“THERE ARE NO HOUSEWIVES ON STAR TREK”: A REEXAMINATION OF EXIT RIGHTS FOR THE CHILDREN OF INSULAR FUNDAMENTALIST PARENTS

Paula McAvoy
Spencer Foundation

Abstract. In this essay, Paula McAvoy addresses the problem caused by the liberal state’s necessary tolerance of insular fundamentalist groups and the concern that children raised in such groups do not have a fair opportunity to evaluate their inherited beliefs. This tension comes to the fore around disagreements over schooling and requests for religious accommodation. Often, these requests are treated as straightforward dilemmas — either the state accommodates the group at the expense of the child’s future interest in autonomy, or the state must use its power to coerce the group into compliance. McAvoy argues for a principled middle ground between these two views. Using William Galston’s conditions for securing the right to exit (set out in his 2002 book Liberal Pluralism) and evidence from Anabaptist apostates, McAvoy shows that insular groups cannot satisfy these conditions. Consequently, when accommodation is necessary, the state must mitigate the foreseeable costs to children by enacting policies that “facilitate entrance” for those who later choose to exit.

Religious fundamentalism poses a particular challenge to liberal societies. In short, liberalism rests upon the idea that there are multiple and competing “good lives” and that individuals ought to be allowed to choose among these good lives with little intervention from the state. Fundamentalists, on the other hand, believe that there is one divinely prescribed good life and that movement away from the way puts one, and perhaps one’s family, at risk of eternal suffering. Such a belief system is allowable under liberal theory, but liberals disagree about how to secure the future rights of children raised by fundamentalist parents. Liberals recognize that parents have a right to raise children within a particular belief system, but eventually children ought be allowed to evaluate those beliefs and decide if they are good for them — a choice they have difficulty making when they are taught that all other ways of living are morally wrong.

This conflict over the rights of children often comes to the fore around questions of schooling and requests for religious and cultural accommodation. In such cases, policymakers are asked to decide to what extent parental interests should be accommodated and when, if ever, the state is justified in enacting policies that secure what Harry Brighouse calls a child’s “future interest in autonomy” against the wishes of his or her parents. On one side of the debate are group rights advocates who argue that encompassing cultural and religious groups, such as Hasidic Jews, Mormon polygamists, Islamic and Christian fundamentalists, and the Amish, deserve state protections against policies that infringe on certain beliefs and practices. According to these theories, the state cannot interfere

2. See William Galston, Liberal Pluralism: The Implications of Value Pluralism for Political Theory and Practice (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002). This work will be cited in the text as LP.
with internally illiberal cultural practices such as arranged marriages, female circumcision, sex discrimination, or polygamy if the group grants members the “right to exit.” In other words, the principles of liberalism only demand that groups do not prevent members from leaving. On the other side of the argument are autonomy-promoting theorists, including Stephen Macedo and Susan Moller Okin, who think that this standard of accommodation renders the principles of liberalism meaningless. They argue that when the state privileges group autonomy over individual autonomy, women and children become vulnerable to coercion within the group. Liberal states, in this argument, ought to secure certain individual liberties, including a child’s future interest in autonomy, and it is appropriate to use the state to enforce compliance. Further, if parents are allowed to isolate their children and expose them to one conception of the good life while teaching that all others are damnable, exit becomes highly unlikely. Macedo argues for “liberalism with spine,” by which he means policymaking that is, at times and with good reason, willing to defend democratic principles. For accommodationists the right to exit is the safety valve against private-sphere coercion: so long as people can leave, we are to believe that the group is not that coercive. For the autonomy-promoting liberals, schooling is a possible safety valve against parental coercion, because it is believed that this is where children will be exposed to other ways of living and will then be better equipped to evaluate their inherited beliefs.


PAULA MCAVOY is an Associate Program Officer at the Spencer Foundation, 625 North Michigan Ave, Suite 1600, Chicago, IL 60611; e-mail <pmcavoy@spencer.org>. She is currently on leave from Illinois State University. Her primary areas of scholarship are cultural and religious accommodation and democratic education.
is to say, in an emerging liberal society, the state may not force less liberal groups to adhere to the basic principles of liberalism but must negotiate toward a solution that leaves individuals comparatively better off. Ideally, the result of this compromise will not be a “live and let live” policy but will, through negotiation, model the principles of liberalism in such a way that over time, illiberal groups evolve toward a way of life that recognizes individual liberty.

Each instance in which the question of cultural accommodation arises requires decision makers to attend to the circumstances of the groups in question. As an illustration of how contextual features ought to affect the state’s balancing of children’s interests against the interests of fundamentalist parents, I enter into the long-standing debate about the Anabaptists [Amish, Hutterites, and Mennonites] and the 1972 Supreme Court case, Wisconsin v. Yoder. This is not an argument about whether or not the case was correctly decided or whether or not groups have rights. Instead, I use the tools of applied moral and political philosophy to show that when we attend to the experiences of group dissenters — and not just the interests of the group — a different picture of exit emerges. In making the case, I assume that Anabaptist and most other fundamentalist traditions are allowable ways of living for adults. From here, I argue that in our particular circumstances, [1] the state may not force Anabaptist children into high schools, and [2] children born into most Anabaptist families do not have sufficient opportunity to exit (as exit is currently understood) primarily because they have not received an adequate education. Because justice requires the state to compromise with the parents at the expense of their children, the state has an obligation to mitigate the costs to children once they are better able to assert their own interests. In this essay, I primarily focus on the second part of this argument, the problem with exit rights, but first I provide some background to the Yoder case in addition to a brief explanation about why the state cannot force Anabaptist children into high schools.

