The Relevance of Karl Popper's *Open Society*

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Abstract. In *The Open Society and its Enemies*, Karl Popper contrasts closed and open societies. He evaluates irrationalism and the different kinds of rationalism and he argues that critical rationalism is superior. Living in an open society bestows great benefits but involves a strain that may in some people engender a longing to return to a closed society of tribal submission and an attraction for irrationalism. Attempts to recreate a closed society lead to totalitarianism. In the light of Popper's arguments I criticise contemporary identity politics and I argue that identity politics is irrationalist and tends to totalitarianism.

Keywords. Critical rationalism; identity politics; irrationalism; open society; Karl Popper; totalitarianism; tribalism.

I. INTRODUCTION

Karl Popper's *The Open Society and its Enemies* was written during World War Two. The book is an extended argument against totalitarianism, whether in fascist or socialist form. In recent years a new form of revolt against civilisation, against rationality, freedom and personal responsibility, has arisen. That is the irrationalist movement of identity politics. The aim of this paper is to show the relevance of Popper's *Open Society* to the criticism of this latest fashion for totalitarianism.

In section 2 I summarise what Popper says about closed and open societies, the transition from the former to the latter and the mistaken if understandable quest to return from the strain of civilisation to tribal submission. In section 3 I expound Popper's discussion of irrationalism and different varieties of rationalism. In section 4 I discuss Popper's critical comparison of critical rationalism and irrationalism. In section 5 I show how the salient defects of irrationalism are exemplified in identity politics. In section 6 I conclude with some brief reflections about the totalitarian tendency of identity politics and how rationalists should respond to it.

II. CLOSED AND OPEN SOCIETIES

A tribal or *closed* society resembles a herd or a tribe in being a semi-organic unit whose members are held together by semi-biological ties of kinship, living together, sharing common efforts, common dangers, common joys and common distress. The members of a closed society have a magical or irrational attitude towards social customs, which they do not distinguish from the regularities found in nature, regarding both type of regularity as enforced by a supernatural will. The customs are consequently rigid. They are also very restrictive: all aspects of life are regulated by taboos that leave few loop-holes, so the right way of acting is almost always specified; though, in difficult situations, doing what is deemed right may demand courage or other virtues. There is little in the way of competition for status among the society's members. Its institutions, including its castes, are sacrosanct. Changes in the tribal ways of life are relatively infrequent and when they happen they have the character of religious conversions rather than rational attempts to improve social conditions (Popper 1945, I, pp. 171-74). In a closed society, the tribe is everything and the individual nothing (Popper 1945, I, p. 190).

In an *open* society many people strive to rise socially, to take the places of other members, or to define a social place for themselves which is different to the one in which they find themselves. People are allowed to separate themselves from social groups and to have relationships with many others that involve no close personal ties. Open societies function largely by way of abstract relations, such as exchange or co-operation. There are still social groups in an open society but, with the exception of some lucky family groups, most are poor substitutes for the tribe because they do not provide for a common life and many of them do not have any function in the life of the society at large. However, personal relationships of a new kind arise which can be

entered into freely, instead of being determined by the accidents of birth; and with this, a new individualism arises. Similarly, spiritual bonds can play a major role where the biological or physical bonds are weakened (Popper 1945, I, pp. 173-75). An open society is characterised by individual initiative and self-assertion, interest in the human individual as individual, and not only as tribal hero and saviour, and the belief that there is nothing more important in our life than individual persons (Popper 1945, I, p. 190).

The gradual transformation of closed societies into more open ones was prompted by population growth, colonisation and trade. Commercial initiative was one of the few forms in which individual initiative and independence could assert itself in tribal societies. Close contact with other tribes that had different customs impugned the assumption that tribal institutions are unchangeable. The development of the open society and the breakdown of the old ways generated feelings of insecurity. The endeavour to be rational, to forgo at least some of our emotional social needs, to look after ourselves and to accept responsibilities, was the cause of stress. This 'strain of civilisation' is still felt by people today, especially in times of social change. It is the price to be paid for every increase in knowledge, reasonableness, co-operation and mutual help, and consequently for the increase in our chances of survival and in the size of the population (Popper 1945, I, pp. 176-77).

