, Renewing., pp. 294-298.

<sup>64</sup>Ibid., pp. 58-59.

attempt to distinguish non-Orthodox forms of Judaism from those forms which are Orthodox, he fails to recognize that there are Jewish definitions of God wherein God does not provide supernatural revelation, eliminating the Covenant altogether.<sup>65</sup>

Borowitz presents an elaborate history of the C/covenants, reviewing them via Hegel, Hirsh, Rosenzweig, and Nietzsche.<sup>66</sup> He sees this history as one which does not change the essential form of the Covenant, i.e.: the relationship between God, Torah, Israel, or, for Rosenzweig, the world. For these men, the form has always remained constant. Yet, it would seem that this attempt to view Jewish history as somehow possessing a singular form or idea is a distortion and a deprecation of the diverse ideas which Jews have held in the past.<sup>67</sup> Maimonides, to name but one of countless others, has been a part of the history of ideas which did not find God, Torah nor Israel in a C/covenantal relationship with Jews. Nonetheless, Borowitz asserts that the Jewish people are Covenantally contracted to the God of the universe in a manner that is particular to them. Of this special relationship Borowitz states:

[W]hatever language a Jew uses to speak of God, the communication needs to make God sufficiently

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<sup>65</sup>See Moses Maimonides, The Guide of the Perplexed, trans. by Shlomo Pines (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963) Part II, Chapter 36.

<sup>66</sup>Borowitz, Renewing, p. 76.

<sup>67</sup>See Ellis Rivkin, The Shaping of Jewish History: A Radical New Interpretation (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1971), pp. 3-83.

real that "commandment" results and energizes a Jewish life that deserves to be associated with the term "Torah."<sup>68</sup>

Such a comment has little content other than an expression that whatever ideas one possesses that would compel specific behavior, one can assign the name "Jewish" to that behavior, call those ideas compelling that behavior "Torah", and name the source of those ideas "God."

Borowitz does concede that he uses the term Torah in a broad sense to "refer to the substance of our ongoing religious experience...."<sup>69</sup> Using this term in this way deviates from the Classical meaning of Torah. Borowitz, however, asserts that the Classical Jewish system was not of a singular voice in its thought or practice.<sup>70</sup> If we are to assume by this that Borowitz welcomes a diverse membership within the non-Orthodox Jewish community, what are we to assume he will make of those Jews who hold beliefs which conflict with one another? Indeed, there have been and remain many Jews today who assert ideas which are mutually exclusive of one another. In response, Borowitz maintains that such ideas which reject the "community's accepted norm" lie outside the Jewish community as a whole. For this reason, they are not Jewish ideas, but rather the non-Jewish ideas of particular Jews. Such assertions regarding the nature of Judaism are troubling to me,

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<sup>68</sup>Borowitz, Renewing, p. 117.

<sup>69</sup>Ibid., p. 56.

<sup>70</sup>Ibid., p. 57.

particularly when presented as non-Orthodox. Orthodoxy, interestingly enough, views Covenant theology as beyond the limits of Jewish belief.

Borowitz's view of Covenant seems at odds with that which has been indicated through the scientific study of the Bible: one cannot assert that the terms of the so-called Sinaitic Covenant are any more obligatory upon the members of the Jewish community than are the terms of the Noahidic covenant because the Torah does not represent a contract between human persons and God; it is the product of humankind from ages now past. There is a failure on Borowitz's part to embrace the historical shifts in religious definitions. While he does not adhere to a Pharisaic definition of Judaism, neither does he adhere to a Biblical Judaism. He deviates radically from both of these earlier forms. Yet, he declares that the forms have not changed and his Covenant theology is in keeping with these antiquated Judaisms. Borowitz offers the view that aggadah indicates that Classical Judaism allowed much freedom of thought for Jews so long as the halakhah was followed rigidly. Actions, then, were of primary importance; thoughts of secondary nature. This, however, is not so. Much has been included in the halakhah which severely restricts the variety of thought which Classical Judaism would have tolerated. In Sanhedrin 10a, we find that those who believe that there is no resurrection, that Torah is not from heaven and that there is not a God are deprived of any



portion in the World-to-Come.<sup>71</sup>

In actuality, Borowitz has conceived a theology from his own unique mix of history and has labelled it authentic. While I do not have difficulty in accepting the authenticity of his new religious system, I do object to his imposing his values onto other individuals. In creating a new theology, he has falsely asserted that his ideas were extant in the past. He then suggests that Reform Judaism must fall within the parameters set forth by this old/new view of Judaism. In so doing, however, he restricts his "non-Orthodox" Judaism by the practices and beliefs of a Rabbinic Judaism. In order to give specificity to his Covenantal Judaism, he utilizes the terminology and the boundaries as established by this earlier form of Judaism. What he reveals in so doing is his admission of the legitimacy of earlier Judaism to be the sole authentic source of Jewish views today. He abdicates nearly all authority to this earlier Judaism as absolute for him.<sup>72</sup> Borowitz does not seem to recognize the implications of Biblical criticism which have undermined such an authority structure. The limits of the Judaism have broken open with the fall of the boundaries previously set by a revelation which for centuries enjoyed a status as the source of ultimate truth. The inroads of science have closed paths which Borowitz wishes to remain open.

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<sup>71</sup>See T.B. Sanhedrin 10a.

<sup>72</sup>While Borowitz asserts the autonomy of the individual, he cannot seem to allow for total freedom. The authoritarian nature of such a religious system prevents its classification among authentic non-Orthodox religions.

### THE TRANSCENDENT GOD

Borowitz "points to" his understanding of the Transcendent One. This, for him, is God. He falsely claims to refrain from this term, however, because it "is so heavy with question and misconception...."<sup>73</sup> Yet, he maintains that "the spirituality [he is] pointing to offers no tight answers to the problem of reliability. Only an orthodoxy could do that."<sup>74</sup> If Borowitz is suggesting that only Orthodoxies have certain answers -- either for the individual who accepts them on faith without universally demonstrable proof, or whether on the basis of such proof -- then I question this position which raises doubts as to the validity of the position held by Jews who firmly maintain a Jewish identity and yet deny the existence of a Transcendent. Borowitz denies that these Jews fall within the bounds of his Jewish identity which asserts there can be no particularity of Jewish identity without this Transcendent. It is on that front which many liberal Jews take offense. They posit that their personal Jewish response is not borne out of a Covenantal relationship with a Transcendent Being. Rather, it grows out of a greater understanding of the nature of human existence which demands of individuals seeking a level of ideological security (without the fundamentalism of an Orthodoxy) a guarantee of

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<sup>73</sup>Borowitz, Renewing, p. 114.

<sup>74</sup>Ibid.



freedom for the other. Such a Jewish response to pluralism need not result in a denigration of individuals who believe otherwise. Instead, it allows for the widest range of personal conceptions of God.

Borowitz, however, insists that the experience of the Transcendent is universal. Yet, via the Covenant, he maintains his Jewish particularism. All the while he is offering his view of God, he frustrates his own efforts by suggesting that "we are more certain of [experiences of transcendent reality] than of any theologian's conceptualization of God."<sup>75</sup> Such statements present an obstacle for validating the particular behaviors which a community-norm might mandate. This difficulty is found in Reines's Polydox community, as well, for different reasons, however. Numerous questions arise in response to this: If we are to rely solely on our own private experiences of the Transcendent, how then might community arise? Around what can it center? What does it seek to establish as "common"? Conversely, if there are to be common rituals, what authority either ordains those behaviors as binding upon the members of a particular community or declares them to be unquestionably universal?<sup>76</sup> How does the process of conversion work if membership in the community derives from experiences of the Transcendent? In responding to these question there remains a remarkable similarity between

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<sup>75</sup>Ibid.

<sup>76</sup>See Alvin Reines, "A Common Symbolism For Reform Judaism", 1970, pp. 7-8.

Borowitz' Covenant theology and Reines's Polydoxy and his use of the word Jew as an Ontal symbol.<sup>77</sup> Whereas Reines grants autonomy to each member of the Reform community to determine an authentic Jewish identity for themselves, Borowitz reserves such authenticating power for the community.

### ISRAEL

In discussing the "momentous folk experiences," of the Jewish People, Borowitz suggests that there have been only six: Covenant, Settlement, Rabbinism, Diaspora, Emancipation, and post-Holocaust disillusionment.<sup>78</sup> I question the validity of this list, as I believe that before one can attempt to delineate the major events impacting upon the Jewish community, one must first define that community as well as suggest a methodology for determining how that community-definition is reached. Reines suggests that religious identity is that which marks the authentic Jewish community. His definition of religion allows him the latitude to include as a religious community those individuals who have attempted to resolve the conflict of finitude.<sup>79</sup> The momentous events for the Jewish people, according to Reines, then, would be those events which

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<sup>77</sup>See Alvin J. Reines, Polydoxy: Explorations in a Philosophy of Liberal Judaism (Buffalo: Prometheus Books, 1987), pp. 166-167.

<sup>78</sup>Borowitz, Renewing, p. 1.

