Emotional Beliefs

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Abstract A belief in alien abduction is an emotional belief, but so is a belief that Iran intends to build nuclear weapons, that one's country is good, that a sales tax is unjust, or that French decision makers are irresolute. Revolutionary research in the brain sciences has overturned conventional views of the relationship between emotion, rationality, and beliefs. Because rationality depends on emotion, and because cognition and emotion are nearly indistinguishable in the brain, one can view emotion as constituting and strengthening beliefs such as trust, nationalism, justice or credibility. For example, a belief that another's commitment is credible depends on one's selection (and interpretation) of evidence and one's assessment of risk, both of which rely on emotion. Observing that emotion and cognition co-produce beliefs has policy implications: how one fights terrorism changes if one views credibility as an emotional belief.

Waking from a deep sleep you find yourself paralyzed and flying over your bed. You have either been abducted by aliens or you are experiencing sleep paralysis that occurs due to an interruption in the sleep cycle. Odds are, aliens have not abducted you, but just as Dostoevsky experienced God during an epileptic seizure, many people attribute to aliens the experience of sleep paralysis.[1] Emotion is central to experience and helps to explain why people accept the improbable as probable. One cannot sensibly deny one's own experience: feeling is believing because people use emotion as evidence. A belief in alien abduction is an emotional belief, but so is a belief that Iran intends to build nuclear weapons, that one's country is good, that a sales tax is unjust, or that French decision makers are irresolute. Although trust, nationalism, justice, and credibility are all emotional beliefs, most people think an emotional belief is irrational. To my knowledge, political scientists always use "emotional belief" pejoratively. As long

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1. Clancy 2005.

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as one views emotion as compromising rationality, then it is hard to imagine an emotional belief as capturing anything other than fantasies or illusions. Neuroscientists have led the way in revealing the extent to which rationality depends on emotion.[2] It is now evident that people who are "free" of emotion are irrational.

An emotional belief is one where emotion constitutes and strengthens a belief and which makes possible a generalization about an actor that involves certainty beyond evidence.[3] The experience of emotion is not a mere product of cognition or a reaction to a belief. It is not an afterthought. Feelings influence what one wants, what one believes, and what one does. As three psychologists observed: "The influence of emotions upon beliefs can be viewed as the port through which emotions exert their influence upon human life."[4] Beliefs are where emotion and cognition meet.[5] No literature on emotional beliefs exists in political science and hardly any exists in psychology.[6] International relations theorists typically emphasize how specific situations produce emotions such as fear or anxiety that undermine rational decision making.[7] Shifting attention from specific emotions to specific beliefs makes emotion central to political science as well as accessible to political scientists who do not study psychology. Focusing on the effects of anger, anxiety, or greed can be helpful, but at least as helpful is a focus on emotional beliefs such as trust, nationalism, justice, or credibility.

The term "emotional belief" is imperfect. If it is true that rationality depends on emotion and that emotion and cognition are intertwined, then beliefs—all beliefs—depend on emotion. Although the term is redundant, most readers will view it as a synonym for irrational beliefs. For example, deterrence theorists distinguish "cognitive" from "motivated" beliefs. Cognitive beliefs are free of emotion: cognitive limitations (such as an inability to process large amounts of data) demand simplifications that can compromise rationality. In contrast, analysts characterize emotion's influence on a belief as a motivated bias, which distorts, shields, and conceals facts that are too psychologically painful to confront.[8] Deterrence theorists conceived of motivated biases as narrow (involving severe situational dilemmas), as idiosyncratic (rather than hard-wired like cognitive biases), as undermining rationality, and as following (rather than preceding) cognition. Given the common assumption that emotion undermines rationality, one would not want to put emotion into beliefs.

2. See Damasio 1994; and Phelps 2006.
3. See Frijda, Manstead, and Bem 2000; and Frijda and Mesquita 2000.
4. Frijda, Manstead, and Bem 2000, 1.
5. Fielder and Bless 2000.
6. For the absence of psychological research on emotional beliefs, see Frijda, Manstead, and Bem 2000, 5; Clore and Gasper 2000, 10; Frijda and Mesquita 2000, 46; Fielder and Bless 2000, 144; and Konijn, van der Molen, and van Nes 2009, 335.
7. See Jervis, Lebow, and Stein 1985; and Hymans 2006.
8. Lebow 1981.