There were two rival responses to the breakdown of the closed society and its magical beliefs. The rise of rationalistic philosophy supplanted the tradition of passing on a myth by the tradition of challenging and critically discussing theories and myths. Ironically, the early philosophers argued for a return to tribalism and they organised sects with a common life modelled largely after those of an idealised tribe. In contrast to the attempt to replace the lost magical faith by rationality was the rise of irrationalism which, rejecting the claims of reason, attempted to replace the lost feeling of unity by a new mystical religion. Nearly all these early thinkers were labouring under a tragic and desperate strain (Popper 1945, I, pp. 188-89).

Plato found that his contemporaries were suffering under a severe strain due to the social change and social dissension consequent upon the rise of democracy and individualism. His recommendation was the arrest of change and the return to tribalism (Popper 1945, I, pp. 169-71). However, the recommendation was impracticable. Once people have learned to use argument and criticism and to exercise personal responsibility, including the responsibility of helping to advance knowledge, the attempt to return to a harmonious state of submission to tribal magic leads instead to the inquisition, the secret police, and a romanticised gangsterism. Beginning with the suppression of reason, we end with the most brutal and violent destruction of all that is human. If we wish to remain human, we must go forward into the open society, into the unknown, the uncertain and insecure, using what reason we may have to plan as well as we can for both security and freedom (Popper 1945, I, pp. 200-201).

III. RATIONALISM AND IRRATIONALISM

The differences between irrationalism and different kinds of rationalism concern the extent to which we should seek to solve problems by the use of argument (Popper 1945, II, pp. 224-25). Popper often says 'argument or experience,' instead of simply 'argument,' but by 'experience' he means *argument from experience* (empirical refutation). Popper distinguishes five different types of philosophy:

- irrationalism;
- pseudo-rationalism;
- uncritical rationalism;
- fideist rationalism;
- critical rationalism.

An *irrationalist* seeks solutions to problems by appealing to emotions, passions, instincts, impulses or traditions. The irrationalist maintains that most people are more amenable to appeals to emotion than to argument and that even the few scientists who take argument seriously are bound to their rationalist attitude merely because they love it; and, besides, their creativeness, like that of artists or statesmen, is entirely irrational and mystical (Popper 1945, II, pp. 227-28). The irrationalist therefore propounds aphorisms and dogmatic statements which must be 'understood' or else left alone (Popper 1945, II, p. 299, note 52). He may, though, make use of argument when it serves his purpose; for instance, he may use arguments to criticise a position of a rationalist, because he knows that the rationalist is generally prepared to listen to argument (Popper 1945, II, pp. 227-28, 231, 240). Irrationalists have included members of Orphic sects in ancient Greece (Popper 1945, I, p. 188), mediaeval mystics (Popper 1945, I, p. 229) and, in modern times, Edmund Burke, Henri Bergson, Adolf Keller, Alfred North Whitehead, and Arnold Toynbee (Popper 1945, I, pp. 229, 241, 247-58).

The *pseudo-rationalist* claims an intellectual intuition that enables him, and others relevantly like him, to know with certainty or authority. Popper's paradigm of a pseudo-rationalist is Plato (Popper 1945, II, p. 227). In contemporary analytic philosophy claims to certainty are rare, but claims to intellectual intuition and to epistemic authority are common (Brown 1977; Stich and Nisbett 1980, pp. 198-99). For example, Robert Audi (2013, pp. 65-82) claims that those who have appropriate epistemic virtues, such as moral sensitivity, can apprehend, intuitively, moral truths that others fail to see. "Insofar as we are self-critical and have justified self-trust, as some of us do, our retention of a belief after such scrutiny tends to be confirmatory" (Audi 2013, p. 80; for criticism see Frederick 2015). The pseudo-rationalist's claim is false: all our knowledge is fallible and there are no authorities with superior faculties that give them privileged access to the truth (Popper 1945, II, p. 227).

The *uncritical rationalist* claims to reject anything that cannot be supported by argument (Popper 1945, II, p. 230). Popper's paradigm of the uncritical rationalist is Edmund Husserl (Popper 1945, II, p. 654, note 8; p. 362, note 5), though he also seems to suggest the earlier Ludwig Wittgenstein and the positivists (Popper 1945, II, p. 353, note 6). Uncritical rationalism is commonplace in contemporary analytic philosophy, partly as a legacy of positivism. One form of it is evidentialism, which has been formulated as follows:

(E) "It is wrong always, everywhere, and for anyone to believe anything on insufficient evidence" (Clifford 1877, p. 295).

