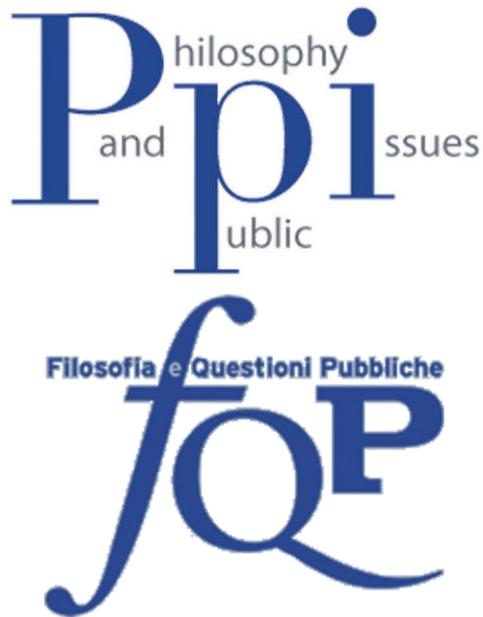


SYMPOSIUM
IDENTITY AND LIBERAL POLITICS



RESPONSES TO CRITICS

BY

KWAME ANTHONY APPIAH

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Responses to Critics

Kwame Anthony Appiah

Introduction

Each of these four essays challenges claims suggested or asserted in my book about how to respond to the facts of identity in ways that will make the world better. They also all suggest (even if they don't assert) that I could – and perhaps should – have said more about these questions, which are, in the broadest sense, political. I could offer in mitigation that I did say in the introduction to the book that I thought philosophers “contribute to public discussions of moral and political life ... not by telling you what to think, but by providing an assortment of concepts and theories you can use to decide what to think for yourself.” And I do think that there is a useful place for a book that tries simply to understand how identity works, seeking also to limn the forms of some central specific identities. In answering questions about how to deal with political and social challenges posed by the ways identities really work in the

world, it must be helpful to have such an understanding. But in these responses, I want both to get clearer about my actual views on the questions on which these essays challenge me, both by way of insisting on what I did say in the book, and by saying more than I did. I cannot take up every useful idea or contest every misconception. I will try to focus on a few large themes. And let me say at the start how grateful I am for the thoughtful attention of these four colleagues and to this journal for asking them to respond to my book.

I

Volker Kaul

Volker Kaul's essay focuses on the ways in which *The Lies that Bind* pursues a liberal agenda while, at the same time, endorsing social identities that seem at least in tension with and perhaps even just inconsistent with liberalism. I agree that my position is broadly liberal, and that liberalism can be in tension with actually existing identities. But in trying to defend a liberalism that is friendly to identity, I had hoped to demonstrate that liberalism is compatible with the existence of identities, even if it must reject some forms of identity and insist on the liberalizing reform of others. I find much of what Kaul has to say congenial, and I am grateful for his careful reconstruction of my arguments. What I'd like to do in response, rather than taking him on point by point, is to sketch a conception of the legitimate role of identity in a liberal political order.

Liberalism like all significant traditions of political thought is as much a collection of arguments and themes as it is one coherent system of values and beliefs. I find my own place in that tradition in seeing the state as centrally concerned with the creation of a context in which each citizen has the possibility of making a

dignified human life. I think, like most contemporary liberals, that this requires a bundle of somewhat diverse civil and political rights; but, again like many, I think that the state also has a role in making sure that every citizen has access to the bundle of economic, social, and cultural resources that a dignified life requires. At least since Mill, the liberal tradition has recognized that providing for the needs of all requires acknowledging their diversity:

[D]ifferent persons also require different conditions for their spiritual development; and can no more exist healthily in the same moral, than all variety of plants can exist in the same physical atmosphere and climate. The same things which are helps to one person towards the cultivation of his higher nature, are hindrances to another... Such are the differences among human beings in their sources of pleasure, their susceptibilities of pain, and the operation on them of different physical and moral agencies, that unless there is a corresponding diversity in their modes of life, they neither obtain their fair share of happiness, nor grow up to the mental, moral, and aesthetic statures of which their nature is capable. (Mill 1989, 68).