<sup>79</sup>See Chapter Six.

demanding a shift in the current formulation of or response to the conflict of finitude, evidenced by the changing nature of that community's response to the conflict. Borowitz seems to suggest that only these<sup>60</sup> major events are significant in their having shaped Jewish spirituality today. Again, what has become of the inroads which *Wissenschaft* has made for Reform Judaism? What of the dethroning of the divine authorship of a literally true Torah? Borowitz has not fit this into his scheme. I believe this is a major omission. Such a difficulty prompts the question: Who is included within the "sacred community" of Israel? Also, how does Israel receive definition if the relationship between God, God's duty and the individual is unique for every individual? Such a private relationship would appear to preclude the possibility of setting clear limits on the membership of Israel. While such limits may remain open, how can it be said of the individual who is uncertain as to his or her identity that he or she is duty-bound?

Remarking on the contradiction between duty and autonomy is David Novak. 'Novak, a Professor of Jewish Philosophy at the University of Virginia, reacting to Borowitz's article, "The Autonomous Jewish Self,"<sup>61</sup> offers insightful criticisms of Covenant theology, seriously

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<sup>60</sup>There remains doubt as to whether or not some of these events occurred, especially Covenant, Settlement and post-Holocaust disillusionment.

<sup>61</sup>See Eugene Borowitz, "The Autonomous Jewish Self," Reform Judaism, Vol. 4, No. 1, Feb. 1984.

bringing into question the cogency of Borowitz's idea of an autonomous self duty-bound to a covenant. He asks Borowitz:

If revelation is not an act of divine lawgiving, but only the experience of God's presence, then on any specifically practical issue, is the authority of the covenant not going to be just as anthropocentric as it was for the older, modern rationalist, form of Liberal Judaism? In the end, is it not man and not God who speaks norms? How can any norm emerging from the covenantal ethos be considered anything more than human-made law? If so, how can such a law be practically binding on autonomous individuals together in one community short of some formal contract accepted by each one of them?<sup>82</sup>

That these questions are posed in defense of an alternative non-Orthodox Judaism does not alter their keen awareness of the weaknesses which remain embedded in Borowitz's Covenant theology. My response to these questions would be that I concur with them. Nonetheless, Novak has overlooked that despite the humanocentric source of this theology, Borowitz grants authority to the community to accept or reject an individual's identity. Still, the individual maintains the right to promote the truths of his or her Jewish experience and encounter with God as worthy of normativeness.

This liberal or postmodern approach to Covenant produces a difficulty which Borowitz has ignored. While the specifics of any Covenant must remain sufficiently vague to allow for personal autonomy, Borowitz would maintain that the God with Whom he has a relationship mandates Jewish duty. This duty would consist of or reflect the terms of

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<sup>82</sup>David Novak, "Contemporary Jewish Theology," ed. by Dan Cohn-Sherbok (Lewiston: The Edwin Mellon Press, Ltd., 1991), p. 199.

the Covenant. Inasmuch as the terms of the Covenant cannot be mandated apart from the community in Covenant, how is it then possible to distinguish between the Covenant of Israel and the covenant of all of humankind if neither has specific terms? Borowitz gives no clear answer to this question.

### THE LIMITS OF AUTONOMY

Borowitz asserts that the basis for his faith is not found in an unmitigated, rationally derived truth. Rather, he asserts that his knowledge stems from a non-rational or "pre-rational" faith. While he uses the term faith in an alternate manner from its usage in the Pentateuch,<sup>83</sup> such non-rational faith may serve as the legitimate basis for his beliefs. This does pose limits to his Covenant theology, however. Borowitz, relying on the private nature of his faith, has no authority to mandate for others what to do or believe, given that his beliefs are private. Others, who either have no knowledge of his personal experiences or as a consequence of the failings of language do not possess the capacity to understand his experiences in the whole, cannot ever share his God idea except through their own faith.

There are, no doubt, many Jews who do not share Borowitz's views -- the very reason he gives for placing authority not in the hands of the individual but elsewhere.

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<sup>83</sup>Faith, *emuna*, does not mean non-rational belief. Rather, *emuna*, indicates belief or assent via the witnessing of empirically verifiable evidence. See Exodus 4:8 and 4:30-31.



Yet, despite the reliance upon a Transcendent source of authority, Borowitz must concede that he alone is the source of his theology. Indeed, there may be myriad theologies, one from every person! How, then, does one make a determination as to which viewpoint is the surer one? Borowitz accepts this as a great difficulty. His resolution is to adopt his position through faith. I believe this answer, though not in disregard of the question, fails to offer a suitable response.

That Borowitz derives his authority from his relationship with the godhead<sup>64</sup> of his Judaism is as valid a proof as my asserting that I have authority from the godhead to state that Covenant theology is false. While Borowitz may concede that as an individual I have such authority, yet as a member of Corporate Israel I cannot effect my theology as valid in my Jewish community, my beliefs are overrun by his. My self-determination is non-existent in such a system. Inasmuch as Borowitz emphasizes the primacy of community over the autonomy of the self, Reines is unwilling to do this. He sets individual freedom as the Absolute. I suggest to Borowitz that the Polydox which Reines offers is the only viable solution which preserves the freedom of the individual while maintaining Jewish identity as a particular response.

Additionally, I believe that Covenant theology can only

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<sup>64</sup>In asserting Covenant theology, Borowitz is effectively asserting that he has received prophecy from God. See Deuteronomy 18:15-22 in reference to false prophets.

operate in a Polydox structure. Because each faith experience is unique and every idea to which an individual assents may contradict the ideas of other individuals, it becomes necessary to institute limits upon every individual by recognizing that the faith which they possess for their truth need not be identical to the truth of others. That to which a particular individual assents may be true for them and for many others as well, yet it can never attain universal acceptance due to the limitations of the human mind.

Borowitz finds fault with Reines's position, citing the position of Buber which asserts that self-determinism is found only in mutuality.<sup>85</sup> Still, Borowitz's chief concern is not how to ensure freedom, but how to specify "the sources of authority that should legitimately limit the exercise of the free self."<sup>86</sup> Further, Borowitz critiques rather severely the positions of Kaplan, Heschel, Buber, and Cohen, to name a few.<sup>87</sup>

### MESSIAH

The Hegelian notion of a historical progression is insufficient for providing humanity with logical solutions to its challenges. Borowitz rejects the notion that rationalism provides humanity with the ability to advance

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<sup>85</sup>Borowitz, Renewing, p. 178.

<sup>86</sup>Ibid., p. 181.

<sup>87</sup>Ibid., p. 160.



ethically. He asserts that the rabbis of the Rabbinic period were more understanding of the human condition than are thinkers today.<sup>88</sup> Ironically, this assertion is in line with the hylotheistic position that process does not indicate progress.<sup>89</sup> I believe that Borowitz's position regarding the limitations of humanity stem not from the inability of man to overcome their evil forces, nor is it the result of economic inequities. Rather, as the godhead is limited, so too are we limited in our ability to transform the world. The conditions which now exist set boundaries upon the possibilities for the future. Yet, within the possibilities that do exist, there are those which allow for evil and those which allow for good. The godhead, however, will not be directly responsible for choosing. The individual will. There is one difficulty which Borowitz' Covenant theology cannot overcome. In his theology, centered on ethical behavior, the community rejects human Authority and hence individualized notions of this Transcendent Authority (like his own). How, then, do we as a community arrive at truth?

#### SUMMARY

Borowitz's unwillingness to define his source of authority, his lack of justification for continuing to refer to Classical Jewish responses as maintaining their validity

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<sup>88</sup>Ibid., p. 165.

<sup>89</sup>Hylotheism, p. ?

for Reform Jews, and his failure to seek a palatable solution to the problem of theodicy all contribute to the inefficacy of his Covenant theology for the modern or postmodern Jew.

Most ironic, as Reines notes<sup>90</sup>, is the evidentiary system of the Pentateuch which would condemn the liberties taken by the theological construction of Borowitz.<sup>91</sup> This presents Borowitz with profound evidence against his theology in that he seems to suggest that Classical Judaism would support his ideology. In fact, it does not.<sup>92</sup>

While Polydoxy and hylotheism may not point to Covenant theology, the principles upon which the former are founded are compatible with the latter. Most remarkable is the failure of Covenant theology to offer validation of Polydoxy (or hylotheism), while simultaneously relying upon it for its own validation.

Borowitz has struggled with his Jewish heritage and, true to Israel, he has emerged from his wrestling with God, formulating a new mode of Jewish identity. This Jewish identity which he has expressed is an identity shared by many Jews today. Yet the manner in which they speak belies their greater struggle. Even as these Jews are constrained to let go of an inoperative Covenantal relationship with an

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<sup>90</sup>Reines, "Hylotheism," p. 7, note 20.

<sup>91</sup>See Numbers 16:1-50 for the fate of Korach who rebelled against the commands of the God of Israel.

<sup>92</sup>See Deuteronomy 4:2 and 5:32 which state in no uncertain terms that the commandments given by the God of Israel are not to be altered in any manner.

omni-parental deity, so too are they constrained to admit that their views have no significant impact on their lives. That they are secure in their identity only admits to the terror with which they peer into the world, now confronting, now hiding, eyes closed. The reality which must confront them is indeed a frightening one. For no one who comprehends the challenge which faces all Jews can with any conviction affirm that the process of responding to this challenge is easy. In order for us as Jews to move forward in our ideological struggles, we must first be willing to grieve over the loss of the ancient religious ideas. Their value has moved from currency to relic. We who wish to seek solutions must be willing to reject our failures. Borowitz, unfortunately, cannot admit the loss of these ancient ideas, and in attempting to integrate them with incompatible contemporary ideas has created a system divided against itself that neither the traditional Jew nor the contemporary postmodern Jew can find useful in meeting the challenges of the world in which we find ourselves.