Uncritical rationalism Popper argues, can be defeated by its own chosen weapon, argument. The demand to reject any assumption that cannot be supported by argument cannot itself be supported by argument. An attempt to support it by argument would involve a vicious regress, because the premises of the supporting argument would need their own supporting arguments, and so on *ad infinitum*. Since the demand of the uncritical rationalist cannot be supported by argument, it implies that it should itself be discarded. Indeed, the demand that we should start with no assumptions rests upon the truly colossal assumption that it is possible to start with no assumptions and still obtain results that are worthwhile (Popper 1945, II, pp. 230-31). So, if the evidentialist tries to justify (E) by appealing to evidence, he will need further evidence to justify his evidence; so, to avoid an infinite regress, he will eventually need to stop at evidence accepted without evidence and thus do something wrong on his own view. Popper says that many uncritical rationalists, such as Alfred North Whitehead, once they became cognisant of the contradictions inherent in their own position, capitulated to irrationalism (Popper 1945, II, p. 231; p. 356, note 9).

What we may call '*fideist rationalism*' is a half-way house between irrationalism and uncritical rationalism. In order to avoid the self-contradictions of the latter, it requires an irrational faith in some positions that are accepted uncritically and are not held open to dispute. All other positions are open to argument. A minimalist version would be:

(F) believe nothing which is unsupported by argument, except (F).

Generally, however, fideist rationalists are more eclectic, believing a variety of propositions unsupported by argument, such as some vaguely specified principle of induction (Ayer 1956, pp. 71-75; Putnam 1974, p. 239; Strawson 1952, pp. 256-63), ordinary observation statements (Moore 1939, pp. 165-67), the existence of the external world or of other minds (Ayer 1956, pp. 80-81), liberal values (O'Hear 2009, pp. 209-13) and so on. Fideist rationalism is common in contemporary philosophy in one form or another, one exponent being the later Wittgenstein (1969, sections 341-44). However, it is saved from self-refutation only by the *ad hoc* adoption of limited irrational commitments.

Critical rationalism, Popper says, is the attitude of admitting that "*I may be wrong and you may be right, and by an effort, we may get nearer to the truth*" (Popper 1945, II, p. 225). It is the acknowledgement of one's limitations and that, although argument is the only means of learning, it rarely settles a question (Popper 1945, II, p. 227). Critical rationalism recognises that we begin, and must begin, with assumptions that are accepted without argument or support; but it requires that we be ready to learn from argument (1945, II, p. 225). Its principle is:

(C) one should hold all one's views open to criticism and, if criticism shows them to be faulty, be prepared to replace them with better ones.

If one adopts (C) without justification or support by argument, that is not inconsistent with (C), so long one holds (C) open to criticism. Thus, the critical rationalist avoids the infinite regress of uncritical rationalism. Pseudo-rationalist appeals to intellectual intuition or epistemic authorities are

also avoided. So, too, does the critical rationalist avoid all of the rag-bag of irrational commitments that pockmark fideist rationalism. Initially, Popper failed to distinguish critical rationalism from fideist rationalism: he held that the adoption of (C) shows an irrational *faith in reason* (Popper 1945, II, pp. 228-31). However, as William Bartley pointed out (1984, pp. 96-107, 112-23), and as Popper conceded (1945, II, p. 369 note 1, pp. 377-83; 1983, pp. 18-22), the critical rationalist does not need to make any such concession to irrationalism because (C) is held open to criticism rather than accepted uncritically and deemed beyond dispute. So, unlike fideist rationalism, critical rationalism avoids self-refutation without resorting to *ad hoc* manoeuvres. Popper's paradigm critical rationalist is Socrates (Popper 1945, II, p. 227). Given the difficulties of pseudo-rationalism, uncritical rationalism, and fideist rationalism, Popper often uses the term 'rationalism' to mean critical rationalism.

One who adopts (C) is prepared to give up (C) if (C) can be shown to be false or self-contradictory or paradoxical, or if some other position can be shown to be superior to (C). As we have just seen, critical rationalism is better than pseudo-rationalism and uncritical rationalism, because it survives the arguments that tell against those philosophies, and it is better than fideist rationalism because it avoids the latter's *ad hoc* manoeuvres. However, irrationalism is self-consistent, since the refusal to accept arguments involves no self-contradiction; and the irrationalists claim that irrationalism is superior to all forms of rationalism. The critical rationalist is therefore under obligation to defend critical rationalism against that claim. At a minimum that means showing that irrationalism is not superior to critical rationalism. Popper defends the stronger position that critical rationalism is superior to irrationalism. It is worth noting that Popper's arguments against irrationalism are also arguments against the irrationalist components of fideist rationalism.

