Transforming Conflict: Trust, Empathy, and Dialogue

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Abstract

There remains within International Relations a general presumption towards mistrust which characterises interactions at the global level and which has been identified as a relevant factor in conflict transformation. How we conceptualise trust and mistrust matters because it can make the difference between war and peace. This article considers trust, empathy, and dialogue as central concepts for an understanding of conflict and its transformation. Arguing for a relational and dynamic understanding of trust, empathy, and dialogue, the article identifies limitations within IR and contributes to an emergent interdisciplinary research agenda. The contested and unresolved negotiations between Iran and the West over Iran's nuclear program which is framed by the parties as a dilemma of trust, serves to illustrate some of the obstacles to exercising empathy and, at the same time, the need to engage in reflexive dialogue in order to build trust and transform adversarial relationships.

Introduction

There remains within International Relations (IR) a general presumption towards mistrust which characterises interactions at the global level and which has been identified as a relevant factor in conflict prevention and transformation. How we conceptualise trust and mistrust in IR matters because this can make the difference between war and peace (Kydd, 2005: 3). More recently trust has become the focus of a burgeoning field of research within and beyond IR (see Booth and Wheeler, 2008; Glaser, 2010; Wheeler, 2010; Hardin, 2002; Möllering, 2006; Kydd, 2005; Hollis, 1998). Once we begin to question how adversarial and mistrusting relationships might be transformed into more cooperative ones, it is a relatively small step to suggest this requires conceptual tools for understanding empathy - an integral element to human relations - and the communicative encounters which form a central vehicle in international politics for the diplomatic management of conflict. Recognising the limitations of orthodox IR theories which have tended not to engage extensively with these concepts – all of which are underpinned by human emotion – because emotions have largely been perceived to undermine rational decision making in international politics, the aims of the article are threefold. First, it brings together innovative and contemporary interdisciplinary research in the separate spheres of trust, empathy, and communicative ethics and makes an argument for their consideration in international politics and conflict analysis as explicitly *relational* and dynamic concepts. Second, in so doing a series of questions are identified which contribute to an emergent interdisciplinary research agenda in IR focused on addressing issues of conflict transformation. Crucially, such an agenda includes: the role played by emotions in dynamic processes of trust, empathy, and dialogue; the status of emotions in negotiations and conflict transformation processes and the concomitant

methodological question of how, as scholars, we might access and interpret them; the challenges posed by the need to engage with multiple actors and levels of analysis (e.g., does empathy occur between collectives as well as individuals, and how can we talk of emotions in relation to states?), and the theoretical and empirical conditions under which an adversarial relationship may transform into a more cooperative one. Third, by drawing on the illustrative character of the contested and unresolved negotiations between Iran and the West over Iran's nuclear program the need for a holistic and coherent approach to trust, empathy and dialogue in conflict transformation becomes clear. Framed by the parties themselves as a dilemma of trust, this complex and protracted conflict serves to highlight some of the obstacles to exercising empathy and, at the same time, the need to engage in reflexive dialogue in order to build trust and transform adversarial relationships.

A relational approach*?*

Trust, like other concepts within the social sciences, has been placed within the framework of reason and rationality, raising questions concerning whether rationality is crucial to trust or whether it is in fact detrimental to trust within social life (Hollis, 1998). Rationalist approaches to trust emphasise the importance of interests and the pay-off structure which shape the interaction. As Ruzicka and Wheeler have argued, once the 'distribution of pay-offs from cooperation changes, for example as a result of the changed circumstances of one of the players, there will be an incentive to abandon cooperation' (2010a: 73). Given the risks attached to such a relationship in the international sphere, and the likelihood that it may break down, it is clear why actors would exercise caution regarding their own investment in it. On the other hand, recognition of the centrality of promises in establishing and maintaining a trusting relationship belongs to what has been called the binding approach (Ruzicka and Wheeler, 2010: 73). This rests 'on the notion that actors will honour their promises' even if they have opportunities to defect for selfish gains: 'to trust is to expect that the other party or parties will do what is required to begin and maintain the relationship because they value both its existence and continuation' (Ruzicka and Wheeler, 2010: 73; see also Booth and Wheeler, 2008; Hollis, 1998; Möllering, 2006).

While the rationalist approach clearly favours strategic calculation by actors (which may well be motivated by fear as well as self-interest), the binding approach invites reflection on the feelings which underpin judgments of value and obligation. Since cooperation in international politics is likely to rely on elements of both rational thinking and feelings, it becomes clear that trust possesses both a cognitive and an emotional dimension (Booth and Wheeler, 2008: 232). It is not a purely cognitive activity but is based on a belief beyond empirical certainty and the feelings one holds for another, that the other will not act in ways which will harm. Thus, for the purposes of the current argument, trust is, as Mercer has argued, an emotional belief; how people feel influences their interpretation of another's behaviour (Mercer, 2005: 95). An emotional belief is defined as 'one where emotion constitutes and strengthens a belief and which makes possible a generalization about an actor that involves

certainty beyond evidence' (Mercer, 2010: 2). Yet such emotional beliefs are not objective and immutable (and neither is trust); even those conflicts that appear to be driven by beliefs about the other which are frozen in stone can undergo transformation, bringing with it the possibility of new practices that can transform such conflicts. There are (at least) two potential sources of transformation of emotional beliefs which shape and influence issues of conflict: (a) new evidence, and (b) empathy.

A decision taken by actors to trust – against the background of existential uncertainty integral to international politics – should not disguise the concerns over mistrust which clearly arise at times. The question of trust in international politics unavoidably raises its shadowy alter ego, deception. Once deception is present or believed to be present in a relationship, 'trust is usually disturbed and trustworthiness is reconsidered, too, when the act of deception is seen as a betrayal of the trustor's positive expectations and willingness to be vulnerable' (Möllering, 2008: 6). Trust and deception are, in other words, two sides of the same coin: the possibility of the one renders the other meaningful. Deception and empathy also construct a particular duality: on the one hand, empathy may be exercised in order to better exploit or deceive other actors; on the other hand, it may also increase understanding of the acts and intentions of other actors in ways which both reveal and remove the perceived necessity for deception on both sides thus paving the way for possible confidence-building measures. Dialogue and deception similarly hold an important relationship with respect to each other because it is commonly through particular communicative practices that deception or trust is articulated and developed. So, while trust/mistrust may be the problem which pervades US-Iranian relations, for example, this is articulated, consolidated and perpetuated through various communicative practices (be they diplomatic exchanges, public rhetoric, film and media, direct negotiations, Security Council meetings, etc.). Communicative practices in international politics are thus intimately entwined with concepts of trust and empathy. The relational nature of these concepts draws strength from the recognition that they are all intersubjective; that is, they require interaction with others.