My view is that among the socially provided resources in a just liberal society, there will be a variety of identities, produced through processes of negotiation among equals. They will have to be various in recognition of this diversity of persons. Precisely because identities, as I have defined them, involve pre-given structures of constraints, it may be that the forms of identity that meet a person growing up in a society fail to provide them with a way of being in the world that suits the needs and interests they discover that they have. Then they must militate for change. But they couldn't find their way into a human world at all if they didn't

have some such options. The idea of a human world without identities makes no sense.

So, Kaul is not completely right to say that I “cannot accept a society in which class division is a matter of social institutions rather than individual freedom.” If there are social identities associated with different places in hierarchies of wealth and honor – and that is what I take to be the key to current class structures – they can be made compatible with liberalism, but only if people are not denied access to the most highly remunerated or honored positions on the basis of their other identities and only if every position is compatible with human dignity. Since what dignity requires is, in part, a matter of changing social understandings, we can only know if this is possible once we try to achieve it. It is true that I am skeptical of this possibility, and so I think of class as one of the kinds of identity that we should do without. But that is not because its structure is imposed on people through a process of social negotiation: it is because of the kind of structure that it is.

On the other hand, I do not see any reason to think that gender – social identities grounded in real or imagined differences in the sexual body – cannot be reformed, through such processes of social negotiation, in ways to make all gender options – male, female, gay, straight, bi, cis, trans, non-binary, intersex – consistent with human dignity. Indeed, I am hoping that that is where we are going.

Settling questions like these is in part a matter of what Mill called “experiments of living.” Different groups in different societies explore different options. Seeing them, others outside can borrow and adapt. These are all collective processes, but they should serve the needs of individuals. Where they can be shaped to that end, they are compatible, I think, with a liberal concern for human dignity.

II

Michael James

Michael James makes two important criticisms of my argument. The first is that in stressing the error in essentialism I seem to suggest that a wider grasp of the truths of anti-essentialism would reduce political conflicts around identity. “Although I am thoroughly convinced by Appiah’s anti-essentialism,” he writes, “I am more skeptical that epistemological transformation will prove nearly as useful in mitigating identity conflict” (James 2020, 34). This is because he thinks that a good deal of identity conflict arises because people feel threatened – his essay, recall, is entitled “Essentialism or Threat-perception” – and are thus mobilized against people of other identities whether they essentialize them or not.

It was natural to think that, because I lay so much stress on the errors of essentialism in my criticisms of the way people think about identities, I must believe that combatting essentialism will contribute centrally to undoing some of the harms done in the name of identity. But I don’t anywhere say this in the book, and, for the record, my view of the contribution of anti-essentialism to identity-conflict is more modest.

Furthermore, as I’ll say at the end, I do have views about the mitigation of identity conflict, and the central strategies I favor could be pursued even if essentialist views persisted, even, indeed, if they were correct.

But I think it is important to see that identity-conflict is not the only problem identities raise; and, as Sally Haslanger rightly sees in her essay (2020), a significant part of my interest lies elsewhere. My central concern in this book was ethical not political: in allowing people to understand how identities work

in their own lives, they are freed from the sense that their identities are somehow inevitable and fixed and thus more able to develop strategies for working to reshape the identities they live with. A second virtue of this sort of analysis is that it helps even those who are satisfied with their identities to grasp more clearly how others might not be; and thus, to develop empathy for demands for changes in identity of the sort that trans people have successfully articulated in the last couple of decades. Dialogue about these issues is a part of the social process of moving identities in directions that work better for more people.