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The experience of emotion might be appropriate or inappropriate, but it is not true or false.[9] Emotion is not irrational and neither are emotional beliefs. The emerging consensus that emotion is important to rationality has not led to a consensus among political scientists on how best to study it.[10] One way to identify emotion's influence on politics is through beliefs. A focus on emotional beliefs allows one to incorporate a panoply of emotions into political science concepts. The approach is generalizable and applies to rational actors. The idea that emotion constitutes beliefs might seem counterintuitive. For this reason, I address the "appraisal" view of emotion (where beliefs must precede emotion) and note that rational decision making depends on emotion. I then discuss how emotion constitutes and strengthens beliefs and detail three propositions on emotional beliefs. Instead of examining specific emotions, I focus on a specific belief—credibility. A belief that another's threat or promise is credible depends on one's selection (and interpretation) of evidence and one's assessment of risk, both of which rely on emotion. Understanding that emotion constitutes and strengthens beliefs can have policy implications. How one attempts to persuade another and how one best fights terrorism changes if one views credibility as an emotional belief.

Emotion and Beliefs

An *emotion* is a subjective experience of some diffuse physiological change whereas a *feeling* is a conscious awareness that one is experiencing an emotion. Although it is mainly through feelings that emotion influences thought, the speed with which physiological changes register as a feeling makes distinguishing emotion and feelings extremely difficult even in the lab.[11] I treat emotion and feeling as synonyms. A *belief* is a proposition, or collection of propositions, that one thinks is probably true. A belief presupposes uncertainty. In contrast, *knowledge* is risk free, impersonal, and constant.[12] I do not believe in gravity; I know it exists. An emotional belief means relying on "some internally generated inference" to go beyond the evidence and to assume some risk that one might be wrong.[13] As former Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage said, "I think Iran has a secret nuclear-weapons program—I believe it, but I don't know it."[14] Gravity is common knowledge; Iran's intent to develop nuclear weapons is an emotional belief (except for Iranians who know). Most analysts view the emotion in beliefs as an unimportant

9. See Zajonc 1998; and Solomon 2000.
10. See Bleiker and Hutchison 2008; Brader 2006; Crawford 2000; Jervis 2006; Löwenheim and Heimann 2008; Marcus, Neuman, and MacKuen 2000; McDermott 2004a; Neuman et al. 2007; Rosen 2004; and Ross 2006.
11. See Damasio 1999, 56; and Damasio 2004.
12. See Becker 1996; and Calhoun 2004.
13. Fielder and Bless 2000, 144.
14. Hersh 2006.

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consequence of cognition at best, and a source of disinformation and error at worst. If cognition produces emotion, then emotion tells nothing one does not already know.

Cognition, Emotion, and Beliefs

An appraisal (or cognitive) approach to emotion captures the commonsense view that beliefs precede emotion. In the appraisal view, one cannot experience an emotion without first understanding how one is implicated in that situation: emotion without cognition is either impossible or is not really emotion but more like instinct. Elster argues that most of the time, and for most emotions, "a cognitive antecedent is in fact needed."[15] One appraises as good or bad an event, object, or agent and this interpretation causes an emotion, which in turn can lead to specific changes in one's body, expressions, and behavior.[16] As Frijda put it, "In goes loss, and out comes grief."[17] Emotion follows appraisal.

The philosopher and psychologist William James viewed emotion as information and argued that physiological changes precede beliefs.[18] James was the first to drive emotion into the body and give it primacy over cognition. Modern psychology and neurobiology support his central ideas. First, emotion is not necessarily postcognitive.[19] People can experience emotion without conscious awareness and without cognitive mediation.[20] Someone who cannot feel their body (due to paralysis, for example) has a narrower emotional range: the greater the paralysis, the more impaired is feeling.[21] Psychologists know that facial movement alone can produce small changes in subjective feelings.[22] In general, people are more aggressive in hot weather, which would explain why the hotter it gets, the more likely a pitch will hit a baseball player at bat.[23] The body produces these feelings, not cognition.

Second, an appraisal view cannot account for the initial source of the appraisal. To appraise means to evaluate an object, event, or agent as good or bad. A cognitive view of emotion suggests that one wins an award, appraises this as good, and then feels happy: in goes success, out comes happiness. However, people need emotion to give value to facts.[24] One appraises winning an award as good because it helps one's career (or one's social standing or humankind) and makes one happy: feelings are part of the appraisal. As psychologists Clore and Gasper suggest, "The

15. Elster 1999, 270. See also Nussbaum 2001; and Solomon 2000.
16. See Smith and Lazarus 1993; and Ortony, Clore, and Collins 1988.
17. Frijda 1988, 349.
18. James 1884b, 190.
19. See Zajonc 1980; and Damasio 2004.
20. Frijda, Manstead, and Fischer 2004.
21. Damasio 1999, 289.
22. Zajonc, Murphy, and Inglehart 1989.
23. Reifman, Larrick, and Fein 1991.
24. Frijda 2000.

