Should Groups Matter?
A PRRUCS Issue on Religion, Freedom, and Civil Society

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Between the individual and the state, are certain social groupings necessary for democracy to flourish? Or are they all arbitrary, historically-contingent, and as likely to harm as to help? What rights of autonomy does the state owe, if any, to groups, and which ones, if any, may it prioritize? What do these groups, in turn, owe to the political community? Or to each other? And moving beyond a strict framework of legal obligation, are the sorts of virtues that make a good group member the same as those that make a citizen *good*? These lines of inquiry have concerned political theorists and social commentators for millennia, and the answers have inspired activists and social movements. Some legitimate realm of autonomy accorded to religious and kinship groups has been almost taken for granted in America, but has been more closely scrutinized of late. Even more vexed is the question of which protections and privileges are owed to non-filial, non-religious social entities, such as non-profits, community or ethnic groups, identity-based associations, and the like. While it might have been tempting to dismiss further talk about group rights with abstract declarations of common dignity that we believed were already universally accepted, the horrific events of racial injustice this spring have demonstrated only too painfully the distance that we and our shared institutions still must learn to travel. On the other hand, the pathways to addressing these questions at other times can appear to lead down ever narrower trails navigable only by those with technical expertise. Yet the solutions inevitably shape the wider moral horizons of the whole community. That is why this volume, and this PRRUCS Series as a whole, invites leading scholars of diverse outlook to write about salient issues of contemporary civil society in a manner that is broadly accessible. It thereby also invites a specialist and non-specialist readership to think with us about the shape of the polity that we cannot but shape together.

Our current situation of lockdowns and quarantine offers a unique twist on social and political responsibility. Pandemics are not rare in human history. Times of trouble are even more common. The duties of citizens always come to the fore during these times, as do reflections upon these duties. But a health crisis of this magnitude in modern times is not common. What makes it even more strange is that one of the best ways to help others is to leave them alone.. So—what are the responsibilities of citizenship in times like these? As Catherine E. Wilson (Villanova University) reflects, we must discern how citizens can cultivate virtue in both normal and abnormal circumstances. We may discover that the virtue of solitude, demanded in our current moment, may have significant political—and personal—ramifications once we emerge from it. For most agree that our political atmosphere is at least as toxic as our natural environment. Lia C. Howard (University of Pennsylvania) explores the question of how to aerate our political culture. The answer is found, as it often is, in concrete, local, and associational action, and not just in the episodic activity of the voting booth.

The more general question of citizenship and autonomy is especially relevant to the kinship group, the state's oldest rival in human history. Who owns children? Are children citizens first of the state, or of the family into which they are born? Melissa Moschella (Catholic

University of America) explores the philosophical foundations of this question and its implications for public policy and civil education. Rogers Smith (University of Pennsylvania) offers a historical survey of how religious groups from three monotheistic traditions confronted accusations of "dual allegiances" in America and how suspicions of political disloyalty are resurfacing along those lines today. Michael D. Breidenbach (Ava Maria University) follows Smith's analysis with a case study, exploring how Catholics in early America concocted different strategies to demonstrate their contested loyalty, and how those different strategies in turn shaped their political futures. Luke C. Sheahan (Duquesne University) concludes this volume with two essays that cast new light on the global future of democracy and ordered liberty. The first essay discusses a conceptual framework that helps to make sense of the contours of our constitutional community today, investigating at the same time whether certain well-accepted protective mechanisms, such as the First Amendment, facilitate the autonomy of social groups or undermine them. The second essay examines how the Chinese political community has treated non-profits and how an overlooked but seminal social theorist might offer a path forward.

A time to restitch the social fabric of our community will follow our spring lockdown. If we hope to promote a healthy polity as we resume activity amidst the lingering threat of pandemic, we must think critically and constructively about how social and physical well-being will continue to be related. We hope that this collection of essays, reflecting on both our foundations and our futures, might help us advance in our ongoing quest for the common good.