Reviews

Why Nationalism, Yael Tamir (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2019), 224 pp., cloth $24.95, paperback $19.95, eBook $24.95.

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Yael Tamir's *Why Nationalism* is a very good, very timely, and very unfashionable book. It is good in that it reflects and refines Tamir's earlier defense of liberal nationalism, and does so in a clear and accessible style. It is timely in that the resurgence of nationalism and populism around the world over the past decade has shown how much liberal political philosophers have misunderstood the societies in which they often reside. It is unfashionable, finally, in that it makes the case—and does so powerfully—that liberal political philosophy should not only *listen* to voters attracted to such nationalist figures as Donald Trump but should also regard these voters as recognizing a political truth that liberal political theory has too often ignored.

Tamir's book constitutes a sort of normative history of political thought, beginning with the fall of the Soviet Union. The West, Tamir argues, misunderstood that triumph, taking its victory over the Eastern model to reflect a rejection of nationalism and local affiliation in favor of liberal universalism. That vision was, in retrospect, clearly an error. Tamir's analysis, however, shows this error to have had far-reaching consequences. The right wing in developed societies, lacking an enemy, began to see the state itself as an enemy. The Western democratic state model, once prized by the Right as an alternative to the Soviet Union, became the target of its hostility, as it later saw the model as an impediment to the free movement of people and of capital. The left wing, however—and, for that matter, liberal political philosophy—also thought nationalism an outdated relic and focused instead on globalized visions of justice and governance. Both the Right and the Left ignored the fact that nationalism was implicated in the success of the liberal democratic project itself; national identity provided people with a reason to regard politics as more than merely transactional, and gave people a moral reason to seek to do justice to those they regarded as fellow nationals. In the absence of that identity, the project of liberal self-governance itself began to fail. The wealthy—those in the "mobile classes," in Tamir's memorable phrase (p. xiv)—could move their talents to whichever place valued them most highly, or ensure that policies were put into place to maximize a return on those talents. Those without special wealth or talents, however, were left behind and no longer given any particular role in the process of allocating the advantages of social cooperation. In a previous generation, the thought that all national members were

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"in it together" (p. 114) was taken to ground the provision of public goods, political voice, and education for citizenship and mutual comprehension. After the failure of the national project, however, widespread attention to the well-being of the nation itself was largely eliminated; the wealthy have indeed become "citizens of the world," says Tamir, but only in the sense that they are deracinated agents able to eat in Paris and sunbathe in Bermuda—without taking themselves to have special obligations to *any* particular nation's poor (p. 101). The resurgence of nationalism and populism, for Tamir, represents the justified resentment of the less mobile and less educated, who have rightly felt that a deal has been broken: that "members come first, not because they are in some inherent way better, but because we distribute what we have created together" (p. 118). Tamir's book is itself a plea that such national claims be brought back to the table, both for political philosophy and in political practice—the former, through the abandonment of the usual liberal presupposition that nationalists are stupid or deluded; and the latter, through a "cross-class coalition" (p. 165) to rebuild the national project as a site for distributive and political justice.

This is a powerful story. It is subtle; it does not so much insist that nationalism ought to take pride of place over liberalism as it argues that nationalism ought to be returned to the table and given the respect it has too often been denied in recent decades. I am not convinced—not yet, at any rate—that this argument is entirely correct. I am worried, to put it most simply, that *racism* is not given nearly enough attention within Tamir's analysis. She argues, for instance, that hostility to immigration is rational on the part of those who will be competing with those immigrants for jobs (p. 123). It seems, however, empirically plausible that much of the hostility to migration comes not from economic rationality but from a feeling of unease over the racial dynamics that are altered by increased migration. More broadly, though, I worry that Tamir's analysis of liberalism sometimes seems to insist that nationalism is the *only* possible basis for social trust and solidarity—which might be true but has yet to be established. Tamir's nationalism, after all, begins in small spaces like "the kitchen, the garden, and the nursery" (p. 75), and creates a shared experience in which people see themselves as linked to a particular geography, particular foodstuffs, particular stories, and particular architecture (pp. 70–75). If this is true, then I have to confess that most of the places I have lived have not been nation-states; Canada, after all, understands itself not as a nation-state but as a political project shared among distinct nations, and there is very little shared between the resident of Chicoutimi and the resident of Vancouver (apart, perhaps, from an anxiety about the United States). The United States, moreover, has always seemed just too big and diverse to have any such meaningful commonalities. Tamir acknowledges as much in her discussion of the America of Hillary Clinton as distinct from the America of Donald Trump (p. 105)—but I think an inhabitant of Honolulu might have had, even prior to the fall of the Soviet Union, rather different culinary and architectural habits than an inhabitant of Houston. It is not clear, in short, that the nation valorized by Tamir is actually the only story we might tell about which societies flourish—and which do not.

Tamir's analysis, moreover, seems to insist that liberalism itself could never do

the job of motivating a return to the "cross-class coalition" that the welfare state produced. She might be right; but, once again, I think we need to see more evidence here. A reinvigorated liberalism, after all, might have focused on the divide between unskilled workers and educated workers without basing its argument on anything unique to (say) the United States as a national project. That this project did not emerge is not itself evidence that it might not be brought forth now. Tamir asserts that "the workers of the world will never unite" (p. 101). She may be right, but I am not sure we have been given adequate reasons to think she is.

If Tamir is unduly harsh on liberalism and nonnational forms of solidarity, though, she might be unduly gentle with the pathologies that accompany nationalism. The reinvigoration of national sentiment might be useful for liberal purposes in some version of reality, after all, and yet dangerous in our own; from the fact that nationalism helped create responsive politics in the past, we should not infer that it would necessarily do so now. It is hard, after all, to imagine how nationalism might help us solve global problems such as forced migration, climate change, and the emergence of novel pandemics. Nationalism, finally, always entails the drawing of lines between the member and the nonmember—and even if Tamir is right that such lines must be drawn, it is worth noting that a line is often drawn by political opportunists in ways that reflect racial or ethnic purposes as much as shared geography. Tamir is, of course, aware of this problem, but insists that nationalism must nonetheless be accepted as part of the best response to neoliberal capitalism (pp. 169–71). For my part, I would argue that if nationalism is to be brought back to the table, we should make sure that it does not bring its less reputable allies with it.

I am, in short, unsure about whether or not Tamir's arguments succeed. However, I am entirely confident that political philosophers ought to read and engage with them—and that we owe her a tremendous debt for having brought these arguments forward, and in so clear and powerful a manner.

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Global Poverty, Injustice, and Resistance, Gwilym David Blunt (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 298 pp., cloth $99.99, eBook $80.

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In this work of nonideal theory, Gwilym David Blunt flips the existing narrative on ethics and extreme poverty by examining the global poor's right to resist. This is a refreshing intervention in a debate that has consistently focused on the duties of the affluent, at the expense of taking seriously the ethical dilemmas of the oppressed.