**The Yoder Decision**

One of the most frequently cited examples of cultural accommodation in public schooling is the ruling in the Supreme Court case Wisconsin v. Yoder.7 In the case, Amish parents sought to exempt their children from compulsory schooling after eighth grade, believing that high school education is too worldly and interferes with the community’s ability to raise their children to adhere to their religious values. The Supreme Court allowed for this accommodation, arguing that compulsory schooling for the Amish violated the parents’ rights to free exercise of religion and that two years of additional education were not necessary for life within Amish society. Since then, most Anabaptist children have ended their formal schooling at eighth grade.

The conflict that brought the Yoder case to the Supreme Court began over the issue of religious freedom, but the case also illustrates a conflict between the interests of parents, children, and the state. In 1968, three Amish families in New

---

Glarus, Wisconsin, refused to enroll their fifteen-year-old children in school as required by the state. They then refused to pay the fine associated with violating the law. Because the Amish do not use the courts to settle disputes, a group called the National Committee for Amish Religious Freedom took up the case on their behalf and fought for the Anabaptists’ “right” to raise their children according to their religious beliefs. The state argued that compulsory schooling was necessary for the state to secure its interest in developing self-sufficient, democratic citizens prepared for life in a complex modern world. The defenders of religious freedom argued that the parents’ right to raise their children according to their beliefs and practices trumped the state’s interests. Barely mentioned was the child’s “future interest in autonomy.” Justice Stephen Douglas articulated this point of view in his partial dissent:

> It is the future of the students, not the future of the parents, that is imperiled by today’s decision. If a parent keeps his child out of school beyond the grade school, then the child will be forever barred from entry into the new and amazing world of diversity that we have today. The child may decide that that is the preferred course, or he may rebel. It is the student’s judgment, not his parents’, that is essential if we are to give full meaning to what we have said about the Bill of Rights and of the right of students to be masters of their own destiny.

Morally, all three sets of interests (parents’, children’s, and the state’s) matter a great deal. The Supreme Court was asked to decide whose interests matter more in this case, and the decision to recognize the parents’ interest in promoting a particular way of life traded away formal schooling for their children, a decision that has considerable costs for the young adults who later decide to leave the group.

The Amish are a particular type of rights-seeking group: an insular group of religious fundamentalists who wish to live an apolitical, communitarian life. Group rights theorists argue that insular groups have a right to exist and that in most cases the state is obligated to protect their way of living — a view that is in line with the *Yoder* decision. But if one takes seriously Okin’s and Macedo’s concerns about private-sphere coercion and rejects the idea that the group’s interests should trump the individual’s, how then should the state respond to accommodation requests made by cultural groups? Okin argued that in such cases the state should “enforce liberalism” and to do otherwise is to let “multiculturalism run amok.” I have a practical and a principled objection to this view. Practically, the dynamics of insular groups are such that they are able to engage in a level of civil disobedience that limits the state’s ability to respond justly when a group objects to policies like school attendance. History has shown that the Anabaptists refuse to comply with state orders to send their children to large, bureaucratic schools that are not designed, as they say, “on a human scale.”


the state were to insist on compliance, it would need to be willing to take children into state custody and perhaps jail parents. Given that children in Anabaptist communities are cared for, loved, and getting their basic needs met, a liberal state may not, in my view, engage in the level of coercion necessary for compliance. In short, “enforcing liberalism” replaces group coercion with state coercion and violates the practice of overlapping consensus, which must treat participants as political equals engaged in negotiation. In other words, my argument is not that the group has an absolute right to self-governance, but that the state does not have the right to force families [in this case] to comply. For that reason, accommodating their request to opt out of high school becomes a practical necessity.

**Securing the Opportunity to Exit**

As Justice Douglas’s dissent notes, the *Yoder* decision, while necessary, leaves some Anabaptist children worse off. In *Liberal Pluralism*, William Galston argues that a just liberal state must “pursue a policy of *maximum feasible accommodation*” (*LP*, 20). Galston is sympathetic to group rights, but also recognizes that accommodation presents a problem for the principle of “voluntary association” because children do not freely enter the groups they are born into. Like autonomy-promoting liberals, Galston does not want to leave people vulnerable to group coercion, but he argues that the best that the state can do is ensure that groups recognize the right to exit. Of the group rights theorists, Galston provides one of the more nuanced explanations of exit and says that “individual freedom is adequately protected by secure rights of exit, coupled with the existence of a wider society open to individuals wishing to leave their groups of origin” (*LP*, 122). Exit, he goes on to argue, is “secure” when individuals [1] are aware of alternative ways of living, [2] have the capacity to assess those alternatives should they choose to, [3] have not been subject to brainwashing or other types of psychological coercion, and [4] have the ability to “participate effectively in at least some ways of life other than the ones they choose to leave” (*LP*, 122–123). Galston believes the Amish are an example of a group that sufficiently recognizes this right.

