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Edited by

**PATRICK HAYDEN**

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# The Ashgate Research Companion to Ethics and International Relations

*Edited by*  
PATRICK HAYDEN  
*University of St Andrews, UK*

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# Notes on Contributors

**Ruchi Anand** is Associate Professor at the American Graduate School of International Relations and diplomacy, Paris, France.

**Iain Atack** is Lecturer and Coordinator of the M.Phil. programme in International Peace Studies at the Irish School of Ecumenics, Trinity College Dublin, Ireland.

**James Brasse** is RCUK Research Fellow and Assistant Professor in the department of Politics and International Studies at the University of Warwick, UK.

**Luis Cabrera** is Lecturer and director of Graduate School in the department of Political Science and International Studies at the University of Birmingham, UK.

**Omar Dahbour** is Professor in the department of Philosophy, Hunter College of the City University of New York, US.

**Mark E.N. Franke** is Associate Professor in the Centre for Global Studies at Huron University College and core graduate faculty in The Centre for the Study of Theory and Criticism at the University of Western Ontario, Canada.

**Des Gasper** is Associate Professor at the Institute of Social Studies, The Hague, The Netherlands.

**Patrick Hayden** is Senior Lecturer in the School of International Relations at the University of St Andrews, UK.

**Adam Jones** is Associate Professor in the department of Political Science at the University of British Columbia Okanagan, Canada.

**Anthony F. Lang, Jr** is Senior Lecturer in the School of International Relations at the University of St Andrews, UK.

**Anthony J. Langlois** is Senior Lecturer in the School of Political and International Studies at Flinders University of South Australia, Adelaide.

**Steven P. Lee** is Professor in the department of Philosophy at Hobart and William Smith Colleges, New York, US.

**Brian Orend** is Professor in the department of Philosophy and director of International Studies at the University of Waterloo, Canada.

**Serena Parekh** is Assistant Professor in the department of Philosophy and the Human Rights Institute at the University of Connecticut, US.

**Steven C. Roach** is Assistant Professor in the department of Government and International Affairs at the University of South Florida, US.

**Fiona Robinson** is Associate Professor and Supervisor of Graduate Studies in the department of Political Science at Carleton University, Canada.

**Richard Shapcott** is Senior Lecturer in the School of Political Science and International Studies at the University of Queensland, Australia.

**Gabriella Slomp** is Senior Lecturer in the School of International Relations at the University of St Andrews, UK.

**William Smith** is Lecturer in the Politics Programme at the University of Dundee, UK.

**Elizabeth Stanley** is Senior Lecturer in the School of Social and Cultural Studies at the Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand.

**Paul Voice** is Professor in Philosophy at Bennington College, Vermont, US.

**Alison M.S. Watson** is Professor in the School of International Relations at the University of St Andrews, UK.

**Martin Weber** is Lecturer in the School of Political Science and International Studies at the University of Queensland, Australia.

**Matthew S. Weinert** is Assistant Professor in the department of Political Science and International Relations at the University of Delaware, US.

**Andrew Williams** is Professor in the School of International Relations at the University of St Andrews, UK.

**Morton Winston** is Professor in the department of Philosophy and Religion at The College of New Jersey, US.

**Maja Zehfuss** is Professor in the Politics Programme at the University of Manchester, UK.

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# Introduction

Patrick Hayden

This book focuses on normative issues of global importance, by examining historical, political and legal debates about the nature of international relations and which key theoretical paradigms are best suited to deal with the central ethical dilemmas facing international politics and world affairs. There is little doubt that the theory and practice of international affairs is tied in interesting and important ways to normative questions. Indeed, there is reason to suspect that world politics is, at bottom, a fundamentally normative enterprise. But this proposition runs counter to much of what passes for received wisdom in the discipline of international relations (IR). As Mervyn Frost (1996, 1) has pointedly explained, 'although normative questions regularly arise in the day-to-day practice of international politics the discipline of international relations has not accorded ethical theory a central place within it'. Despite this longstanding reluctance or, indeed, resistance towards normative theorizing on the part of mainstream IR, there can be no doubt that international ethics has become firmly established as a field of study straddling a number of disciplinary boundaries.