CHAPTER SIX  
REFORM JUDAISM AND RATIONAL EMPIRICISM

As the Heisenberg uncertainty principle suggests, observing an experiment affects its results in such a way that the outcome is inextricably linked to the perspective of the experimenter. This principle is no less true for philosophy than it is for chemistry or physics. Accordingly, the manner in which the theological question is answered is directly related to the manner in which it is asked. As every theologian brings to his or her inquiry certain assumptions, not only will the formulation of the theological question impose upon the outcome, but the careful reader will be able to discern in the outcome these biases, as well.

In contra-distinction to the dialogical personalism of Eugene Borowitz, Alvin J. Reines's theology is decidedly a rational empiricism, that is: a system created by reason on an empirical base. Dr. Reines begins his exploration of Jewish theology with two assertions. One is in regard to his view of Reform Judaism. 'He understands Reform and all authentic liberal religions to be fundamentally Polydox religious systems'<sup>93</sup>. The other is in regard to his evidentiary system. Dr. Reines is an empiricist. In attempting to understand Dr. Reines's theology, hylotheism, it is critical to keep in mind these preconditions he sets

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<sup>93</sup>For further reading on Polydoxy, see Reines, Polydoxy, pp. 155-183.

for asserting anything as true.

In formulating hylotheism, Dr. Reines sought a theology which was consistent with his understanding of religion. Consequently, in order to understand why Dr. Reines has found hylotheism to be the only empirically verifiable theology, one must first understand his view of religion apart from his theology.

### RELIGION

Reines does not define religion as "belief in God," however that term is given meaning. Instead, he finds soteria, ultimate meaningful existence, to be at the core of religious existence.<sup>94</sup> Drawing from the entire history of religion, Reines sets forth that religion is the human attempt to resolve the conflict of finitude. The conflict of finitude is the internal psychic struggle which seeks to harmonize a realization that the self is finite-in-nature with an awareness that the self desires an infinite existence, i.e.: infinite pleasure, perfect health, eternal life, perfect relationships, all material possessions, etc. This conflict can cause great angst within the human person. Failing to meet these desires results in a loss of meaningful existence. Accordingly, in the quest to attain ultimate meaningful existence, many diverse systems of thought have been devised to resolve this conflict, each

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<sup>94</sup>See A.J. Reines, Polydoxy, p. 63, for further explanation of the term "soteria."

hoping to provide for the attainment of that ultimate meaningful existence. Whether such systems have been in the guise of political or economic theories, views of the human psyche or definitions of the word God, these attempts to comprehend the world are religious systems.<sup>95</sup>

For Reines, each religious system can be expressed as a set of essential beliefs. While this requires that every aspect of the religious system be expressed in language, an activity which is perhaps not possible for all religious systems, Reines maintains that to assert anything about a religious system which cannot be reduced to communicable language is to assert statements that have no truth-value at all. Accordingly, these assertions would be meaningless.

Under this rigorous method of constructing all religious systems as a set of ideas, religious systems can be distinguished from one another. As the essential beliefs of one system coincide or differ from those of another system, so too do religions coincide or differ from one another. Thus, a religious system which asserts that the Oral Torah is divinely revealed is a different religious system from one which maintains that the Oral Torah is not divinely revealed.

Clearly, there is the possibility for much debate over which religious system offers the best resolution to the conflict of finitude. As conflict over religious truth has

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<sup>95</sup>Reines notes that in resolving the conflict of finitude a concept of God is not required. For example, Buddhism is generally regarded as a religion and it has no concept of God.



been the source of great human suffering, Reines's methodology for exploring the content of his definition of the term God attempts to preclude such conflict. He remedies this struggle for supremacy by positing what he deems to be at the core of liberal religion: individual freedom. Such a religious system, by virtue of it being a liberal religious system, is Polydox. Before delving into Reines's own God-concept, then, let us first briefly explore his idea of Polydoxy.

### POLYDOXY

Reines has summarized three basic propositions of Polydoxy in his essay on Hylotheism. The first reiterates the Freedom Covenant, to which all Polydox Reform Jews ought commit themselves. It states:

Every member [of the religious community] possesses an ultimate right to religious self-authority, but, at the same time, has the duty to limit her or his exercise of freedom within the boundary set by the freedom of other members.<sup>96</sup>

Such an agreement between individual members of a religious community allows for a multiplicity of religious ideologies within the same community.<sup>97</sup>

The second proposition asserts that "[e]very person is

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<sup>96</sup>Reines, Polydoxy, p. 25.

<sup>97</sup>Inasmuch as Polydoxy has been formulated by Reines as a liberal religious system, J.S. Mill has articulated a libertarian political theory which reflects the contents of the Freedom Covenant. See J.S. Mill, On Liberty, ed. by Gertrude Himmelfarb (London: Penguin Classics, 1985), pp. 157-162.



a unique individual."<sup>98</sup> Reines contends that psychological and biological research has revealed that no two individuals are alike. This proposition rejects the Aristotelian notion ascribing to all humans an essence, "rational animal." Such an essential nature would require that all persons should have an identical understanding of truth.

The third proposition is that "God-views are subjective."<sup>99</sup> As no person is exactly like any other person, how an individual chooses their religious system is entirely subjective. There can be no objective argument to determine which of them is more correct.

The term Polydox emerges to describe the community which allows every individual to chose his or her God-view, and allows for the peaceable co-existence of the resultant diverse values, requirements for truth and understanding of what is real.

#### RESPONSES TO FINITUDE<sup>100</sup>

All religious systems, whatever their specific content, fall into one of three categories: the *infinite* response to finitude, the *discognitive* response to finitude, and the *finite* response to finitude. Of the first category there are two kinds: the infinite *personal* response and the

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<sup>98</sup>Alvin J. Reines, "Hylotheism: A Theology of Pure Process" (Cincinnati: Alvin Reines), p. 2.

<sup>99</sup>Ibid.

<sup>100</sup>For a full discussion of the major responses to finitude, see: Reines, Polydoxy, pp. 64-72.

infinite *relational* response. Most prominent of the three larger categories have been religious systems of the infinite response to finitude. This category of religious systems offers ultimate meaningful existence in that the individual making this response finds soteria through their own infinite existence. In the *infinite personal response* individuals are the source of their own being. They are uncreated, independent, and powerful in every way. They are the ground of their own infinite existence. In the *infinite relational response* persons are finite yet receive infinite existence by forming relationships with another being, namely God.<sup>101</sup> This God grants to individuals infinite existence so that they may satisfy the infinite conation found within every human person.

The second category of religions is the *discognitive response to finitude*. It functions altogether differently from the other two in that rather than resolve the conflict of finitude by granting infinite existence to its adherent, it temporarily suspends the conflict by dulling the awareness of the finitude of the individual. This response is exemplified by drug addiction, psychoses, and suicide.

The third category of religion is the *finite response to finitude*. It is a demanding religious system which "contains essentially three elements: acknowledgement of the truth of the perception that the one is finite; renunciation of infinite conation; and setting and accepting limits in

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<sup>101</sup>This is the category into which Reines would place the Postmodern Judaism of Eugene Borowitz.

all areas of desire."<sup>102</sup> Hylotheism is a member of this class of religions in that it requires of its adherents an awareness of the limits of their existence, thus offering them soteria only from that which is possible.

### THEOLOGY, TRUTH AND BEING

Prior to an exposition of hylotheism it is critical to explore several general concepts: theology, truth and being. The first of these, theology, is understood by Reines to be any definition of the word God. However one may chose to define God, whether such a definition has meaning for others or not, is one's theology. The theology of Alvin Reines is hylotheism. This singular term refers to a complex definition of God, as defined exclusively by Dr. Reines. Thus we come to our second term, truth.

Truth, for Reines, does not entail a relationship between some extra-mental reality and a statement regarding that reality. Truth refers to a relationship between an idea or statement and an individual who holds such an idea to be true.<sup>103</sup> Reines's reference, then, is not an objective standard against which all individuals judge value. Rather, truth is asserted in terms of its validity for the individual alone. This is a Polydox approach to truth. Such a view allows the individual to subjectively

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<sup>102</sup>Reines, Polydoxy, p. 70.

<sup>103</sup>For further reading on the subjective nature of truth, see Mill, On Liberty, pp. 81-82.

set the requirements for determining truth. Ideas for which Reines has sufficient empirical evidence such that he finds them to correspond to that which is real, i. e.: that which has relation to extra-mental existence, are ideas which he holds to be true. Thus we come to our third term, being.