For group rights theorists, the burden of exit falls primarily on the group itself; they cannot prevent members from leaving, and so long as the larger society accepts dissenters, the conditions of justice are satisfied. In looking at the particulars of the Anabaptist case against Galston’s conditions for exit, I conclude that the Anabaptists do not adequately secure the right to exit for their children. To show this, I consider social science evidence about adolescent Anabaptists and their experiences in deciding whether or not to remain in the group. I supplement this research with the voice of an excommunicated Mennonite woman whom I call Emily.12 I interviewed Emily over the phone for several hours about her reasons for leaving her church, the barriers she faced when trying to exit, and the factors

---

12. Emily [pseudonym], interview by author, November 2008. At the time we spoke, Emily was thirty-one years old, was married, and had one child. She left the Mennonite church at the age of nineteen. She had earned a bachelor’s degree in accounting and a master’s degree in education, and she was in
that helped her to leave. I do not suggest that her experiences should speak for all Anabaptists; rather, I use her story to give contextual detail about decisions to exit. Philosophers often identify the morally salient features of a situation without paying sufficient attention to those affected — a practice that can lead to incorrect assumptions. Hearing Emily’s experiences helps us to better identify the moral trade-offs. I use this evidence to argue that Galston’s conditions for exit are correct, but insular fundamentalist groups cannot satisfy these conditions. As a result, the right to exit is only secured when the state enacts policies that facilitate entrance into another way of life.

“There Are No Housewives in Star Trek”

When Emily was seven years old, her mother converted to a Holdeman Mennonite Church in rural Louisiana.13 Emily had attended a public school from kindergarten through second grade, but upon her mother’s conversion, she began to wear “plain” clothes and enrolled in a small Mennonite school in which she was one of five students in her grade level. Members of the church were not allowed to watch television, listen to the radio, or watch movies, but they could check out books from the official church library. Emily explained that books for the library were selected by the congregation’s “reading committee” and mostly consisted of books about animals and Anabaptist martyr stories. Because Emily’s mother was not raised in the church, she was more liberal with reading material and took her children to the public library once a week to check out ten books. Emily read all ten every week. She recalls especially enjoying Star Trek novels and explained that they had a profound impact on her. As she said, “One day I realized, ‘there are no housewives in Star Trek, and I don’t want to be a housewife.’”

Galston’s first condition for exit is being aware of alternative ways of living, and Emily certainly had some exposure to the world outside of her Mennonite church. She was born outside of the group and had attended public school for a few years. Further, her father did not convert, but he supported her mother’s choice to raise their children within the church. Finally, her mother’s sister moved in with the family for several years following a divorce. This aunt was attending college and was an example of a woman living on her own and getting an education.

Emily describes herself as an “outlier” because she had exposure to books and to her non-Anabaptist relatives. One might be tempted to think that this outside exposure was enough to define her upbringing as “non-insular.” She was not, after all, on a remote compound, nor was she in an all-Amish community. The fact that she describes herself as “very sheltered” and that when she read, “It was like everything . . . was science fiction, even things that weren’t,” speaks to the group’s

13. The Holdeman Mennonites are one of the more conservative Mennonite sects. They require members to reject the fashion of the world and wear “plain” clothes. Members are allowed the use of cars, telephones, and electricity. More liberal Mennonites do not stop schooling at eighth grade and encourage higher education.
ability to define psychological boundaries between themselves and those on the outside. Other children in her community only read books from the official library and the textbooks used at school. Similarly, Amish children have limited access to the world of ideas — indeed, a basic tenet of all Anabaptist groups is to live separate from the world, and this is one reason they limit the use of technology. Most, but not all, children attend small Amish schools taught by young women who also have an eighth-grade education. Still, Amish families live among others, shop at stores, sell their goods to non-Amish neighbors, sometimes work with non-Amish laborers, and are at least aware that others live in a different way.

Galston is correct that being exposed to alternative ways of living is essential for exit because it can create the desire to exit. But this possibility is precisely why groups work so hard to limit access to ideas — by controlling the church library, ending formal education at eighth grade, and the like — and why they envelop the group in a culture of fear, which is the most effective tool for discouraging members from leaving the group.

“ALL RIGHT, THEN, I’LL GO TO HELL”

In Mark Twain’s Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, the climactic moment of the book occurs when Huck decides between doing what he has been taught is right (turning in an escaped slave to his “rightful owner”) and doing what feels right (saving his friend Jim from returning to slavery). The dramatic irony of the moment is that Huck makes the morally correct decision to save Jim, but believes what he is doing is officially wrong, and so declares, “All right, then, I’ll go to hell.”