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feelings of emotion provide information about the appraisal of situations with respect to one's goals and concerns."[25] Unless one accepts meaning as given, then eventually one must address why one interprets something as "good," which is to say why an interest is an interest or why a concern is a concern.[26] Suggesting that emotion contributes to "interest" does not reduce interest to emotion, but emphasizes that emotion is part of one's evaluation (not simply a consequence of it).[27]

Third, an appraisal view cannot account for rationality's dependence on emotion. Damasio revolutionized emotion research when he showed that people who retained their cognitive skills but were deprived of emotion (due to brain surgery) could no longer be rational.[28] His research has been extended to other areas. Researchers have noted that an inability to experience certain emotions characterizes both autism and psychopathy, and others built on Damasio's findings to explain why substance-dependent individuals ignore severe long-term consequences in favor of short-term rewards: the parts of the brain crucial for processing emotional information are abnormal and fail to guide decision making.[29] The only study thus far of beliefs at the level of the brain found that emotion intertwines objective and subjective beliefs: no physiological difference exists between believing that $2 + 2 = 4$ or that torture is evil.[30] An author of the study noted: "I think this is yet another result, in a long line of results, that calls the popular opposition between reason and emotion into question."[31] Accepting or rejecting beliefs depends on emotion.

Emotion and cognition are not competing processes. According to one neuroscientist, "The mechanisms of emotion and cognition appear to be intertwined at all stages of stimulus processing and their distinction can be difficult."[32] Nationalism makes one feel pride, and a feeling of pride is evidence that one's country is good. Cooperative behavior leads to a feeling of trust, and the feeling of trust is evidence that one should cooperate.[33] Even in the case of formal logic or solving math problems, emotion's effects are powerful, pervasive, and helpful.[34] Emotion is part of reasoning and not a distraction upsetting a coldly rational process.

Rejecting the view that emotion must follow cognition or only distorts rationality makes it possible to explore how emotion and cognition co-produce beliefs. The radical separation of thinking from feeling is descriptively inaccurate and provides

25. Clore and Gasper 2000, 38.
26. Frijda 2000, 69.
27. For emotion as the basis for interest, see Hirschman 1977.
28. Damasio 1994.
29. Verdejo-García, Pérez-García, and Bechara 2006. Autism and psychopathy are different mental disorders with different consequences. For a comparison centered on emotion, see Blair, Mitchell, and Blair 2005.
30. Harris, Sheth, and Cohen 2008.
31. Harris quoted in Wheeler 2007.
32. Phelps 2006, 46; see also Turner and Stets 2005.
33. Rilling et al. 2002.
34. See Blanchette 2006; and Harris, Sheth, and Cohen 2008.

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a shaky foundation for normative (or rational choice) theories of decision: policymakers do not eliminate emotion from their decision making because they cannot, and if they could, their choices in most situations would be irrational. Reasserting the importance of emotion does not mean emotion is more important than cognition or that emotion is only a source of good judgment. But it does mean that emotion is important to what and how people think. Analysts should understand emotion not so that they can eliminate it—which is probably impossible and is certainly undesirable—but so that they recognize the essential role it plays in their beliefs and in the beliefs of others.

Emotion Constitutes Beliefs

Emotion constitutes a belief when the belief's meaning changes without emotion. Trust, nationalism, and justice are emotional beliefs. Although political scientists sometimes view trust as a consequence of incentives, an alternative perspective views feelings of warmth and affection as the basis of trust.[35] Psychologists tested the hypothesis that emotion is important to trust by giving subjects a natural hormone (oxytocin) that creates feelings of warmth between mammals.[36] Subjects who experienced these feelings were more likely to trust others than those given a placebo. Scientists have shown that the development of trusting feelings creates physical changes in the brain that lead to trust.[37] In this case a stimulus (emotion) changes both how and what one thinks. People do not merely respond to stimuli, but are changed by it.[38] Trust based on feelings of warmth and affection allows one to go beyond the incentives or evidence and to risk being wrong. Cognition and emotion meet in "trust," which makes it an emotional belief.

Nationalism is also an emotional belief. Emotion influences how and what one believes, it adds value to facts, and it captures a distinctive way of seeing situations.[39] An emotional belief typically implies a belief in which one has a point of view. One must arrange the evidence to support a belief that goes beyond the evidence. Analysts view nationalism as part sentimental, part instrumental, and differ over whether nationalism is primarily responsible for hate of outgroups or love of one's own group.[40] Whether a feeling of pride precedes, follows, or co-determines the belief presumably varies by individual. Distinguishing the cognitive from the emotional aspects of nationalism can be difficult; imagining nationalism without emotion makes the belief unrecognizable.

Justice is an emotional belief. It is more than an abstract set of principles about how one should organize society; justice involves a perspective that depends on

35. See Jones 1996; and Mercer 2005b.
36. Kosfeld et al. 2005.
37. King-Casas et al. 2005.
38. Zajonc 1980.
39. Jones 1996.
40. See Kelman 1997; Anderson 1991; and Volkan 1985.