IV. CRITICAL COMPARISON OF CRITICAL RATIONALISM WITH IRRATIONALISM

Popper's arguments against irrationalism are not intended to convince the irrationalist, who can be expected to dismiss them and to attribute Popper's failure to share his mystical insight to class, racial, religious or other group bias (Popper 1945, II, . 242-43). The arguments are intended, rather, to show that critical rationalism is rationally tenable, that critical rationalism does not require rejecting critical rationalism, as it would if irrationalism were a better philosophy. Popper's arguments are largely moral ones (Popper 1945, II, pp. 232, 240-41). In what follows I reorganise and summarise them.

(1) When *making choices*, arguments can be used to draw out the consequences of the options so that we can make an informed decision, otherwise we choose blindly (Popper 1945, II, pp. 232-33). The irrationalist might claim that our emotions, passions, instincts or impulses give us as good a guide to the consequences of options (Popper 1945, II, p. 241). But that appears to be false. The contrast between the progress of modern times and the enduring squalor of the Middle Ages attests that, on the whole, people who make decisions in the light of a rational comparison of the consequences of options are more successful in achieving their aims than those who defer uncritically to tradition or to other emotional attachments (Popper 1945, II, pp. 241-44). This is not to deny that we owe a great deal to tradition. But the critical rationalist, instead of viewing a tradition as sacrosanct or as valuable in itself, will analyse it into concrete personal relations and view it as valuable or pernicious according to its influence upon individuals. We may thus realise that each of us, by way of example and criticism, may contribute to the growth or the suppression of a tradition (Popper 1945, II, p. 226).

(2) The critical rationalist will seek to *resolve disputes* by using arguments to help to identify the advantages and disadvantages, costs and benefits, of alternative options. That can generate agreement about which options should be excluded even where agreement cannot be reached on which remaining option is best. Such steps toward conflict resolution are precluded by the irrationalist emphasis upon emotion and passion. Indeed, disputes arise when the more constructive emotions and passions, such as reverence, love or devotion to a common cause, have shown themselves incapable of solving a problem. That leaves the irrationalist with an appeal to other and less constructive emotions and passions, such as fear, hatred, envy, and ultimately, violence (Popper 1945, II, pp. 233-34). For example, Tom likes the theatre and Dick likes dancing. Tom lovingly insists on going to a dance while Dick wants for Tom's sake to go to the theatre. This conflict cannot be settled by love; rather, the greater the love, the stronger will be the conflict. There are only two solutions; one is the use of emotion, and ultimately of violence, and the other is the use of reason, of impartiality, of reasonable compromise (Popper 1945, II, p. 236).

Things might not seem so bleak as Popper suggests in that the irrationalist has two other recourses. First, as Popper acknowledges, the irrationalist may make use of ar-

gument when it serves his purpose without thereby being inconsistent himself; and he is not bothered about being inconsistent in any case (Popper 1945, II, pp. 227-28, 231, 232, 235, 240). So, if appeals to emotion fail to resolve the dispute, the irrationalist could try producing some arguments to knock out options to which he is emotionally opposed. However, he can succeed in that only if he is dealing with a rationalist who is prepared to listen to arguments: between two irrationalists such a recourse is not viable. Second, if he cannot secure agreement on the basis of emotions, the irrationalist may resort to trade: 'do what I want here and I will give you this.' But trade occurs only if the parties to it are able to agree terms, which may be difficult if the parties to the trade are both irrationalists. Between irrationalists, the recourse to trade may just replace one irresolvable dispute with another.

(3) Critical rationalism implies that people have *equal rights* because, by recognising everyone with whom we communicate as a potential source of argument, it acknowledges the "rational unity of mankind" (Popper 1945, II, pp. 225, 232, 234-35). The implication may seem doubtful and Popper does not make out a cogent case for it. Nevertheless, such a case can be made using materials that Popper has supplied. In brief, our capacity for criticism enables us to consider, and experiment with, different kinds of life to discover who we are; our fulfilment depends upon such discovery; so morality demands equal negative freedom for all humans (Frederick 2016, pp. 39-48). It might be objected that irrationalism implies the *irrational* unity of mankind, recognising everybody with whom we communicate as a potential source of emotions, passions, instincts and impulses; so it also has a connection with the idea of equal rights. But, Popper says, irrationalism is not bound by any rules of consistency, so it may be combined with any kind of belief, such as a belief in unequal rights. Further, it lends itself easily to the support of a romantic belief in the division of people into leaders and led, masters and natural slaves (Popper 1945, II, p. 232), for we cannot feel the same emotions towards everybody, those who are near to us and those who are far from us, friend and foe, compatriots and aliens, leaders and led, believers and unbelievers, and so on (Popper 1945, II, p. 235).