Deciding to leave a fundamentalist community also requires one to accept a future in hell. When Emily left her parents’ house at age nineteen, she believed she would “spend eternity in a napalm environment.” At first she hoped to live at home and simply live her own life, but after three days she packed her bags and went to live with her aunt. At the time, she told herself that she would be back one day, but six months later she married a person “of the world” and knew that she had left forever. As she describes it, it took years for her to come to believe that she had not, in fact, chosen hell. During those years, her anxiety about the afterlife woke her up at night. To this day, her mother, brother, and sister still worry for her soul:

Because what they see when they look at you is someone they love being tortured for eternity in a hell dimension. And that is all that they see, and they feel it and they believe it and there is no amount of logic or argument that can convince them otherwise, because it is a faith-based belief.

To show their love, Emily’s mother still apologizes for failing her, and her brother, in accordance with Mennonite practice, does not allow her to eat at his family’s table, but will set a place for her at a separate spot in the room. They still hope that she will return to the church. Amish young people who appear to be moving away

14. See Hostetler, Amish Society; and Kraybill, The Amish and the State.

from the church and deciding not to get baptized report that family members and friends will write passionate letters trying to persuade them to return, ministers will pay them visits, and the family might also show up at the dissenter’s new residence to sing and pray outside of the house.  

Galston argues that the right to exit prohibits groups from “brainwashing or other types of psychological coercion,” but all insular fundamentalist religious groups create a boundary between “us,” who are saved, and others, who are damned — what Emmanuel Sivan refers to as a “wall of virtue.”  

I am not suggesting that inculcating a belief in hell necessarily qualifies as psychological brainwashing. Certainly, many young people are raised with some belief in good and evil and the possibility of an afterlife in hell. But it would be difficult to overemphasize the hold it can have on people raised in insular communities. Emily, for example, reported that she “cried her eyes out” on her last day of eighth grade, but she never asked if she could continue school “because then God would have been unhappy with me.” Even girls who have been raised in fundamentalist polygamous sects of Mormonism, forced into marriage, raped by members of the community, and escaped from the sect, have returned because they feared that their new life was causing their family to go to hell.  

The group’s “us and them” boundary is strengthened by outward signs of membership such as wearing plain clothes, driving buggies (for the Amish), and wearing beards. Emily explained that her “seventeenth-century-style dress” caused non-Mennonite people on the street to avoid talking to her. On occasion, she was asked about her religion and “why you wear all of those coverings,” but she does not recall having a “normal interaction” with a person who was not a church member or member of her family until she was nineteen years old. While boys in her church also had clothing restrictions, they did not look so out of the norm. Daily wear consisted of trousers and a plain t-shirt, and Emily speculated that

16. Tom Shachtman, Rumspringa: To Be or Not to Be Amish (New York: North Point Press, 2006). Emily also reported this.

17. Emmanuel Sivan, “The Enclave Culture,” in Fundamentalisms Comprehended, ed. Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 18. Sivan makes the following observation about enclave religious groups: “Last but not least, the enclave must place the oppressive and morally defiled outside society in sharp contrast to the community of virtuous insiders. A sort of ‘wall of virtue’ is thereby constructed, separating the saved, free, equal [before God or before history], and morally superior enclave from the hitherto-tempting central community. Who but the depraved would desire to cross such a boundary and join the defectors and evil outsiders?”

18. Andrea Moore-Emmett, God’s Brothel (San Francisco: Pince-Nez Press, 2004). Certain polygamous sects believe that if a woman leaves, the entire family is going to hell.
this lets them blend more easily with the outside world — and makes it easier for them to leave.19 The cultural symbolism in the group also emphasizes the patriarchal structure. As a girl, Emily was taught that covering her head was a sign of submission to the “natural order” in which men rule, and women obey. Perhaps most tellingly, when she left the community, she had to relearn how to speak because, as she explained, while it was never explicitly taught, women spoke so softly that they could not be heard by non-Church members.

Emily uses the word “brainwashing” to describe her experiences in the church and describes her childhood as “a human rights violation.” It is true that Anabaptists are allowed to exit and are aware that people leave, but when leaving is equated with damnation, that is a particularly difficult barrier to break through — especially when one has little understanding of how life works in the “Devil’s Playground.”20 While Emily does not speak for all Anabaptists, her story reinforces Okin’s concern that the notion of a right to exit does not adequately take into account the private-sphere coercion that exists for all children, but most strongly applies to girls. Fundamentalist groups have one conception of the good life and believe, as Emily articulated, “there is one thought and that thought is that everything that was done before will lead to heaven and everything that was not will lead to hell.”

This conception of hell inhibits the development of Galston’s fourth condition — the ability to assess other ways of living — because all other ways of living are evil. Galston believes that Amish youth are sufficiently able to overcome this early conditioning because of the cultural tradition of Rumspringa, or the “running around” period that begins when children turn sixteen. During this time, Amish teenagers are allowed and even encouraged to experience the temptations of the “English” world. To that end, Amish teenagers go to movies, watch television, drink, smoke, do drugs, attend wild parties, and otherwise experience the basest activities available in non-Amish society. During this period, which can last for several years, they are told to decide if they want to be baptized and “join church,” a decision that ends Rumspringa and carries a lifetime commitment to the group. Not joining leaves Amish young adults in a type of spiritual limbo in which they know they are sinning and would most likely go to hell if they should die, but they are still allowed to have contact with their families.21 If they get baptized and then leave, they are excommunicated and banished from their family and friends in the community.

