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Renée Jeffery

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Reason and Emotion in International Ethics

The study of international ethics is marked by an overwhelming bias towards reasoned reflection at the expense of emotionally driven moral deliberation. For rationalist cosmopolitans in particular, reason alone provides the means by which we can arrive at the truly impartial moral judgments a cosmopolitan ethic demands. However, are the emotions as irrational, selfish and partial as most rationalist cosmopolitans would have us believe? By re-examining the central claims of the eighteenth-century moral sentiment theorists in light of cutting-edge discoveries in the fields of neuroscience and psychology, Renée Jeffery argues that the dominance of rationalism and marginalisation of emotions from theories of global ethics cannot be justified. In its place she develops a sentimentalist cosmopolitan ethic that does not simply provide a framework for identifying injustices and prescribing how we ought to respond to them, but actually motivates action in response to international injustices such as global poverty.

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Preface

Emotions matter. This is something I have always known. But *why* do they matter? This question, along with a whole raft of others, has been nagging away in the back of my head for many years. What exactly are emotions? What do they do? What contributions do they make to human interactions? How should we understand their contribution to politics, both domestic and international? And what role do emotions play in making moral judgments and motivating ethical actions?

Arriving at the point where I can now, at least partially, answer some of these important questions has been a long and circuitous journey that began well before I began self-consciously researching and writing about the emotions. This journey began during my time as a Ph.D. student at the University of St Andrews in the early 2000s. There, sitting in my icy little office researching a thesis on Hugo Grotius and the ‘Grotian tradition’ of thought in international relations and international law, I developed an interest in the work of the early Scottish international lawyers, the moral sentiment theorists and, in particular, David Hume. I suppose, living in Scotland, if not inevitable this was at least fitting. However, such was the nature of my Ph.D. that, no matter how hard I tried, I could not wedge Hume and his contemporaries into it or, indeed, into the book on Grotius that followed. And so, my work on Hume and the moral sentiment theorists was relegated to the metaphorical bottom drawer. There it stayed for some years while I undertook my first academic job at La Trobe University and focused my research on the idea of evil in international relations.

In 2007, however, I was appointed to a lectureship at the University of Adelaide. There my colleague Lisa Hill, a renowned scholar of two other great Scots, ‘the two Adams’, Adam Smith and Adam Ferguson, helped to re-ignite my interest in Hume. Together with Ian Hall, she invited me to contribute a chapter on Hume to an edited book, *British International Thought from Hobbes to Namier* (2009). This was the

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only encouragement I needed to return, once more, to studying Hume's works.

In the intervening years, my interest in Hume's moral sentiment theory turned, unsurprisingly, into an interest in the emotions more generally. More surprising was the fact that my background in the history of international political thought led me to study advances made in our understanding of the emotions within the neurosciences. The reason for my scientific turn was simple. The history of international political thought provides us with a set of very good reasons why Hume's moral sentiment theory came to be marginalised in the study of ethics, politics and, later, international relations. But those reasons were based on assumptions about the nature of emotions and the nature of reason and rationality. I thus began to wonder whether those assumptions were right. Surely, I thought, we know enough about the human brain to adjudicate between those who advocated a sentimentalist approach to ethics and those who discarded it in favour of more reasoned approaches? As it happens, a rapidly advancing and vibrant area of the brain sciences focused on the nature of the emotions and their relationship to reason does exist and, as we will see, has provided crucial insights into the claims made by the moral sentimentalists and their adversaries. In this, I must thank Alex Wendt who, as one of the editors of *International Theory*, the journal in which I published my first major piece of work on the emotions, encouraged me to delve further into the neuroscience and psychology of the emotions.

It is currently a great time to be working on the emotions in international relations and international ethics. Not only have scientific advances helped to clarify many key aspects of the emotions but a growing group of scholars have begun to engage in debate over the place of the emotions in International Relations studies. I have been extremely fortunate to spend time discussing the emotions with several pioneers of this emergent area of research including Roland Bleiker, Emma Hutchison and Neta Crawford, the latter of whom, in contrast to Wendt, encouraged me to continue developing my work on the emotions in the history of international political thought. In addition, I had the great pleasure of attending a workshop on the emotions and world politics at the University of Queensland, hosted by Roland Bleiker and Emma Hutchison. Although the manuscript of this book was almost entirely complete by then, the two days of rigorous engagement with Neta Crawford, Jonathan Mercer, Janice Bially-Mattern, Christian

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Reus-Smit and Tim Dunne helped to iron out some remaining wrinkles in the argument.

Although inspiration for this book was the product of my time at the University of Adelaide, it was written and researched at Griffith University and the Australian National University. My thanks therefore go to my colleagues at the Griffith Asia Institute and the Centre for Governance and Public Policy at Griffith University for their support, engagement and commitment to scholarly inquiry. I not only thoroughly enjoyed my time at Griffith but learnt an awful lot from my colleagues there. I particularly wish to thank Jason Sharman, Pat Weller, Andrew O'Neil, Michael Wesley, Sara Davies, Alex Bellamy, Juanita Elias, Gideon Baker, Haig Patapan and Hunjoon Kim for their collegiality and support during the three years of my fellowship. In January 2012 I took up a position in the School of Politics and International Relations at the ANU. It was there, in 2012 and 2013, that the manuscript of this book was finally finished. At ANU I have particularly benefited from conversations with and support from several of my colleagues including Keith Dowding, Juliet Pietsch and Maria Rost Rublee. I thank them all.

As always, however, my greatest thanks are reserved for my family. To Ian, Sadie and Scarlett, thank you for being so patient as I worked so obsessively to finish this book. I can't promise I won't do it again – you all know me well enough to realise that before long we will be back in the intense final writing stage of whichever book comes next. What I can promise is not to lose sight of the fact that without the three of you, my work and my life would be greatly diminished.