And, in fact, I do not even think that identities have to be conceived in an essentialist way, or in terms of the sort of essences that have traditionally been associated with them. James is right that much modern conflict around race is organized not by biological essentialism but by cultural essentialism; and, perhaps he is correct, too, in supposing that some of it is not really essentialist at all.

I am less certain about this second point. If you respond spontaneously with negative attitudes to Black people, it is natural to think that, at some level, perhaps below conscious awareness, you think that Black people have something deep and important in common. If you don't think that, why respond to them all in that way? But, in any case, I take this to be an empirical question, of the sort that is explored by psychologists working on racial attitudes – including implicit ones; and that literature suggest to me that the fact that people do not defend essentialist views doesn't mean they don't have them or fall back into them routinely when they are not vigilantly policing their own attitudes. So, I would need persuading that, as he says, “[o]ver the years, the number of white Americans who believe that racial identity is primarily biological has steadily declined,

so that now only a small minority holds such a view” (James 2020, 39). And, once I was persuaded of that, I would need evidence that the resulting position of these White Americans was not a form of cultural essentialism.

Now James had begun by pointing out, usefully and correctly, that in using gender as a model for identity, I picked a form of identity that is not transmitted inter-generationally within groups to model identities that normally are. Typically, you share your religion, nationality, race, class, and culture with your parents; almost always, though, you don’t share your gender with them.

This point made, he suggests that the model has misled me.

Appiah is certainly correct that we must discard the 19th century science of essentialism in favour of the best intellectual tools of the 21st century. But doing so is no guarantee that it will heal the social and political problems surrounding identity conflict, and part of the reason stems from the disjuncture between those identities that are inter-generational, like race, religion, or class, and those that are not, like gender or sexuality. (James 2020, 37).

Now, I agree, of course, that the forms of identity-based violence associated with identities standardly inherited in families are often different from those associated with identities that are not. More generally, the ways in which descent-based identities work are clearly connected with the fact that, in being centered on families, they draw in a particular way on the sentiments of intimate life. I am not so convinced, though, that the reason that the dissolution of essentialism doesn’t eradicate identity-conflict is that xenophobia and religious bigotry and classism are associated with descent-based identities. But that is only because, as I’ll argue

in closing, the solutions to identity-conflict I favor can work with gender, too, and, as I've already said, they don't depend on anti-essentialism.

James's second main line of objection is that I fail to attend to the role of inter-group threat as a source of inter-group conflict. I agree that I do say little about this, but that is because, as I say, my focus in the book wasn't on inter-group conflict – on war, pogroms, revolutions – at all. He argues that when people act on the basis of one identity to mobilize against another, it is often because they feel threatened by those others. This must be true. He gives as an example the shift of some white working-class voters from supporting Barack Obama to voting for Donald Trump because of a shift from a sense of class threat to a sense of a racial threat. But notice that there is no evidence of an objective shift in the situation of those voters from being more threatened as working-class to being more threatened as white.¹ What shifted in this case, then, was which form of identity was salient for those voters. It was a shift in attitudes not in the situation.

But speaking of threat as a source of conflict strikes me as unhelpful unless we recognize two things, both of which have to do with the way identity works. The first is that what matters is not whether someone's individual position is truly under threat. It is perceptions of threat, not their reality, that matter in motivating conflict. And drawing attention to a person's identity can sometimes lead them to feel threatened whether or not they face any actual personal danger. Talk of White racism can make White people feel threatened, whether or not they are in danger. Talk of

¹ There are interesting questions about how they understood the threat in ways that could seem morally legitimate even to them. Arlie Russell Hochschild's work is very helpful in understanding this moral understanding. Cf. Hochschild 2018.

sexism can make men defensive, even when their personal material situation is not at risk.