19. This observation is supported by Thomas Meyers, who found that young Amish men in La Grange, Indiana, had more opportunity to explore the world, were more likely to blend in, and consequently defect at higher rates. Thomas J. Meyers, “The Old Order Amish: To Remain in the Faith or to Leave,” Mennonite Quarterly Review 68, no. 3 (1994): 378–395.

20. “The Devil’s Playground” is the title of a documentary about the Amish Rumspringa period, but it is also a phrase used within the community to describe life in the “English world.” Devil’s Playground, film, directed by Lucy Walker (New York: Stick Figure Productions, 2002).

Galston argues that this period offers a sufficient opportunity to assess other ways of living:

At the end of this period, substantial numbers of Amish youth decide not to return to their community of origin (the precise percentage is in dispute) and typically find gainful employment elsewhere. I find it difficult to conclude that the Amish have deprived their children of meaningful exit rights or that the Supreme Court has abetted them in this abuse. (LP, 335)

Evidence does not support Galston’s conclusions. First, not all Amish communities practice Rumspringa, and those that do vary in the amount of exposure to the outside world that young people experience. In general, the larger the community, the more diversity there is in the youth culture and the more wild the Rumspringa period. For the tamer communities, Rumspringa allows young people to participate in evening singings and to have more free time with friends. They have very little contact with non-Amish youth. For Mennonites and some Amish there is no Rumspringa, and young people are expected to live by cultural norms for their entire lives. Emily was baptized at the age of ten, ended school at eighth grade, and began work at fourteen. Further, in a ten-year study of Amish youth, medical sociologist Denise Reiling found that Old Order Amish youth who go through Rumspringa experience “far greater” depression and anxiety than youth in other cultural contexts. She attributes this to social pressure, culture shock, and, most significantly, the fear of death and hell. While Rumspringa is set up to be a period of choice, Reiling found that much of the social stress was caused because, unlike other youth rebellion, Amish adults have set up the situation. First, parents raise the children with “rigid adult norms,” and then when the child turns sixteen, the norms are “inverted” and parents tell their children to do all the things that they have been taught will displease God. In fact, the system works to the community’s advantage — youth who experience a Rumspringa period are more likely to get baptized than those in groups that do not allow Rumspringa.

This period does not set up a fair counterbalance to the Amish way of life, but instead pushes young people to experience anomie and alienation in the modern world and then compare that to the deeply communal life of the Amish. The one activity that is strongly discouraged is enrolling in school. One Amish girl explained that when her older brother decided he would continue his schooling by enrolling in the local public high school, his mother would scold him, “It’s wrong, it’s wrong,” every morning as he got ready to catch the bus. The sister, who also graduated from high school, said, “Amish parents would rather have their kids go out and drink and do that stuff than have them go to school and get an education and try to make, you know, a life for themselves.” In the documentary Devil’s


25. Quoted in Shachtman, Rumspringa, 93.
Playground, which follows several Amish youth during their Rumspringa period, one adult described the experience as an “inoculation” — it is a small dose of sin that helps one to build up antibodies against a worldly life.26 By contrast, when children attend high school, almost none of them return to the Anabaptist faith.27

Certainly people do leave Anabaptist groups — Emily did, as do about 10 to 20 percent of Amish youth.28 This tells us that the group does not physically prevent exit, but it does not tell us that the group is sufficiently upholding Galston’s terms of exit. What we do not know is how many would leave if they had the opportunity to live well on the outside.

Returning to Galston’s framework, with regard to insular fundamentalist groups, psychological coercion will always be present because teaching members to fear God and unbelievers is essential for maintaining group boundaries and identity.29 This, in turn, makes it difficult, but not impossible, for young people to develop the capacity to assess other good ways of living. Yoder certainly “abets” this “abuse” by giving parents even more opportunity to promote their way of life by stopping formal education at eighth grade. Even more problematic for the opportunity to exit, however, is the complicated reality of the “English world.” Data indicates that over the past ninety years, retention has gone from about 50 to 90 percent.30 In that time, there have been two significant changes. First, most Anabaptist children have moved from public rural schools into Anabaptist-run schools, which increases their level of isolation.31 Second, the world outside of the Anabaptist communities has changed so significantly that the transition out of the group has become much more difficult.

“Part of Your World”

When young Emily, her brother, and her sister accompanied their mother to the store, they occasionally snuck away to the electronics department to watch television. When Emily was about ten years old, she managed to see most of the

26. See the documentary film Devil’s Playground.

27. Meyers found that of Amish children who attended an Amish elementary school, there was a 12 percent rate of defection. Of those who attended a public elementary school, 21 percent defected. He also found that men defected at much higher rates than women. For example, of the people who defected in Indiana in 1969, 12 percent were women and 82 percent were men. This is very different than in the 1920s, when men and women defected more frequently and at nearly equal rates (51 percent of men and 49 percent of women left the group). See Tom Meyers, “The Old Order Amish.”