Emotions and empathy in international politics

The importance of the affective elements of politics has long been recognised within philosophical traditions and has been broached by Western thinkers as varied as Plato, Aristotle, Rousseau, Adam Smith, David Hume, Hannah Arendt, Jürgen Habermas, and Martha Nussbaum. A common theme to these writings is the relationship between feelings and ethics or morality. Our ability to experience pain and pleasure, to imagine the pain and pleasure of others and the desire for others to share our experiences, prevents us from acting purely on the basis of self-interest and provides an incentive to perceive ourselves and evaluate our actions through the eyes of others (Frevert, 2011: 161; Lebow, 2005: 298). Despite a rich philosophical tradition, emotions and empathy have received little systematic enquiry in mainstream IR theories (Bleiker and Hutchison, 2008).

A convincing case for the paucity of traditional IR theories' ability to engage with these issues given their insufficient individual ontologies premised on the

assumption of an autonomous, calculating, egoistic individual has been made by Richard Ned Lebow (2005). Lebow's critique of those theories of IR which adopt a broadly rationalist approach to explain cooperation rests on the contention that emotions 'are absolutely fundamental to creating any general propensity to cooperate with a given group of actors' (2005: 284). In common with other critical traditions, Lebow argues that the notion of the autonomous individual is a 'fiction of the Enlightenment' (2005: 284). Moreover, behaviour cannot simply be explained by reference to external incentives. While actions may certainly be a response to incentives, what constitutes an incentive and the reasons why actors may consider it to be important cannot be separated out from their conceptions of identity and interests. The latter are formed intersubjectively, through collective experiences, affective ties and relationships embedded in communities. As such, to explain the behaviour of actors we must also examine their internal incentives and their social and emotional beliefs and attachments (2005: 284, 291). This touches upon a critical question for scholars of trust and empathy in IR: how to respond to the need to engage with multiple levels of analysis? At stake are not only the complex personal cognitive and affective processes of individuals, but those of individuals who also adopt roles as formal representatives of collectives such as international institutions, governments of states, and other political or cultural groups. IR is rightly charged with the practice of personifying the state (Wendt, 2004; Lomas, 2005). Nowhere is this more evident - and controversial - than when attempting to explore the emotions relevant to international politics.

While emotions such as fear and mistrust have been very much present in neorealist narratives of IR, they have generally been understood as a product of the perceived anarchy of the international system. Under anarchy, fear compels states to follow the logic of survival or perish. By contrast, scholars such as Neta Crawford have argued that conflict does not emerge from the structural pressures of the system, but from the way in which emotions such as fear or mistrust shape and influence the perceptions and identities of decision-makers (2000: 131-6). In sum, emotions have been recognized as core components in our constitution of identity and community; as physiological, biological or bodily sensations; as forms of knowledge; as affect or feelings, and as central to our ability to form evaluative judgments (Bleiker and Hutchison, 2008: 124; Hunt, 2007; Nussbaum, 2001; Solomon, 1988). Crawford writes that 'feelings are internally experienced, but the meaning attached to those feelings, the behaviors associated with them, and the recognition of emotions in others are cognitively and culturally construed and constructed' (2000: 125). If this is so, then they deserve greater attention than they frequently receive in international politics.

That this has not been so to a significant degree reflects methodological concerns arising from the dominance of positivist social science. The epistemological challenge issued by critical theory to positivism was reflected in a corresponding shift in IR theory from which emerged a range of critiques of positivism. Approaches to IR which adopted a neutral and objective understanding of reality were rejected and alternative epistemological positions quickly emerged. These articulated an awareness of the relationship between knowledge, power and interests, and undermined any claim to an 'objective reality', instead articulating an intersubjective and, at times, a

radically subjective approach to knowledge and meaning. These critical approaches were primarily focused on the realist/neorealist orthodoxy which identified material power as an endemic feature of international politics and one that structured state interactions. While this 'critical turn' opened the methodological way for closer consideration of emotions and empathy, much of the relevant research has continued to be done in other disciplines and has struggled to fully penetrate the dominant IR focus on issues of security and conflict. There can be little question, however, that the critiques of positivism paved the way for the 'linguistic turn' in IR and Habermas remains a seminal figure in these debates. Much of this focus on language emerged from a philosophical preoccupation with Western metaphysics and the nature of reason and modernity, leaving less attention to be paid – until more recently – to the specific dynamics of conflict transformation.

Emotion, as suggested by the dominance of rationalism, has long been subordinated to cognition by philosophers and IR scholars alike, serving only to explain irrationality or mistaken judgments. Justice, it was argued, must be free of passion because emotions distort our capacity for rational and ethical judgment (for critiques see: Bleiker and Hutchison, 2008: 120; Hutchings, 2005; Morrell, 2010; Sylvester, 2011). Countering this tendency, the reciprocal relationship between cognition and emotion has been firmly established both in the natural sciences and the social sciences (see Crawford, 2000; Damasio, 1994; Decety and Ickes, 2009). Challenging the precepts of rationalist theories which have traditionally dominated IR, research in the social sciences has more recently argued that:

> Emotion is necessary to rationality and intrinsic to choice. Emotion precedes choice (by ranking one's preferences), emotion influences choice (because it directs one's attention and is the source of action), and emotion follows choice (which determines how one feels about one's choice and influences one's preferences) (Mercer, 2005: 94).

Contra the rationalist position that emotion is merely a *product* of cognition or a reaction to external stimuli, Mercer suggests that all decision making is shaped by emotional beliefs. Emotions are not simply produced by specific situations, but shape our reasoning, our framing of the situation and our responses to it; 'emotion and cognition co-produce beliefs' (Mercer, 2010: 5).

