Special Status for Groups
by Russell Hardin

Group Autarky

In general, national autarky will depress productivity and income. Similarly, group autarky within a society will hinder productivity and especially productivity growth if the autarky is economic as well as social. The scale of the American economy is smaller because the Old Order Amish, Indians on tribal reservations, and inner-city blacks are virtually out of the American market. But the Amish, reservation Indian, and inner-city black economies are radically smaller than they would be if they were more fully integrated with the national market.

Many advocates of group difference insist that something would be lost if all groups were merely assimilated socially and economically. I wish to address the problems that such groups, especially communal groups, pose for economic productivity and development, both for themselves and for the larger society. I will also consider the normative claims for maintaining group differences through governmental preferences of various kinds. It is commonly asserted that government should support such groups by protecting them against the ravages of full integration in the larger society, perhaps on analogy with traditional views that government should protect individuals in various ways against the depredations of other individuals.

Allowing groups their own autarkic existence often seems normatively unproblematic. But it raises two practical questions with normative implications. First, how do we deal with the costs inflicted on children of their parents’ desire for autarky. Second, how should we allocate the costs of such autarky, if there are any, between the autarkic group and the rest of society. There is a huge literature in political philosophy on the first of these questions, and I will address it only briefly below. The most common view on this question in western philosophy and politics is roughly that of John Stuart Mill. While adults should be allowed the autonomy to go their own way if they wish, children may justifiably be protected by government until they reach such age as to be capable of autonomy. There is very little literature of any kind on the second of these questions, and it is this question I wish to address here. In particular, I will be concerned with the economic costs of social group autarky.

Social Interests

To weigh the problem of socially autarkic groups, we must draw a distinction that is often not necessary for explanation of behavior but that is often taken to be relevant for moral judgment of groups and their lives. This is a distinction that is commonly drawn by defenders of communal group norms: a distinction between economic and social interests. Economic interests seem relatively easily translatable into income. Social interests might also be translated into economic interests, although many advocates of various social interests insist on distinguishing them. Rather than argue this point, I wish to give as much ground to the advocates of communal social interests as plausible in order to address the implications of social group autarky.

Some advocates of social interests also insist that such interests take precedence over economic interests in any moral assessment of them when the two kinds of interest come into conflict. The distinction becomes important politically in debates over policies on economic growth. Growth in mere G.D.P., it is supposed, should not override concern for various group’s social interests, such as their interest in maintaining their community, their religion, their language, or their values, especially as expressed in their group-specific norms.

There is a vague tradition of thought that makes claims for the moral superiority of social over economic interests. In common discourse, social interests are simply held to be less crass than economic interests or, less articulately, simply to be right and inviolable. In western political philosophy the claim of moral superiority may result from a distorted appreciation of the protection of religious liberty in the tradition of liberalism that follows from John Locke. But the actual concern of early liberals is that of the illiberal Thomas Hobbes. It is to protect politics and economic life from the intrusions of religiously motivated violence and coercion. The American constitutional protections of religious liberty are similarly designed to keep religious differences and conflict out of politics.

In general, one should be wary of claims for moral superiority of group demands for political preference, especially when such preference comes at great cost to others. Most of the claims of social groups in our time do seem to entail costs to others. Even if these latter costs are “merely economic,” however, as in the higher food costs that protection of the way of life of farmers entails for consumers, they should not obviously be trumped by the supposedly
more moral social benefits. For utilitarians, of course, neither kind of good trumps the other in principle. Rather, they must be weighed against each other. Even for non-utilitarians, however, neither kind of good can trump the other in principle. If it did, then we would have to conclude that even massive economic costs are justified by trivial social benefits. While many western moral philosophers write as though this conclusion were sensible, it cannot be entertained as a plausible political principle. Indeed, it was against such views that Hobbes, Locke, and early liberals saw the need to block absolutist religious claims on the polity.