As an empiricist, Reines will only grant the attribute of being to that for which he has empirical evidence, evidence acquired through the five senses. In relating theology, truth, and being, Reines begins his definition of God with an inquiry: "What existent -- if any -- shall I refer to by the term God?" Such a question implies that in order for his definition of God to be true, its primary requirement is that it must be correlative with something that has existence or being. Such a theology is clearly ontological in nature. It is this requirement of existence which is critical for Reines's theology to have meaning. Reines notes that personhood, omniperfection and the absolute power to overcome nothingness are generally required of God in order for the word to have meaning.<sup>104</sup> He rejects these preconditions for accepting a God-view as true, as his God-view does not require such attributes. Neither is it the purpose of Reines's theology to provide a coherent understanding of the totality of the historic Jewish experience. Rather, the function of hylotheism is to articulate a referent to the term "God" for which Reines has evidence that it is a real, i.e.: empirically verifiable,

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<sup>104</sup>Reines, "Hylotheism", p. 7.

existent. Only through having an awareness and expression of that which is real, Reines suggests, is the individual ably suited to embark upon those behaviors which allow for the attainment of soteria.<sup>105</sup>

While religious thinkers such as Brightman posit that coherence is a necessary condition for truth, Reines rejects such a test for truth.<sup>106</sup> Brightman states that "coherence [is] a 'way of knowing' God, that is...a way of discovering and testing truth about God."<sup>107</sup> Yet, Brightman also notes that coherence cannot be determined until such time as all truth is known. He realizes this may well be impossible. Nonetheless, he is committed to coherence as a test of truth.<sup>108</sup>

#### EVIDENCE

As stated above, Reines requires evidence as his test of truth. He requires evidence to determine that which has real existence. As there can be little value in speaking of a subject about which one has no knowledge, and granting that certain knowledge is unattainable, Reines is reduced to rely upon assumptions<sup>109</sup> in asserting that which is true of

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<sup>105</sup>Soteria is ultimate meaningful existence.

<sup>106</sup>Reines, "Hylotheism", p. 15.

<sup>107</sup>Brightman, A Philosophy of Religion (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1940), pp. 189-190.

<sup>108</sup>Ibid., p. 129.

<sup>109</sup>Assumptions are those propositions for which Reines does not have empirical evidence.

his reality. In this he does not differ from Borowitz. It can be argued, however, that one can assent to the truth of any number of assumptions. Such a methodology yields that all statements can be determined to be true. In acknowledging that one must make certain assumptions yet at the same time must limit their number, Reines ascribes to the principle of Occam's Razor. Occam's Razor states that the simplest of competing theories, those requiring the least number of assumptions, are to be preferred over those that are more complex, which require more assumptions.<sup>110</sup> That Reines has chosen to employ Occam's Razor is, also, a subjective and arbitrary decision. In choosing to employ it, he has assumed the following: induction, memory and the universal status of sensory perceptions as reflective of an extra-mental universe. That he cannot demonstrate that these are realities and must accept them on faith does not cripple his attempt to derive meaning from the world.

In addition to his preliminary assumptions, Reines has chosen empirical evidence as his criterion for determining that which has real existence. This requirement, too, he concedes, is one he has chosen arbitrarily.<sup>111</sup> In seeking to communicate with others our limited knowledge of the world, we are restricted to our senses, that which unites us with the world beyond ourselves. Yet, as each of us may perceive what is outside of us differently, thus

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<sup>110</sup>Reines, "Hylotheism", p. 6.

<sup>111</sup>Ibid., p. 3.



underscoring that all statements concerning reality are made subjectively, nothing can be said of reality to which all others must assent. Only the experiences which produce physical evidence can be shared by others. They are public in that sense. Such physical evidence is perceived by the mind of the individual observing it. As not all individuals perceive reality in the same manner, it follows that there need not be any agreement as to the true nature of reality, regardless of the public nature of it and the human experience of a sensory perception of it. All that can be said to be known, then, are the sensory perceptions within that individual's mind. That which the mind perceives via the five senses Reines has termed "sensa". Those emotions which are internal feelings which cannot be demonstrated like pain or hunger or love, and sensations which are experienced within oneself Reines has termed "selfa".<sup>112</sup> It is only through sensa and selfa that we can claim to have knowledge of the extra-mental world.

As sensa and selfa are the only entities which can be said to have certain existence, they are an equivalent term for being. Reines maintains, however, that both sensa and selfa are created by mind. They do not give us incontrovertible knowledge of the extra-mental world. They only indicate the possibility that such an extra-mental world exists. In establishing a definition of God based upon that which can be known, Reines asserts that only selfa

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<sup>112</sup>Ibid., p.3.



and sensa have a continued existence. Thus, Reines's definition of God is "the enduring possibility of being."<sup>113</sup>

Asserting that the traditional claims of authority to mandate behavior and belief -- in the interest of providing soterial existence -- must be understood to be without divine sanction, Reines removes himself from the shackles of a dubious and impotent history. Such a tradition has no authority to limit his use of the word God. He further posits that his criterion for accepting a God idea as true is not limited by the fact that he is a Jew.<sup>114</sup> His use of the term Jew is in keeping with his understanding of its historical usage. Jewish religious thinkers have always claimed for themselves the authority to assert their ideas as Jewish, regardless of the specific content of those ideas.<sup>115</sup> As part of the continuing process of the changing nature of Jewish thought, Reines asserts the truth of hylotheism. For him, it is the only valid Jewish theology.

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<sup>113</sup>Reines, "Hylotheism", p. 8.

<sup>114</sup>Ibid., p. 5.

<sup>115</sup>See Chapter 2 in Reines's Polydoxy, as well as Julius Guttman's Philosophies of Judaism (New York: Schocken Books, 1964).

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### PROCESS THEOLOGY

#### PARTIAL PROCESS THEOLOGY

As stated previously, Alvin Reines begins his theological inquiry seeking that to which he might refer by the word "God." The particular theology for which he has empirical evidence is hylotheism, a theology of process.

Process theology is that class of theologies which characterizes the godhead of that particular process theology as possessing mutability. Prior to Reines's introduction of hylotheism, process theology was of one variety. Of process theologies today there are two varieties: pure process theology and hybrid or partial process theology.<sup>116</sup> The former, pure process, is a theology wherein the totality of the godhead is in process. Reines's theology of hylotheism is a theology of pure process, as no part of the godhead is static. The latter, partial process theology, is a theology wherein only a portion of the godhead is in process, and a portion of the godhead is immutable. A theology which attributes immutability in any part to the godhead is a partial process theology. This kind of process theology characterizes the theologies of several modern religious thinkers, most notably those of Alfred North Whitehead, David Ray Griffin,

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<sup>116</sup>For a fuller discussion of Reines's views regarding partial process theology, see section IV of "Hylotheism", pp. 31-47.

and Charles Hartshorne.

#### CRITIQUE OF NON-HYLOTHEISTIC PROCESS THEOLOGY

Reines assents to the truth of hylotheism because it is the only theology for which he has evidence of truth. As there is evidence for the truth of hylotheism, Reines states, there is an absence of empirical evidence attesting to the truth of alternative theologies. Reines offers a criticism of these hybrid or partial process theologies for three reasons: they lack empirical evidence suggesting the godhead possesses an enduring component; they equate process with progress; and they attribute change or process to some other cause than the godhead.

The process theologies of Whitehead, Griffin and Hartshorne are theologies which attribute to a portion of the godhead immutability. This static component of the godhead would serve as the enduring ground of value, establishing as universal truth certain modes of quality, here Christian values. Not surprisingly, then, this limiting of the mutability of the godhead is the only means by which these Christian theologians have been able to assert "eternal universal truths." By way of response to the Christian partial process theologians who predicate such values upon the infallibility of Revelation, Reines asserts that such values arise out of the subjective speculation of the partial process theologians who are human persons.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>117</sup>Ibid., p. 46.

As all persons are finite, their existence temporally limited, it is not possible that there could be eternal values. Reines maintains that any and all values arise from the individual, not from the godhead.

In articulating what he perceives to be the essential error within partial process theology, an equation of process with progress, Reines presents the ideas of David Griffin, a Christian process theologian. Griffin indicates the following:

God's aim is for the entities in the world constantly to experience greater value. The prerequisite for greater value is greater complexity, for as a greater variety of data can be synthesized into a harmonious unity, a greater intensity of feeling is possible. A few of the most important thresholds in the ascending complexity of finite existence were life, the psyche, and consciousness. These novel possibilities were able to emerge out of an extremely complex ordering of molecules; and a psyche, especially one with consciousness, could only emerge out of an extremely complex order among the living cells. Hence the fact that the direction of the evolutionary process is toward ever-increasing complexity is illuminated by the idea that God's aim is toward higher types of values being experienced by his creatures.<sup>118</sup>

Reines offers a critique of this position which equates complexification with an ever increasing value of the universe. As always, his criticism is leveled from his own personal vantage point. He states:

The prime example of complexification is the human person. The question is: Did the evolutionary process produce higher value in the universe by the emergence of the human person? The answer, of course, is determined by the criterion employed to measure higher value. The criterion I use is:

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<sup>118</sup>David R. Griffin, A Process Christology (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1976), p. 153.

that which furthers the well-being of the earth (which includes its atmosphere) and all life on earth. By this criterion, the emergence of humankind through the evolutionary process has been the greatest and most calamitous disvalue produced in earth's history. No species has destroyed more of the earth, more of the earth's species of living creatures, more members of its own species, and has suffered, apparently, more anguish, particularly from inherent defects and conflicts of its psychic structure. Complexification does not mean higher value, just as process does not mean progress.<sup>119</sup>

Partial process theologies, Reines goes on to say, "conceive the divine process as a cosmic becoming leading assuredly, albeit gradually, to universal betterment and the increase of human good. In hylotheism, process is not progress; process has no necessary relation to progress. Process occurs because it must...."<sup>120</sup> Lacking empirical evidence for such assertions, Reines denies in no uncertain terms that the likening of complexification with progress is false and thus equating progress to process is most assuredly false. As an essential idea of partial process theology, its rejection demands that partial process theology must necessarily be rejected as false.

