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*I am a first year PhD student. My overall thesis is attempting to theorise towards and justify a conception of Political Liberalism which does not engage in ideal theory and can offer pragmatic policy solutions to real-world problems such as institutional and corporate malpractice. The paper I am presenting sketches some of the preliminary ideas as to how I will attempt to justify this conception*

**Reviving a Liberal Consensus: The Role of Contextualism in Modernising Political Liberalism**

**Keywords**

Political Liberalism; Toleration; Contextualism; Ideal Theory; Consensus

In this paper, I argue that the growing intolerance and anti-liberal sentiments in western societies is a reflection of Political Liberalism (PL) contributing to its own demise. I suggest that this can be counterbalanced, by informing PL with contextualism. By being contextually situated in the non-ideal, rather than ideal domain, and by drawing on contextual truths of morality, the idea of a consensus on liberal values can be revived, giving PL a renewed relevance.

PL is distinctively characterised by its stance of value-neutrality. This involves abstaining from accepting the truth of any particular comprehensive philosophical, moral or religious doctrine. PL justifies this neutral attitude partly because it promotes the value of toleration, and ensures the stability of a political conception of justice. However, western societies are becoming increasingly intolerant, as evidenced by the wave of far-right populism across Europe over the last decade, and a growing unrest surrounding increasing levels of immigration.

My paper will attempt to modernise PL, by using contextual factors to revive a liberal consensus. My first claim is that PL’s commitment to ideal theory has lessened the extent to which any of its normative claims can have impact in informing or reforming actual political policy. To modernise the stance, PL should be contextualised, by situating it within the non-ideal world. Secondly, to promote toleration in society, I argue that the stance of value-neutrality that PL currently employs should be replaced with a contextualist attitude. PL may be justifiably cautious of basing its political claims entirely on individual moral theories and doctrines, however, this does not mean that it cannot buttress its stance on toleration with moral claims that are contextually true. PL could buttress its commitment to toleration by endorsing a contextual moral truth, e.g. that in modern society, it has sometimes been morally right to interfere with intolerant political doctrines, if such interference creates a better environment for more tolerant attitudes to thrive. Also, I argue that one reason for the demise in a liberal consensus, is because PL aims for stability over truth; as such, it cannot present its arguments for democratic or liberal values in a way which assigns them any truth values. However, while Liberalism and democracy are not true beyond reasonable doubt, it is contextually true that values they promote such as toleration, participation, and treating citizens as free and equal have had many benefits in the non-ideal world we inhabit, and there are good reasons to uphold them.

It would be wrong to claim that these methodological modifications will prevent all intolerant attitudes, or make all individuals embrace PL. This paper only claims that informing PL with contextual realities and contextual moral truths may help revive a liberal consensus. Given that until now, PL has embraced ideal theory, and hasn’t allowed input from contextual realities, it has been unable to reinforce its claims. Therefore, if one is trying to revive a liberal consensus, this is a significant and beneficial modification to propose.