From the logic of collective action, it follows that social groups would not be able spontaneously to act on their own behalf unless their members individually saw the moral or social interests of the group as trumping their own individual economic interests enough to get them to donate time and money to the group cause. Apart from such moral commitments, they might act politically through voting if they vote. And they might be mobilized by a political entrepreneur, who benefits from leadership. An odd implication of such entrepreneurship is that it can actually heighten the sense people might have of their group identity. The entrepreneur creates the group in order to be able to lead it. Creating or heightening identification with such a group may then lead to or deepen conflict between that group and the rest of its society. This is the story of Slobodan Milosevic and Franjo Tudjman, two of the most cynically destructive and bloody so-called leaders of our time.

In a further perverse twist in enabling collective action despite the logic against it, groups can develop strong norms of exclusion that are enforced against outsiders and aberrant insiders by the spontaneous actions of individual group members. These norms can be self-enforcing at the level of the group because enforcement of them can be in the interest of individual group members. As with political entrepreneurship, the development of such norms then heightens identification with the group. Such norms undergird the autarky of social groups of many kinds. And they can stimulate interest in entrepreneurial leadership of such groups. Elsewhere, I have argued that, because these effects are essentially grounded in interest, the moral claims for groups that seem articulate in their self-proclamation may in fact be misplaced. Indeed, groups with essentially universalist values cannot reinforce their members’ commitments with norms of exclusion and the sanctions that these entail. It is only groups with narrowly defined, group-specific interests that can do so.

Two Examples

To clarify the distinction between social and economic interests, consider two groups. The first group is the Lubavitch community of Brooklyn, whose interest seems clearly to be a social interest in protecting their way of life. The second group is farmers, whose interest is ostensibly the economic interest of protecting their income when harvests are so large as to drive prices down to levels that would reduce farmers to poverty.

Members of the Lubavitch community have a way of life that they want to maintain. This way of life is richly communal and religious and, in the firm beliefs of many, it entails isolation from the corrupting larger society. Substantial isolation would require economic autarky, which would entail poverty and, very likely, destruction of the community. The Lubavitchers compromise on a remarkable version of partial autarky by employing themselves in their own community in communal industry. They survive economically through the grace of other Jews in the larger society who support them through donations and by buying the religious artifacts that the Lubavitchers manufacture. Suppose the supportive buying and the donations ended. Then the Lubavitcher way of life would cease to be economically viable. They might then seek support from government, but this seems to be a fairly clear case of non-economic, social interest that government might not support any more than it would underwrite the efforts of commercially failed rock singers whose preferred way of life is full-time rock singing.

Compare the situation of the Lubavitchers to that of American farmers over the past two centuries of declining need for farmers as agricultural productivity has risen dramatically. The protection of farmers is commonly demanded as a group benefit. In a largely agrarian nation under democracy, the group of small farmers can be a very large political interest. Such protection is commonly discussed, both in political discourse and in political-economic analyses, as a matter of economic interest. The supports that farmers seek are universalistic in the sense that anyone who goes into farming in relevant ways is entitled to them. It is not the community of farmers as such, but the individual farmers who are supported. And the supports are essentially straight cash.

Yet, much of the rhetoric of support for farmers is couched in quite different terms. In the United States the issue, ostensibly, is to support the family farm—a particular way of life. To genuinely protect the way of life of farmers might eventually require the pro-Farm interests seem economic and are commonly treated as economic in the group-theory literature in the West. But they can in many ways better be seen as a social interest, perhaps especially in nations in which peasants or farmers are a very large fraction of the work force.
duction of vastly too much food. In fact, so much so that the food may need to be destroyed instead of consumed simply to keep incomes high enough to make farming viable. This has marginally been the effect of American farm supports, but it would have to be carried to much greater extreme if most farmers and their children did not leave the farm, thereby giving up their way of life. Alternatively, government could simply pay farmers to stay on the farm without producing food, as American government does in part. But if carried to extremes this policy would finally destroy the supposed way of life of farmers even while keeping them on the farm.

Hence, the interest of farmers, a very important group in most societies, is ambiguously defined even though the form of the support is straightforwardly economic. Farm interests seem economic and are commonly treated as economic in the group-theory literature in the West. But they can in many ways better be seen as a social interest, perhaps especially in nations in which peasants or farmers are a very large fraction of the work force. Their concern is not economic productivity so much as their way of life. They wish to protect that way of life despite the forces of efficiency that undercut it. Indeed, in many nations, what many farm-workers have wanted is to achieve the way of life of independent farmers and they have demanded land reform that would allow them to have that life. It seems unlikely that they would readily have accepted merely a steady income in lieu of land. It was the land and its way of life that they wanted.