The contemporary field of international ethics is preceded of course by a long history of moral and political thought, which explores the many ethical and philosophical issues arising from the attempt to sort out how people should live their lives in a reflective and responsible way. Central to this ongoing argument is recognition of our social embeddedness, the fact that we are inescapably related to others and therefore that our moral beliefs and political decisions impact upon the lives and decisions of others. These basic features remain an essential part of the recent literature on ethics and international relations. The expression 'international ethics' did not come into general use until relatively late in the twentieth century, however, when it became clear that the sterile standoff of the first 'great debate' in IR – the intellectual struggle between so-called realists and idealists in the 1920s and 1930s over the nature of international politics and thus over the role of ethical principles therein – was not sufficient to meet the normative challenges confronting the world after the Second World War.<sup>1</sup> Strictly speaking, it was also not possible to

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1 For illuminating critical studies of the 'myth' or conventional historiography of the first of the four 'great debates' which have thus far defined the self-image of IR, see Ashworth (2002), Schmidt (1998), Smith (1995) and Wilson (1998).

refer in a formal sense to a subject called 'ethics and international relations' prior to the modern formation of an international system composed of sovereign states. Clearly the advent of the international system had led to more specialized and novel reflection upon the particular moral considerations unique to a world organized around nation-states. Nonetheless, we can find in the history of moral and political theory many important examples of normative thinking about the types of issues that permeate contemporary international affairs. In other words, thinking about the ethics of politics – and the politics of ethics – has been a characteristic feature of the negotiation of political life in pre-national as well as international contexts, and will continue to be so in the possibly post-national era that some glimpse on our own historical horizon.

Historically, the pervasiveness of 'the moral problem in international relations' (Hoffmann 1981, 10) has been apparent at least since the time of Thucydides, in the fifth century BCE. The conflict between Athens and Sparta depicted by Thucydides in the *History of the Peloponnesian War* presents a stark example of the dilemmas surrounding the role and demands of morality in international affairs, broadly construed. The Melian dialogue, in particular, focuses on the central issue of whether justice or self-interest ought to guide relations between different political communities. Complicated by questions of empire, power, scarcity, freedom and honour, the Athenians justify their conquest of Melos and the slaughter and enslavement of its inhabitants on the grounds of necessity, stating that 'the strong do what they have the power to do and the weak accept what they have to accept' (Thucydides 1972, 402). Interestingly, the Athenian justification does not eschew morality *in toto* but defines it according to a natural relativism; the 'standard of justice', they claim, 'depends upon the equality of power to compel' (*ibid.*). In Aristotelian terms, the Melians advocated formal justice in international affairs, while the Athenians insisted upon proportional justice: different political communities are owed reasonably *unequal* treatment on the basis of their relative 'power to compel'. In these terms it is only fair or right for the stronger to rule the weaker, and for the weaker to submit to the stronger. Thucydides' work thus poses one of the most fundamental questions of international ethics: should 'strangers' be treated according to the same ethical principles or standards that we apply to members of our own community?

The position adopted by the Athenian delegation to Melos typifies a form of agent-relative partiality in the sense of insisting on a narrow scope of moral concern. On this view, it is not only permissible but even mandatory to favour one's own community when it comes to making decisions about whom to aid and whom to harm (see Hurka 1997; McMahan 1997). Ethical partiality resonates with 'commonsense' morality, of course, inasmuch as many people recognize the requirements we owe to those with whom we have personal relationships or special ties as normatively significant. Whether it be the relation of parent to child, spouse to spouse, friend to friend, or fellow citizen to fellow citizen, it is widely thought that one normally owes more by way of moral concern towards 'one's own', but less to mere acquaintances and least of all to strangers (Cottingham 1986).

Partiality in moral decision-making is a familiar though often controversial dimension of international ethics – particularly as consideration of which persons fall ‘inside’ or ‘outside’ the scope of moral concern came to be defined increasingly in terms of the territorially delimited boundaries of the nation-state. One prominent attempt to overcome the parochialism implied by moral partiality can be found in the cosmopolitan tradition. The cosmopolitanism endorsed by the Stoic philosophers of classical Greece and Rome, for instance, embodies a wide scope of moral concern because it maintains that this scope should be universal, extending to all human beings. For the Stoics, the common human capacities for reasoning provide the grounds for fellowship in a world community; if all humans as rational beings are equal, then all humans together form a single community. It is both desirable and possible for individuals to consider themselves citizens of their local communities as well as citizens of the world (Hayden 2005, 12–14). As Martha Nussbaum explains, classical cosmopolitanism sought to avoid treating moral partiality and impartiality as mutually exclusive alternatives by conceiving of our affiliations and moral obligations as a series of concentric circles that relate together those both near and far:

