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## REVIEW

### *The Tribe: The Liberal-Left and the System of Diversity* by Ben Copley

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#### INTRODUCTION

A widely-held view is that political affairs have become more polarised than perhaps at any other time in living memory (Pew Research Center 2014; Gentzkow 2016; Wheatley 2017). To be sure, the ability of individuals of divergent party-political affiliations and ideological dispositions to agree over contentious matters has always been bedevilled with difficulty. More recently, however, the perception is that any willingness to cross partisan divides and constructively engage people with divergent views has greatly diminished. It is even suggested that political polarisation threatens to spill over into social interaction, driven by a lack of personal esteem towards, and lack of contact with, people subscribing to alternative political beliefs (e.g. Webster and Abramowitz 2017).

Political polarisation has gained popular traction as *explanans* for social friction, although the true extent of polarisation is the subject of ongoing debate (Nivola 2005; Fiorina 2018; Fiorina and Abrams 2008). Putting uncertainties about polarisation extent to one side, one may wish to consider the determinants of seemingly irreconcilable attitudes within the political domain. Many observers have suggested economic problems, such as slowing macroeconomic growth and rising economic inequality, could translate into polarised political conditions. Others indicate that social media websites, such as Facebook and Twitter, may have amplified interpersonal political disagreement. Factors such as ethno-linguistic fractionalisation, globalisation and declining trust are also claimed to be impactful (Grechyna 2016).

In his book, *The Tribe: The Liberal-Left and the System of Diversity*, British political journalist and blogger Ben Copley advances another, albeit well-rehearsed, hypothesis to explain political polarisation. The author's notion is that

fractious political discourses centred upon individual and group identities—known as “identity politics”—exacerbates polarisation. According to Copley, the enunciation of identity-charged themes encourages people to coalesce into non-cooperative “tribes” of shared political identity-affiliation. According to Copley the implications of such a development is significant:

the politics of identity based around largely unchosen characteristics like your skin colour and sex is now going strong in Western countries, including Britain. What is more, it is drawing most succour by linking into left-wing and liberal political organisations and movements—to the extent that the politics of identity appears to be the defining trait and core purpose of liberal-left politics nowadays (p. 2).

In *The Tribe* a polemical, and sharply critical, treatment of the identity-infused underpinnings of political polarisation is presented. According to Copley, the British proponents of identity politics have somehow appropriated key organisations such as mainstream media outlets and, likewise, social-democratic and progressive parties (i.e. Labour, the Greens). Having acquired influential positions within such entities the identity-focussed political actors have, then, manufactured a so-called “system of diversity” reallocating privileges for “in-groups” at the expense of “out-groups.” In Copley's opinion the in-group members nominally include the likes of women, racial minorities, gays and people with disabilities, whereas the likes of white, able-bodied heterosexual men are seemingly now on the political outer.

We should be under no illusion that *The Tribe* adds to a now very crowded market of literature fixated upon the topic of identity politics. Within this market it is possible to identify a growth in the dissemination of “contrarian,”

but I find unconvincing, views to the effect that minorities, which have long been, and in some respects still are, the target of discrimination and ill-treatment, are supposedly now in the cultural, economic, political and social ascendancy. On both counts, the book adds little to the literature already in existence.

That being said, there is no denying Cogley's basic point that identity is a feature of politics. Under some circumstances, issues grounded in the identity of people can be diffused through discourse in non-constructive ways. This induces political polarisation and the concomitant narrowing of communicative possibilities between groups. Fair-minded individuals would, surely, share the view such tendencies need to change in the interests of resolving genuinely collective action problems, not to mention realising the array of benefits associated with living together better.

Classical liberal insights are not explicitly canvassed in *The Tribe*, but I think they could aid the development of a nuanced, and fuller, perspective about identity politics and political polarisation. The liberal view helps explain what identity is, the political parameters of identity and its normative significance, and some guidance as to how to manage the reality of diversity. It is these tasks I set myself for the remainder of this review, pointing to key agreements and disagreements with Cogley's work along the way.

## IDENTITY IN TENSION: STATIC VERSUS DYNAMIC CONCEPTIONS<sup>1</sup>

Despite the lack of a unifying definition of identity, a useful conceptualisation may refer to it as sets of expectations, representations and understandings about who a person is, what kind of person they are, and how they relate to others. From an economic perspective, identity is deeply intertwined with a notion of human agency: “[a]gency is seen as a property of individuals which results from identity: identity establishes personhood and is embedded into human groups, both synchronically as confluence of population-level processes of social categorizations and diachronically as narratives that distinguish individuals relative to others” (Herrmann-Pillath 2013, p. xxvi).