Individuals and Groups

Spontaneous economic actors are of two kinds. There are individuals who largely seek their own benefits and there are groups that seek benefits for distribution to individuals within the group and, arguably, group-level goods that are not distributable to the members. Because there is generally need for government to oversee many economic provisions such as the maintenance of order and the enforcement of legal agreements, we generally have relatively strong governments that are, incidentally, capable of distributing benefits while maintaining legal and political order. Hence, economic actors can both seek benefits through entrepreneurial success in the market and demand benefits from government. With rare exceptions, individuals cannot do the latter unless they do so under entitlement or other benefit programs established for defined groups. Individuals therefore generally attempt to be productive on their own or to gain government benefits as group members.

Spontaneously mobilized or defined groups typically are also of two kinds: those organized around a specific economic interest, such as production or consumption of some economic value, and those organized around a specifically defined non-economic group, such as an ethnic group. Groups organized around a specific interest can have constantly changing membership depending on who does or does not share the interest. Groups organized as such for the sake of the actual group typically have relatively stable mem-

berships and often exclude others from the benefits they seek or enjoy. One can imagine a third kind of group mobilized around very general economic interests such as the maintenance of generally useful infrastructures or the introduction of laws that would increase efficiency of interactions. This third kind of group would generally oppose the demands of the other two kinds. But, because its interest is relatively universal, we can generally expect such a group to be relatively weak politically except when its votes are counted.

Economic growth depends centrally on the easy possibility of individual economic failure. This entails that in actual experience economic growth will be coupled with frequent individual economic failure. A corollary of this is that, in a period of economic growth in a nation as diverse as India or the United States, many social groups will fail as groups. This will particularly be true for groups whose vaunted way of life is not economically viable in a dynamic economy, as thorough-going communal autarky is not economically viable. Efforts to protect such groups are effectively efforts to dampen growth and economic efficiency just as efforts to protect individuals from failure by guaranteeing their success would dampen growth.

It is relatively easy to design universal welfare floors to protect individuals who fail economically. It is not easy to define analogous "floors" to protect groups as such when they fail. Individual members of groups can be protected under the general welfare floor for all individuals. But there is not a set of interests that groups per se have in common that can be made the elements of a universal floor for groups. If such groups are to be protected, any particular failed group will commonly have to be protected by an ad hoc program designed specifically for it.

Against many government policies that tend to destroy them, groups as such can, however, often be protected without great cost to others. For example some groups are given protection against universalizing educational programs by allowing them to have their own schools. When the government policy is one that generally benefits individuals, the group that rejects the benefit can typically be accommodated easily enough. But social groups cannot easily be protected against economic forces that undercut them without great effect on economic growth.

Special Status for Groups

Suppose we nevertheless conclude that social or moral status should be protected in some cases. What could be the form of relatively general principles for deciding when there is a proper case? One fairly simple principle is that any group that is, at least with respect to the value being protected, autarkic. For example, a religious group might worship as it pleases because it does not interfere with anyone else when it does so. But it could not impose its religious principles on non-adherents. This is Locke's and Mill's position on religious liberty and it is arguably the position of the U.S. constitution on religious freedom.

This principle of autarky could be applied to any value or norm
that a group wants protected, and not merely to religious values or practices. It is a rough analog of Mill’s harm principle, which he proposed for determining the range of individual liberty. Under the harm principle, I should be allowed to do anything I wish so long as I cause no harm to anyone else. So long as I meet this principle, I can be an atheist and reject religious requirements for salvation, but I cannot put myself at risk for any reason that motivates me, I can even do harm to myself.

Ways of life generally “need” protection, however, only when they are not economically viable. But that raises the question why others in a society should subsidize a group’s way of life. The claim of the moral rightness of the group’s difference might suffice for defending against deliberate efforts to break down the group. It does not suffice for imposing a duty on others to care for it. Groups that are not viable may simply perish without anyone being actively to blame for their perishing. In an era of dynamic economic change, we can expect groups to perish from within as the blandishments of the more dynamic economy of the larger society draws individuals out of the social group that cannot autarkically keep up with that larger society. This is not unlike the failure of egalitarian national experiments in our era in the face of blandishments from egalitarian alternatives to which the most capable could migrate. Moral defense of egalitarianism is inadequate to make it viable. Similarly, the moral defense of community is inadequate to make it viable.