The second point about identity and threat is that in warfare or in communal riots, it is not really threats to *me* that motivate: it is threats to *us*. So, as in the case James quotes, it was a shift from a class “we” to a race “we” that did the work in redirecting the sense of threat. Which threats a person perceives will depend not just on the question what changes in the world would actually reduce their individual well-being; it can depend as well on whom they identify with. What concerned these voters, on James’s account, was a loss in status of their group – a decline, so to speak, in the identity premium for being White. And while they might have feared that this would reduce their economic well-being, the motivator was surely, in large measure, that collective loss.

James has many other interesting things to say. I am sorry I cannot respond to them all. But let me end this section of my response by gesturing towards an answer to his objection that I do “not do much to interrogate the philosophical problems posed by discrete *states*” (James 2020, 40). While my discussion of nationalism and the positive uses of identities organized around states does, indeed, not address the question of the legitimacy of state boundaries in the first place, that is a topic I did discuss in *The Ethics of Identity*. What I wrote there still strikes me as right:

It is because humans live best on a smaller scale that liberal cosmopolitans should defend not just the state but the county, the town, the street, the business, the craft, the profession, the family *as* communities, as circles among the many circles narrower than the human horizon that are appropriate spheres of moral concern. They should, in short, defend the right of others to live in democratic states, with rich possibilities of association within and

across their borders, states of which they can be patriotic citizens. And, as cosmopolitans, they can claim that right for themselves.²

But if this is to work, as I argue in *The Lies that Bind*, national identities must be shaped to achieve those ends.

III

Yuli Tamir

The fact that my book is so keen on its anti-essentialism leads not just James but, I think, all four readers to conclude that my main remedy for the problems of identity is anti-essentialism. If four such thoughtful readers draw the same conclusion, the fault must be mine.

So, in responding to Yuli Tamir's essay, I should like to begin by saying – but for the last time – that this is, indeed, clearly not enough. Tamir's position, though, is not, as I read her, that this isn't enough, but that it's no help at all. "Is the growing interest in 'fact finding' paving the way for human solidarity? After reading the book, I remain a skeptic" (Tamir 2020, 49).

Well, it may not be paving the way for human solidarity, but, as I have been insisting, that wasn't the main focus of the book. It is true that I did argue, at the end, for a sense of human solidarity; but that wasn't as an alternative to other identities, but as a supplement to them; and it wasn't meant to be anti-essentialism as such that gets us there, but the freedom from a determinism of identity that comes from the recognition that there are choices to

² Cf. Appiah 2005, 246.

be made in deciding who we are. On that, as she says, she agrees with me.

Tamir's response here leads her into a fascinating discussion of the question when lies should be resisted, and when it is okay to let them be. She thinks that *The Lies that Bind* has nothing to say – I give, she says, no hint – as to how we should answer this question. I am not sure it is right to say there are no hints, but I do think she is right that I should say more.

As I mentioned in the introduction, this question is at the heart of my last book, *As If*. The central idea there was that untruths do not have to be rejected if they are useful in particular projects. We work with different pictures, I argued, for different purposes. Each can be true enough for its purposes. So, the short answer to the question when lies should be refuted is: When they are getting in the way of some morally worthwhile project. We should argue vigorously against the untruths about racial and gender and class inferiority that enable oppression, sustain inequality, and deny the dignity of those about whom these lies are told; we should oppose them, as well, because in undermining the self-confidence of the oppressed, they also weaken their capacity for resistance.

If this is the right general answer, then, as Tamir sees, objections to untruths are justified relative to practical contexts. And so, there is the important question of how we decide which picture of the world to bear in which contexts. “How do individuals compartmentalize their beliefs? How do they decide, in each particular case which of the conflicting beliefs to act upon?” (Tamir 2020, 56).

I am not sure that there is a useful general answer here. But here is one thing that strikes me as just true: In different contexts we bring different identities to bear; and those different identities often come with different pictures of the world. That is the truth

she exemplifies by talking about the ways in which Ethiopians handle the question of how to respond to leopards. In other words, the modularity of our beliefs is something that we all handle regularly with ease, but our identities are part of the way we handle it.