Demarcating identity into individual (personal) and group (social) categories represents an elemental attempt at categorisation made by most identity researchers and, for that matter, other people in most walks of life. A given person may self-reflectively hone their own sense of individual identity, which may be compared and contrasted with identities subscribed to by other persons. In addition, it is

possible to discern a pervasive relation between individual and group identities. This arises from the fact people often express their self-identity with reference to certain group-memberships (e.g. age, race, gender, kinship, nationality, religion, sexual preference, ideological or political affiliation, and civic association membership). The bilateral senses in which individual and group identities relate add another dimension of complexity toward our understanding of identity.

Both individual and group identities may be based with reference to physical attributes, or objects, which are claimed to be more readily observed in situations of interpersonal engagement. Cogley puts great emphasis upon skin colour and gender-based attributes, for instance, as pivotal identity referents in contemporary British politics. Identities are also expressively attached to the application and use of different kinds of commodities, and patterns of conduct. Clothing, food, music, venues, even vocabulary and manner of speech may be stereotypically identified as being in use by certain groups of people, relatively more often than by others. Certain forms of individual and group identities may also attach to economic and non-economic roles, which map onto notions of socio-economic class—for example, manual labourers may be described in some quarters as people possessing “working class” identities.

The idea that identity is permanently etched onto certain attributes or objects is challenged by an emergentist perspective stressing that identity conceptions are neither interpersonally uniform nor immune to (intrapersonal and interpersonal) critical reflection, negotiation and change. The limitations associated with attempting to objectively enunciate identities on, say, physicalist or essentialist grounds is illustrated by the (I consider, compelling) argument that many identifiers are evolvable social constructions endowed with particular, often normative, meanings (Horwitz 2011). Some categories, such as religious belief, are arguably more readily interpretable through the emergence lens, but it is considered that other identifiers casually depicted by some as somehow “fixed,” such as race and gender, are in fact also fluid conceptions. These propositions suggest, in brief, that many aspects of identity are subject to change.

In evolutionary terms the speed and diffusion in which change occurs is indelibly shaped by context. One may generically observe identity evolution unfolding less rapidly than certain guises of economic evolution yet proceeding more quickly than, for instance, the evolution of legal and political institutions. The “relative stability” of some indi-

vidual and group identity categories reflects the desire held by considerable numbers of people with keeping their identity reasonably consistent over time. Individuals and groups may wish to sustain certain identity markers to signal a reputation for trustworthiness and reliability to others, whereas the perpetuation of shared group identities may promote economic coordination and facilitate social capital development.

Following the view just described, a desire to fix identity (or at least to slow identity evolution) rests in the desire to secure legibility to others in the face of heterogeneity and uncertainty. Contraindicating such desire is an equally pressing appetite or need on the part of some to amend their identities, realising a different sense of self and toward those they affiliate with. Certain forms of identity are ascribed to individuals by their parents, relatives and community members at a relatively early age, but which are progressively subject to amendment as people mature through adulthood and socio-economically interact in different ways. The important point here is that identity is hypothesised to be largely the result of voluntary choice, rather than the consequence of some preordained, or otherwise fixed, assignment by others (Lomasky 2002). What we observe, commensurately, is a *diverse* set of identities with their incidences within the population waxing and waning.

For pluralist liberals, such as Wilhelm von Humboldt and John Stuart Mill, diversity is reflective of the free expression of individual personalities, enabling perspectival learnings and discoveries which are conducive to individual and societal betterment. Reflecting upon the social thought of Humboldt the historian George Smith (2013) aptly said, “[f]reedom and the diversity of situations breed individuality and individuality, in turn, generates even more freedom and diversity, which in turn promote even greater individuality—and so on, indefinitely. This mutual and reciprocal causation is the engine of cultural progress, as new talents are developed, new relationships are formed, and new ideas are discovered.” From the standpoint of classical liberalism, then, diversity is at the core of a vibrant, dynamic civil society, and is not interpreted as a terrible burden or threat to be mitigated (Muldoon 2018).