If we accept the argument that emotion – like language – is a constitutive element of international politics, then we are able to re-examine the assumptions which underpin our interactions with others in situations of conflict. The social and intersubjective ontology underpinning critical theories (broadly understood here to include critical constructivism, Habermasian critical theory, and hermeneutics) shifts our focus away from maximizing utility and rational self-interest towards the constitutive role of language, desires and beliefs. If political conflicts are underpinned by emotional dimensions then an inability to understand others' feelings is likely to be a dynamic which contributes towards perpetuating mistrust and conflict (Ditto and Koleva, 2011; Skitka and Wisneski, 2011).

Making a decision to trust is not simply based on a rational assessment of the evidence – actors may decide to trust others against the odds for reasons that can only

be explained by accessing the emotions which underpin this decision. Conversely, actors may also find it hard to trust despite the presence of relevant material evidence because of the strength of the conviction with which particular emotional beliefs are held (Mercer, 2010: 9). Research in psychology has demonstrated that there is a correlation between moral convictions and strong emotions associated with particular policy preferences (Skitka and Wisneski, 2011). Trust and empathy may be predispositions, but they are also decisions, emotional beliefs, and responses which may shift over time and are embedded in cultural, historical, and interpersonal narratives and relationships.

Given the supposition that emotions and concomitant beliefs are not static but dynamic processes, it is incumbent upon us to explore where the potential for transformation and change lies. There are at least two potential sources of change: (a) new evidence, and (b) empathy. The effect of new evidence on beliefs draws on the rationalist position that actors will update our beliefs and interests as a result of new information (Kydd, 2005; Grobe, 2010; Mercer, 2010). However, if the way in which new evidence is processed takes place through the interpretive lens of particular theories, beliefs, or normative expectations, then the outcome is likely to be somewhat different than that posited by rationalists. Moreover, it is difficult to explain different conclusions based on the same evidence if the role that emotions play in framing our interpretations is not considered. Mercer illustrates this by indicating the different American and Israeli intelligence estimates carried out in 2006 as to when Iran might acquire nuclear weapons. The Israelis believed it could take Iran two years, while the Americans expected it to take five to ten years. Both groups undertook the analysis on the basis of the same evidence and knowledge and in close consultation with each other: 'Different conclusions based on the same evidence are irrational only if one believes in a naïve accommodation of beliefs to evidence…The Israelis and the Americans felt the threat of a nuclear-armed Iran differently and these different feelings were part of their assessments' (Mercer, 2010: 19).

Being able to understand the role that emotional beliefs may play in the construction of trust, mistrust, vulnerability, insecurity or threat relies on being able to exercise empathy. The necessity for the recognition of empathy emerges in various strands of political theory and International Relations including, deliberative democracy and communicative action (Crawford, 2010; Dews, 1992; Morrell, 2010), conflict resolution (Rothman, 1992; Broome, 1993; Halpern and Weinstein, 2004) psychological approaches to foreign policy analysis (Jervis, 1970, 1976; Jervis, Lebow and Stein, 1985; White, 1991), and political judgement (Solomon, 1988; Arendt, 1965, 2006). While trust, empathy, and dialogue have received increasing interdisciplinary attention as individual concepts, they should not be examined in isolation. Instead, they should be conceived of both theoretically and empirically as *relational* and dynamic concepts. Support for such an argument is implicit in Lebow's assertion that:

> the world's greatest philosophical and religious traditions emphasize the role of emotions, not just of reason, in bringing about the fundamental disposition to cooperate. Affection builds empathy, which allows us to perceive ourselves through the eyes of others. Empathy in turn

encourages us to see others as our ontological equals and to recognize the self-actualizing benefits of close relationships with others. From Socrates to Gadamer, philosophers have also argued that dialogue has the potential to make us recognize the parochial and limited nature of our understandings of justice (Lebow, 2005: 42).

A multitude of meanings have been ascribed to empathy, not all of which clearly map onto each other. The most common distinction is that drawn between cognitive and affective empathy (Rothman, 1992: 61-2). While not easily disentangled, the latter, often conflated with sympathy, usually refers to shared feeling with another, such as pain or suffering (Decety and Ickes, 2009; Engelen and Röttger-Rössler, 2012; Morrell, 2010). Cognitive empathy, in contrast, tends to refer to the cognitive projection of oneself into the shoes of another, whilst maintaining a clear differentiation between self and other. In psychotherapy, Carl Rogers defined empathy in the following way: 'To sense the client's inner world of private personal meanings as if it were your own, but without ever losing the 'as if' quality, this is empathy, and this seems essential to a growth-promoting relationship' (cited in Morrell, 2010: 51).

Cognitive empathy places emphasis on the actor's ability to understand the perspective and emotions of the other, without necessarily having to share those feelings (see White, 1991: 292). This raises the pertinent issue of 'moral neutrality' (Hollan, 2012: 71). Unlike sympathy which requires an element of concern or care for the other, empathy does not necessarily imply altruistic or compassionate action; empathy may be used to hurt or humiliate another actor, to reinforce reasons for mistrust. Similarly, empathy requires an ability to tolerate the emotional and moral ambivalence that exercising empathy may give rise to (Halpern and Weinstein 2004). While this separation characterizes much of the literature, maintaining a strong division between cognitive and affective empathy fails to fully integrate the role of emotions and to acknowledge the constitutive force of cognition and emotion. Thus, cognitive empathy is not a process devoid of emotions despite its representation at times as a rational and intellectual process within a tradition that has long separated reason and emotion. Emotions are relevant to both cognitive and affective empathy. Crucially, what the distinction serves to highlight is the indeterminacy of empathy and the role that emotions can play in shaping motives and intentions.