*The first one encircles the self, the next takes in the immediate family, then follows the extended family, then, in order, neighbors or local groups, fellow city-dwellers, and fellow countrymen – and we can easily add to this list groupings based on ethnic, linguistic, historical, professional, gender, or sexual identities. Outside all these circles is the largest one, humanity as a whole. Our task as citizens of the world will be to ‘draw the circles somehow toward the center’ ... making all human beings more like our fellow city dwellers, and so on (1996, 9).*

Though classical cosmopolitanism recognizes that anyone has claims to basic moral concern, regardless of the relationship in which he or she stands to the addressee, it also admits that these claims rest alongside those of persons to whom an agent stands in a special relationship (family, close friends, fellow members of a community). Nevertheless, critics have questioned the natural law foundation underpinning the philosophy of Stoicism and its modernist (or Kantian) variations (Hegel 1991); raised doubts about the attractiveness, practicality or efficacy of obligations towards distant others (Miller 1995; Walzer 1994), and wondered whether cosmopolitanism’s moral universalism is simply too demanding to be considered reasonable (Scheffler 2001). Further, as Thucydides had already grasped, within an anarchical society the reality of unequal power and the attendant preoccupation with self-interest greatly complicates the normative picture. Carrying out our responsibilities to other human beings – however far one extends the moral community – in a justifiable way clearly is no easy task.

A further step in addressing these issues more systematically, and in direct response to the emergence in Europe of the Westphalian order of sovereign territorial states, was taken by Immanuel Kant. Kant’s conception of international ethics is grounded on the categorical imperative, the various formulations of



which express the universalizability of the principle that all human beings possess intrinsic worth or dignity. This principle, Kant argues, is valid for all persons anywhere, and provides a basis for justifying the universal obligation to respect the dignity of others via the institutional mediation of a system of individual rights (1996). Kant's argument goes even further in that he regards the republican form of government as providing for the 'rightful condition' of justice. Morality or right, in other words, demands that states adopt a system of public law that provides one of the necessary conditions for the realization of individual rights. Kant (1991) sets out the architecture of international justice in terms of three overlapping components of public law: municipal or civil law (*ius civitatis*), international law or the law of nations (*ius gentium*), and cosmopolitan law (*ius cosmopolitanicum*). Cosmopolitan law is intended to guarantee the right of 'hospitality', a 'universal right of humanity' to all individuals. Kant believed that developing an ethical international order on the principle of human dignity would lead us to the point 'where a violation of rights in one part of the world is felt *everywhere*' (*ibid.*, 107–8).

The power of Kant's vision has reached the point where almost everyone now recognizes human rights – or at least speaks the language of human rights – and the notion of universal human rights has become integral to, yet contested within, the theoretical and empirical development of international ethics. Whatever objections may be raised to Kantianism in general and rights theory in particular – many of these are aired in the following chapters – another significant dimension of Kant's formulation of international rights points towards the central question of war and whether there are some relevant principles of normative ethics attached either to the justification or to the condemnation of war. For example, Kant's conception of a confederation of republican states that would make lasting peace possible not only challenges the realist belief in the enduring conditions of anarchy and insecurity, it also draws attention to the way that the behaviour of states at the international level is strongly influenced by properties of their domestic political structure (or 'regime type').<sup>2</sup> Kant therefore favoured a republican constitution because it both best protects the rights of individuals and provides a mechanism for keeping peace between states that are similarly structured. Kant puts it thus:

*The republican constitution ... offers a prospect of attaining the desired result, i.e. perpetual peace, and the reason for this is as follows. – If, as is inevitably the case under this constitution, the consent of the citizens is required to decide whether or not war is to be declared, it is very natural that they will*

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2 Kenneth Waltz (1959) later referred to this type of focus on how domestic factors influence or cause international outcomes in terms of the 'second image' of international relations theory; the 'first image' focuses on causal factors at the individual or psychological level, such as the urge to dominate, while the 'third image' focuses on factors at the level of the international system, such as the pressures of anarchy. Kant's emphasis on the three levels of public law, it might be argued, demonstrates a nuanced grasp of how the three levels of individual, state and international system are inextricably entwined and mutually constitutive; see Harrison (2002).