Partial process theologies also suggest that change occurs because of the creativity or the will of entities other than the godhead. Such assertions are denied by Reines. In hylotheism the requirements of the godhead are responsible for change. Such change may or may not result in human suffering. Reines critiques the attempt of

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<sup>119</sup>Reines, "Hylotheism", note 50, p. 53.

<sup>120</sup>Reines. "Hylotheism," p. 18.

Hartshorne to offer an explanation of the presence of human suffering or evil in the universe. Hartshorne suggests that as not only is God free but "all creatures have creativity above zero, all are creators."<sup>121</sup> It is this creativity which results in human suffering or evil. Reines asserts that such a view of deity is not tenable. He argues that were this the case, then this limited deity would be surpassed by some other entity which would have the requisite power to overcome human suffering.<sup>122</sup> As there is no evidence for such a being, it is the deity who must ultimately accept responsibility for the presence of evil. In hylotheism it is the finite power of the godhead which prevents it from overcoming the evil in the universe. Reines asserts that as progress is denied of the godhead of hylotheism, human suffering is not precluded from such process. He states: "Since process serves only deity's need, any direction that process takes accomplishes this with the result that human good or evil can result from it." "[T]he existential need and impuissance of the godhead require it."<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>121</sup>Charles Hartshorne, A Natural Theology for Our Time, edited by William Reese (LaSalle: Open Court Publishing Co., 1964), p. 4.

<sup>122</sup>Reines, "Hylotheism", pp. 40-41.

<sup>123</sup>Ibid., p. 18.



## CHAPTER EIGHT

## HYLOTHEISM

In contrast to partial process theologies is the pure process theology of hylotheism. In this process theology no portion of the godhead is static. The entirety of that which is defined as the godhead is in constant flux. Hylotheism derives its name from the Greek word, *hylos*, meaning *potential*. Hylotheism, then, refers to the theology which characterizes God as potential or the enduring possibility of being, where being is equivalent to *sensa* and *selfa*. In hylotheism "deity is conceived of as entirely and always becoming -- the possibilities constituting the godhead continually going out of existence and new possibilities arising."<sup>124</sup> Reines states the following of his theology:

"The essential concept of hylotheism is that the godhead is in constant process.... For to the degree that the godhead changes so does the nature of human beings change, bringing into existence new conditions and requirements for the attainment of *soteria*."<sup>125</sup>

Hylotheism is a system of thought which expresses the idea that underlying and preceding that which is empirically verifiable, actual existence, is a potentiality which provides the ground for that being to exist in actuality. Actual being, then, supplies proof that such potentiality exists. That actual being is continually manifest is

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<sup>124</sup>Ibid., p. 17.

<sup>125</sup>Ibid., pp. 47-48.

evidence for the endurance of this possibility for being or God.<sup>126</sup>

In clarifying the essential ideas expressed by hylotheism, Reines has outlined three principles inherent in it: the actuality principle, the equivalence principle and the process-time principle. These principles address major concerns of both process and non-process theology. They are the underlying principles of hylotheism and together reveal that hylotheism is coherent with an empirically verifiable reality which often challenges the validity of non-hylotheistic theology. Reines posits five fundamental facts of existence which he claims "represent major instances of the 'hard' facts that confront theology...":<sup>127</sup> the existence of dysteleological surds; existence only through destruction; evolution; death; and the value-death of the universe. In this chapter, I shall first present Reines's three principles of hylotheism and later go on to discuss how they respond to the five fundamental facts of existence.

#### THE ACTUALITY PRINCIPLE

The actuality principle explains why there is being or actual existence, namely, the universe.... This is appropriate since a cosmology would seem rather incomplete without offering an answer to the ancient question: Why existence, why not nothingness? The answer of hylotheism to this question is that the godhead, the enduring

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<sup>126</sup>Such a theology differs radically from the Aristotelian notions of an immutable, omnipotent personal God. The God of hylotheism is neither a person, nor omnipotent, nor immutable.

<sup>127</sup>Reines, "Hylotheism", p. 14.

possibility of being, requires actual existence for its own existence. Inasmuch as possibilities reside in being, without being there would be no possibilities, and the godhead would cease to exist. Being is thus an instrument of the godhead's existence. In sum: the actuality principle states that being or the universe exists only because the godhead's existence requires it.<sup>128</sup>

The significance of the actuality principle is that it answers the question of "Why being?" Simply put, there is being because the godhead requires it. Reines explains that the godhead is made up of possibilities which inhere in actual being. Without actual being, then, there would be nothing in which the godhead could inhere, thereby precluding its existence. Accordingly, as the godhead requires actual existence for its own existence, so then, there is being as a necessary requirement of the godhead of hylotheism.

Inasmuch as what is actual can only emerge out of that which is possible, hylotheism posits that all that exists in actuality emerges out of the existent potentialities of the godhead. As not every humanly conceivable actuality has a possibility for its actual existence, such limitations having been imposed by present actual existents, it can be inferred that there are limitations to the godhead. Such deficiencies are incorporated into the godhead, thereby rendering the God of hylotheism finite. These limitations are that the godhead has no actual being, it cannot overcome nothingness, and that the godhead cannot overcome human

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<sup>128</sup> Ibid., pp. 15-16.

suffering. Also, the God of hylotheism, existing only as potential and having no actual existence with which one can relate, is not a person with whom one can communicate nor one with whom one can enter into relationship.<sup>129</sup>

### THE EQUIVALENCE PRINCIPLE

According to hylotheism all actualities or instances of being are of equivalent worth to the godhead. This is that they enable the continuation of the divine existence as described above. Any and every occurrence of being performs this function so that to deity no actuality is of greater value than any other.<sup>130</sup>

As indicated by Reines's equivalence principle, all instances of actual being, the universe and all it contains, are of equivalent value to the hylotheistic deity. This value is expressed in the actuality principle which asserts that the purpose or telos of every and any instance of actual being is to provide actual being in which the potentialities which make up the godhead can inhere, thus conserving the existence of the godhead. That such actual existents may produce human suffering is, as stated above, indicative of the limited nature of the godhead of hylotheism. Such a deity cannot overcome the presence of human suffering as such a God cannot acknowledge the humanocentric distinctions made between "suffering" and

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<sup>129</sup>Such a God has no capacity for either a written communication of Revelation nor an oral communication, as claimed by prophets. Accordingly, all "divine commandments" which have as their authority either a written text or an oral transmission have no legitimate authority as the God of hylotheism is incapable of authoring such commands.

<sup>130</sup>Reines, "Hylotheism", p. 16.

"pleasure." All such terms are of no relevance to God, which places equal value on every actuality.

#### THE PROCESS-TIME PRINCIPLE

More intriguing and certainly more fundamental to the Greek philosophers than the question of "Why being, why not nothingness?" was "Why becoming?"; that is, why does process or change occur? The answer necessitated by hylotheism is that the power of deity to prevail over nothingness is limited to the point where it is only capable of being the ground of being or actualities that survive ephemerally.... [T]he view of hylotheism is that process results from divine imperfection, the godhead's inability to attain an assured and lasting dominance over nonexistence.... Similarly, the existential need of deity requires time, the movement of present to future. As already observed, the possibilities that make up the godhead are transient. The godhead would therefore go out of existence if there were no time. For the possibilities of a particular present perish, and only the emergence into existence of new possibilities give duration to the godhead. In sum: the process-time principle is that process and time entail neither human progress nor regress; either may occur as the consequence of a process-time which is solely an instrument for satisfying the existential need of the finite godhead.<sup>131</sup>

Hylotheism is designated as a pure process theology. Such designation indicates that its God is in constant process. The process-time principle explains the reasons why such change does occur and, given that such change occurs, how it is achieved.

All actual existents, by virtue of the fact that they are actual being, are temporally finite. As that which is real or has actual existence is constantly falling away to make room for new reality, the possibilities which precedes

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<sup>131</sup>Ibid., pp. 16-18.



those future actual existences and inhere in them are also in constant process. God, then, defined as the endurance of those potentials which allow for future actuality, is continually altered by that which is realized. The process-time principle indicates that this process within the godhead, and therefore within actual being, comes about from the godhead itself. Simply put, change from actual existence to non-existence occurs because the godhead cannot sustain an enduring existence for actual beings. This is the primary limitation of the godhead. The godhead, possessing such a nature, cannot exercise absolute control over actual existence. What does remain within the power of the godhead, by virtue of its own endurance as the possibility of being, is an ability to provide potentialities for being such that they may become some actual being. This process, however, can only occur in time. This is explained by the second half of the process-time principle.

While it is evident that actual beings, possessing potentials for new being, may give rise to those potentials in new, actual beings, such a process cannot occur without the passage of time. While time itself is indeed empirically elusive, it is evidenced in actual beings whenever process occurs. If time were to cease, however, it would follow that actual beings would cease to exist as the possibilities which give rise to their continued existence as actual beings would no longer have the requisite time in which to allow the process from potential to actual to



occur. Without time, then, all being -- potential and actual -- would cease to exist. Thus for its own continued existence the godhead requires time.