29. Sivan, “The Enclave Culture.”

30. See Meyers, “The Old Order Amish’; and Stevick, Growing Up Amish.

31. McConnell and Hurst report that in 2004, Amish schools numbered 1,316 and catered to 35,863 students in more than twenty states. The claim that this increases the isolation of Amish children is mine, although McConnell and Hurst claim that Amish schools are “crucial for cultural and social continuity within the Amish community.” McConnell and Hurst, “No ‘Rip Van Winkles’ Here,” 236.
animated Disney film *The Little Mermaid* during various shopping trips — first the middle, next the beginning, and then the end. In the story, Ariel, the mermaid daughter of King Neptune, becomes fixated on living “where the people are” and resents her life under the sea. Emily described this story as “very inspirational,” and she memorized the following section from the song “Part of Your World” and sang it to herself “for a long time after that”:

- Betcha on land they understand
- Bet they don’t reprimand their daughters
- Bright young women, sick of swimmin’
- Ready to stand . . .
- When’s it my turn?
- Wouldn’t I love
- Love to explore that shore up above?
- Out of the sea
- Wish I could be
- Part of that world

Galston’s final condition for exit is that people have the ability to “participate effectively in at least some ways of life other than the ones they choose to leave” ([LP], 123). What it means to “participate effectively” in another way of life is not clear. At the very least, it must mean that one is able to pursue work that allows one to live comfortably outside of the originating group. It would also require one to have a good understanding of the rules and norms of the society that one is entering and to be aware of one’s rights as a citizen. It is instructive to look at Emily’s story as it applies to each of these conditions. Her experience sheds some light on the obstacles dissenters face, the ways in which the Yoder compromise impedes exit, and what conditions are necessary for exit.

**Meaningful Work**

After completing eighth grade, Emily worked at various jobs including dog grooming, washing cars, helping at her former school, and working for her father’s logging company. With the exception of her father, all of her employers were members of her church. She also notes that it was unusual for her, as a young woman, to work outside of the home. Most other girls she knew did babysitting or housecleaning, or they helped their own families until they got married. Emily believes economic factors explain why almost no young women leave the church:

Not unless they are from a background like mine, where you had some experiences with family outside of the church, or there have been some rare cases when they have fallen in love with someone who is outside of the church, a man, and then that man enables them to leave, or they elope. Other than that I have never heard, never — of all the women I have talked to — I have never heard of a woman leaving that faith by herself. Although for men it is fairly common — preliminary, I would say 10 percent.

Men, she explained, have marketable skills such as carpentry that allow them to earn a livable wage. Still, very few men leave.

One hundred years ago, we can imagine that it was easier for Amish men to transition out of their culture and use their farming and carpentry skills to pursue

---

a comfortable life. In fact, in the 1920s, about 50 percent of men and 49 percent of women left the group.\textsuperscript{33} Even in the early 1970s, American society still had a good number of factory jobs available, and family farms, while on the way out, still existed. An eighth-grade education was probably not a terrible hindrance, and it would not have been too difficult, as some did, to pursue a high school equivalency and move toward a more advanced degree. The post-\textit{Yoder} world is quite different. Education is used as a positional good in which degrees become the currency of exchange for more meaningful, entry-level work.\textsuperscript{34} Further, it is often necessary to have a high school diploma in order to get work outside of Anabaptist-run businesses. While Anabaptists have usually developed an outstanding work ethic, the jobs available to them are at the lowest end of the economy. Staying in the community gives one economic (as well as emotional and spiritual) support. For girls, marriage is essential for economic security because, as Emily explains, they are unable to make a livable wage.\textsuperscript{35} Once married, very people few leave.

**Understanding Rights and Norms**

Emily’s formal schooling and church teachings actively miseducated her so that she had a skewed understanding of how life works beyond her community. Her historical knowledge consisted of church history — with an emphasis on the evils of the Catholic Church and the virtues of her own. She was also told to reject the idea of citizens having rights:

\begin{quote}
My eighth-grade teacher told us, he said, “You have no rights.” He said, “The worldly conception of rights is wrong.” … He said, “If someone harms you in any way, then that is to the greater glory of God, because you have the opportunity, like Jesus did, to sacrifice yourself.”
\end{quote}

In general, Emily found her early education prepared her well in the basic skills of reading, writing, and math, but she had to reeducate herself in science, Biblical history, world history, and the law. She also had no idea how to get into college or about financial aid programs available to her. Without her aunt, and later her husband, she would not have known how to navigate within that world.

Ministers also used the pulpit to teach about the immorality of those living on the outside. Homosexuality, she learned, was evil and fornication was

\begin{itemize}
  \item 33. Meyers, “The Old Order Amish.”
  \item 34. For more on education as a positional good, see Fred Hirsch, \textit{The Social Limits of Growth} (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1976); and Martin Hollis, “Education as a Positional Good,” \textit{Journal of Philosophy and Education} 16, no. 2 (1982): 235–244.
  \item 35. Shachtman describes a similar phenomenon among the Amish. One of his female interview subjects took a job in a recreational vehicle factory — a job normally taken up by Amish men. She was sexually harassed until she quit. Next, she took a job sewing curtains, which paid about half as much as her factory job, and she quit once she was married and ready to have children. See Shachtman, \textit{Rumspringa}.
  \item 36. Kraybill explains that the Amish take a similar stance with regard to the government. They see themselves as humble subjects — not citizens with rights or people who can or ought to challenge authority. The Anabaptists seek an apolitical life in relative isolation. See Kraybill, \textit{The Amish and the State}, 18.
\end{itemize}
rampant. Anecdotally, Emily, who has been trying to contact and interview other excommunicated Mennonites, has found that she is one of very few women who have left and not been raped. As she explained, because women within the group are sheltered and taught not to speak up for themselves, those who leave become easy prey for sexual predators.