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emotion. What one cares about, what is a concern to an actor, is part of one's understanding of justice. Someone troubled by injustice may expend effort to understand the sources of injustice or act to alleviate that injustice. Without the emotion there is no concern and no reason to expend effort on the problem. As one philosopher put it: "Intentionality and phenomenology are inextricably linked."[41] An emotion is about something (intentionality) and it is a way of seeing something (phenomenology). One's beliefs about injustice cannot be understood or analyzed independent of how one feels about injustice. Emotion is not an addition to a belief about trust, nationalism, or justice; it is essential to those beliefs.

Emotion Strengthens Beliefs

Emotion also strengthens beliefs. Clore and Gasper observe that belief-consistent feelings are often taken as evidence confirming one's belief: "Evidence from the sensations of feeling may be treated like sensory evidence from the external environment, so that something both believed propositionally and also felt emotionally may seem especially valid. . . . Even in the case of purely logical argumentation, people need to feel that the case against their position is compelling before they change their minds."[42] Emotion is evidence for beliefs. One's anger and shame at the George W. Bush administration's use and defense of torture confirms one's belief that torture is a war crime. A belief in God relies on emotion as evidence. A believer feels God's glory and this feeling is evidence of His grace.[43] Armitage's 2006 belief that Iran had a secret nuclear weapons program relied on a specific reading of the historical record coupled with a feeling that the Iranian leadership could not be trusted. How you feel influences not only what you believe, but how strongly you believe it. Emotion turns observers into actors (because without emotion beliefs are inert). According to U.S. intelligence agencies, emotion was the first of four factors driving the insurgency in Iraq.[44] Emotion is motivation.

Feelings can generate irrational or empirically unfounded beliefs. For example, fear and anxiety can precede and shape beliefs.[45] Festinger puzzled over why after an earthquake an anxiety-producing rumor—that another earthquake was about to hit—would spread, until he realized that the belief did not cause the anxiety but was produced by it.[46] After Hurricane Katrina severely damaged New Orleans, rumors of rampaging gangs, murder, and rape were common and influenced how authorities responded to the crisis. Frightened imaginations produced many of the most alarming stories.[47] Emotion's influence can be so powerful that one might

41. Goldie 2004, 97.
42. Clore and Gasper 2000, 25.
43. Frijda and Mesquita 2000.
44. National Intelligence Estimate 2006, 2.
45. Öhman and Wiens 2004.
46. Festinger 1957, vi–vii.
47. *New York Times*, 29 September 2005, A1.

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speak of someone being blinded by hate or love, led astray by fear and anxiety, or believing in alien abductions. Emotion can contribute to irrational beliefs and self-destructive behavior. Extreme emotion distorts judgment,[48] as does extreme cognition (which Elster characterized as "hyperrational").[49] A focus on the distorting power of emotion is not wrong, just incomplete.

Emotional beliefs are normal. Normal people do not distinguish thoughts from feelings because thoughts are images marked by feelings.[50] As Damasio notes, emotion captures the body and influences thoughts: "Because the brain is the body's captive audience, feelings are winners among equals. And because what comes first constitutes a frame of reference for what comes after, feelings have a say on how the rest of the brain and cognition go about their business. Their influence is immense."[51] One always knows when one is acting contrary to one's feelings. Emotion can be disregarded but not ignored. I can cooperate with someone I distrust, but I cannot trust someone I feel is untrustworthy. Nor can I command myself (or someone else) to trust because emotion cannot be commanded. Love me! Admire me! Find my threats credible! I can command behavior, not emotional beliefs. Trust me! An emotional belief is one where emotion constitutes and strengthens a belief and which makes possible a generalization about an actor that involves certainty beyond evidence.

Propositions on Emotional Beliefs

Emotion is an assimilation mechanism, is important to strategy, and carries utility. Each proposition captures a different aspect of an emotional belief. A neuroscientist observed that "Everyone thought phenomena like love and jealousy were simply impossible to study, that they were too variable, too individual. They preferred to think of them as magic."[52] But emotion is not magic and neither are emotional beliefs.

Emotion Is an Assimilation Mechanism

Rationalists suggest that one should *accommodate* (or update) beliefs by using new information to revise those beliefs. Gradually and imperfectly, the beliefs of different analysts will "converge towards reality."[53] However, if beliefs, expecta-

48. Kaufman 2001.
49. Elster 1999, 295.
50. Damasio 1994.
51. Ibid., 159–60.
52. Lucy Brown quoted in Benedict Carey, "Searching for the Person in the Brain," *New York Times* (Internet ed.), 5 February 2006.
53. Kydd 2005, 19.

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tions, or theories influence interpretations of evidence, then one *assimilates* data to beliefs.[54] Overstating the power of this assimilation process is difficult.