*have great hesitation in embarking on so dangerous an enterprise. For this would mean calling down on themselves all the miseries of war (ibid., 100).*

Kant suggests that as states with a republican form of government become more numerous, international conflict will decrease. In linking the belligerent or pacific behaviour of states to their specific political institutions, decision-making procedures and culture (as reflected, for instance, in a commitment to tolerance, conflict resolution and public debate), rather than to the exigencies of an anarchical international system, Kant laid the intellectual foundation for the democratic peace thesis. The democratic peace thesis – as developed by scholars such as Bruce Russett (1993) and Michael Doyle (1983) – refers to two propositions. One is that ‘mature’ or stable democracies can be expected to keep the peace between themselves, but not necessarily with other non-democratic states, and the other is that democracies are more likely than other states to be more pacific in their relations overall, including with non-democracies. While there is substantial debate about the strength of the empirical evidence used to support the thesis, it also has been said that it ‘comes as close as anything we have to an empirical law in international relations’ (Levy 1988, 662).<sup>3</sup>

Debates about the democratic peace proposition roughly coincided with both a renewed interest in the just war tradition (or with ethics and warfare more broadly) and a flourishing of normative theorizing about international affairs. While much of the international relations scholarship during the mid-twentieth century eschewed overt normative theorizing due to the charge that such approaches were naively idealist or ‘utopian’ – an accusation levelled by E.H. Carr (1981) against interwar liberalism in 1939 – much of political theory and philosophy (of the Anglo-American variety at least) during this same period was preoccupied with behaviouralism and positivist epistemology and methodology (Schmidt 2002, 118–19; Gunnell 1993). When political theory was normatively oriented, it tended to focus on public affairs at the domestic rather than international level. John Rawls’s hugely influential *A Theory of Justice* (1971), which develops an account of social justice on the basis of the ‘self-contained’ community, is a case in point. Rawls sought to address the question of justice between states (and ‘peoples’) in his later work, *The Law of Peoples* (1999), which has since been the subject of vigorous debate. Yet the intense superpower rivalry of the Cold War, with its numerous proxy wars and persistent threat of ‘mutually assured destruction’, as well as the disastrous wars raging in Southeast Asia in the 1960s and 1970s, brought attention back to the just war tradition initiated by Augustine and Aquinas and their attempts to establish a legitimate basis for the conduct of war. Indeed, the just war tradition developed sophisticated distinctions between *ius ad bellum* (just resort to war), *ius in bello* (just conduct of war), and even *ius post bellum* (just termination of war) (Orend 2002; Walzer 2004). Michael Walzer’s (1992) work in particular revived just war thinking and demonstrated its continued relevance to the moral issues raised by the problem of war.

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<sup>3</sup> For critiques of the democratic peace theory, see Layne (1994), Moaz (1998) and Rosato (2003).

In addition, the changing contours of the international political landscape and rapidly evolving technological developments proved conducive to a rapid rise in 'new normative approaches' to international relations and world politics (see Brown 1992): decolonization led to the transformation of colonial territories into sovereign, independent states; human rights and norms proscribing genocide became institutionalized within the UN system and assorted international regimes; nuclear, chemical and biological weapons proliferated alongside the emergence of 'high-tech' warfare; states became increasingly interdependent economically and processes of globalization accelerated; social movements, interest groups and NGOs dramatically multiplied across more porous state borders; humanitarian crises or emergencies arising from drought, famine, armed conflict and forced migration led to calls for (and against) military intervention in distant lands; the gap between rich and poor both within and between states widened inexorably; democratic transitions from repressive regimes spread; and global environmental problems such as climate change, air and water pollution, and food and resource scarcity continued to mount. In the wake of such developments, normative approaches to world affairs have become not only increasingly popular, but seemingly imperative.

Although normative theorizing about international relations was relatively neglected in the first half of the twentieth century, it is clear that this is no longer the case today (see Smith 1992). The surge of interest in ethics and international relations that began in the late 1960s gradually gathered pace over the following four decades; the turning point signalling the field's 'arrival' can perhaps be marked by the appearance of a new specialist journal, *Ethics & International Affairs*, in 1987. Since then the expression 'ethics and international affairs' has come into general use.