Most significantly, the ethos of Anabaptist culture discourages critical thinking and questioning. Adults model good behavior, and children are taught to follow without asking why.37 As Emily explained it,

> You learn to do things efficiently, and you learn to do them well, and you learn to do them without asking questions, which means you are able to be part of a machinery that can accomplish a lot. But I think you are unable to examine where the machinery is going that you are a part of.

Many who live within an Anabaptist community would disagree with this notion, or would argue that seeking to know the “reasons why” leads one away from salvation. Further, there is tremendous diversity among Anabaptist communities, with some being much more liberal than others. Nevertheless, the idea that it is virtuous to reject “the wisdom of the wise” (Corinthians 1:19) is common among Anabaptist believers and an important part of remaining separate from the world.38 For those who want to leave, entering a world full of choice and moral ambiguity after this type of upbringing is difficult to negotiate alone.

I have identified the transition costs associated with moving from an insular group into the mainstream culture. Like moving to a new country, one must learn the cultural norms and negotiate a new institutional system. For members of insular fundamentalist groups, the process also involves breaking through the psychological barriers of their religious beliefs without the support of family and friends (and in the face of considerable opposition from them). One could argue that the state ought not to be concerned with these costs because those who really want to leave are willing and able to bear them. For some this is true, but for many young people the situation is more complicated. Emily’s story is instructive: she was only able to leave because she had experiences that were culturally unusual and, most importantly, she had somewhere to go.

At this point, it might be helpful to review the key factors that enabled Emily to leave her Mennonite community:

1. She was exposed to other ways of living through family members.
2. She had exposure to the world of ideas through access to the public library.
3. She had not lived her entire life in the church community and had some memory of life before joining the group.

37. See Hostetler, Amish Society, 182.

38. See Hostetler, Amish Society; and Kraybill, The Amish and the State.
4. She had a place to go and a relative who could facilitate her transition into “the world.”

5. She had earned enough money to own her own car, which gave her some of the freedoms that boys in her community had.

6. She got married soon after leaving. This helped her resolve not to return and gave her another source of support.

For those without these experiences, the costs of exit act as a barrier against leaving. For Anabaptists, the Yoder decision has exacerbated these costs by putting children at a comparative disadvantage in the competition for jobs and enabling the group to have too much control over the upbringing of their children.

**Facilitating Entrance**

Galston is careful to argue that the right to exit “must be more than formal” and that “communities cannot rightly act in ways that disempower individuals — intellectually, emotionally, or practically — from living successfully outside their bounds” \textit{(LP, 104)}, but he then defends Yoder on the grounds that the Amish raise children with a sufficient opportunity to exit. He opposes parents who “[foster] servility in children” by undermining their child’s “expressive liberty” \textit{(LP, 105)}, but his defense of Yoder is inconsistent with this view. When the state gives insular fundamentalist groups full control over their children, they \textit{will} act in ways that disempower the children. What I have shown is that while the group allows people to leave, its members also coerce their children in ways that interfere with their ability to assess and access life outside of the group.

One response to this argument is to reaffirm Galston’s framework, but to reject his assumption that the Amish have secured the option of exit for their children. If we take this approach, how, in practice, should the state respond to the Amish? It would make sense to conclude that if continuing the education of these children beyond the eighth grade would sufficiently develop their capacity to assess and access life outside of the group, then Anabaptists should not be given an education exemption. However, in the current context of school choice and Anabaptist schools, even if Yoder were overturned, groups could simply extend their own schools for two years and continue to keep control over the curriculum. This response does little to further exit rights because children would still be sheltered from life outside of the group. If public schools are the necessary remedy, then the state — under our current system, at least — is unable to force compliance on that issue.

Another way to consider the story of Emily and the Anabaptists is to say that Galston’s framework for exit is correct but the obligation for securing exit is misplaced. A liberal state cannot trade away its obligation to children. If it is true that accommodation is a practical necessity and it is also true that the right to exit is clearly in danger, then the state, as the guarantor of last resort, must enact policies to mitigate the costs of accommodation. In this case, the state traded away four years of schooling for Anabaptists at a time when children could not assert their preferences. If those children, on growing up, decide that they want to leave...
the group and would like more schooling, then they ought to be able to reclaim what the state traded away from them. Further, because transitioning out of the group entails financial and psychological costs, the state needs to provide services that facilitate entrance.

Several different policies might help to mitigate these costs, and I identify only a few examples here:

1. States with Anabaptist enclaves could encourage local high schools to make it known to children in the area that they are allowed to enroll, even if they have been out of school for several years. Schools should design appropriate programs that meet the special needs of these students.