Fifty-four wine experts were asked to taste and then identify the odors of two glasses of an identical white wine, one of which was dyed red. Experts used terms such as "spice," "wooded" and "blackcurrant" to capture the white wine dyed red, and terms such as "floral" and "honey" to describe the white wine. None characterized the "red" wine as white.[55] Suggesting that "believing is tasting" does not mean rejecting external realism—that a real world exists independent of thought. The Cascade Mountains exist regardless of one's beliefs. But "mind-dependent" phenomenon, which includes for the philosopher Searle marriage and war (and I would add justice, credibility, and the taste of red wine), depends on assimilation.[56]

Emotion is an assimilation mechanism, as Aristotle recognized: "For things do not seem the same to those who love and those who hate, nor to those who are angry and those who are calm, but either altogether different or different in magnitude. For to the friend the man about whom he is giving judgment seems either to have committed no offence or a minor one, while for the enemy it is the opposite."[57] Research on causal attributions supports Aristotle's intuition that feelings influence explanations.[58] Although one is, in some sense, merely processing information when one seeks to understand why a friend was murdered or why one's country is at war, it would be surprising if one's feelings did not influence that assessment. The more ambiguity about the cause of the behavior, the more latitude for one's preferred interpretation.

Evidence consistent with feelings causes no dissonance and elicits no further search. Disconfirming evidence can lead to a search for more evidence, but it can also lead one to discount the disconfirming evidence, as two psychologists note: "Disbelieving is an important mechanism by which information that contradicts one's convictions can be discounted."[59] Whereas I view neuroscience as providing smoking-gun evidence that rationality depends on emotion, Elster dismisses this evidence: "The fact that efficient decision making and normal affect are impaired by the same brain lesions does not show that the latter is a condition for the former."[60] I believe the evidence, Elster disbelieves it, and one cannot know which view is best. A belief or disbelief in emotional beliefs is itself an emotional belief: emotion is implicated in what one believes. Analysts assimilate as well as accommodate; they are neither slaves to their feelings nor are they indifferent to them. For example, one study found that the reward sections of the brain light up when subjects discount evidence that challenges their beliefs in a

54. Jervis 1976.
55. Morrot, Brochet, and Dubourdieu 2001.
56. Searle 1998, 14.
57. Aristotle 1991, 141.
58. See Heider 1958; and Ortony, Clore, and Collins 1988.
59. Frijda and Mesquita 2000, 70.
60. Elster 2004, 47.

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way that is similar to how a drug addict's brain responds when getting a fix.[61] Disbelieving disconfirming evidence feels good (as does cooperation).[62] Assimilation and accommodation—like emotion and cognition—are not competing processes. Each depends on the other.

Rational Actors Depend on Emotional Beliefs

Rationalists and political psychologists generally agree that one's own decisions ought to be free of emotion. A premise of behavioral finance is that because emotion distorts rationality in predictable ways, savvy investors can prey on the emotional herd. For example, knowing that investors typically sell winning stocks too soon and hold losing stocks too long should influence how one invests in the stock market. But savvy strategic actors are also emotional. An ability to attribute mental states to others is necessary to predict and explain behavior. Imagining the mental states of others involves an ability to represent those mental states to oneself. Someone who experiences anomalous emotional reactions to situations is likely to attribute those anomalous reactions to others.[63]

For example, people with autism have trouble with social interaction because of their diminished empathic ability. As one autistic person noted: "Autistic people who are very intelligent may learn to model other people in a more analytical way.... Given time I may be able to analyze someone in various ways, and seem to get good results, but may not pick up on certain aspects of an interaction until I am obsessing over it hours or days later."[64] Having a diminished emotional capacity can help in some situations, such as remaining calm when one's car skids on ice, feeling no guilt when telling a lie, or making better financial bets because one experiences no fear. These selected benefits come at substantial costs. In one experiment emotionally deprived people beat normal people in an investment game (because the absence of fear allowed them to take bigger gambles). Outside of this experimental context, three out of four of the emotion-deprived players experienced personal bankruptcy.[65] A diminished ability to experience emotion can make one more analytical, but less rational.

The ultimatum game illustrates how ignoring emotion results in strategically inept behavior. In this game, one player (Amy) gets ten one-dollar bills; she can give as many or as few as she likes to the other player (Becky). Becky can then accept Amy's proposal (then each get what Amy proposed) or reject the proposal (and both get nothing). Because one dollar increases Becky's utility, if Amy is a rational player she will keep nine and give away one. People come closest to play-

61. Westen et al. 2006.
62. Rilling et al. 2002.
63. Blair 2002.
64. Quoted in Malle 2005, 227.
65. See *Wall Street Journal*, 21 July 2005, D1; and Shiv et al. 2005.