Missing from many accounts of empathy is a sense of the *temporal dimension* of empathy. In other words, while empathy frequently focuses directly on the encounter, this misses out a broader social, biological, and political context for the prior possibility of empathy as well as the changing dynamics of empathy before, during, and after communicative encounters. A consideration of 'time' and its treatment across negotiating processes in international politics has important implications. Most obviously, negotiations take time and are part of an iterative process which is affected by the cognitive and emotional interpretation of what has gone before. The time-bounded nature common to negotiations also has implications for the potential for trust and empathy to emerge. A temporal dimension to empathy reflects the idea that 'human beings think, perceive, imagine, and make moral choices according to narrative structures' (Sarbin, 1986, as cited in Hammack and Pilecki,

2012, p. 76).   Placing the interconnected concepts of trust, empathy, and dialogue within a framework of historical narratives also serves to acknowledge that the cognitive and emotional components of these concepts also have a narrative form: our relationships to objects, people, and beliefs are developed over time (see Nussbaum, 2001: 2-3).

In addition to the absence of an explicit temporal dimension is the lack of a clear set of processes through which empathy may occur which integrate both affective and cognitive mechanisms.   Acknowledging the need for a model of empathy which embraces its complexity and does not offer a reductionist account, Mark H. Davis has argued for a multidimensional approach.   Instead of defining empathy 'solely as affective responses or cognitive reactions, the multidimensional approach recognizes that affect and cognition are intertwined in empathy' (Morrell, 2010: 55).   The resulting model of empathy seeks to articulate a conception of empathy that speaks across the various disciplines in which it plays a role and embraces a range of components ascribed to empathy.   What emerges out of Davis' model is awareness of empathy as a process rather than an emotion in and of itself. There is, Morrell argues, 'no "empathy" that we feel; instead, empathy is a process through which others' emotional states or situations have an affect upon us' (2010: 62).   Recognising empathy as a process rather than a state conceives it as a multidimensional process which recognises the intertwining of cognition and emotion and pays attention to the antecedents, process, and outcomes of empathy through which transformation of relationships can emerge (Morrell, 2010: 55-62; see also Cameron, 2012a, 2011).   These characteristics are picked up and developed further by Lynne Cameron's empathy model in ways which contribute to a dynamic and relational understanding of trust, empathy and dialogue.
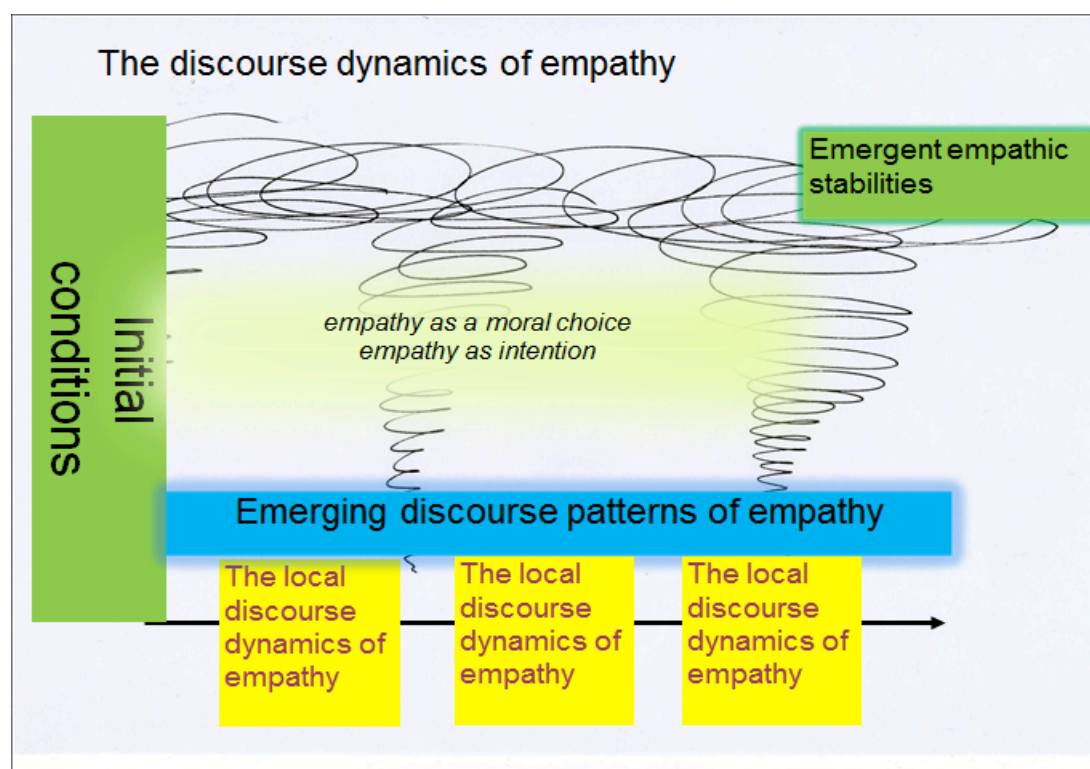

Fig. 1. Cameron, 'Multi-level dynamic model of empathy' (2012)

Cameron's model recognizes that empathy 'appears to have been studied both as something that <u>occurs in</u> talk and as something that <u>emerges from</u> talk', thus acknowledging the close relationship between empathy and communicative practices. She rightly suggests that 'an appropriate descriptive model will be dynamic, i.e. will characterize empathy through multiple processes operating at, and interacting across, different levels and timescales' (2011: 2).

Furthermore, Cameron not only pays attention to those mechanisms which enable or facilitate empathy, but also to those which may serve to *block* empathy (2012b). This addresses a key concern for scholars of IR whereby a central focus on the causes of war require a sensitivity to those contextual factors which enable and prevent, perpetuate, end, or transform conflict. Emotional beliefs form one potential block to exercising empathy. Emotional beliefs embrace a range of related factors which may be analytically distinguished, such as specific socio-cultural factors including individual and collective identity, traumatic memories (Bell, 2006; Fattah and Fierke, 2009) and historical narratives (Hammack and Pilecki, 2012; Monroe, 2002). Other blocks to empathy encompass personal predispositions or an individual capacity to exercise empathy both in particular contexts and over a period of time, as well as the kind of communicative practices adopted when engaging in dialogue. Although beyond the scope of this article, careful empirical work on particular cases is required to establish contextual factors which act to block empathy and to differentiate between cases where empathy and dialogue can work to build trust and where it may be too risky or costly for actors to make themselves vulnerable. Also relevant for empathy in the international sphere is Cameron's recognition of the role for deliberate empathy whereby the *intention* to exercise empathy (or not to) shapes the nature of the interaction and the exercise of empathy as a moral or ethical choice. This maps onto the work of those who link empathy to moral ideas and recognise it as a prerequisite for political and moral judgment, as well as the work of those who argue that entering into a trusting relationship requires actors to take a decision to trust the other (Ruzicka and Wheeler, 2010).