(4) Openness to criticism demands, when put into practice, a real effort of our imagination; and reason supported by imagination fosters *humanitarianism* because it enables us to understand that people who are far away, whom we shall never see, are like ourselves, and that their relations to one another are like our relations to those whom we love. Irrationalism tends in the opposite direction. First, without argument, nothing is left but acceptance or rejection, which leads to dogmatism, which suppresses imagination. Second, the emotions of love and compassion keep our focus more parochial, since it is humanly impossible for us to love, or to suffer with, a great number of people (Popper 1945, II, pp. 239-40).

(5) Critical rationalism is linked to the recognition of the necessity of social institutions to protect *freedom of criticism and freedom of thought* because it acknowledges that everybody is liable to make mistakes, which may be found out by himself, or by others, or by himself with the assistance of the criticism of others. It is inconsistent with claims to authority. It suggests the idea of impartiality, that nobody should be his own judge, that the other fellow has a right to be heard, and that we have not only to listen to arguments but also to respond, to answer, where our actions affect others (Popper 1945, II, pp. 237-39). In contrast, the abandonment of the respect for argument in favour of the 'deeper' layers of human nature views thought as a superficial manifestation of what lies within the irrational depths. It therefore leads to the attitude which evaluates the person of the thinker instead of his thought on its own merits; it splits mankind into different categories; it tends toward censorship and the silencing of out-groups; and ultimately it will be used, as in Plato, to justify murder (Popper 1945, II, pp. 235-36).

(6) Critical rationalism fosters *humility* rather than arrogance. The irrationalist, who prides himself on his respect for the more profound mysteries of the world and his understanding of them, says that the scientist merely scratches the surface of things. But in fact the irrationalist neither respects nor understands the world's mysteries. He just satisfies himself with cheap rationalisations. He is free to maintain anything because he need not fear any test; though, despite this dubious freedom, he repeats endlessly the same myth of the lost tribal paradise, the hysterical refusal to bear the strain of civilisation. In contrast, the critical rationalist, in the person of the scientist, shows greater reverence for mystery by devoting himself to discovering it step by step, always ready to submit to facts, and always aware that even his boldest achievement will never be more than a stepping-stone for those who come after him (Popper 1945, II, pp. 244-45).

V. DEFECTS OF IRRATIONALISM AND IDENTITY POLITICS

Popper's comparative evaluation of critical rationalism against irrationalism enables us to enumerate a number of the characteristic defects of the irrationalist. In summary:

a. dogmatic;
b. appeals to emotions and passions;
c. makes uncritical appeals to tradition;
d. dismisses arguments, except when they can be used in his favour;
e. ready to settle disagreements by violence;
f. opposes freedom of expression;
g. authoritarian;
h. affirms in-group privilege rather than impartiality or equal human rights;
i. makes ad hominem evaluations of the person, perhaps on the basis of the person's group affiliation, rather than of the proposition the person expounds;
j. favours tribal collectivism;
k. refuses, sometimes hysterically, to bear the strain of novelty, dissenting opinions, insecurity, personal responsibility and rationality.

In identity politics, people tend to form exclusive political alliances based on their shared religion, race, class, sex, culture, sexual orientation, disability or other characteristic. There need be nothing amiss with identity politics in principle. For instance, where there is officially condoned discrimination against people of a particular race or religion, an alliance amongst those in the affected group to secure equal rights may be sensible; though it would generally be more likely to succeed if it were not an exclusive alliance but, rather, one that sought support from people outside of the affected group on the basis of shared humanity. However, the currently popular form of identity politics embraces irrationalism. Some parts of the trend may be outright irrationalist but, mostly, the practitioners of identity politics appear to be fideist rationalists who are prepared to consider argument in connection with some issues but who have a wide range of contentions which are accepted unconditionally and deemed to be beyond dispute. Like the irrationalists of old, the advocates of identity politics favour a return to the closed society. As a consequence, the current identity politics exhibits all of the defects of irrationalism listed above. To show that, I will list and then discuss briefly, a number of the concepts employed and positions taken by current spokespersons of one or other form of identity politics.