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ing the game the way rationalists recommend either when they are told they are playing against a computer or when they are autistic. About a quarter of autistic adult subjects propose nothing, suggesting that they cannot imagine why this would seem unfair and would provoke the other player to reject the offer. The other autistic adults who give above zero tend to split the difference. Even though they are not capable of predicting what offer others will accept, they develop through socialization rules or workaround solutions that tell them how much to offer.[66] In no culture do players in ultimatum games behave as rationalists recommend, even when the payoffs are equivalent to three times the average monthly expenditure of the participants.[67] Normal people know—and they know that others know—that punishing jerks feels good. It is also possible that people reject unfair offers not to punish jerks, but because experiencing inequality feels bad. Anyone who has experienced inequality can, perhaps, identify with capuchin monkeys who chose to eat nothing over cucumbers when they knew other monkeys got the more desirable reward of grapes. Rather than cash in their tokens for cucumbers, the inequitably treated monkeys sometimes threw their tokens at the experimenter.[68] Although one might argue that a cucumber in the hand is better than "sour grapes," the token-throwing monkeys felt differently.[69]

The popular belief that emotion undermines rationality is so strong that people will choose things they do not want in order to appear rational. When given a choice between a small piece of chocolate shaped like a heart and a bigger piece shaped like a cockroach, most people prefer the heart but choose the cockroach because they think they "should" choose the bigger piece.[70] Rational choice theory makes the same mistake as people choosing cockroach-shaped chocolate. For example, because Elster views emotion as only distorting rationality, he argues that rejecting Amy's offer of $1 out of anger or resentment is irrational.[71] But in this case, Becky would be irrational if she spent $15 to enjoy a movie or selected a small piece of chocolate over a big piece. For some people the gains of punishing a selfish person are no different than enjoying a movie.[72] If feeling inequality or failing to protest that inequality causes pain, then throwing tokens at your tormentor or rejecting an unfair offer is rational.

Feeling Is Believing Because Emotion Is Evidence

How one feels influences what one wants and what one believes, or, as a group of psychologists put it, "feelings form the neural and psychological substrate of

66. Bhatt and Camerer 2005.
67. See Cameron 1999; and Henrich et al. 2001.
68. Brosnan and de Waal 2003.
69. See Elster 1983.
70. Hsee et al. 2003.
71. Elster 2004.
72. Rabin 2002.

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utility."[73] Rather than view utility as something that one consults prior to choice, Kahneman and other decision theorists have begun to view utility as something one experiences.[74] Without the experience of emotion, it is not obvious why the harder one works on a problem, the more one cares about finding the solution. Or why people often care more about being treated with respect than they do about increasing their paycheck.[75] Or why being paid to perform a task can make that task less enjoyable.[76] Or why people feel differently about money they have earned than over money they have found. On this last point, neuroscientists have shown what intuition knows: "Earned money is literally more rewarding, in the brain, than unearned money."[77] In these cases and in general, the experience of emotion influences what one wants and what one believes. Feelings carry utility.

Imagining future feelings—or beliefs about future preferences—is central to making a rational choice. How will one feel if bombing a target kills many civilians, and how will one feel if not bombing results in the escape of some terrorists? Preferences are so dependent on emotion that Kahneman suggests calling them attitudes.[78] Predicting future feelings (and thus preferences) is difficult partly because preferences are reference dependent, which means that how one feels and what one wants depend on changes from some reference point, usually the status quo.[79] Gains and losses from some reference point (I lost $20,000 in the stock market this week!) influence utility more than final or absolute states (my total wealth is $100,000). Because preferences are reference dependent, how one obtains an outcome influences how one feels about that outcome. Outcome matters, but so does the process.

The distinction between "being" and "becoming" captures the reference-dependent quality of preferences. If one suffers a spinal cord injury and becomes paralyzed, the reference point is being able to walk and to be independent; the prospect of confinement to a wheelchair is horrible. Many people with spinal cord injuries initially think they would rather be dead, which is reflected in suicide rates that are five times higher than average.[80] However, most people adjust to spinal cord injuries and report an acceptable level of life satisfaction, especially in the developed world.[81] Because current feelings influence beliefs, imagining correctly how one will feel in the future is difficult. New smokers wrongly imagine that they will not regret their decision to begin smoking.[82] Lottery winners wrongly imagine they will be happier, and people denied tenure wrongly imagine they will

73. Slovic et al. 2004, 321.
74. See Kahneman 2000a; and Kahneman and Krueger 2006.
75. See Tyler et al. 1997; and Kier forthcoming.
76. Deci 1971.
77. Camerer, Loewenstein, and Prelec 2004, 565.
78. Kahneman 2000b.
79. Kahneman 1999.
80. Dijkers 2005.
81. Ibid.
82. Slovic et al. 2004.

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be unhappier, than they generally are.[83] Being and becoming are different. Without experiencing these feelings, imagining correctly future preferences can be difficult. This observation helps explain why depressed people cannot see past their depression, and happy people have trouble appreciating the depths of depression. Feelings change and with them, beliefs. It would be simpler for theory construction if this were not so, not only because one could focus on outcome rather than process, but also because one could assume that preferences are stable.