Human interactions are conducted over a criss-crossing array of economic, social and political activity. From this standpoint it should come as no surprise that actors involved within the political domain are amongst those with an interest in promulgating certain senses of identity amongst the citizenry at large. Drawing upon the work of James C. Scott (1998) it is hypothesised that a perennial

project of statecraft is to make the individual members of society legible for the purpose of tax collection, entitlement allocation and rent distribution. That is to say, the long-held governmental practice of administratively and legally codifying individual and group identities represents a core component of the broader quest by political agents (*qua* rulers) to render diverse individuals (*qua* subjects) legible for political purposes. In Cobley’s words, “in a sense identity *is* politics, as the establishing of group boundaries. By identifying and demarcating the various groups that carry out political activity, we politicise them and the people within them—and divide them off from others” (p. 33).

Cobley is correct to discern that the inherently relational character of identity entails interpersonal distinction. When people of diverse identities peacefully commingle with one another in the pursuit of mutually beneficial exchanges there is the prospect of gains from trade to occur. We may conceive of this potential for exchange and associated realisation of gains in the broadest sense, not only encompassing economic interactions but social and political. But there is the risk that individuals and groups may exploit differences in identity markers to foment adversarial, not cooperative, relationships, at the cost of opportunities for market-tested betterment, social cohesion and political harmony.

It is empirically observed that human beings have tended to act “groupishly” towards one another—treating members of designated out-groups (whomever and however defined) less favourably than members of in-groups. The human tendency to undermine the aspirations, interests, and values of those deemed as possessing out-group identities regrettably, and often, found historically safe harbour in the form of discriminatory government policies. In other words, the longstanding political project of promoting widespread legibility does not necessarily equate with generality of treatment of the ruled by the rulers. Indeed, political manipulation of inter-group animosities and tensions seems, on the basis of experience, to have aggravated malign social phenomena such as racism, sexism, and xenophobia.

## COMPLICATING THE NARRATIVE I: MULTI-PARTISAN IDENTITY POLITICS

*The Tribe* is centred upon identity-grounded political polarisation and who might be complicit in instigating such phenomena. A case in point is that, “[f]or the liberal-left and the system that it oversees ... identity is central. The liberal-left as an identity group *makes an issue of identity* as some-

thing fixed and intrinsic in our society, prescribing whether someone is an oppressor or a victim and should therefore be favoured or disfavoured” (p. 227). As mentioned, British social-democratic and progressive parties are asserted as key culprits in attempting to compartmentalise and fix individual and social identities for the purposes of political gain. Similar criticisms are also directed at individual political figures, such as the London’s Labour Mayor Sadiq Khan, and media outlets with a perceived “left-of-centre” political bias including the British Broadcasting Corporation and *The Guardian* newspaper.

The prominent entities and personalities mentioned by Copley appear to be at the veritable tip of an institutionalised framework that is, somewhat curiously, referred to as a system of diversity. This system, in economic parlance, could be interpreted as a production function of inputs (i.e. petitions for favours and protections by members of various identity groups) translating into outputs (i.e. supply of fiscal and regulatory privileges, provision of political recognition, speech-suppression activity, etc.). Production is supposedly mediated by a hierarchical apparatus of so-called “administrators” who “take on a role distributing power to the favoured groups via prominent members of those groups” (p. 4). The assistance provided by administrators then, as it were, “trickles down” from recognised group representatives toward the larger body of in-group members.

I refer to this system as a curiosity given that its features bear distinctly organisational qualities contrasting the classical liberal appreciation of human diversity as an emergent order of trialled ways of being, doing and knowing, embodying ever-increasing complexity. One could also question the robustness of the system of diversity as explicated by Copley. As famously noted by Mancur Olson there are difficulties holding large-scale groups of people together because of the possibilities of free-riding and defection. A sharing of a certain identity marker does not necessarily guarantee coherence and stability within the group, since individuals customarily subscribe to a variety of interests, beliefs, passions and viewpoints which may generate intra-group tensions in other ways.

Any characterisation of a system of diversity of the left, by the left, and for the left, does not equip the reader with a holistic picture of identity politics embraced *across the political spectrum*. The claimed centrality of political-left involvement with identity politics makes some of the book’s arguments—for example, “we can see day by day how progressives achieve their progress by relentless control, by subjecting social, political and ethical spheres to their de-

mands” (p. 221)—susceptible to interpretation as being over-dramatic. To provide a well-rounded account of the manipulation of identity the intensive efforts of conservative political figures to shore up, and entrench, certain conceptions of individual and group identity also needs due consideration.