Tamir argues that many of the useful untruths that sustain, say, national identity, are not so much lies – offered to deceive – as bullshit, in the technical sense, introduced by Harry Frankfurt, of things said without a concern for truth. A good national story, of the sort that Renan discusses in the essay Tamir mentions, need not be offered with a sincere full-throated sincerity. And she argues that in many contexts the right response, faced with bullshit, is not to contest the falsehood but to focus on “identity issues rather than truth-finding.” It seems to me, though, that when we are facing utterances offered as bullshit, it may be better not to think of them as statements of belief at all. As I put it in *The Lies that Bind*,

an avowal of faith is a performance as much as it is a proposition. The Athanasian Creed tells of “one God in Trinity and Trinity in unity.” Who knows what this has meant to individual believers around the world? It’s a pledge of allegiance: the act of affirmation matters independently of what philosophers would call its “propositional content.” Could most Christians explain, for that matter, precisely what it means for the Holy Spirit to “proceed from the Father and the Son,” as the Nicene Creed insists? (Appiah 2018, 37).

But I am glad to find that we agree about two central ideas: what matters is not untruth, as such, but dangerous untruth; and we can cordon off the dangers of the untruths some identities require to do their work, because we have ways of keeping our different pictures from contaminating one another.

Tamir's other main worry about my book is that I don't discuss the ways in which identities conflict within a single individual. I suppose the discussions of religion and gender in the Creed chapter were meant to be an example of a small-scale examination of that sort. But I agree there is a great deal of exploration to be done here, though I fear this is a topic about which it is rather hard to generalize: and the perhaps too-brief discussion of Cavafy at the end aimed to suggest how many dimensions of identity can struggle to fit into a single life.

IV

Sally Haslanger

Sally Haslanger's essay very helpfully locates the ethical project that I said I was engaged in in the context of an interpretation of the Enlightenment that she exemplifies in some work by Bernard Williams. I am grateful to her for this elegant formulation of what I was up to:

The Enlightenment gave us resources to think of ourselves as autonomous, as persons with a right to live our lives according to our own conception of the good rather than essentially bound to social roles. Identities sometimes stand in the way of autonomy because we take the local imperatives to constitute who we – ourselves and those around us – truly are. This is a mistake, and it is a pernicious mistake because it stunts our autonomy, creates unnecessary conflict, and gives undue power to those who claim authority in knowing who we are and what is good for us (be they priests, scientists, influencers). But we are social beings, and we cannot be autonomous without being embedded in a social milieu that provides opportunities for meaningful action. Socially intelligible agency seems to require willing conformity to social

norms and meanings, and thus identity comes back to bite us (Haslanger 2020, 28).

I wish I had put it this way myself.

Now Haslanger's sympathetic account of the project comes, like James's, with a courteous insistence that this focus leaves out something very important: "On a different approach, however, a crucial lesson of the Enlightenment was not about autonomy but justice" (*ibid.*, 29). And in seeking justice, as she argues, reforming identity is not just a matter of reforming oneself. Indeed, as she says, so long as identities, shaped as they are, are part of what keeps unjust social institutions, social structures, in place and doing their doleful work "because they enable us to be fluent in the existing structure" (*ibid.*, 28). This is a deep and important point, one that relates to my own observation that identity reform is collective work and requires negotiation.

I think that the sort of analysis of identity that I gave in my book can advance that work of justice in two ways. First, as I've already said, if we are to reform rather than abandon identities – precisely because we cannot live fluently without them – we must understand how they work, and, in particular, how they sustain injustice and obstruct that individual pursuit of one's own life that Williams and I are focused on. It is, after all, part of the work of justice to allow each person a decent opportunity to make such a life. But the work of justice is not, as Haslanger rightly insists, merely conceptual. It is a matter of organizing movements, in the course of which the creation of identities – as tenants, in her very illuminating example – will be part of the job. As Haslanger says in closing: "Ideology critique and the creation of new identities – as a feminist, as an antiracist, as a socialist – is a first step in creating a

movement, but the best way to broadly disrupt problematic identities is to change the world” (*ibid.*, 30).