#### CORROBORATIVE EVIDENCE

Reines posits that aside from the evidence which immediately gives support for the truth of hylotheism, there exists corroborative evidence for its truth, as well. He notes five fundamental facts of existence to which, he asserts, only hylotheism can offer a meaningful response. The three principles of hylotheism stated above are coherent with these five fundamental facts of existence, here restated: the existence of dysteleological surds; existence only through destruction; evolution; death; and the value-death of the universe.<sup>132</sup>

In addressing the existence of evil, Reines posits that hylotheism alone responds satisfactorily to the problem of theodicy. Reines utilizes Brightman's term, "dysteleological surd," to describe that "evil which is inherently and irreducibly evil, containing within itself no principle of development or improvement."<sup>133</sup> While departing from Brightman by asserting the existence of dysteleological surds, Reines finds within his experience that there are such actualities which cannot be expressed as a good in any fashion, as they produce some measure of human

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<sup>132</sup>Ibid., p. 14.

<sup>133</sup>Brightman, A Philosophy., pp. 245-246.

suffering. The existence of such dysteleological surds provides further evidence for the truth of hylotheism. The Holocaust need not be recalled as witness to the existence of surd evil in the universe. There are newborns who die of AIDS related illnesses. Millions of individuals are poverty-stricken. Emotional disturbances and pain, suffered from a variety of losses, wrack the lives of countless people. These facts attest to the vastness of human suffering. As the actuality principle states, the godhead requires actual existence for its own existence. This principle in conjunction with the equivalence principle, which states that all instances of actuality are of equivalent worth to the godhead, together yield that the actuality of such entities *including dysteleological surds* would sufficiently provide for the existential needs of the godhead. Thus, while human suffering is an element of such actualities, the existence of dysteleological surds, though not specifically required by the godhead, in accordance with the existent possibilities for their actual existence as determined by the present actualities in existence, is not and cannot be precluded by the godhead.

The second fundamental fact of existence presents another challenge to hylotheism's theodicy: existence only through destruction. Reines asserts that this "is exemplified by the obvious fact that all living beings, ... non-carnivorous plants and inanimate systems from sub-atomic particles to galaxies must by incorporation destroy either the structures or integrity (that is, the independent or

pure condition) of other entities in order to exist." Such a fact is coherent with hylotheism and the time-process principle. The time-process principle states that the godhead cannot prevail over nothingness. Hence, coherent with and as a result of the finite power of the godhead, the "quantity of existence available to actualities is...limited with the result that to exist one actuality must take existence from another by destroying it."<sup>134</sup>

In addressing what he terms "the fact of evolution," Reines asserts that the process of the "survival of the fittest" is coherent with the process of hylotheism. As evolution describes the process by which beings which did not possess the capacity or potential for a continued existence ceased their existence, as they were not sufficiently fit for survival, so too, hylotheism posits that in order for an actuality to endure as an actual existent it requires the inherence of future possibilities for actual existence within its present actual existence. So then, the process of evolution is coherent with the process of hylotheism.

Perhaps most disturbing to the theologian is the question: "Why is there death?" Whereas the answer given to this question in the Biblical book of Genesis<sup>135</sup> is that death is the result of the sins of Adam and Eve, hylotheism responds with the process-time principle, stating that death

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<sup>134</sup>Reines, "Hylotheism", pp. 20-21.

<sup>135</sup>See Genesis 2:15-17; 3:14-24.

comes from the inability of the godhead to prevail over nothingness.

Reines posits two kinds of human death: death-in-life and death-of-life. Distinguishing between them Reines states:

Since the actual existence of a human in its entirety consists of a single selfum or sensum, and each endures only instants in time, humans are continually going out of existence or perishing. This form of perishing is called death-in-life -- for new selfa emerge linked by memory to the selfa and sensa that have perished. Death, as ordinarily understood, is the cessation of a perished selfum and sensum series that can be linked together by a presently existing selfum recollecting the series. This constitutes death-of-life.<sup>136</sup>

Death-of-life, then, is the death of the process of death-in-life. This latter death, Reines asserts, is responsible for the feelings of angst or asoteria, a mental state in which an individual has lost ultimate meaningful existence. Death-in-life and death-of-life typify the hylotheistic process of actual being continually going out of existence yet potential being providing for a renewed existence. Thus God, as the enduring possibility of being, is limited in that it cannot provide humans with temporally infinite existence.

Additionally, Reines gives evidence in support of the truth of hylotheism as it relates to several theories of the universe. As the value-death of the universe is speculated by scientists, hylotheism alone among theologies is coherent with this fact of existence.

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<sup>136</sup>Ibid., pp. 25-26.

In offering scientific support for his view of the truth of hylotheism, Reines cites W. Sullivan, a physicist who writes:

We do not know for sure whether the universe is open or closed...If the universe (is open and) expands forever, the stars, one by one will collapse into white dwarfs, neutron stars, and black holes (or some other form of superdense state). The white dwarfs will cool into black dwarfs. The pulsars will radiate away their energy, and run down. The end will be universal darkness....If, as many would prefer on philosophical grounds, the universe stops expanding and collapses, perhaps to rebound into a new universe as part of a cycle without beginning or end, the prospects for anyone alive at the time of collapse are no more appealing.<sup>137</sup>

Reines remarks on this evidence for the eventual destruction of the universe. He states:

Thus the direction of the universe is toward extinction of everything that reasonable human beings hold valuable: either in an eternal lifeless cold and darkness (as the evidence now indicates), or in the annihilation of a big crunch singularity that is followed by a new beginning, a senseless cycle in which whatever is valuable is always doomed to ultimate and inevitable destruction. I find the optimistic view of God and the universe set forth by partial process theology to be incoherent with the destiny of the universe as presently conceived by scientific cosmology.<sup>138</sup>

In affirming the eventual value-death of the universe, Reines does not contradict the equivalence principle, as a universe without value is to the godhead of equal worth to a universe with value. The sole value of the universe to the hylotheistic godhead is that it provides the godhead with

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<sup>137</sup>W. Sullivan, Black Holes (New York: Bantam Books, 1979), pp. 267-268.

<sup>138</sup>Reines, "Hylotheism", pp. 43-44.



existence.

### SUMMARY

While it is clear that the God of hylotheism differs greatly from the majority of historical Jewish views of God, such a God is nonetheless coherent with what is known to be true as regards an empirically verifiable universe. Reines offers a brief summary of his definition of the God of hylotheism in the following paragraphs:

By God I mean the metaphysical cause or ground of being and/or the processes of being. The primary importance of the human search for an understanding of the ground of being is to acquire the knowledge necessary to attain soteria, that is, ultimate meaningful existence.... Belief in one category of God-views provides for a resolution of the conflict of finitude by the decision that through God's grace, despite appearances, humans are ultimately infinite; another category of God-views requires the decision that humans are ineluctably finite. Theistic absolutism belongs to the former category; hylotheism and process theologies generally belong to the latter.

It is evident that hylotheism represents a God-view that gives no comfort to those whose psyches are dominated by infinite conation and require therefore assurance of personal infinite and invulnerable existence to attain soteria. Even for those who are capable of resigning themselves to finite existence and the consequent acceptance of the ultimate finality of death, hylotheism is an austere and demanding God-view. Why then should one accept it? For the reason given earlier for accepting any God-view, the conviction that it is true.<sup>139</sup>

Seeking an awareness of the ever-changing nature of the godhead, Reines maintains, is the responsibility of the Polydox Reform Jew, that he or she might best be enabled to

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<sup>139</sup>Hylotheism, p. 13-14.



fulfill the religious goal of the attainment of a state of soteria; finding ultimate meaningful existence in life.

## CHAPTER NINE

### A CRITIQUE OF HYLOTHEISM

#### POLYDOX REFORM JUDAISM

Hylotheism is the Reform Jewish theology to which Dr. Alvin J. Reines assents. He defines authentic Reform Judaism as a Polydoxy. Given this, it is appropriate to focus first on the notion of Reform Judaism as a Polydoxy. Polydoxy asserts the autonomy of the individual members of a religious community and regards the relations among these autonomous members to be governed fundamentally by the Freedom Covenant. The Freedom Covenant states that every member of a religious community pledges to affirm the ultimate religious self-authority of all other members in return for their pledge to affirm his or her own.<sup>140</sup> In Polydox Reform Judaism, then, no individual has the authority to determine for another individual those beliefs to which he or she assents, and no individual member can mandate or limit the freedom of other members of the community. Inasmuch as the beliefs and practices of an individual member of a Polydox Reform Jewish community cannot be limited by another member, self-authority is granted to every individual member to accept whichever God-view that individual finds compelling. Thus, a Reform Jew may assent to any theology, including hylotheism, so long as

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<sup>140</sup>Reines, Polydoxy, p. 25.

he or she does not compel another Reform Jew to subscribe to those beliefs.

Reines, in accordance with this notion of Reform Judaism, rightly asserts that the individual Reform Jew, as a free<sup>141</sup> being, possesses the right to determine for himself or herself the requirements for belief in a God-view. He states that such criteria must be arbitrarily chosen because inasmuch as no individual has authority to assert for another individual those ideas which must be accepted as true, so then there can be no objective basis from which one might argue for theological truth. This requires that all criteria for determining theological truth must be understood to be subjective. Such a methodology is in full keeping with the Polydox principles Reines has set forth for Reform Judaism.

#### TRUTH AND BEING

Reines defines truth not in relation to all individuals, but in relation to the self. He maintains that truth is determined by whatever subjective criteria one sets for asserting it. Basing himself on this principle, Reines holds that empirically verifiable evidence is required by him in order to assent to a belief or proposition. It is empirical evidence, he states, that must be presented to verify every claim that some extramental entity exists.