At the risk of over-simplification, one may state that it takes two, or more, persons or groupings to polarise in a political sense. From this perspective conservative party leadership and supporters are just as culpable in the diffusion of identity norms in contemporary political affairs as their progressive counterparts. It is possible to nominate case after case example whereby non-conformity with conservatives’ preferences on identity-political grounds have led to unemployment, social banishment and, in some cases, country flight, however space limits us to consider some more generic principles.

Anecdotally, some of the identity criteria used and manipulated by the “political right” in an attempt to draw public support to their causes, and to denigrate the “political left” and its policy agendas in the process, include (but is not limited to): nationality; language; religion; age; sexual preference; gender identity; occupational and employment status; residential location; military involvement and veteran status; and political party affiliation. For the remainder of this section we consider the involvement of political conservatives in perpetuating what Alex Nowrasteh (2016) aptly describes as “patriotic correctness,” attempting to galvanise political support about a fixed national identity through laws, policies, rhetoric and symbolic gestures.

Key conservative theorists have asserted that their commitment to assert a national identity for large numbers of people, living proximately together in geographical space, is not intended as a polarising political project. Roger Scruton (2017) argues that a “national loyalty marginalizes loyalties of family, tribe and faith, and places before the citizens’ eyes, as the focus of their patriotic feeling, not a person or a religion but a place.” To realise national identity as the *locus* of multi-person binding, “[w]e need an identity that leads to citizenship, which is the relation between the state and the individual in which each is accountable to the other. That, for ordinary people, is what the nation provides.”

The purpose of nationalism, as told by conservatives, is not to polarise. It is, rather, to articulate a defence of large-scale, transcendent institutional and organisational structures to be shared and supported by large numbers of people. Instead of the polarisation resulting from political efforts to fix identity into “us and them” categories, the con-

servative agenda is intended to encourage (and retain, for retention is inherently conservative) mass support for more encompassing, arguably more inclusive, forms of identity. Copley expresses a fairly similar view when suggesting that “[i]n a democratic society, the ‘us’ is different to the ‘us’ of identity politics. Democratic citizenship discriminates on the basis of who is *here* and *of here*, of who has an established connection *to this place*, rather than such things as skin colour, ethnicity, gender and religion” (p. 226). In the sense in which Copley expresses it, nationalism is an identity wedded to a principle of self-government held by a population in common.

Perhaps the most obvious critical response to the conservative deployment of nationalism as binding agent for their version of identity politics is that it, all too often, has been cynically employed for exclusionary purposes. The legal, regulatory and symbolic ramifications of nationalism—invariably entwined with broader citizenship imperatives of appreciating communal tradition tied to a given locality, and the impression of a shared future in that same location—may well imply the existence of a political “us” applicable to multiple persons. The exclusionist character of nationalism has been illustrated, however, in the interpretation of the “us” as overwhelmingly a native-born in-group, whose interests and prerogatives are substantially elevated above those of an immigrant, out-group “them.”

The policy manifestations of an anti-immigration stance, depicted here as a largely (but not exclusively) conservative indulgence in contemporary identity politics, have become unnervingly apparent in recent times. These include the emergence of xenophobic political leaders and parties, the instigation of stricter policy limits against migration flows (and travel limits applied to residents of certain countries), and the prescriptive enforcement of entry conditions (including stricter visa conditions, offshore immigration processing, mandatory detention, separating families at border points, etc.). Evidence of such a backlash against mass immigration, as reflected in policy punishments against certain forms of cross-border human movement, is anecdotally evidenced in North America, Europe and elsewhere.

A basis for the tension between the ideas of nationalism and immigration, so it appears from a conservative political perspective, is that an influx of large numbers of people alters the demographic composition and cultural complexion of a country. Such a development is alleged to be undesirable, perhaps because immigration makes it even more difficult, at least along some margins, to render the diverse inhabitants of a country legible for policymaking purposes.

Similarly, Copley claims that “[w]ith the shape and make-up of the community constantly shifting and expanding through mass immigration, those who govern and the people they govern come to have less in common and less mutual understanding—undermining links of reciprocity and mutual responsibility between members of the political community and the government it elects, creating constant problems of legitimacy” (p. 225).

