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PARADOXES OF POLITICAL ETHICS

How do the hard facts of political responsibility shape and constrain the demands of ethical life? That question lies at the heart of the problem of “dirty hands” in public life. Those who exercise political power often feel they must act in ways which would otherwise be considered immoral: indeed, paradoxically, they sometimes feel that it would be immoral of them not to perform or condone such acts as killing or lying. John Parrish offers the first wide-ranging account of how this important philosophical problem emerged and developed, tracing it – and its proposed solutions – from ancient Greece through the Enlightenment. His central argument is that many of our most familiar concepts and institutions – from Augustine’s interiorized ethics, to Hobbes’s sovereign state, to Adam Smith’s “invisible hand” understanding of the modern commercial economy – were designed partly as responses to the ethical problem of dirty hands in public life.

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CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore, São Paulo
Cambridge University Press
The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 8RU, UK

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York

www.cambridge.org
Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9780521873550

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First published 2007

Printed in the United Kingdom at the University Press, Cambridge

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

ISBN 978-0-521-87355-0 hardback

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*For my parents
John W. Parrish and
Mary Kay Parrish
and in memory of
Gary Phelps*

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Preface

During my second year of graduate school, one of my advisers asked me, a little exasperatedly: “But do you see dirty hands *everywhere*?” I realized that the answer I wanted to give was an enthusiastic “yes” – but that it would require a great deal more thought and work to begin to show that there was something to justify this urge. This book records the results of the thought and the work. The reader will have to judge whether it has been enough.

I owe much to many. My thanks must begin with Richard Tuck, in whose company this whole endeavor began. Richard was the principal supervisor of my graduate work and in particular of the doctoral dissertation from which this book emerged. Throughout the long process, Richard urged me to sharpen my focus without narrowing my view; to dare to pursue major figures and large, complex themes; to treat my own encounter with primary sources as primary in the scholarly process; and to trust my own capacity to be *gripped* as an accurate barometer of broad intellectual interest. Each chapter of this book bears the mark of Richard’s wide learning, incisive intelligence, good humor, and friendship – as do I.

Let me next thank those individuals who read part or all of the manuscript of this book in its various stages of drafting and disarray, enabling those readers who came after to be spared some of its worst obscurities, infelicities, and mistakes. In addition to Richard, four other persons read and commented on this book in its entirety during the years it was a doctoral dissertation: Christopher Brooke, Pratap Bhanu Mehta, Dennis F. Thompson, and Alex Tuckness. Together they contributed more than anyone else to shaping the resulting book. More recently, Paulann Canty, Kenneth Chatlos, and several anonymous reviewers were kind enough to read the full manuscript and provide valuable thoughts about it.

Many other individuals read one or more separate chapters of the manuscript and provided comments that have been collectively indispensable. They include: Arash Abizadeh, Jonathan Allen, Arthur Applbaum, Deborah Baumgold, Nicholas Conostas, Michael Ferguson, Bryan

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Garsten, Justin Hardin, Clarissa Hayward, Kinch Hoekstra, Istvan Hont, Jill Horwitz, Alan Jacobs, Aaron James, Madeline Kochen, Dale Kuehne, Wayne LeCheminant, Harvey Mansfield, Bryan McGraw, Tamara Metz, Russell Muirhead, Michael Neblo, Andy Sabl, Michael Sandel, Allan Silverman, David Siu, Travis Smith, and Alexander Wendt. I have learned much from all of them. It is customary to say that any remaining mistakes are my fault alone: but that seems a bit out of keeping with a book whose central theme is collective responsibility (as well as more than a bit obvious). Anyway: blame whom you like, but certainly start with me.

Several worthy institutions supported my work financially. The most significant have been: the Mustard Seed Foundation; the Government Department at Harvard University; the Center for Ethics and the Professions at Harvard; Harvard's Packard Fellowship; the Ohio State University; and Loyola Marymount University. Thanks in particular to the staffs of the various libraries at Cambridge University, Harvard University, and the Ohio State University for their help. I must also acknowledge the excellent research assistance I received from the following persons: Richard Arnold, Zac Cogley, Melissa Daugherty, John Hickey, Ben Jones, Ryan Peterson, and Yusuf Sarfati. Commissioning Editor Hilary Gaskin and Production Editor Elizabeth Davey at Cambridge University Press shepherded the manuscript from draft to publication. Richard Arnold and Melissa Daugherty doublechecked the book's numerous references. Joanne Hill copy-edited the text with great care. Melissa Daugherty and Ryan Peterson helped extensively in compiling the index.

Most of Chapter 2 appeared first as "Two Cities and Two Loves: Imitation in Augustine's Moral Psychology and Political Theory," *History of Political Thought* 26 (2005), 209–235, and is reprinted here with the kind permission of the publisher, Imprint Academic.

Any scholarly book has in back of it a set of intellectual and personal struggles that motivate and fuel one's study – and those who share one's struggles make their own special contribution to the product of one's labors. In this respect I must thank many of the persons mentioned above, plus: Jason Burnett, David Campbell, Derek Cowan, Jared Denslow, Eric Dickson, Kyla Ebels Duggan, Antje Ellerman, Joan Ford, Todd Hulin, Macartan Humphreys, Kathryn Linehan, Allison MacLaren, Robin Parrish McAlister, Bryan McGraw, Karyn Johnson Pace, Michael Pace, Ben Read, Michael Sandel, Todd Shepherd, Kevin Stenzel, Annie Stilz, Charley Turner, Larry Walker, Scott Wasson, Stephanie Wasson, Nicholas Wolterstorff, and Iris Marion Young. Alan Jacobs deserves special

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mention here. During the years I wrote this book, no one talked with me more extensively about these matters than he – and no one helped more.

My struggles with dirty hands first took sharp focus in a cramped college newspaper office at William Jewell College; those experiences were the first (and roughest) draft of this book. During that period, I learned from and alongside: Elspeth Grindstaff, Lois Anne Harris, Gordon Kingsley, Bob McGill, Mike Mirakian, Brandi Rathbun, Jim Tanner, and Stacy Williams. The most valuable lessons I learned about ethics and public responsibility during those years were from Gary Phelps, to whose memory this book is in part dedicated.

Lynn Mitchell-Parrish has shared life with me during the years between the dissertation's first draft and the book's appearance in print. Thanks mainly to her love and friendship, those years have been my happiest yet. Readers who enjoy the book owe much to Lynn for enduring my alternating bouts of uncertainty, pedantry, avoidance, and despair while I was writing it – and for giving me a life better than the book to come home to.

To my parents I (and this book) owe most of all. From them I learned to do practically everything I have done in these pages: it is they who taught me to read, to think, to play, to worry, to search, to question, and to persist. I dedicate this work to them, as a small token of recognition for all the work they did for me.