Communicative ethics: closing the circle

From a normative perspective, dialogue invites an equality of trust and respect. Such qualities – to which we may also add empathy – require more fostering and preparation in contexts of conflict and crisis than others. Protracted conflict raises the long shadow of past experience and memory for all parties which cannot be ignored if the qualities of trust and empathy are to be nurtured within dialogue. Similarly, proponents of dialogue and participants need to be aware of the inequalities which frequently structure dialogic encounters at the international level if they wish to contribute to a sustainable transformation of conflict. At such times, the need for 'legitimate dialogue' is more urgent than ever. What characterises such dialogue, and the role that argument, persuasion, and legitimacy play in international politics has been a subject of increasing concern among IR scholars (Crawford, 2002, 2010; Bjola, 2009; Head, 2012; Hurd, 1999; Hurrelmann *et al*, 2007; Hutchings, 2005; Linklater, 1998, 2005; Risse, 2000)

Habermas' concern with emancipation through communicative rationality equips us with a set of sophisticated conceptual tools with which to cast a critical and reflexive eye on the procedures, institutions and interactions which sustain, shape and constrain norms concerning the use of force. Those in IR concerned with the 'democratic deficit' of international institutions have looked to Habermas' theory to identify ways in which institutional arrangements might be improved, thus preventing the resort to force to settle international disputes (Dryzek, 1987; Archibugi, 2003; Held, 1996). Those interested in questions of legitimacy and decision-making within the international sphere have found resources in Habermas' normative and procedural approach to discourse ethics (Boréus, 2006; Bjola, 2005; Fishkin, 1992; Head, 2012; Hurrelmann *et al*, 2007). Communicative ethics offers both an '*instrument of criticism* of unjustifiable limitations of the rights and opportunities of discourse-partners' and a normative guide 'as a way of defining an ideal which can be approached through practice and organizational arrangements' (Alexy, 1989: 194; see Benhabib, 1992; Blaug, 1999; Eckersley, 2004; Head, 2012). Practical political dialogue in international politics takes place under a variety of conditions and constraints. Interpreting Habermas' model of discourse as a principle of legitimacy rather than a concrete institutional design secures a critical ability to identify different forms of constraints on practical discourse, such as exclusion or coercion, and subsequently offers access to a powerful account of legitimacy relevant to a focus on conflict transformation.

While Habermas' account is not sufficiently sensitive to the workings of trust and empathy, it is nonetheless appropriate to focus on discourse ethics to articulate an alternative conception of communicative practices for two reasons. First, although the charge has been leveled that Habermas' conception of rational argument and reason falls foul of the dichotomy between reason and emotion, nonetheless discourse ethics ascribes an important role to empathy through the requirement of perspective-taking. Second, the significance of the critical leverage secured by his work in relation to decisions to use coercion or force in international politics ensures that we cannot simply dismiss discourse ethics despite its limitations (see Bjola, 2009; Eckersley, 2004; Head, 2008, 2012; Linklater 1998, 2005; Ron, 2009). It is appropriate, therefore, to establish both a critique of Habermas' position regarding empathy in moral discourse and to offer an alternative conception of communicative ethics which places a stronger recognition of the relational nature of trust, dialogue and empathy at its core. While the multi-disciplinary literature on empathy assumes communication is necessary, it does not tend to theorise what such communication (or its distortion) might look like. With few exceptions, little attention is paid to the kinds of communicative practices through which empathy may be enabled or blocked (Burton, 1969; Cameron, 2010, 2012b; Crawford, 2010; Head, 2012).

The link between trust and communicative action draws on the validity claims integral to Habermas' theory. These include: the speaker's sincerity, the factual accuracy of the claim, its comprehensibility, and the normative appropriateness of particular communicative interactions. Habermas indicates that speakers implicitly make these claims whenever they engage in dialogue and that they can be justified if necessary. Illustrative of the relationship between trust and communication, Harald Müller has argued that 'when there are doubts about sincerity, communicative action

becomes impossible. From this point of view every breach of a promise, however strategically trivial, places in question the kind of action that has been chosen' (Müller, 2001: 169). Thus, the capacity to interrogate communicative practices contributes to the kind of reflexivity which may facilitate transforming hostile relationships. Reflecting on the validity claims integral to communicative action poses a dilemma of interpretation as actors have to decide how to interpret the actions, intentions and statements of others under the precondition of uncertainty. The perceived presence or absence of sincerity/honesty will impact upon the way in which actors interpret and respond to others. In a similar vein, so will an intention or decision to exercise empathy. This critical interrogation of communicative practices is an element rarely integrated with the concerns of security dilemma theorists in IR who focus on concepts of costly signalling and the (mis)perceptions attached to sending and receiving signals (Booth and Wheeler 2008; Glaser, 2010; Jervis, 1970, 1976; Kydd, 2005).

The second element of Habermas' theory of communicative action which is of central concern, is empathy. The form of empathy which has a central role in Habermas' discourse ethics is intended to support and enable the cognitive activity of ideal role-taking, thus building on the aforementioned distinction between cognition and emotion. Habermas 'builds the moment of empathy *into* the procedure of coming to a reasoned agreement: each must put him- or herself into the place of everyone else in discussing whether a proposed norm is fair to all' (Habermas, 1990: viii-ix, 1993: 174). Habermas acknowledges that:

> Empathy, […] the capacity to transport oneself by means of feeling across cultural distance into alien and prima facie incomprehensible life conditions, patterns of reaction, and interpretive perspectives – is an *emotional precondition* for the ideal taking over of roles, which requires each person to adopt the standpoint of all the others (Habermas in Dews, 1992: 269).