Special Status for Social Groups: Conflict With Others

Giving social groups special status raises two big issues: conflicts between groups and conflicts of interest within a group. The first can sometimes be minor if a group can pursue its values with relative autarky. The second is chiefly a matter of inter-generational differences in interests, which can be enormous. In this section, I wish to address the first of the these issues. Then, in the following section, I will discuss briefly the issue of conflicts of interest internal to a social group.

Some ways of life are exclusionary, as is the Lubavitcher way of life. Lubavitchers do not wish to find new recruits in the larger society and would not welcome intruders in their community, although they would likely welcome the “return” of descendants of the Lubavitch community who have left the community. Many Serbs do not want Bosnian Muslims, many Hutus do not want Tutsis, and many Sikhs do not want Hindus in their own communities. They want separation and they commonly follow norms of exclusion.4

It would be hard to object to such exclusion if the groups were autarkically unrelated, as the Lubavitchers in the United States are relatively unrelated to the rest of the polity. But typically such groups interact heavily through the larger economy and society of which they are part. And they often practice their norms of exclusion in that larger economy as well as “within” the narrower confines of their own community. Perhaps the most important action government takes against specific groups in many societies is to break their exclusion of others in the larger economy. The American system of affirmative action and the Indian preferences for members of scheduled castes are measures in favor of excluded groups. They have their effect, if any, through their impact on the power of relevant exclusionary groups, specifically by overriding those groups’ norms of exclusion. A social group whose program is exclusionary poses a particularly severe problem if it actually gains power. Once in power, it or its leaders may choose to seek group benefits principally by extracting resources from others or by restricting job and other opportunities to their own group members.

Consider several kinds of group that have asked for or been granted special status on social or moral grounds. There have been many of great importance, such as children, women, and the elderly. But let us focus on religious groups, ethnic groups, especially minority ethnic groups, and linguistic groups. Religious, ethnic, and linguistic groups are commonly accorded special status in many nations today.

Many kinds of social group, such as professional and status groups, require exclusion to gain their privileges. The exclusion that supports professional groups is legally enforced when they gain legal control over government or policy. Status groups are fundamentally grounded in exclusion that is enforced spontaneously by members of the groups through norms of exclusion but that can also be enforced by government. Religious, ethnic, and linguistic groups are not grounded in exclusion, although religious and ethnic groups might practice exclusion and ethnic groups very often do so. Linguistic groups very often might even prefer inclusion. For example, the French seem actively to want others to speak French.
Religious Groups

Social autarky for religious groups need not have economic consequences but, if coupled with norms of exclusion, it can. Laws and wider social norms that prohibited Jews from owning real property in medieval and later Europe did have economic consequences. Indeed, those laws coupled with rival Catholic and Jewish interpretations on Biblical injunctions on lending at interest virtually created the Jewish hegemony over lending, banking, and some aspects of merchandising. But in recent times, Catholics, Jews, and Protestants have become interchangeable in western economies even when some of them have maintained strong religious communal ties. There are some religious groups in the United States—notably the Lubavitchers of Brooklyn and the Old Order Amish—that are so thoroughly autarkic that their way of life does have economic consequences, although the economic losses are borne mostly by the members of these groups rather than by the larger society. And some groups still practice enough exclusion even in their business relations that there are distinctively Catholic, Jewish, Mormon and other firms grounded in norms of religious exclusion, just as there are distinctively Irish, Anglo-Saxon, German, and so forth firms grounded in norms of ethnic exclusion.