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<sup>141</sup>This freedom is not to be understood as a freedom in contrast to a determinism. Rather, it is a freedom of self rule or autonomy.

Such a criterion is in accordance with the autonomous structure of Reform Judaism that he has set forth.

A difficulty which remains is the nature of the relationship between the extramental world and the realm of *sensa* and *selfa*. Reines uses the term *sensa* to refer to those subjective mental phenomena that are experienced as appearing through the five senses. He asserts that *sensa*, though subjective and created by mind, are realized from an extramental ground, the enduring possibility of being. Those intramental phenomena which are experienced by introspection as coming from within the person he terms *selfa*. They do not correspond to an extramental reality. Reines identifies the term "misrepresented selfum" as a designation of that which an individual refers to as a *sensum*, that mental phenomena produced by an extramental existent, which is actually a *selfum*. Based upon his inability to acquire empirical evidence for the existence of such an entity, Reines would assert that it exists only as a *selfum*. If he cannot empirically verify what another has determined to be empirically verifiable, Reines has no grounds for assenting to the truth of its "extramental" existence. Not only may disagreement result from so subjective an entity as *selfum*, it is also the case that Reines cannot determine for another individual whether or not that individual is experiencing *sensa* or *selfa*.

The enduring possibility of being or existence, where existence is synonymous with *sensa* and *selfa*, is only extant within the mind. That *sensa* and *selfa* exist only in our

mind is problematic, however. Reines assumes that there is a relationship between that which exists in extramental reality and the sensa in our minds. Such a God is claimed by Reines to have extramental existence through the empirical verifiability of the sensa it produces. Yet how can Reines assert that "empirically verified being" has an extramental existence, given that the definition of "existence" is empirical verifiability? This is a tautology. It would appear that Reines cannot claim any extramental existence either for the godhead of hylotheism or any other empirically verified entity. Empiricism as Reines has defined it does not seem to allow such a possibility. He can only claim that hylotheism is coherent within the confines of his own mental processes. This dilemma in Reines's thinking uniquely places him as a "subjective empiricist".<sup>142</sup>

This criticism leveled against his ability to demonstrate extramental existence, however, does not detract from his asserting ideas as true. Reines would claim that in asserting truth, only he needs compelling evidence for asserting such truth. Consequently, his extramental reality need only be real for him.

While Reines does criticize other theologies as false for him, it must not be forgotten that his criticism is not intended to discredit such theologies as necessarily false

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<sup>142</sup>This is my own term for one whose basis for truth is empirical evidence, yet does not claim that such evidence is universal.

for all individuals. As he does not intend to limit others by that which he finds to be true, truth ceases to be a term positing ideas to which all others must assent. A religious structure wherein an individual can assert his or her autonomy while preserving the freedom of the other to accept as real whatever God-view they find to be true is found only in Polydoxy.

### UNIVERSALISM AND PARTICULARISM

In rejecting the notion of a universal truth, he simultaneously denies universal values. While there are certain individuals who maintain that the particularism of Jewish identity conflicts with a broad universalism, Reines does not object to universalism on the grounds of a Jewish particularism. He rejects universalism as it is incoherent with what he perceives to be true of the universe. While the universalist may struggle with a belief in the particularism of Jewish identity, Reines is not confronted by this challenge. His authenticity as a Jew is assured by virtue of the fact that he identifies as a Jew. In a Polydox structure, such self-authenticating identity is a valid means for proclaiming one's identity as a Jew. Ironically, Polydoxy, granting autonomy to the individual, would engender the fostering of particularism. This is not a difficulty for Reines as in such a Polydox structure freedom is assured to all members of the Polydox community and thus the particular individual's beliefs are protected.



### THE LIMITS OF FREEDOM

Hylotheism is the only religious system which grants to the individual autonomy for freedom of thought. Yet, as the rights of every individual are protected to the extent of the limits of an individual's freedom, a difficulty arises as one approaches the limits of that freedom. Where the values of one individual might hold that certain behaviors are within the limits of their autonomy, another's values might equally maintain that such behaviors have crossed over into the realm of another person's autonomy. The hylotheistic God of process neither asserts values as true (which would then be asserted as true by the individual assenting to hylotheism), nor does it deny that a given value is true (which would then be denied by the individual assenting to hylotheism). As neither individual has a greater claim to the validity of the values to which they assent, hylotheism, in the interest of preserving the rights of both individuals, would demand a Polydox structure wherein neither person's autonomy is compromised.

The current dispute over abortion and the woman's right to choice is a fitting example of such a conflict where a blurring of lines might exist for one or both parties involved. As there can be no certainty as to the nature of the personhood of an unborn fetus, the question cannot be resolved with any satisfaction or surety. What can be certain, though, is that while individuals might disagree as to who has the greater claim to truth, in a Polydox system

both individuals retain freedom or control over themselves, each choosing how they shall respond to the existential questions which present themselves to them.

What emerges as a challenge for Polydox Reform Judaism is the formation of a community as it struggles for consensus on how it might best preserve the rights of its members. Freedom alone is a slender thread binding individuals together. In asserting the validity of Polydoxy and hylotheism, Reines has authored numerous works expressing the values of this freedom and the hylotheistic godhead. Written in multivalent language, they serve to meet the needs of a diverse community while uniting the community on such commonalities as expressed by hylotheism.

#### THE SELF AND THE NON-SELF

As demanding as the extreme of freedom for the individual may be, it is asserted due to the lack of one individual's authority to determine for another individual how he or she ought live. Reines, in asserting Polydoxy, affirms that the point of origin from which one moves toward that limit is to be found within the individual. He makes such a claim based upon empiricism, as defined above. While it may equally be asserted that the authority for setting this limit lies outside the self, Reines has no evidence for such a claim. While there remain difficulties in asserting that the individual may claim such self-rule, the "self" is

not readily defined.<sup>143</sup>

Given Reines's assertion that the individual's freedom extends to the limits of another's freedom, it remains for the individual to define his limits in relation to that other. It must be understood, then, that determining those limits can only be done in consonance with those who are external to the individual. It remains to be seen how the individual, in consonance with others, can determine his or her limits, (thus distinguishing between himself or herself and those selves external to that individual) if such terms as "self" and "external" require another individual for significance.

Attempting to resolve such difficulties, Reines claims that all that can be known by him is that for which he has empirical evidence. Accordingly, he could only assert that his "self" extended to the limits of his person as experienced by him. Whereas others may disagree with his definition of self, unless they could empirically demonstrate to him that the limits of his self existed elsewhere, he would insist that such a definition of self was the only definition to which he could assent.

### VALUES

No principle, regardless of its widespread appeal, can

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<sup>143</sup>The complexity of this philosophical problem is explored in-depth by Eli Hirsch, The Concept of Identity (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982). See especially pp. 201-210.

be mandated in a Polydox religious system. It follows logically, then, that Reform Judaism cannot mandate either the necessity of values or the content of those values for its members. Nevertheless, Reines, in identifying human intolerance as a source of human suffering, has placed freedom at the apex of his religious system. This is in itself reflective of his supreme value: the primacy of individual freedom. While the principles of Polydox Reform community would not compel any of its members to assent to a particular value, including freedom, it remains that in order for such a religious system to endure, it must require of its members the preservation of the freedom for the other. This, then, emerges as the sole value to which all Polydox Reform Jews must commit themselves. Consequently, the Freedom Covenant stands as a binding force upon all those who wish to identify as Polydox Reform Jews. It is this covenant, Reines maintains, which marks the authentic Reform Jewish community.

The equivalence principle of hylotheism asserts that all actual being is of equivalent worth to the godhead. Thus the godhead of hylotheism does not endorse any value, including freedom. Consequently, criticism has been leveled against hylotheism as nihilistic. Hylotheism, however, exists within a Polydox religious structure. Polydox Reform Judaism, though, identifies freedom as integral to its definition. While it might appear that a contradiction exists between the value-laden religious structure of Polydoxy and the value-free theology of hylotheism, Reines

thwarts such attacks. As "freedom for the individual" is most certainly not a value-free ideal, so then the Freedom Covenant cannot be labelled nihilistic.

### SOTERIA

Bruno Bettelheim, in his introduction to The Uses of Enchantment, makes the following comment: "If we hope to live not just from moment to moment, but in true consciousness of our existence, then our greatest need and most difficult achievement is to find meaning in our lives."<sup>144</sup> Reines, in accord with contemporary psychologists,<sup>145</sup> has posited that the primary function of religion is the attainment of soteria, ultimate meaningful existence, achieved by resolving the conflict of finitude. While Polydoxy guarantees personal freedom, and it has been shown that the libertarian nature of the Polydoxian Freedom Covenant allows for the attainment of soteria, the primary test for the validity of hylotheism as a theology of a Polydox religious system is in determining whether or not it contributes to the resolution of this conflict and offers a means by which one might attain soteria. While Reines could legitimately respond that hylotheism is valid in that it provides him with a means of attaining soteria, it is the

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<sup>144</sup>Bruno Bettelheim, The Uses of Enchantment (New York: Vintage Books, 1975), p. 4.

<sup>145</sup>See also A. J. Reines's "Freud's Theory of Knowledge" for an analysis of Freud's view of God and religion.



purpose of this work to determine whether or not such a theology might hold significance for others -- offering them the ability to attain soteria, should they also seek that as their highest goal. In either case, hylotheism is presented as a valid theology for Reines, and, given the context in which Reines offers such a theology, it remains valid.