The classical liberal view is that the costs of anti-immigration are immense. Aside from an inability to expand domestic markets and forge economic networks with individuals farther afield, limiting freedom of human movement comes at a cost of epistemic deprivation of knowledge with respect to diverse experiments in living (Tebble 2016). That is to say, an anti-immigration posture prevents natives and migrants from commingling in proximate geographic space, sharing perspectives and learning from each other experimentally. These matters are canvassed by Lomasky and Tesón (2015), who critique political efforts to sediment cultural norms (and, implicitly, the identities tagged with them):

The desire to impose cultural standards is an authoritarian preference that clashes with a nonwaived individual right, the right to move about and interact with whom you please. The cultural conservationist favors using the power of the state to prevent changes in the culture. These changes, which immigration inevitably causes, are the result of spontaneous, voluntary processes: immigrants do not coerce the natives into abandoning their hamburgers and adopting Indian curries. The cultural conservative proposes to interfere with these voluntary processes and thinks that closing borders is a good way of doing it. But, ... these border-closing actions coercively interfere with people’s right to personal mobility. This is true in all cases where immigrants have all sorts of commendable personal preferences, such as improving their lives by engaging in mutually advantageous transactions with natives (p. 118).

The rationale for highlighting identity politics as a practice shared by political conservatives and progressives is not to engage in partisan tit-for-tat. Our observations are intended to illustrate that certain styles of political conduct overlap party and ideological divides. More generally, the political process is inherently contestable in that multiple persons of differing political persuasions may fixate upon a

common theme (in this case, identity norms) to gain ascendancy. In this context, supporters of the political left will expend (public and private) resources and create networks in an attempt to convince others of the merits and virtues of their position, and criticise alternative positions held by others. This conduct is replicated by figures on the political right.

In summary, multi-partisan efforts to privilege certain forms of identity over others typically generate significant, yet needless, frictions. These exertions which are prevalent within the political domain have potentially far-reaching consequences for the ability of people to surmount, or at least reconcile, identity-based differences and coordinate better together.

## COMPLICATING THE NARRATIVE II: “PRO-LIBERTY” IDENTITY POLITICS

To the extent that in-group members are valorised, whereas out-groups are denigrated, widespread prejudice and discrimination may be levelled against certain people based upon their identity categorisation. A refusal to countenance the involvement of out-group members in economic and social networks risks exclusion, poverty, inequality and a lack of opportunity for sizeable numbers of people (Novak 2016). Even worse, prejudice and discrimination could descend into a destructive promulgation of dehumanising attitudes and behaviours against members of the out-groups. At least in theory the evolutionary character of identity might make it more difficult for discriminators to be definitive about the targets of their malign intentions, but the reality is that othering has been, and continues to be, an important sociological problem impacting the life opportunities of far too many people.

The account of identity politics in *The Tribe* is, as mentioned, reminiscent of interest group theory found in the public choice literature. Representatives of certain interests successfully lobby legislators and key bureaucrats to direct policy-generated rents and, in the case that Copley attempts to build, to serve “protection” on behalf of minority perspectives. In the context in which Copley writes, the interest groups appear collectively sewn together by supposed epistemological insight that:

takes account of various forms of victimhood, which are all grounded in knowledge—in *knowing* how these properties of identity and the people holding them fit into the world, as victims of the world. Reality appears

as a place in which one set of identity groups suffers victimhood and oppression from another, all working in one-way relationships of power (p. 21).

To its many critics much of the scale of activity falling under the heading of identity politics is interpreted as political aggrandisement. As such, it should be categorically ruled out as legitimate activity within a liberal system of politics which emphasises generality and neutrality of treatment for all persons. Even so, it is considered that not all political claims utilising identity considerations are necessarily illiberal given the particularised, group-oriented ways in which governments have differentially treated, and in some respects still differentially treat, people. In simple terms context is important when discerning the legitimacy of identity politics, raising the possibility that other long-established liberal commitments, such as justice, may validly come into argumentative play (Levy 2016).

As explained by Steven Pinker (2011) and other scholars, Western societies have largely accommodated an “emancipation sequence” of expanding rights and liberties, eradicating (though not completely in all circumstances) social blights such as racism, sexism and homophobia to the extent they were given expression through public policies. The complex, intersecting mix of (affective and intellectual) argumentation, political lobbying and social mobilisation by those people agitating for change—such as oppressed minorities and their allies—may well be interpreted as a species of identity politics, insofar as attention is centred upon group treatment. To be sure, this proposition reflects, of course, little more than the reality that certain governmental policies previously enshrined the *de jure* differential treatment of persons, using identity as its basis.