The Old Order Amish pose an extreme example of autarky that is relatively complete. It ranges from social to economic. The Old Order Amish insist on withdrawing their children from schooling altogether after about age fourteen in order to protect them against the blandishments of the larger world by, essentially, keeping them ignorant. Moreover, they have won special dispensation from the Supreme Court to follow their policy despite its violation of state laws on the education of minors.5

While many people in the larger society object to this special dispensation for the Amish, they do not do so on the ground that it costs others. The Amish are almost fully autarkic within the larger society of the United States. Rather, they object to it as an unreasonable trammeling of Amish children, whose lack of education constrains their further lives and makes them far less autonomous than they would otherwise be. Hence, once they are adult, they might be free in principle to lead different lives. But in practice they are relatively disqualified from doing so; they are best qualified to stay at work in the narrow community of the Old Order Amish.

Linguistic Groups

Successful social autarky for linguistic groups is inherently harder than for ethnic and religious groups. Linguistic minority groups have poorer access to a nation’s economy than do the linguistic majority or the speakers of the national language. For example, those in China who master Mandarin Chinese and those in Canada who master English have broader opportunities than those who do not. Those who begin with the national or majority language as their own language have a decided advantage over those who do not. Maintaining a group’s identity when it speaks a minority language is therefore much more costly than merely maintaining the religious identity of a group that is free to compete in the economy on relatively equal terms with those of other religions. When members of a language community learn another language for economic reasons, they have simultaneously learned it for other possible ends, such as developing ties with other communities.6

Members of a language community are almost naturally excluded from other language communities. No deliberate exclusion, no norm of exclusion is required for exclusion. Merely the costs of dealing with people who do not speak one’s language are sufficient to cause de facto exclusion. Yet, within a language community, there may be a norm of exclusion enforced against those who abandon the language or, especially, the children of those who have abandoned it and raised their children in a different language.7 Such an intra-group norm of exclusion raises the costs to a member of the group of adopting another language. Hence, linguistic groups may strive to be more broadly autarkic than many other kinds of social group. They have to be merely in order to sustain their communities. But the costs of such autarky, when the autarky includes economic separation as well as linguistic and social separation, can be massive.

If we adopt the principle of autarky to judge the extent to which a group should be allowed to practice its own norms, linguistic groups pose a major problem: how to equalize opportunities for political participation. We might agree that the costs of political participation to some substantial degree should be borne by the whole citizenry. If some group faces unequal costs, it is then up to the larger society to redress the difference. There are two parts to this issue. First, there are the costs of participation to ordinary citizens in electoral politics. Second, there are the costs of giving groups voice, the costs of political leadership or representation of groups. For the first of these, it should not cost one person much more to vote than it costs another. Clearly, there cannot be full equality of costs of participation unless the polling places go to the voters rather than the other way around. But within the realm of practicality, such mechanical costs can be substantially equalized.

In multi-lingual nations such as India, Belgium, Canada, and the United States, equalization of costs further requires making various voting materials available in all the relevant languages. Unfortunately, this does not resolve the difficulties of minority language groups. The real costs of voting for most people are the costs of becoming adequately informed to be able to vote intelligently in their own interest. This requires education for literacy and beyond. If minority language groups are educated in the predominant language of the nation, their groups are severely undercut. If they are educated in the languages of their groups, the extra costs of informing them for intelligent voting may be substantial. Even then they may not have access to adequate news coverage to give them understanding and information comparable to what is available in
the predominant language. In Belgium and Canada, education and communication in two different languages are handled well enough to overcome disparities in costs to voters. In the United States and India the problems are far more severe and the disparities are great for some language groups.

The second problem, that of the costs of giving groups voice, is far more difficult. Nativists commonly claim that minority language speakers can expect to be equal in a society only if they switch, at least for their children and further generations, to the predominant language. The claim is almost certainly true in fact, both economically and politically. Representation of a permanent minority group on the grounds only of its social characteristics undercuts the possibility of representation of other issues within the group. The majority population can politic on various issues for differential benefit. Consider a very simplistic model in which each citizen spends the same total amount of time and resources in politicking for various causes. Those who use part of their time and resources politicking for their social group have less time for other matters. They will therefore tend to be less well represented on other matters.

Being politically equal may genuinely require switching to the predominant language. But this is tantamount to giving up one’s group. A liberal response to that complaint is that it is individuals, not groups, who matter. But even if one accepts this response, one can still object that the adult members of a minority language group are not merely group members, they are also individuals. And the movement of their children and grandchildren out of their language brings enormous losses to many of these people. They virtually die before their time—or, rather, their community dies out from under them, leaving them increasingly isolated. They might wish to claim that switching languages also brings losses to their children and grandchildren. The liberal could respond that the tradeoff for those losses is greater gains. The committed member of the minority group might answer that the gains are not greater except economically. The losses are moral and social and they are ignored in the liberal’s vision.