Several features of this recent trend are especially noteworthy. First, while contemporary issues of the day fuelled the growth of normative theorizing, it also has been driven by a renewed attention to the classics of moral, social and political thought. This interest reflects awareness that the history and resources of international theory extend well past the twentieth century, and recognition that issues central to the concerns of recent decades often had been examined with sophistication and depth by early modern and pre-modern thinkers (see Boucher 1997; Jahn 2006). A second feature of contemporary normative theorizing about international relations is the wide array of topics it addresses. While much of the initial literature appearing in the 1960s and 1970s was dominated by discussions of issues traditionally central to the ethics of warfare, scholars soon turned their attention to a much more expansive set of concerns, such as global distributive justice (for instance Beitz 1999; Pogge 2002), immigration and refugees (for instance Cole 2000; Nyers 2006), the gendered aspects of IR (for instance Enloe 1990; Robinson 1999), and environmentalism (for instance Attfield 1999; Eckersley 2004). A third notable characteristic of recent international ethics is its openness toward post-positivist perspectives and a concomitant willingness to challenge the traditional dominance of liberalism and realism (whether classical or 'neo'). Critical theory, feminist theory, hermeneutics, postcolonial theory and poststructuralism have been insufficiently appreciated in international theory, yet each brings important

challenges to the orthodox examination of contemporary world events – such as deconstructing the binary oppositions that have conventionally framed ethical questions and issues (Edkins 1999). All of these features indicate a favourable climate for greater pluralism within ethical and political theory of international relations.

Given these developments, the aim of this *Companion* is to provide an up-to-date survey of the state of the art in ethics and international relations. It makes no attempt to cover every possible issue in the field, as both current events and theoretical innovations thwart such aspirations. Instead, it is a selective though reasonably comprehensive representation of some of the most important debates, theories and issues shaping the past, present and future of normative international theory. With this in mind, the chapters are both surveys that inform the reader of relevant figures and literature and assess salient developments, and original essays that reflect the distinctive viewpoint and insight of their authors. They are intended for advanced undergraduate and graduate students, as well as for those with some knowledge of the field looking for an authoritative and stimulating reference work on international ethics today.

As the preceding discussion indicates, the approaches and interests of those working in the field of ethics and international affairs have become quite diverse. A glance at the table of contents hopefully reveals that this diversity is well represented in the present volume. The *Ashgate Research Companion to Ethics and International Relations* is divided into five parts. Part I covers the most influential theoretical approaches discussed in the field, whether defined as ‘traditions’, ‘paradigms’ or ‘schools of thought’. As Martin Wight (1991, 259–60) observed, it is important to resist treating theoretical traditions as ‘railroad tracks running parallel into infinity’; rather, they are like ‘streams with eddies and cross-currents’ that ‘influence and cross-fertilize one another’. Indeed, normative theorizing at an international level reflects a wide range of competing yet cross-cutting approaches, including political realism and liberalism – perhaps the two most dominant theories of international affairs in the twentieth century – as well as Marxism and, more recently, critical theory, feminist theories and poststructuralism. The major living religious traditions also have contributed to discussion about normative international issues.

Part II consists of essays examining various dimensions of and approaches to questions of war and peace. Aggression and peaceful coexistence have been of long-standing interest to political theorists, ethicists and international relations scholars, although perceptions about the causes and consequences of both vary considerably amongst realist, pacifist and just war perspectives. Even though theoretical reflection on war and peace is not new, current conditions have led to renewed consideration of foreign policy, the rules of war, the prospect of lasting peace and the complex association between humanitarianism and militarism.

Part III addresses a set of issues concerning human rights, while Part IV turns to issues of international justice. In many respects the chapters in Parts III and IV exhibit a tendency not only to extend and clarify normative thinking but also to ‘apply’ ethical theories to specific issues within contemporary world affairs. This is not to suggest any kind of formulaic application of pre-set values, beliefs or

principles; rather it is to stress that the activity of 'doing' international ethics often becomes most explicit when it engages with those issues that, at any given time, appear most prominent in public discourse. Concerns relevant to human rights, cultural identity, democratization, poverty, development and the environment, to name just a few, inform many national and international public debates today.

Part V explores some relatively new directions for ethics and international affairs arising from the advent of globalization and the unique ethical challenges it brings forth. Here many of the assumptions of the theoretical approaches surveyed in Part I are re-evaluated in light of our global age, and the prospects for new forms of political action, dialogue, community and citizenship are addressed. While the problems and opportunities raised by globalization are neither entirely unique nor subject to general consensus, they pose significant questions for all those interested in thoughtful reflection on ethics and international relations.

In the end, it is hoped that readers of this volume will encounter not only exposition and criticism of prominent issues and approaches, but also distinctive viewpoints on how we are to understand the implications of particular normative theories and subjects under discussion by some of the most distinguished and interesting scholars in the field. Whatever else its publication may accomplish, this volume will have achieved its main purpose if it contributes to the continued flowering of international ethics.

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