***A Call for Participants***

**COMMUNITARIAN WORKING GROUP AT SETON HALL**

A widely accepted feature of contemporary life involves the polarization of worldviews, political and cultural, that tap into our deepest identities as human beings. While some commentators bemoan the crisis of meaning (due to secularization and other forces), others focus on tribalism as the problem of our age. Arguably there is a direct connection between the two, the loss of meaning pushing people toward a search for tribal commitments that can give their lives meaning. If we are at a moment in civilizational history in which tribal differences have become paramount, then the following questions merit disciplined investigation:

1. How can we, humans, understand tribalism as central to our nature as a species?
2. What are the major tribal cleavages in the contemporary world?
3. What are the consequences, positive and negative, of these tribal cleavages on the society writ large?
4. To the degree that tribalism seriously erodes trust and cooperation within society, how can we talk to and deal with each other in ways that begin to transcend the damage caused by it?

The above questions comprise what can be called the communitarian project. Communitarianism is a worldview onto itself, seeking to build bridges and foster dialogue across tribal divides of whatever kind. It can have various goals, including (1) finding common ground against the backdrop of tribal commitments and (2) training members of social tribes to adopt the perspective of the “impartial spectator” (see Adam Smith) that privileges the common good.

The Heterodox Academy Campus Community at Seton Hall (one of 74 nationally) invites the faculty to join a working group that will explore the above questions and then apply the insights generated to campus life, whether in relation to faculty-student interactions in the classroom, faculty-administration shared governance issues, or University-wide fora that confront the major social issues of the day. Heterodox Academy (HxA) is an organization whose mission is:

to advance open inquiry, viewpoint diversity, and constructive disagreement across higher education – the foundations of our universities as truth-seeking, knowledge-generating institutions. HxA empowers members to organize on their campus and within their disciplines, educates academics on the importance of our principles, and advocates for policies to protect open inquiry across higher education. [Its] vision is an academy in which a vibrant community of inquirers investigates a broad range of questions about the world by bringing diverse perspectives to bear, thereby enlivening the pursuit of truth, knowledge, and progress.

The call of the HxA for open inquiry, viewpoint diversity, and constructive disagreement is very much in line with recent initiatives in civic engagement at some colleges and universities. We see a seamless connection between the communitarian project, on the one hand, and a commitment to a robust democracy, on the other.

We envision devoting the 2025-26 academic year to monthly sessions in which the assembled group discusses texts that address the four questions listed above. At our first meeting (hopefully in September 2025) we will develop a schedule for the academic year. What follows is a sampling of the texts we might examine in depth during the upcoming academic year:

B. Bishop, *The Big Sort.* Houghton-Mifflin, 2008.

M. Carolan, *A Decent Meal: Building Empathy in a Divided America.* Redwood Press, 2021.

J. Fishkin, *Can Deliberation Cure the Ills of Democracy?* Oxford University Press, 2025.

M. Gergen, F. Barrett, and K. Gergen, “Appreciative Inquiry as Dialogue: Generative and Transformative.” Pp. 3-27 in D.L. Cooperrider and M. Avital, *Constructive Discourse and Human Organization.* Emerald Group Publishing, 2004 (e-book in SHU Library)

J. Greene, *Moral Tribes.* Penguin, 2014.

J. Haidt, *The Righteous Mind*. Vintage, 2013.

A. Hochschild, *Stolen Pride*. The New Press, 2024.

E. Klein, *Why We’re Polarized.* Avid Reader Press, 2021.

I. Manji, *Don’t Label Me.* St. Martin’s Griffin, 2020.

J. Rausch, *The Constitution of Knowledge.* Brookings Institution Press, 2021.

Our work in 2025-26 can lay the groundwork for (1) a future Academy at Seton Hall; and (2) a communitarian agenda at Seton Hall, beginning in Fall, 2026.

This initiative is open to faculty from all disciplines and programs at Seton Hall.

Please communicate your interest in joining the working group by reaching out to anthony.haynor@shu.edu or mark.horowitz@shu.edu by August 25. In your communication indicate your faculty position and the discipline/program with which you are affiliated.

Thank you.

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