In the end, the liberal can say little more than “Take it or leave it.” Generally, the children and grandchildren will take the majority language if doing so makes a big difference to their economic opportunities, just as peoples around the world commonly learn second languages according to utility. The older generation of a minority language group will simply lose unless it is able politically to insure the protection of its group by requiring the education of its children in the minority language. This political victory might ensure the economic disadvantage of future generations of the group while securing the life of the group. In this respect, it is analogous to the choice of the Old Order Amish to hobble their children by blocking their education and thereby their opportunities outside the Amish community. The striking feature of this resolution is that such a group may be relatively autarkic in its society, at least if it is geographically concentrated so that schooling is not radically more expensive for its children than for others. Indeed, if the group shares the values of the American Old Order Amish, it might require much less investment in education than the larger society would offer to other children.

Autarky for linguistic groups within a society is likely to have substantial economic consequences, surely for the autarkic groups themselves but also plausibly for the larger society if its market would benefit from being at a larger scale. In late nineteenth-century France, the large number of distinct groups and languages within French borders were seen as an obstacle to national unity and to nationalist aspirations. These groups were converted into French speakers within a generation or two. This conversion seems likely to have eased the way for economic productivity. For example, it made it easy for a youth leaving the farm to go to any city in France where there might be greatest opportunity for employment rather than only to the few places where the local language would be spoken. It simultaneously made it easier for communities to assimilate and disappear, likely to the dismay of older generations in those communities. (It may also have eased the way for French nationalism in World War I. The latter result was no doubt the chief concern of those who pushed for a single national language.)

Ethnic Groups

Ethnic groups are often simultaneously religious and linguistic groups, which means that they are often both exclusive and excluded. This complexity has been a recipe for uncounted disasters throughout the twentieth century. Majority ethnic groups often want autarky that is relatively complete, excluding others from the majority economy, polity, and society.

As a rule and as is also true for religious groups, the practice of exclusion by the enterprises of particular ethnic groups need not be substantially important to economic prospects of their society in general if there are competitive firms of other groups or even merely competitive firms with open, non-exclusionary recruitment. Where there is adequate competition, the chief losers from such exclusion are likely to be the firms that practice it because they will not make choices on strict productivity grounds. This sanguine conclusion does not follow, however, in a context in which there is a prevalent, strong norm of social exclusion or prejudice. For example, where anti-black racial prejudice ruled social and economic relations in the United States, blacks were clear losers, so much so that it would seem implausible to suppose the prejudicial businesses suffered more than blacks did.

Special Status for Social Groups: Conflict within the Group

It is intellectually hard for a group to proclaim universalistic commitment to the idea of group autonomy, because the ground on which the group claims autonomy for itself may be that there is
something inherently right about its values. And it is intellectually hard for a liberal who is committed to individual autonomy, whether from Millian or from Kantian principles, to accept claims of group autonomy. Group autonomy de facto seems to involve control over the making of the next generation and perhaps also control over the behavior of even the current generation. Group autonomy at its extreme means that the Salman Rushdies of the world may be killed on behalf of the groups whose values they offend and that claim them as members.

We might be able to protect individuals against such depredations as the fatwa against Rushdie, but we still face the intergenerational problems that lie at the heart of the debate over the normative appeal of community. Defenders of communitarian ideals insist that the liberal vision is one of a vacuous individual because individuals are of necessity created by communities. There is no over-arching principle according to which we can say creating people in the image of one community or set of ideals is better than creating people in the image of another. Liberals might almost agree, adding chiefly that the people we create should be reasonably autonomous and not just the puppets of some community. Debate on this issue has so far shown little progress beyond statement of the problem.