Multiculturalism. In one of its forms (Song, 2017) this is the affirmation that cultural differences should be celebrated and respected so that society preserves a diversity of cultures; in particular, the cultures of minority groups need special protection from the dominant culture including, in some cases, rights of self-government (defect (h) in-group privilege). Multiculuralism's prohibition or inhibition of criticism of the cultural practices and beliefs of minority groups (defect (f) opposition to freedom of expression) encourages the members of such groups to take offence at criticism of their characteristic beliefs or practices (defects (a) dogmatic, and (k) refusal to bear the strain of civilisation) and it tends to imprison the members of those groups within their traditional culture (defects (c) uncritical appeals to tradition, and (j) tribal collectivism). Even if a particular culture is ideal for some people, there will be other people for whom it is unsuitable; and some of the latter may be members of the culture in question. Criticism of their cultural practices can help them to find a way of life that is more suitable for them; and the most effective criticism can come from people outside of the culture who are not blinkered by the culture's unquestioned presuppositions. Further, no culture is perfect: all have practices or beliefs that can be replaced with something better, to the benefit of the members of those cultures. Indeed, some cultural practices, such as enforced female genital mutilation, are wrong and should be prohibited. So, preventing cultures from changing in response to the growth of knowledge and changing circumstances denies people opportunities for growth and learning (defect (g) authoritarian).

Cultural Appropriation. It is held to be wrong for someone from a 'privileged' group to borrow or copy something from the culture of a 'marginalised' or 'oppressed' group without getting permission (Arewa 2016; Johnson 2015). So, when people in third-world countries wear denim jeans, it is not cultural appropriation; but when a white person wears a Native-American headdress, it is. For instance, Adrienne Keene (2010) says that, in the Plains Indian tribes the right to wear a feathered warbonnet had to be earned by acts of bravery, the warbonnets were worn only by men and they were regarded as having deep spiritual significance; so when they are worn by white men, or especially women, for fashion or fancy dress, people of the Plains Indian cultures are being subjected to an indignity. However, that ignores the fact that symbolic meaning is conventional, not natu-

ral or divinely ordained (as was assumed in closed societies), and that the conventions of different societies differ. In Western societies feathered warbonnets lack the symbolic meanings that they have in Plains Indian cultures so wearing them for fashion or fancy dress does not symbolise disrespect, unless it is done in a special context. Even then, the disrespect may be legitimate. For instance, one can imagine some white women wearing feathered warbonnets in a comedy sketch to satirise the sexual inequality enforced in traditional Plains Indian tribes. Such ridicule, in part because of the discomfort it causes, can be an effective form of criticism that helps the ridiculed people to see their defects, thus enabling them to change and improve. Objections to cultural appropriation are an extension of the multiculturalism that seeks to imprison people within their inherited cultures, so it has all the defects of the latter ((a) dogmatic, (c) uncritical appeals to tradition, (f) opposes freedom of expression, (g) authoritarian, (h) in-group privilege, (j) tribal collectivism, and (k) refusal to bear the strain of civilisation).

Microaggresions. Derald Wing Sue (2010) says: "Microaggressions are the everyday verbal, nonverbal, and environmental slights, snubs, or insults, whether intentional or unintentional, which communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative messages to target persons based solely upon their marginalized group membership." A person identifies a microaggression by imputing a "hidden message" to some speech or behaviour of another person. For example, "An assertive female manager is labeled as a 'bitch,' while her male counterpart is described as 'a forceful leader.' (Hidden message: Women should be passive and allow men to be the decision makers.)" (Sue 2010). However, the supposed hidden messages are conjectures and they ought to be tested, for example by stating openly the supposed hidden message and then discussing it critically with the person who is supposed to have intimated it. The campaign against microaggressions instead encourages people to respond emotionally to a guessed intention and to denounce and demand punishment of the people they imagine to have slighted them (defects (b) appeals to emotions, (g) authoritarian, and (k) refusal to bear the strain of civilisation). That is a more overt act of aggression than the so-called microaggression (defect (e) fosters violence) and it inhibits people from speaking freely (defect (f) opposes freedom of expression). Only the members of 'marginalized groups' can be victims of microaggressions (defect (h) in-group privilege) and the perpetrators are identified not by the overt content of what they say or do but by their group membership (defects (i) *ad hominem* attacks, and (j) tribal collectivism).

