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Questions for Seekings and Tamir

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Jeremy Seeking's and Yael Tamir's papers can both be seen to examine the question of how a country's institutions on the one hand, and group membership (including membership of ethnic, racial, or cultural groups, as well as socio-economic ones) on the other, interact so as to affect that country's prospects for economic solidarity. Both appear to converge, moreover, on the gist of the answer they offer to this question: it is not the case that cultural diversity on its own is a weighty determinant of the prospects for economic solidarity. Such prospects are more likely to depend on a country's institutional configuration, which also crucially affects the extent and nature of the role which cultural diversity will play.

While Seeking and Tamir may be viewed to engage to some extent with the same main question, they proceed in very different ways. Seeking's analysis is focused on identifying the different mappings of institutional arrangements, degree of cultural diversity, and presence of economic solidarity (where the latter is measured in terms of redistributive measures from the rich to the poor) that obtain cross-nationally, taking the three new democracies of South Africa, Brazil, and Nigeria as case studies. Tamir's, by contrast, moves at a higher level of abstraction, and is primarily engaged in putting forward a general hypothesis concerning why any one such configuration will obtain. Hers is a thesis about the structure of motives that underlie and explain the nation state's ability to realise solidarity.

We may raise one main question about each of these two papers. As far as Seeking's is concerned, we may ask about the normative implications his analysis is supposed to have. Without neglecting the specific factors at work in the three different countries' political histories, Seeking's view is that institutional design is to a large degree responsible for creating the opportunities for economic solidarity, whether in the absence or in the presence of cultural diversity. Does his analysis then imply that, insofar as economic solidarity

is recognised to be of value, we may, and should, focus primarily on understanding the ways in which institutional design can proceed so as to promote solidarity?

If this is the case, it seems that three points, in particular, deserve further attention. The first concerns what general conclusions, if any, emerge from the study of the three countries Seekings focuses on, and which could help us answer just *what sort* of institutional design best works to create favourable conditions for economic solidarity. A second and related point regards the role which Seekings thinks that cultural diversity, where it exists, could be made to play — once again, possibly, thanks to a particular type of institutional design among other things — in promoting economic solidarity. Finally, the conclusions of Seeking's paper, especially if they are to support normatively significant implications, seem to lead naturally onto the crucial question of what may explain the sort of shape which such institutional design can take in any particular place and time.

This is where Tamir's paper may seem to be relevant, that is, in providing a general claim concerning the possibilities for institutional design that will obtain at any particular point. Here the main question we should raise concerns the exact status of the motivational story which Tamir offers. Her main suggestion is that the position we occupy with regard to group membership and the prospects for intra- and inter-group solidarity are the result of our assessment of the risks and opportunities which any such position carries for each one of us. Institutional design, among other things, will affect the particular package of risks and opportunities we face by occupying different positions (communitarian or global, for example), and therefore, ultimately, the possibilities for solidarity. Tamir's claim, then, is that, when we come to occupy one or other of these positions, we are not really assessing their merits on moral grounds, but are rather fundamentally engaged in ascertaining how we can best pursue our interests. Self-interested motivation, rather than an assessment of values, is what accounts, she claims, for the vicissitudes of our political commitments.

But why, we may ask, is Tamir's motivational story presented as competing with the view that we do and should engage in action-guiding moral evaluation of different political positions? That story may well explain why some political projects attract more support than others. But this does not show that, by engaging in debates about the value of economic solidarity, we are only providing rationalisations of what is fundamentally a choice based on self-interest, as Tamir's paper implies. Indeed, Tamir's account itself, insofar as it is to support a normatively significant conclusion, needs to rely on the sort

of value assessment it appears to want to discredit. After all, does Tamir not want to provide the basis for a project which would see the state engaged, once again, in shaping the package of risks and opportunities individuals face so as to make solidarity possible? If so, Tamir will, it seems, need to appeal to value commitments which, rather than being merely the reflection of self-interest, will account for why it is desirable that one's self-interest should, as much as possible, be made to coincide with the interest of all.