The Road to Somewhere, a work of non-fiction authored by the journalist David Goodhart, became one of the most seminal works of 2017 upon its publication in the aftermath of the Brexit referendum.

‘Modern politics has less to do with traditional positions of right versus left, and today has more to do with what I’d call the modern choice, which is open versus closed’.

The above quotation, attributed to a 2007 speech by Tony Blair, neatly encapsulates the central argument of the book. In examining a rising social and ideological divide which eventually culminated in the Brexit referendum, Goodhart identifies two groups in an increasing sense of conflict. The first group, ‘Anywheres’, are generally typical of the winners of globalisation, arising from generally liberal, university-educated backgrounds who are comfortable with the driving ideals of the European Union and free movement. Contrast this with the ‘Somewheres’, defined by Goodhart as those who feel attached to their place of origin and a set of traditional values or institutions, and thus remain wary or even openly hostile to the idea of the European Union, or its effects in mass immigration, increasing diversity or the slow but gradual change made to institutions such as religion or the family.

In analysing the Brexit referendum as a mere symptom of a deeper identity crisis, Goodhart sets out to analyse wider trends affecting this divide, such as the rise of the knowledge economy, the changing relationship between the State and the family, the enduring power of nationalism and populism in an increasingly globalised Europe, and the true degree of social mobility available.

In juxtaposing the arguments of the ‘Somewheres’ against the traditionally liberal arguments promoted by the European project, Goodhart seeks to chart the rise of two competing discourses, and how they may be altered to better reach the other side, instead of descending into a purely partisan conflict. The author chiefly uses the experience of the British referendum as a mirror to other European nations at large, with only limited references to similar factors driving the rise of nationalist forces in other European countries, such as France, Germany or Hungary, among others. However, the general tone of parallels with Britain’s European neighbours remains ever-present between the lines.

Despite some criticism by reviewers that Goodhart remains overly sympathetic the ‘Somewheres’ instead of being perfectly neutral, The Road to Somewhere is a compelling read for people on both sides of the Anywhere-Somewhere divide, if only to unearth the fairly compelling, note-worthy arguments put forward by either side.

Book review by Avtansh Behal