Some Speech is Violence. Related to the idea of the microaggression is the contention that some speech constitutes violence. For instance: "Oppressive language does more than represent violence; it is violence" (Morrison 1993). That is different from the generally accepted point that some words that are said in particularly sensitive or inflammatory contexts constitute *incitement* to violence. The contention is rather that some speech contents, some thoughts, are such that to express them at all is to commit an act of violence. The contention thereby attempts to legitimise defensive or retributive violence against anyone who expresses those thoughts. The contention can be used to defend laws against 'hate speech' but it is often used even more restrictively to prevent or punish types of speech that would be permitted in jurisdictions that have 'hate speech' laws. To give just two examples: students used violence to prevent the social scientist Charles Murray from speaking at Middlebury College (New York Times 2017); and the KPFA radio station in Berkeley cancelled a talk by the atheist and scientist Richard Dawkins because of his supposedly "hurtful speech" about Islam (Graham 2017). However, while it seems plausible that for every thought there is *some* context in which expressing it would *incite* violence, so that expressing the thought *in such a context* should be prohibited, it seems false that there is *any* thought the expression of which *constitutes* violence no matter when or where or how it is expressed. The latter also seems false if we substitute 'causes psychological harm' for 'constitutes violence' (Haidt and Lukianoff 2017). The contention that some speech is violence is used to prevent, by force if necessary, the questioning of favoured views (defects (a) dogmatic, (b) appeals to emotions, (d) dismisses arguments, (e) encourages violence, (f) opposes freedom of expression, (g) authoritarian, and (k) refusal to bear the strain of civilisation).

Ironically, the champion of the open society, Karl Popper, has been invoked to bolster the claims of these closed-society advocates. Popper (1945, I, p. 265, note 4) says that unlimited tolerance must lead to the disappearance of tolerance, so we must claim, in the name of tolerance, the right not to tolerate the intolerant. The question is: what sort of intolerance should not be tolerated? Forcibly preventing people from pursuing peacefully their chosen lifestyles should certainly count as intolerance that should not be tolerated. But advocates of identity politics claim that expressing theories of some kinds should not be tolerated. That seems not to have been Popper's intention: "I do not

imply, for instance, that we should always suppress the utterance of intolerant philosophies; as long as we can counter them by rational argument and keep them in check by public opinion, suppression would certainly be most unwise." That, it should be noted, excludes laws against 'hate speech' as well as the sort of 'no-platforming' that has been occurring at universities and colleges. Popper continues: "But we should claim the *right* to suppress them if necessary even by force; for it may easily turn out that they are not prepared to meet us on the level of rational argument, but begin by denouncing all argument; they may forbid their followers to listen to rational argument, because it is deceptive, and teach them to answer arguments by the use of their fists or pistols." It should be noted that "them" toward the start of the sentence refers no longer to utterances of intolerant philosophies but, rather, to advocates of such philosophies (otherwise the rest of the sentence makes little sense). The restriction on speech here contemplated by Popper is, then, clearly a restriction on time, place and manner of expression rather than on content of expression and falls squarely within the liberal, open-society tradition. Indeed, the last clause of his sentence seems to describe the exponents of identity politics who try to prevent the expression of contrary views, even resorting to violence to do so. That cannot be tolerated in an open society.

That interpretation of what Popper says about the paradox of tolerance in *The Open Society* seems right, in part because it is required to avoid inconsistency with what he says elsewhere in the book. It may be, however, that his infelicitous language was the result of some confusion. For, regrettably, he says in a much later work (1999, p. 97):

> One of the things to be critically watched is the government's toleration of various opinions, ideologies, and religions (in so far as these are themselves tolerant, for ideologies that preach intolerance lose their claim to be tolerated).

That seems pretty clearly to say theories that advocate the use of force instead of argument should be outlawed. That is inconsistent with Popper's critical rationalism because it means that force instead of argument is used to resolve a theoretical question, and that some theories are not debated and criticised, so we lose the opportunity to learn from the mistakes they make.

Trigger Warnings. These are intended to warn people that particular contents may trigger a post-traumatic stress reaction. Originally used to alert people to graphic descriptions of rape that might lead past victims to suffer panic attacks or other adverse reactions, they are now used on websites and on material used in college classes or student reading lists in connection with a wide range of potentially offensive material that might conceivably cause someone to feel upset; and some colleges recommend that 'triggering' material be removed from syllabi (Filipovic 2014). However, that discourages students and others from encountering challenging ideas and it encourages an emotional response to issues instead of a rational discussion (defects (a) dogmatic, (b) appeals to emotions, (f) opposes freedom of expression, (k) hysterical refusal to bear the strain of civilisation).