Regardless of the ideological dispositions of certain key activists of years past, the important point is that they persuaded governments to roll back identity-based discrimination hampering opportunities for cooperation amongst heterogeneous individuals with divergent knowledge and varied backgrounds. This represents a political stance that is unmistakably liberal in substance, with its links between economic, social and political freedoms: “the cumulative and gradual accumulation of liberties by individuals within society has historically been the path to liberty. This historical path to liberty in turn eroded political privileges based on social status, race, or creed, allowing ever-greater numbers of individuals to participate in social cooperation under the division of labor” (Boettke and Candela 2017, p. 138).

A potentially attractive feature of demands to eradicate formal discrimination is that certain activists contributed to change by instilling recognition of more generalist, non-discriminatory, notions of identity in the process. Putting this in another way, an encompassing and inclusive “meta-identity” was projected into political discourse that could help coordinate persons who affiliate with contradictory identities, in so doing eschewing “friend-enemy” political distinctions (Almeida 2014). What is this all-encompassing identity classification to which we refer? It is not nationalism, which has an unhappy tendency to invite group-laden hostilities against those lacking the preferred national status. It is, instead, the notion of a *common humanity*.

Jeremy Waldron (2017) suggests that legally identifying people on the basis of “what sort of person they are” creates a category labelled as “sortal status.” Various sortal status positions have been ascribed to people by the state throughout recorded history, giving rise to in-group and out-group distinctions reflected in law and public policy. Identifying the problems surrounding the morally arbitrary, and unjust, political assignment of lesser sortal status to certain people, Waldron takes the position that “there is just one sortal status: the status of being a human person” (p. 8).<sup>2</sup>

Incidentally, a semantic refinement of Waldron’s propositions—viz. contemplating the existence of a common humanity rather than sub-sets of humanity divided along racialist, sexist, xenophobic or other lines—maps neatly onto the classical liberal commitment to cosmopolitanism. In brief, the cosmopolitan ideal insists that all human beings are endowed with the same basic moral rights—including freedom of movement and to trade (Boettke 2017).

It is evident that Copley yearns for societal arrangements in which people are not treated discriminatorily and prejudicially on the basis of their background characteristics and circumstances. As acknowledged by Copley, “[m]any of the activists who practise the politics of identity are good people. Their politics has significant achievements to its name. The virtual elimination of genuine racism and sexism from our public life is a massive one. ... We should seek to preserve these and other achievements” (p. 233). Nonetheless, one senses significant difference between the emancipatory potentialities of a pro-liberal identity politics, as described here, and the inter-group bargaining and jostling for fiscal and regulatory privileges which are primarily the subject of Copley’s book.

## LIBERAL POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS AS “SAFETY VALVES” TO MANAGE POLARISING POLITICS

The contribution of identity politics to contemporary life has been the subject of debate and contention. As already noted, there exists a body of evidence to the effect that attaching political value to identity has exacerbated political polarisation and, though it, impacted our collective ability to make public discourse more meaningful, inclusive and epistemically productive (Müller 2018). Any tendency to use identity as leverage to gain policy favouritism, for certain groups at the expense of others, has also been criticised, including in *The Tribe*, on account of the potential for such practices to aggravate political non-generality of treatment.

It seems that for Copley, and other critics of identity politics, the narrowness of especially ascriptive notions of identity as a mode for dispensing political privilege is the chief concern. The previous section canvasses the liberal ideal of generality in political treatment (Buchanan and Congleton [1998] 2003) as a broad reflection of political acceptance toward the meta-identity norm of a common humanity. There is no inconsistency between this position and the diagnosis, and reform, of non-generalist (including identity-grounded) legislation and public policies.

The modern classical liberal literature primarily focusses upon the desirability of generic rules for economic and social policy to alleviate policy errors. In addition to the ever-present incentive of political actors to manipulate public policy settings to accumulate political power and to generate rents, the liberal surmises that legislators and bureaucrats are unable to acquire the finely-grained, typically tacit, knowledge to promote the general public interest. The liberal outlook with respect to the political treatment of identity issues raises interesting questions about which format of public governance is likely to be more effective in channelling the implications of deep diversity into positive-sum learning and exchange opportunities.