Successful economic growth requires some cynicism on the part of government toward the claims for the special nature of social groups and the demand that they be given special protection. Indeed, government effort might often rather be directed at protecting individuals from domination by their groups. One might wish to ground the claim for cynicism in the supposition that what groups claiming a moral or social interest really want is merely economic support. But I think that would be false. They often genuinely do want protection of their particular way of life, the practice of their norms, and so forth. The larger society might lose nothing from such protections except for the economic costs, as when farmers are protected against economic forces that would allow the importation of much cheaper food. In many cases, the chief losers are apt to be the future generations of the group whose current generation of leaders wants to be or is being protected.

In a defense of the prevalence of politics over values, one might assert that the benefits of the many in the larger society outweigh the exclusive benefits of the few in some group. But one need not make a strongly moral claim that this is true against those who assert the categorical difference between social and economic interests. One can settle for a simple Hobbesian claim about the objective facts of the matter. It is generally likely to be true that the many will prevail politically in a conflict over some group’s exclusionary values insofar as the political decisions are relatively democratic. This is a generally sufficient claim in many contexts. It fails in contexts in which it is essentially the many who want a special protection against the few or even the exploitation of the few. In many nations with ethnic or religious divisions there is a majority ethnic or religious group which, given democratic power, would happily suppress or exploit minority groups.

Concluding Remarks

Social groups need pose no problem for the larger society and economy unless they practice norms of exclusion that affect the economy. Oddly, the most harmful instances of the practice of such norms may typically be by majority or dominant groups rather than by minority groups of whatever kind. Even the practice of norms of exclusion need not greatly affect the economy, however, but can be restricted to social matters of marriage and residence. Hence, there is no substantial reason for opposition to social authoritarian groups whose separation from the larger society has no negative effect on the larger economy or on the economic prospects of other groups.

There is, however, also no universalist ground for government protection of the social interests of groups that wish to maintain social authoritarianism. Indeed, for anyone who objects to the group control over children to try to keep them bound to the group, there is reason for government protection of group members against their groups.

Policies directed at the group of all are tantamount to policies directed at each and every one. Universalistic protections of everyone independently of membership in any subgroup in the society do not suppose any special status. For example, protections of rights, as in constitutional bills of rights, are universalistic. And programs of affirmative action, even though they might name groups, can be universalistic in the sense that they are directed at making the economic and political status of all more nearly equal. Such protections might provoke severe political conflict just because they break the power of special status.

Apart from separatist and violent groups, which I have not discussed, the hardest problem of group difference is likely to be that of linguistic groups. For such groups simple social authoritarianism is not feasible if they are to be part of the larger economy. To be more nearly equally part of that economy, their members must necessarily adopt the dominant language for at least part of their lives. And when they do, they are apt to weaken the bonds of their linguistic community over them. But there is hardly any practical alternative to their adopting the dominant language unless they are willing to suffer substantial economic disadvantages in comparison to others in their own society. Indeed, for the vast majority of languages currently spoken in the world, there is little alternative to quitting
those languages if the children of their speakers are to enter the broader world in which they could prosper.

Religious and ethnic groups could be socially autarkic without affecting larger economic relations. They generally do not need protection from the state against anyone except possibly their own members, but there is no compelling argument for why the state should paternalistically suppress individuals' actions on behalf of the groups of which they are ostensibly members. Hence, even granting the claim that moral or social interests trump economic interests is insufficient to justify state protection of ethnic or religious groups. The only plausible survivor of that claim is linguistic groups, for whom social autarky cannot be achieved without substantial economic effects and effects on political equality.

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Endnotes
4. Hardin, One for All, chapter 4.
6. In New York City, Puerto Rican English has become gendered for economic reasons. Puerto Rican women speak a different dialect from that spoken by Puerto Rican men. Women speak white English; men speak black English. Why? Because women get jobs in offices as clerks and secretaries; men get jobs as blue collar laborers. In New York, these two job markets are white and black respectively. The socio-linguist William Labov says this is the only instance he knows of gendered English. (Talk at New University, winter 1995.)
7. Amy Wu, an ABC, or American-born Chinese, speaks English and not Cantonese. When she visits Chinese restaurants in New York’s Chinatown without her Cantonese speaking relatives, she is scorned with treatment worse than that accorded non-Chinese. She quotes a friend who says, “You’re either in or out.” (New York Times, 10 December 1995, p. 13.25.)