Mansplaining. This happens when a man explains something to a woman in a condescending way that suggests that the woman knows less than she actually does, perhaps because she is a woman. Of course, it occurs; though such condescending explanations are also often given by a woman to a man, or by a woman to a woman, or by a man to a man. What is troublesome is that the term is sometimes used by feminists to dismiss arguments instead of debating them (defects (a) dogmatic, (d) dismisses arguments, (h) in-group privilege, (i) *ad hominem* attacks, (k) refusal to bear the strain of civilisation).

Check Your Privilege. This phrase is used to tell a person that there are aspects of his identity (such as class, race or gender) that, due to our current social arrangements, give him unfair advantages over others. It invites him to reflect on his advantages and the disadvantages suffered by his interlocutor or by others (Finch 2015). The problem with this device is that it turns attention away from the issues, which can be discussed in general terms, without reference to individual persons, directing attention instead onto the personal circumstances of the parties to the discussion. It can consequently be used as an *ad hominem* attack (defects (a) dogmatic, (d) dismisses arguments, (h) in-group privilege, (i) *ad hominem* attacks, (k) refusal to bear the strain of civilisation).

Tolerance of Contradictions. Some of the characteristic positions of identity politics have implications that contradict the implications of other such positions. For instance, LGBT advocates defend the rights of men to identify as women; yet, since men are deemed a 'privileged' group and women an 'oppressed' group, such transgenderism counts as cultural appropriation and should therefore be prohibited, at least until the transgender men get permission from the 'oppressed' group to transition (though from whom, in particular, they should get permission is obscure). Advocates of identity politics seem simply to ignore this *reduc-*

tio ad absurdum (defect (d) dismisses arguments). Similarly, advocates of identity politics have castigated a woman born white for identifying as black while supporting a person born male who identifies as female (Tuvel 2017).

VI. CONCLUSION

Popper's *The Open Society and its Enemies* contrasts open societies with the closed, tribal societies from which they emerged. Despite the benefits of living in open societies, some people find individual responsibility, freedom and rationality burdensome and stressful, and they long for a return to submission to a closed tribal order. As a consequence they are attracted to irrationalist ideologies. However, the attempt to return to a lost tribal past requires that rationality and freedom be forcibly suppressed; it leads to totalitarianism.

The exponents of identity politics want to establish a closed society in which their ideological views are unchallenged, cultural traditions are ossified, a new caste system of approved identities is imposed, and respect for it is successfully indoctrinated. However, even if such a society were desirable it could not be achieved. People can think, they can question and criticise, they can imagine new possibilities and strive to realise them or try them out. A closed society can be maintained only by ruthless suppression of dissent, curtailment of freedom, thought-policing and punitive 're-education,' all of which can already be seen emerging in the current identity politics. The natural terminus of identity politics is the totalitarian state.

Identity politics is a form of irrationalism, though more likely the limited irrationalism of fideist rationalism rather than pure irrationalism. Irrationalism can be shown to be inferior to rationalism only if rationalism takes a critical form. The pseudo-rationalism of authoritarians who claim special insight, and the uncritical rationalisms of empiricists and *a priorists* who demand that every view be supported by argument, are untenable. The fideist rationalism that is popular with followers of the later Wittgenstein, amongst others, is on a par with identity politics in that it adheres to some propositions that are accepted on faith and held impervious to argument. Only critical rationalism, which holds all views open to criticism and is prepared to give up any view that does not survive criticism, can be shown by argument to be superior to the irrationalism of identity politics. However, argument cannot persuade an irrationalist out of his irrational commitment; so, while arguments may influence people who are undecided about identity politics, those who are committed to the irrationalism of identity politics will simply dismiss the arguments.

An open society can and should tolerate the expression of, and adherence to, irrationalist philosophies, and the criticism of such philosophies; but it cannot tolerate irrationalist acts of violence or incitement to violence or threats of violence. One of the problems with identity politics is that some its advocates do commit or incite or threaten the use of force to prevent people from expressing views that conflict with the irrational commitments of identity politics. That is not surprising because dismissal of argument, and appeals to emotions and passions, which are characteristic of irrationalism, tend naturally to inhumanity and violence, as Popper argued.

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