There is much to commend institutional diversity to accommodate the fact of difference. Political philosopher Julian Müller (2017) contends that a “polycentric democracy,” defined as “an institutional arrangement involving a multiplicity of polities acting independently but under the constraints of a democratically supervised framework designed for institutional competition” (p. 151), can help reduce tensions and, furthermore, enable society as a whole

to tap into the benefits of diversity. The existence of large number of political jurisdictions, under a non-discriminatory “rules of the game” compact (Hutt 1966), would (i) help reduce defuse deep disagreement by offering the possibility of exit to jurisdictions inhabited by like-minded citizens, (ii) reduce shallow disagreements by testing a multitude of socio-economic practices across jurisdictions, and (iii) discover new and better ways of living or, at least, deliver more effective *modus vivendi* arrangements.

Similar views extolling the virtues of institutional flexibility in accounting for heterogeneity have been expressed in the form of Ryan Muldoon’s (2017) dynamised social contract theory, as well as Adam Tebble’s (2016) epistemic liberal critique of uniform national identity. In another important contribution, Aurelian Craiutu (2017) also suggests that polycentrism appears a reasonable fit for liberal ethics respectful of the reality of multiple and shiftable identities:

moderation suitable to our condition today would still require opposition to all types of moral absolutism, and would maintain a healthy dose of scepticism toward all forms of zealotry and agendas trying to simplify the complex reality of political and social life. It would reject all attempts to impose the rule of a single idea or program that defines itself as the single “best way.” By opposing simple systems that seek to transform the diversity of the world into a neatly organized and uniform universe governed by general and rigid rules and criteria, such a moderate agenda would favor social, political, and moral complexity and promote a mixture of institutions, ideas, and principles such as pluralism, balanced constitutions, and mixed forms of government (p. 244).

On some accounts, the ability of individuals to politically exercise freedom of association (and of disassociation) may “be able to ameliorate the psychological and epistemic inhibitors of collective deliberation” (Müller op. cit.). However, this is not to suggest that public infrastructure in which diverse people can encounter one another, and share perspectives, is needless or invalid. Of course, one of those components of necessary infrastructure is the emergent institution of democracy itself (diZerega 1989), which Copley lauds on grounds that it “encompasses the whole of a political community and treats everyone within it as an equal” (p. 225).

Some key liberals have maintained suspicions about the virtues of democracy, on the ground that it has served as

a powerful mechanism to induce a substantial expansion in the scale and scope of governmental activity. Such perceptions are unfortunate, not least since it serves as cannon fodder for at times strident (albeit not necessarily substantive) critiques of liberal thought. As Hayek once remarked, democracy’s great virtue is actually to be found in its dynamism. In this context it is useful to recognise the dynamical benefits of the democratic package of discussion, deliberation, participation and voting, in terms of communicating and distilling knowledge concerning matters of public interest as held by diverse citizenry (for more on this, see Madison 1997, Berg 2015 and Nell 2017).

The nature and implications of applying identity precepts in political discourse and public policy are, to put it mildly, complicated, and not necessarily reducible to simple problem specifications or solution possibilities. By no means does *The Tribe*, or this review for that matter, establish the final words regarding how to respond to some of the more troubling manifestations of identity politics in North America, Europe, the Antipodes and elsewhere. But there appears a good opportunity to pick up some of the themes contained in Copley’s book, advancing the study of identity and its political deployment from the vantage point of classical liberal thinking. From there we might well find that key to overcoming political polarisation is for each and all to summons the courage and foresight to abridge identity, and other divides, and seriously engage one another on issues as natural equals sharing a common humanity.

## NOTES

1. Material in the following section is largely drawn from Novak (2018).
2. In addition to sortal status there is “conditional status,” reflecting personal circumstances in ways which “do not tell us anything about the underlying personhood of the individual who has them” (Waldron 2017, p. 6). Alienage is nominated as a form of conditional status, however the status of being an alien (or migrant more generally) is often confounded, at least in political discourses, with sortal-style personal traits of “non-nationalism” or “foreignness.” In other words, nationalism is held, accurately or otherwise, to be central to the essence or being of a person. We also note under some circumstances there is overlap between alienage and other sortal categories such as race and ethnicity.

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