The imagining of the other's reasons necessary for ideal role-taking, is not, as Crawford notes, the same as actually listening and understanding the feelings and views of others (2010: 31). It does not, she argues, pay sufficient attention to the non-cognitive reasons that people may have for holding or rejecting beliefs which are co-constituted by cognition *and* emotion (2010: 32). Feelings and desires can, for Habermas, achieve '"intersubjective transparency", but they cannot reach the same level of intersubjective recognition of validity as descriptive or normative expressions' (Morrell, 2010: 80) and so are subordinate to cognitive reasons in discourse ethics. In other words, emotions belong to our subjective experiences and cannot achieve universal validity on the basis of communicative rationality.

As a consequence of its formalistic and universalisable approach, discourse ethics has been subject to two key criticisms. First of all, for its adoption of the 'rationalist' human subject central to Western philosophy which retains the traditional binary logic associating the 'feminine' with a lack of reason (Hutchings, 2005: 156). Secondly, for the importance Habermas ascribes to the morality of justice. While he does so because of its universal nature, the preference for justice to the exclusion of

an 'affective' dimension is restrictive and exclusive 'because it rules out certain topics and concerns, which can justifiably be considered moral, from the conversation pre-discursively' (Shapcott, 2002: 229). Forms of expression which do not conform with culturally specific norms of deliberation may be deemed illegitimate and thus serve to block the development of empathic or trusting relations (Young, 1990). In more recent writings, Habermas has responded to his critics in the following way which moves considerably closer to a recognition of the constitutive relation between cognition and emotion. He writes:

> Ideal role taking has come to signify a procedural type of justification. The cognitive operations it requires are demanding. Those operations in turn are internally linked with motives and emotional dispositions and attitudes like empathy. Where sociocultural distance is a factor, concern for the fate of one's neighbor – who more often than not is anything but close by – is a necessary emotional prerequisite for the cognitive operations expected of participants in discourse. (Habermas in Dews, 1992: 182).

Recalling the earlier discussion on empathy, Habermas blurs somewhat the distinction here between cognitive and affective empathy. By recognising that the cognitive requirements of perspective-taking call for a sense of concern for the other, he brings in the role of emotions. Habermas' cognitive empathy occupies a rather more normative position than that of many in IR because it implies an intention not to harm the other that is missing in more rationalist accounts. Habermas also draws our attention to an important factor in thinking about the role of empathy for conflict transformation. Recognising that 'one's neighbor' is frequently not close by raises questions regarding the capacity for empathy to be exercised across space and time. It is commonly acknowledged that empathy tends to be more accessible when the objects of our attention can be easily identified with in terms of language, culture, social norms, class, gender, nationality or race. Across disciplines, the obstacles imposed by spatial distance, time, and lack of familiarity or identification have been recognised as blocks to empathy (Frevert, 2011: 185-192; Cameron, 2012b). Nowhere has this emerged more clearly in international politics than in the debates over the universalism of human rights, humanitarian intervention and in the notion of 'saving strangers' found in theories of cosmopolitanism and the solidarism of the English School (Hunt, 2007: 209-14; Linklater, 1998; Wheeler, 2000; Wheeler and Dunne, 1998).

While Habermas' concept of justice implies that moral motivation is drawn from reason rather than from moral feelings, he nevertheless acknowledges the role of moral feelings in constituting moral phenomena as 'feelings provide the basis for our *perception* of something as a moral issue' (Beiner, 1982: 269). However, he maintains that emotions 'cannot be the *final* reference point for judging the phenomena they bring to light' (Habermas, 1993: 174). Habermas' position remains insufficient to account for the degree to which emotions not only provide the basis for our perception of something as a moral issue, but also influence our judgment, constitute non-cognitive claims in arguments, and consequently shape our decisions.

Crawford has argued for additional validity claims to those established by Habermas of 'empathy', 'perspective-taking', and 'emotional truthfulness' which would 'require actors to examine the role that their feelings play in their judgements. Fear and a drive for invulnerability, for example, may be the paramount motivation for behaviour' (2010: 42). Moreover, acknowledging the emotional content of speech would broaden the kinds of speech which could be taken seriously in a deliberative context and would represent a shift away from the privileging of cognition or 'rational' speech. These additional validity claims complement the broader understanding of empathy encompassed by Cameron's discourse dynamics of empathy. While Crawford articulates more stringent *normative* conditions or capacities for a communicative ethics, Cameron's model allows this process of raising validity claims to be traced through actual dialogue taking place moment by moment. Although coming from different disciplinary backgrounds and adopting different orientations to analyzing practice, they embody similar positions with regard to a commitment to draw together the theory and practice of empathic relations.

Empathy firmly belongs in the conceptual toolbox of a communicative ethics in IR which is attentive to the degrees of inclusion, coercion, reflexivity and recognition present within communicative practices (Head, 2012). Moreover, a concept of empathy which resonates with critical theoretical concerns should be understood as a complex social, political and temporal process. Communicative practices which pay little regard for levels of inclusion, the presence of coercion, recognition of different groups within society, different forms of expression or a plurality of perspectives, both derive from and result in various forms of social, political or linguistic harm which impede the positive transformation of conflictive relationships. Such practices – which may serve to block empathy or the building of trust - include the unjustified exclusion of relevant actors from dialogue; the use of direct or indirect coercion to control or prevent access to communicative processes; an inability to be reflexive regarding the impact of existing institutional arrangements, power relations, or one's own actions/behaviour on others; failure or refusal to recognize certain forms of expression as equally valid, or to withhold recognition from marginalized or subordinate groups. Communicative ethics draws attention to the relationship between specific communicative practices (as distinct from a broader focus on the constitutive role of language) and the role of empathy and trust as they frame the potential for building trust and enabling mindful, reflexive dialogue.

The Iranian nuclear program: crying out for trust, empathy, and dialogue?

'[T]he foundation of this matter is trust. We don't trust Europe, and Europe doesn't trust us. In the process of negotiating and working with Europe, we are seeking to build a foundation of trust' (Mohammadi, citing Rowhani, 2005).