While Polydoxy cannot guarantee that every individual assenting to the truth of hylotheism and its religious system will attain soteria, such a system does not prevent any individual from attaining that state of existence. The attainment of soteria is achieved privately. One must realize, then, that only in a religious system which grants to every individual the right to make a response to finitude which might provide him or her with soteria -- thereby imbuing the religious system with the possibility of universal soterial existence -- can the potential for the actual reality of universal soterial existence be claimed.

When one affirms belief in a god which is the enduring possibility of being, one necessarily affirms a belief that what currently exists is not identical to that which has the possibility of existence. If we are to make a substantive response to finitude, living through what we are currently, then we resign ourselves to the status quo, however brief that may be. In making the substantive response to finitude, living through this present reality, we use induction to assume the actuality of the future, especially the realization of our particular ideals and values. But we also become aware that in order for us to shape our world



into the kind of world which would produce soteria for us, we must confront the present actual world. As we are currently limited to the world of actual existence, we must then so act as to shape our world into the kind of world which would bring about a state of soterial existence for us; if we are to find meaning in our lives, we must do so within the confines of the currently extant universe. It is only in accepting hylotheism then, Reines maintains, that all people might find such ultimate meaningful existence.

Hylotheism suggests, however, that as the godhead conserves the universe, new actualities, emerging from the potential established by the previously existing actual entities, are limited by the potentials which preceded them. In so describing reality, a somewhat deterministic mechanism of the universe is posited with a limited freedom for the individual. Such limited freedom raises the question as to what extent humankind is really free to make any choices about his or her beliefs or behaviors.

#### ONTOLOGY, COSMOLOGY AND TELEOLOGY

Reines's hylotheism responds to three characteristics traditionally attributed to God: being, motion, and purposefulness. His willingness to confront these hard theological questions reveals that Reines, too, is not capable of asserting a God which cannot respond to such issues. While Reines asserts that hylotheism is coherent with several fundamental facts of existence, his proofs bear

this out. There is a coherence of hylotheism with what is true of the universe.<sup>146</sup>

### SUMMARY

As the formulation of a theological question affects its outcome, so it must be remembered that Reines posits a question of ontology: to what existent may he refer to God? Thus, his response must appear in a form which provides evidence for the existence of some entity, named God. As the evidence which Reines seeks need only provide him with suitable grounds for determining truth, it must be implicit in his having accepted hylotheism as true that he has found evidence sufficient for asserting that such a God exists.

Yet, in asserting that the godhead of hylotheism has being, Reines further clarifies his use of the term "existence" or "being". He defines the hylotheistic godhead as possible being inhering in actual being. What Reines does not make clear is the nature of the process between potential being and actual being. There are several questions he leaves unanswered: What is the relationship between potential and actual? At what moment does this occur? If it can be posited of something that it undergoes change from actual being to potential being, at what moment does this occur? If the statement being made is that

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<sup>146</sup>The how of existence, the how of change, and the why of either have not been answered by Borowitz. While he rejects that such questions need answers, there remains a human desire for ordering the universe in a pattern which is intelligible to them.

something does not undergo change but rather facilitates the change of the present actual to the future actual, how is the present actual acted upon if the possibility for its change has no existence, hence no substance? What can be said to be acting upon the matter of reality? Is this God?

Whereas the godhead of hylotheism requires actual being for its own existence, and whereas the expanding universe theory suggests that at some point in time the universe will reach zero density and thus will have no substance, the godhead, too, will go out of existence. It would seem, though, that this godhead would cease to exist when all minds cease to have an awareness of the actual being it grounded. Such a God, then, contrary to Reines's assertion that it is temporally infinite, would have limited endurance.

Hylotheism is a non-theistic finitism. Such a distinction is made of hylotheism because of its rejection of the tenets of theism and the limited nature of the Godhead, it having no actual existence, an inability to overcome human suffering, and a dependence upon actual being for its own continued existence.

Can it be said of this god that it is wholly immanent or wholly transcendent? Whereas Borowitz posits a God who is simultaneously immanent and transcendent, having existence both beyond a physical realm and yet present in the sense of nearness and availability to humans, Reines rejects the plausibility of transcendence as such a God-view has no empirical verifiability and thus cannot be stated to

be true. Accordingly, God, for Reines, can only have an immanent nature. Any other designation would be meaningless to him.

Reines does not touch upon the source of the universe in his essay on hylotheism. He seems to suggest, however, that God, requiring actual being for its own existence, would require a universe comprised of eternally existent matter. Accordingly, creatio ex nihilo must be denied by him.

Borowitz critiques hylotheism<sup>147</sup> by way of criticizing a process God, which necessarily holds no special value for the particularity of the Jewish people. Also, such a God of process effects no providential role in the world, it does not respond to the individuals prayers, it cannot claim responsibility for creating the universe. All of these may be weaknesses within the God of process, yet these faults may be part of the limited nature of the only logically tenable God. That the Jewish people is not elevated by this theology is less a fault of hylotheism than it is a fact of ultimate reality. In so stating, I give credence to the God of process, while denying the God of Torah and of the Torah Life to which Borowitz makes frequent reference. Reines would concur with the "dispensable" nature of the Jewish people, as the godhead requires of all actual existents that they go out of existence. Yet, in his having redefined the nature of Judaism and the membership of the Jewish people,

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<sup>147</sup>Borowitz, Renewing., p. 126.

such annihilation is neither necessary nor desirable.

In positing his views in a Polydox structure, Reines ensures that all others may believe whatever they find meaningful. Additionally, Polydoxy, denying the authority to any of its members to mandate belief, precludes fundamentalism. A belief system which protects the rights of all individuals to exercise their individual beliefs, whatever the latter's specific content may be (given the limits of that freedom ending at the threshold of another's freedom), is an appealing structure for all liberal religions.

## EPILOGUE

Humankind endeavors to seek an understanding of the world in which it exists. Whether such explorations manifest themselves in the form of theology or physics is dependant upon the individual seeking a meaningful existence. While Eugene Borowitz finds solace in his relationship with a living God, known through non-rational faith, Alvin Reines resolves his intrapsychic conflicts in confrontation with all he knows to be real. Who has the surer answer? None can answer but for themselves. As the century draws to a close and Judaism approaches its sixth millennium, the struggle for personal fulfillment continues. In hoping that the future will be one wherein all who seek meaning are successful in their search, all much realize that they must labor to build such a heaven on earth. Sadly, as the people of our world realize that the future is found in economic unity, they find it necessary to distinguish themselves in cultural individualism, proclaiming their identity while suppressing their neighbors'. It is the purpose of liberal Judaism, then, to provide a religious system which not only fulfills whatever attachment to traditions we may harbor, but one which also meets the challenges of our present crises. Thus, it is my hope that this work will sufficiently provide those individuals seeking fulfillment in their religious quest with enlightenment as to the current scope of serious



inquiry into the resolution of the crises of today in order that they might advance the thoughts of Borowitz or Reines and arrive at a plateau from which many others might envision the future of our Reform Jewish faith.

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BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE FOR EUGENE B. BOROWITZ

"Dr. Eugene B. Borowitz was born in 1924 in New York City, the son of Benjamin and Mollie Borowitz. The family moved to Columbus, Ohio, where young Eugene received a Jewish education in a Conservative synagogue. Borowitz first began to think about becoming a rabbi in high school, when he wrote a letter to the then Hebrew Union College. He was ordained in 1948 and two years after ordination returned to the college to pursue a doctoral degree. When the Korean War intervened, Borowitz became a chaplain and finished his doctorate while in military service.

"Borowitz entered congregational life, subsequently joined the staff of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, where he rose to the position of director of the Reform movement's Commission on Jewish Education, and ultimately joined the faculty of the New York Campus of the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion. He has served and taught there with distinction for close to three decades."<sup>148</sup>

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<sup>148</sup>Rifat Sonsino and Daniel B. Syme, What Happens After I Die? (New York: U.A.H.C. Press, 1990), pp. 107-108.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE FOR ALVIN J. REINES

"Dr. Alvin Reines, professor of Jewish Philosophy at the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion in Cincinnati, has become known as one of the most brilliant yet challenging thinkers of the modern period.

"Reines, educated in Orthodox Jewish religious institutions and a descendant of a family that includes eminent rabbis such as the founder of the Mizrachi, an important Orthodox Zionist organization, had originally intended to enter the Orthodox rabbinate. Influenced by his studies in philosophy and psychology, Reines in time came to the personal conviction that Orthodox Judaism was based on beliefs that were untenable when critically examined.

"Upon graduation from Yeshiva University, Reines determined to pursue his studies in a liberal Jewish environment suitable to an inquisitive mind and open to critical thinking. He was ordained from the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion in Cincinnati in 1952, received a doctorate in Philosophy from Harvard in 1958, and has touched thousands of students with his challenging ideas in subsequent years.

"In 1970, Reines and a group of his disciples founded the Institute of Creative Judaism, a research and development institution that publishes liturgy, philosophy, and educational materials emanating from Reines's philosophy

of Reform Judaism as a Polydoxy."<sup>149</sup>

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<sup>149</sup>Rifat. Sonsino and Daniel B. Syme, What Happens After I Die? (New York: U.A.H.C. Press, 1990), pp. 126-127.