Her mention of political identities here draws attention to a whole class of explicitly political identities – partisan and ideological labels – that are a part of the social landscape which I neglected in my book. Reflection on them suggests a couple of ways for disrupting identity conflicts, which I promised earlier I would say something about, in closing.

V

Changing the world

On August 10, 2018, the *Washington Post* published a picture of two men at a Trump rally whose matching T-shirts read, “I’d rather be a Russian than a Democrat.”³ This slogan spoke to our moment. The Republican brand used to be pointedly anti-Russian. In the Trump era, though, you can be a Republican Russophile for whom Putin is a defender of conservative values. American politics, it has become plain, is driven less by ideological commitments than by partisan identities – less by what we think than by what we *are*. Identity precedes ideology.

Political scientists have been investigating these tendencies for a long while. In a research that was published in 2018, Liliana Mason conducted a national survey that determined where people stood on various hot-button issues: same-sex marriage, abortion, gun control, immigration, health care, the deficit. Then they were asked how they felt about spending time with liberals or conservatives. About becoming friends with one. About *marrying*

³ https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/your-everyday-republican-has-some-galling-views/2018/08/10/96b78edc-9bfc-11e8-b60b-1c897f17e185_story.html

one.

People's ideological animus, the study found, wasn't best predicted by their opinions, or even by how strongly they held them. It was best predicted by what *label* people embraced, conservative or liberal. Mason calls this identity-based ideology, as opposed to issue-based ideology. Other researchers in political psychology prefer to speak of "affective polarization." Either formulation is a polite way of saying that political cleavages are not so much "I disagree with your views" as "I hate your kind." You can be an ideologue without ideology. Experiments suggest that *partisan* in-group preferences are extremely powerful. Americans are, in fact, more polarized by party than by race. Indeed, while few Americans are still bothered by interracial marriage, recent surveys find that between thirty and sixty percent of people who identify as Democrats or as Republicans want their kids to marry in the party.

So, think again about those T-shirts. It's easy to assume that the great majority of Republicans who now support Trump are drawn to his noxious views – and easy to forget that among candidates who led in the Republican primaries, his percentage of the vote was the lowest in nearly half a century. Tribes come to rally behind their leaders, and partisan identification wouldn't be so stable if it didn't allow for a great deal of ideological flexibility. That's why rank-and-file Republicans could go from "We need to stand up to Putin!" to "Why *wouldn't* we want to get along with Putin?" in the time it takes to say: Trump's in, Rubio's out.

So, what can we do to take advantage of our tribes without succumbing to the debilitating effects of tribalism? Well, for the citizens of every divided nation, one of their identities is "the national identity." And the theory of democracy is that we the people – all of us – are charged with directing the ship of state together. Democracy isn't about majorities winning and minorities

losing: it's supposed to be a system in which each of us takes responsibility for contributing to the nation's collective welfare. As John Rawls argued, we need to recognize that our fellow citizens, with their differing conceptions of the good, must nevertheless treat each other as free and equal persons, and offer terms of social cooperation that all of us can endorse.

A democratic compact requires us to secure for *everyone* – not just our own kind – the rights enunciated in the Universal Declaration, freedoms of speech, religion, and assembly, the right to petition the government, equal protection of the laws regardless of race, and so on. If you think, as those men in their T-shirts *pretended* to do, that you'd rather abandon the nation than allow it to achieve some of the aims of the other tribe, you're not in the democratic compact at all. And I am pretty confident that those guys *are* in fact still in the compact, despite their T-shirts. In pretending to reject our compact, they only succeeded in reminding us of it. They care about America – and thus about Americans – even when they affect to despise many of them.

So, what can we do to stick to the compact while still caring, as we will, for our own tribes and their common projects?