The framing of Iran's nuclear program by one of Iran's leading nuclear negotiators, Hassan Rowhani, as a dilemma of trust which pervades diplomatic and political interaction serves to highlight the central argument that theorising conflict transformation in the international sphere requires a theoretical account of trust, dialogue and empathy. This is echoed by Indonesia's statement in the Security

Council in March 2008 which draws attention to the use of coercion in current communicative practices and the need for greater reflexivity in order to build trust: 'We need to pose the question whether imposing more sanctions is the most sensible course of action to instill confidence and trust' (UN, S/PV.5848: 11).

Following on from the collapse of negotiations which took place between Iran and the EU3 (France, Germany, and the United Kingdom) from 2003-6, the effect of referring Iran to the Security Council in July 2006 has been to deepen the levels of mistrust between Iran and members of the Council and to reduce the likelihood of a cooperative solution to the nuclear problem. In addition to a range of bilateral and unilateral sanctions imposed on Iran by UN member states, the adoption of four Security Council resolutions (2006-12) imposing sanctions against Iran represents a historically unprecedented application of the Council's enforcement powers under Chapter VII of the UN Charter. This coercive approach by the Council has had the effect of placing the burden on Iran to demonstrate its trustworthiness. On this reading, Iran can only achieve the Security Council's trust in its peaceful nuclear intentions if it satisfies a series of conditions (including the indefinite suspension of enrichment activities) that are perceived by the Council as establishing its *bona fides*.[1] Although the imposition of sanctions against Iran has been strongly supported by the Council, a close reading of the arguments offered by some Council members (for example, India, Turkey, Brazil, Qatar and Indonesia) question the efficacy of a coercive approach in achieving Iran's cooperation over the nuclear issue (S/PV.5984; S/PV.5807; S/PV.6335). The ambassadorial statements of these member states suggests that alternative approaches to sanctions for building trust between Iran and the Council are strongly needed to effectively address the challenge posed by Iran's nuclear ambitions.

The strong belief that Iran is inherently untrustworthy and intent on developing a nuclear weapons capability guides and shapes the response of the international community. This belief of untrustworthiness rests however, on states' selection and interpretation of the evidence gathered through national intelligence and International Atomic Energy Agency inspections; on the belief based on past experience and interactions that the Iranian leadership cannot be trusted; on the dominant historical and emotional narratives in the United States regarding its long-standing relationship with Iran; on the appropriation and use of traumatic memory to frame this relationship, and on the feelings of foreign policy elites of vulnerability or fear of a nuclear-armed Iran. States remain inclined to distrust Iran; the language and rhetoric of deception runs through much of American political commentary despite the conclusion of the United States' National Intelligence Estimates in 2007 and 2011 which reported with "high confidence" that Iran had stopped its nuclear weapons program in 2003 (Berman, 2009; Sanger and Broad, 2011, NIE, 2007, 2011). The highly anticipated IAEA report of November 2011 indicated that Iran had halted weaponisation activities in 2003 and that while it is likely to be seeking nuclear latency, Iran does not have an active nuclear weapons program (IAEA, GOV/2011/65). Despite these findings, the IAEA report has repeatedly been used as evidence of new and incriminating evidence against Iran by those who believe that Iran is indeed intent on developing a nuclear weapon. Such beliefs in the face of

credible empirical counter-evidence lend force to the notion of the influence of emotional beliefs on policy.

To return to the possibilities presented, respectively, by new evidence and empathy for the transformation of conflict, if the United States' government feels that the Iranian leadership is untrustworthy, then it is likely to change its belief only if either strong new evidence comes to light that reduces the degree of uncertainty over Iran's intentions (and even this may be disregarded if it challenges existing strong beliefs as already demonstrated), or if it re-reads the historical record, examines its own interactions with Iran through taking the perspective of the other and imagine how it might perceive matters if it were in Iran's shoes. Such perspective-taking – one mechanism through which empathy can be exercised – may serve to cast both its own actions and those of Iran in a different light. In turn, this *might* – there is no guarantee – shift the predisposition not to trust Iran, potentially opening up alternative paths of engagement and the possibility of developing a trusting relationship. The concrete actions that are necessary to realize alternatives to the coercive approach adopted by the Council depend upon empathy and dialogue. Empathy enables conflict to be re-described in ways which transform actors' understanding of their own and each others' positions (Broome, 1993; Halpern and Weinstein, 2004; Rothman, 1992) and responds to the call issued by John Tirman for a 'new process to cope specifically with the emotional content of a bad relationship' (2009: 528). Seen in this light, the communicative practices adopted by the Council fail to recognize the problem of the historically selective application of its own standards in Iran's eyes (e.g. the reluctance to condemn Iraq's use of chemical weapons in the Iraq-Iran war, the Council's silence on the Israeli nuclear weapons program, and the failure of the nuclear weapons states to act on the disarmament obligations contained within the Non-Proliferation Treaty), leading to distortion and misperceptions of the motives and statements of each side.

Focusing on communicative practices in the context of trust and empathy highlights several important issues. First, considering the example of finding out that someone has lied casts the relationship between trust, empathy, and dialogue in an illustrative light. In Habermasian terms, the validity claim of sincerity is contested by this communicative act. Consider, however, the effects of a lie on the interpersonal relations between the liar and the one lied to. The emotions of the latter (anger, betrayal, hurt) are less likely to incline them to trust the other person again in the near future, particularly if there is no gesture or evidence to indicate that person's ongoing trustworthiness or repentance. The exercise of empathy by both parties might transform a potentially mistrusting relationship by recognising on the one hand, that there might have been understandable reasons for the person to lie, and, on the other hand, the liar's recognition that his/her own trustworthiness may have been questioned and to act accordingly. Without entering into their respective narratives in detail here, both Iranian and Western political elites feel that they have been deceived over a long period of time and this motivates at least some of their actions with regards to the nuclear issue (Mousavian, 2012). Whilst empathy in no way determines change, it opens up the possibilities for it, thus permitting both parties to act in ways which might mitigate the effects of the deception. Empathy offers us a chance to get inside the mind of both sides and to understand why it is that they interpret the situation as they do.