2. States could make four-year educational vouchers available to dissenters who wish to attend local community colleges, vocational programs, or universities. Such programs should also provide for housing and counseling services to those who need it.

3. States could encourage the creation of small charter schools “on a human scale” that develop transition and continuing education programs for dissenters.39

Each policy carries with it the obligation to conduct outreach to young people within Anabaptist communities. A social worker might make an effort to visit workplaces to make sure that young people are aware of the local opportunities. The local police, who often deal with the more disruptive youth in large communities like LaGrange, Indiana, could also disseminate options to young people with whom they come into contact. Such outreach would need to be carefully executed so that the state does not proselytize an antireligious message, but simply informs young people of available options. Policies would obviously vary according to location and group. Utah and Arizona, for example, are now home to hundreds of young men who have been exiled from fundamentalist Mormon polygamous compounds for being disruptive, or simply because the groups can only support a limited number of men.40 These boys have been homeschooled by minimally educated mothers and have also been taught to fear the world. Much needs to be done in response to these compounds, but at a minimum these boys should receive considerable social services, and safe houses should be established close to the compounds to provide refuge for girls from these groups.

One might argue that these policies do not go far enough to protect children from the dangers of parental coercion. I do not have the space to fully answer that


objection here, but I can say briefly that this view touches on an important tension between the interests of families and the goals of a liberal state.\textsuperscript{41} What Anabaptist parents are doing is not coercive insofar as they are teaching their children to adhere to a belief system that the parents accept as true. In other words, if parents believe that hell awaits non-Anabaptists, then they are acting in the child’s best interest when they teach this view. It is reasonable that concerns for safety trump a child’s autonomy. The problem is that the belief system creates a culture of fear that is passed on to future generations and, by design, limits members’ ability to assess life outside of the group. As explained earlier, the state is limited in its capacity and authority to stop parents from passing on their deeply held beliefs. In certain cases, of course, the state is allowed to remove children from the home, and the reports of sexual abuse within Utah’s polygamous compounds might be one example. In cases that are less clear, however, it is better, in my mind, to structure public institutions in a manner that addresses the foreseeable costs to children from different families and groups (such as families in poverty, religious fundamentalists, or refugees) and to shape policies in such a way that children grow up having a fair opportunity to live a life they can accept “from the inside.”

**Conclusion**

In political philosophy, the issue of cultural accommodation is usually posed as a question about group or religious rights and their relation to the state. Philosophers have tried to work out the extent to which (1) groups should be exempted from state regulation or (2) the state should assist a group’s desire to remain separate from the larger society.\textsuperscript{42} This work contributes to our understanding of justice and the proper functioning of the state, but such work also tends to remain at the macro level of analysis. In this essay I have contributed to those discussions, but my focus has primarily been on the interests of children from insular religious groups and how to secure the right to exit given their particular circumstances. I have also shown that when we move from the macro-level discussion of principles into thinking about educational policy, justice requires actors to consider the specifics of the group, the social conditions in the larger culture, and the foreseeable costs to accommodation and nonaccommodation.

Thinking about cultural accommodations and schooling is a particularly difficult domain to enter. Children within liberal society are strangely positioned as emerging citizens who are dependent upon others for their immediate needs and well-being. They have a legitimate interest in developing the disposition of autonomy so that they are able to live well within liberal society, but developing that disposition requires a particular type of upbringing that not all parents are inclined to adopt. All parents have an interest in teaching values to their children

\textsuperscript{41} For more on this tension, see Harry Brighouse and Adam Swift, “Legitimate Parental Partiality,” *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 37, no. 1 (2009): 43–80.

in such a way that they develop a family relationship that can be sustained over time, but when these values conflict with the state’s interest in sustaining a democracy and the child’s interest in acquiring the skills and dispositions to negotiate life in that democracy, the state will be forced to decide whose interests matter more and when.

Here, I have focused on insular fundamentalist groups because they often disagree with the liberal project and consequently take issue with the aims of public schooling. They are also uniquely positioned to be able to engage in a level of civil disobedience that limits the state’s ability to “enforce liberalism.” It is tempting to conclude that because the state is limited in these cases, that it must become highly accommodationist and allow groups to fully control their children’s lives. This is not the approach I have taken. Rather than viewing requests for accommodations as a choice between a winner and a loser, I argue that the state needs to negotiate on behalf of the long-term well-being of children. When accommodation becomes a practical necessity, officials must consider the foreseeable costs to children resulting from the accommodation and institute policies that mitigate those costs for those who may later decide to exit.

IN ADDITION TO the Educational Theory reviewers, I would like to express my appreciation to Harry Brighouse, Jaime Ahlberg, and Quentin Wheeler-Bell for their helpful comments. A version of this paper was presented at the annual conference of the American Educational Research Association. Thank you to the reviewers and to Rene Arcilla for his comments. This project was funded in part by a Spencer Foundation fellowship, which allowed me to engage in lively discussions on this topic with Walter Feinberg, Kevin Kumashiro, Ross Collin, Kai Heidemann, Shervin Malekzadeh, and Ben Smith. Finally, special thanks to Emily for graciously sharing her story with me.