Well, social psychology teaches us that bigotry towards members of one's own community is something that can be both created and destroyed by the circumstances in which people live together. Long ago, the psychologist Gordon Allport argued for what is called the Contact Hypothesis. Roughly, it said that contact between individuals of different groups makes hostility and prejudice less likely if it occurred in a framework that meets a few important conditions: crucially, it must be on terms of rough equality and it must be in activities where shared goals are pursued in contexts of mutual dependency. That's is one reason that America's racially integrated armed services turn out to produce

people who are less racist, on average, when they leave, than when they arrive.

It is this that makes the segregation of communities within a single society potentially so disastrous; for segregation makes it unlikely that children will meet and collaborate, acquiring the experience of mutual reliance on terms of rough equality. We can do something about this, in principle, within the nation, by desegregating our communities and our schools. And Americans are used to thinking that we ought to do this to face the challenges of our racial divisions.

But our political tribes are increasingly segregated, too. So, we need to find more spaces where people of our dominant political tribes build the social trust that allows tribes to cohabit, while continuing to disagree about important matters. We need to be in conversation with one another across all our differences.

Here's a small fictional story that exemplifies what I mean. In the final episode of the first season of the British television series, *Skins*, which is about a group of students in England, there's a scene at the birthday party of one of the characters, Anwar, an English teenager of South Asian ancestry, whose father is a devout Muslim. His best friend, Maxxie, is gay. And he's been waiting for Anwar to tell his parents, which Anwar has been afraid to do. So Maxxie is standing outside, refusing to come into the party until Anwar finally tells them. While they're talking, Anwar's father comes out and invites Maxxie in: his wife has made a spicy curry just for him. As Anwar's father talks, Anwar, in the background, finally says "Dad, Maxxie's gay." But his father ignores him. So, then Maxxie himself says "I'm gay, Mr. Kharral. I always have been." There's a long silence and Anwar waits anxiously to hear what his father will say. And then Mr. Kharral says this: "It's a ... stupid messed-up world. I've got my God; he speaks to me every day. Some things I just can't work out. So, I leave them be, okay,

even if I think they're wrong. Because I know one day He'll make me understand. I've got that trust. It's called belief. I'm a lucky man. Right? Come Maxxie, the food's ready."

This is how things are with people who are in conversation with one another. Mr. Kharral belongs to the Muslim tribe; Maxxie's tribe is Christian or, at any rate, post-Christian. But they do not have to agree. They have only to accept each other. And they can do that without a theory or a principle, because being together has generated commitments that can transcend even serious disagreement. This sort of what I would call "cosmopolitan cohabitation" is something we all know how to do. But we are only going to bother to take this step if we are already in conversation with one another. And that means sharing our thoughts about the things we agree about and about the things we disagree about. Big things and small things. Football, television shows, movies, the gossip about other people at work.

Mr. Kharral begins in exactly the right place: with an admission that he can't work out everything. That the world is hard to understand, and he may not be right about everything. He doesn't abandon his belief that homosexuality is wrong: he lays it aside as something to work out later. Right now, what matters is celebrating his son's 17th birthday with his son's best friend. This works in practice. It doesn't need a theory. I am a philosopher. I *like* theories. But theory isn't the only thing that matters.

In the processes of reform required to achieve a more just society, we need, as Haslanger rightly insists, to change institutions, practices, laws, behavior. But that takes people willing to do the work. Building links across identities is part of what builds that willingness.

To accept the ways in which all politics is identity politics is to recognize that high-flown ideas – including a moral commitment

to equality – don't matter until they come down to earth. Right now, we Americans (like the divided people of post-Brexit Britain) need to find ways to draw on our non-partisan identities, as Americans, as citizens of particular communities, members of churches and synagogues and mosques, to combat the tribalism that is undermining our democracy. For better or worse, it's only through identities that ideas can change the world.

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