Although one can develop solutions for deciding what to do now based on how one will supposedly feel in the future,[84] this is difficult for two reasons. First, emotion is evidence and experienced feelings tend to be stronger and so more influential than hypothetical future feelings. Second, in the case of rare events—becoming paralyzed, getting tenure, going to war, deciding to use nuclear weapons—one cannot know how one will feel, which means one cannot know what one will want and, of course, people will imagine their future preferences differently. Walt Rostow's belief (as head of the State Department's Policy Planning Staff) that nuclear war was winnable led George Kennan to respond that he would "rather see my children dead" than have them experience such an event.[85] The point is not that people are always wrong, never know what they will want, or will always imagine their future preferences differently from others, but that emotion is integral to preferences, to beliefs, and to beliefs about future preferences. Making a rational choice means imagining how one will feel. Believing that emotion is unimportant to one's choice ensures that choice will be irrational.

Credibility Is an Emotional Belief

Deterrence depends on credibility. To keep someone from doing something they would otherwise do requires an ability to make credible commitments. Rather than begin with mythical minds operating in mythical environments, a "third wave" of deterrence theory emerged that used induction and case studies to build theory from the ground up.[86] These theorists debated the relative importance of cognitive and motivated biases. If cognition produces emotion, then cognition (not emotion) is key to understanding credibility. If emotion always undermines rationality, then emotion undermines rational deterrence.

Imagining that emotion only interferes with analysis is wrong: someone deprived of all emotion becomes vacuous, not neutral.[87] Rather than view emotion as undermining rational assessments of credibility, one should view it as constituting

83. See Gilbert, Driver-Linn, and Wilson 2002; and Gilbert et al. 1998.
84. Elster 1979.
85. Kuklick 2006, 1.
86. Jervis 1979.
87. Damasio 1999, 102.

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credibility. Actors are credible when they are thought to have the capability, interest, and resolve to keep a commitment.[88] A German commitment to France is credible if the French believe the Germans will keep it. Without emotion, the concept "credibility" turns into "knowledge," where one knows whether a commitment will be kept. A feeling can be so strong that it makes one certain, but this captures passion or a very strong feeling rather than knowledge. An actor's assessment of another's credibility depends on both the selection (and interpretation) of evidence and on the calculation of risk. Each proposition—emotion as an assimilation mechanism, as important to strategy, and as carrying utility—helps to explain why credibility is an emotional belief.

Assessing Evidence

Credibility depends on how observers assess evidence and on what evidence they decide to assess. Before the Iraq War, each side disbelieved evidence that challenged their convictions. This disbelief illustrates emotion as an assimilation mechanism that influences the selection and interpretation of evidence. For example, Saddam Hussein thought the United States lacked the capability, interest, and resolve to successfully invade Iraq. He believed a U.S. invasion would result in a guerilla war that the Americans could not win.[89] Saddam was convinced that "Iraq will not, in any way, be like Afghanistan. We will not let the war become a picnic for the American or the British soldiers. No way!"[90] Saddam also discounted any U.S. interest in war, believing that the United States obtained all that it wanted (in the form of a regional military presence) after the first Gulf War.[91] He believed improved relations with the United States were possible and senior Iraqis repeatedly approached U.S. diplomats with a promise to be its "best friend in the region bar none."[92] Rather than invade Iraq, it seemed more likely to Saddam that the United States would help to deter or repel an Iranian invasion to protect Iraqi oil fields.[93] Finally, Saddam doubted U.S. resolve. Saddam interpreted U.S. behavior as irresolute in Vietnam, in the 1991 Gulf War, in Somalia, in Bosnia, and in Kosovo.[94] Saddam's belief in Americans' exaggerated aversion to casualties was yet another reason for disbelieving, even a few weeks before the invasion, that the United States would launch a ground invasion of Iraq.[95]

Before the war, the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) repeatedly found evidence that Iraq practiced deceit and deception to hide its weapons of mass

88. Schelling 1960.
89. Duelfer 2004, 66.
90. Woods 2006, 30.
91. Duelfer 2004, 32, 66.
92. Senior Iraqis quoted in ibid., 32.
93. Ibid., 29–30.
94. Woods 2006, viii.
95. Duelfer 2004, 32.