Second, a preliminary examination of the communicative practices of states in relevant transcripts of Security Council meetings demonstrates that member states frequently position themselves in a number of ways which serve to construct notions of 'inside' and 'outside' in relation to belonging and legitimate behaviour within the 'international community'. It is not unreasonable to suggest that this impacts on the potential for building trust and empathy. Moreover, the P5 have demonstrated little willingness to consider Iran's historical narrative, to engage in perspective taking, or to reflect upon perceptions of their own behaviour. For example, Iran's representative in the Council stated that:

> The people of Iran will never forget the inaction of the Security Council with regard to Saddam Hussein's attack against Iran on 22 September 1980, the invasion that resulted in an eight-year-long war waged against Iran, with unspeakable suffering and losses for our nation. That act of aggression did not trouble the same permanent members of the Council who have sought the adoption of the resolution against Iran today, nor did they consider it a threat against international peace and security (S/PV.5848: 6).

Similarly, Iran declared:

> In the early 1950s, the United Kingdom was arguing exactly the same way as today, saying that "nationalization of Iran's oil industry is putting in danger the peace and security of the region and the world". Just replace the phrase "oil nationalization" from accusations against Iran at that time with today's phrase "nuclear activities" and the result will be quite workable statements for diplomats who are repeating history (S/PV.6335: 15).

In response, the UK representative declared that the Permanent Representative of Iran's 'distorted account of history – including personal attacks on my country – simply demean him and seem designed as an excuse for Iran not to respond to international concerns about its nuclear programme' (S/PV.6335: 17). Such language resonates with emotion and seeks to construct the other as 'unreasonable' and thus as acting in ways which leave little room for alternative paths of action other than increasing levels of coercion and mistrust (see S/PV.5848, 3 March 2008; S/PV.6335, 9 June 2010).

Third, communicative ethics draws attention to a set of procedural reflections for constructing future rounds of negotiations over the Iranian nuclear program. First, the legitimacy of preconditions set before parties sit down together at the negotiating table may be called into question. This condition has characterized the negotiations between Iran and the West since 2003 when the EU3 (France, Germany and the United Kingdom) required Iran to suspend all enrichment activities. Suspension prior to negotiations has remained a key US requirement since then and it is one the Iranians have consistently rejected from 2005 onwards when they re-started enrichment activities after a two-year suspension during negotiations. Preconditions

raise questions concerning procedural fairness as a characteristic of negotiations. Is it fair and legitimate to require a substantive commitment only from one side prior to sitting down to talk? For the Iranian negotiators and political elite, this conveys a failure to show mutual respect and to accord them the dignity of an equal negotiating partner. The Iranian refusal to continue suspension has raised levels of mistrust regarding Iran's future intentions for its nuclear program, while the insistence on suspension as a precondition has raised Iranian levels of mistrust regarding the negotiating intentions of the West. Moreover, and crucially for a focus on emotions and empathy, the Iranian rejection of these preconditions can be explained not, as many in the West assume, because they necessarily intend to develop a nuclear weapon, but because they refuse to make themselves vulnerable by acceding to demands they perceive to be harmful to their sense of security, pride, cultural and national identity.

Communicative ethics raises questions of coercion which encompass not just structural violence, but also the procedural parameters established for negotiations such as agenda-setting, control over time, place and, of course, the use of the threat of force (Head, 2012). While pre-conditions represent a form of coercion, the Iranian nuclear program has also been the target of more conventional forms of coercion: the use of sanctions, cyberstrikes (Sanger, 2012), covert operations, and the threat of military force. Notwithstanding that the effectiveness of these tactics in terms of Iran's capabilities remains the subject of much contemporary debate, less attention is paid to the impact they may have on the perceived legitimacy of the negotiations in Iranian eyes. A successful negotiating process needs to acknowledge and address these issues both on a procedural and emotional level.

Conclusion

It has been argued that the reflexive capacities of dialogue, empathy and trust can act as transitional processes through which relationships and interaction may be transformed. Intentions, behaviour, reasons, and emotions are frequently – although not exclusively –expressed communicatively by actors within contexts of conflict. How such signals should be interpreted requires explicit consideration of the cognitive and emotional elements involved within these different forms of communication and, importantly, where their capacity to effect changes lies. Moreover, a reflective stance invites engagement with a number of perspectives and actors and bolsters the call for greater acknowledgement within negotiating processes of the contested historical and emotional narratives which shape conflicts. Rothman has noted that the question of how to move from an adversarial approach to an integrative problem solving approach, 'in terms of how such a transition is effected and how it is understood, is probably one of the least articulated and most important aspects of the entire enterprise of conflict resolution and creative problem solving' (1992: 58). It is the means by which relationships may be transformed that Rothman is drawing our attention to and which deserve greater attention.

It has long been recognised in alternative dispute resolution that people 'are not motivated by *facts*: they are motivated by their *perceptions* of the facts, their *interpretations* of the facts, their *feelings* about the facts' (Ramsbotham, Woodhouse

and Miall, 2005: 290); this resonates with the notion of 'emotional beliefs' as a significant factor shaping conflict in international politics. Recognising the role of emotions raises a correlate requirement for considering the nature and scope of trust, empathy and dialogue as intervening factors in conflict and as potential vehicles for change and transformation. Notwithstanding the commonly heard claim that the international realm is qualitatively different from the domestic, bringing together interdisciplinary research on empathy offers additional tools for understanding these concepts within the context of international politics and opens up hitherto underexplored avenues for investigation. The relational approach of trust, empathy and dialogue is not limited to the international sphere but feeds into political practices and relationships at all levels. Indeed, its ability to embrace multiple levels of analysis challenges the hierarchy of the domestic/international distinction. However, while conflicts occur at the level of international politics as in the case of Iran, then this remains a key site for transformation.

A brief exploration of the challenges posed by the Iranian nuclear negotiations has indicated pathways for exploring the connections between trust, empathy, and dialogue and raises questions which must be at the heart of further research. The challenges posed are considerable and include: integrating multiple levels of analysis; the complexity of building trust and empathy between states affected by a range of domestic and external constraints; navigating multiple social identities, and the difficulties of identifying and attributing causal impact to emotions in multiple actors. Notwithstanding these challenges, arguing that trust, empathy and dialogue should be considered as relational and dynamic concepts – both theoretically and empirically – ensures a nuanced and comprehensive approach to interrogating practice.

Notes

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