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destruction (WMD), though the CIA subsequently concluded that the practice could not exist because the weapons did not exist.[96] When U.S. intelligence learned of Iraqi instructions to the Iraqi military to search "for any chemical agents" and to "make sure the area is free of chemical containers, and write a report on it," U.S. analysts did not believe the Iraqi effort at compliance.[97] The CIA sent to Iraq thirty family members of Iraqi scientists to discover the state of Iraq's WMD programs. Although the family members all reported that the programs had been abandoned, the CIA discounted the reports as unreliable.[98] Other evidence that could have been taken as Iraqis attempting to comply with U.N. inspectors was accepted as indicating the opposite.[99] In this case, distrust—or feelings of pessimism in another's good will and competence—explains the selection and interpretation of evidence. As U.S. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld noted before the war, "the absence of evidence [of WMD] is not evidence of absence."[100] Distrusting Saddam was sensible. It is also true, as the CIA responded in a 2006 assessment, that at some point "the absence of evidence does indeed become the evidence of absence."[101] Emotional beliefs are neither irrational nor always accurate.

Although analysts are better off with emotion than without it, asking whether emotion improves or undermines analysis implies that analysts can choose to eliminate it. Eliminating emotion means one is stuck with the naïve realism of accommodation, where facts speak for themselves and all (eventually) converge on reality. Relying only on emotion implies one is unhinged from evidentiary constraints, as if one lived in a faith-based world (of assimilation) rather than a reality-based one.[102] Distinguishing accommodation from assimilation is complicated further when emotion is evidence. For example, decision makers and analysts normally turn how they feel about an actor (she behaved in a resolute way) into an attribute of that actor (she is resolute). Two psychologists commented, "One perceives wonderful and beautiful people, not people who evoke feelings of delight and enjoyment. . . . We also feel that prophets and political leaders generate admiration because they are admirable, and not vice versa."[103] People commonly turn the subjective experience of feelings into an objective property of an actor.

This tendency allows analysts to view credibility as an attribute (or property) of an actor, as if actors own their credibility the way one owns a pair of shoes or a fleet of battleships. For example, because the French behaved in an irresolute way by not supporting a preventive war against Iraq, the French are irresolute. Or,

96. U.S. Senate 2006, 130–32.
97. Woods 2006, 93.
98. Risen 2006, 106.
99. Woods 2006, 93–94.
100. Quoted in Roger Cohen, "Rumsfeld is Correct—The Truth Will Get Out," *New York Times* (Internet ed.), 7 June 2006.
101. U.S. Senate 2006, 132.
102. See Ron Suskind, "Without a Doubt," *New York Times Magazine*, 17 October 2004, 44; and McClellan 2008.
103. Frijda and Mesquita 2000, 52.

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because the French behaved in a resolute way by opposing a preventive war against Iraq, the French are resolute. "French resolve" exists only in one's head. Analysts are not making a choice about some objective property, such as a credible or incredible type. Instead, the object of judgment is a subjective representation. Analysts define the problem, create the choices, introduce and interpret the relevant facts, and decide for themselves the chances that an actor will keep a commitment. Analysts accommodate their beliefs to evidence while also assimilating evidence to fit their beliefs. Allowing feelings to influence interpretations is normal, and viewing another as irresolute or resolute can be sensible. Feeling-driven assimilation becomes a problem when one does not recognize that others can feel quite differently, and so have different explanations and different expectations. It is not wrong to view the French as either resolute or irresolute, but it is mistaken to assume that others will necessarily share one's characterization.

How analysts feel about an actor, object, or event influences what they believe. People revise their beliefs when confronted with credible evidence and what they find credible depends on their beliefs. For example, an Egyptian student believes (like many in the Middle East) that the 2001 terrorist attacks on the United States were part of a U.S. conspiracy to wage war on Muslims: "The Americans invaded two Muslim countries. They used 9/11 as an excuse and went to Iraq. They killed Saddam, tortured people. How can you trust them?"[104] No magic formula—Bayesian or otherwise—exists for interpreting data and revising one's beliefs.[105] Although access to different evidence can explain differences in beliefs, historians of the Cold War, intelligence analysts on Iraq, professional football handicappers, or political scientists studying credibility reach different conclusions even with access to the same data.[106] Feelings—of trust or distrust, like or dislike, approval or disapproval, love or hate, pride or humiliation—influence the selection and interpretation of evidence and figure into assessments of credibility. Emotion is a powerful assimilation mechanism and provides the first reason for viewing credibility as an emotional belief.

Assessing Risk

Credibility depends on a risk assessment: what are the odds that an actor will keep a commitment? If emotion constitutes assessments of risk, then credibility is an emotional belief. One can think of risk in two ways. The first is risk according to normative decision theory, which relies on probability theory, statistics, and is ostensibly free of emotion. A second way to understand risk is as a feeling. Although economists view risk as variation over outcomes (where the riskiest choice has the most variance), most people have a multidimensional view of risk that includes

104. *New York Times*, 9 September 2008, A16.
105. Jervis 2006.
106. Kirshner 2000.

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emotion. Three different approaches—prospect theory, behavioral risk analysis, and neuroscience—provide evidence for emotion's central role in risk assessment and thus for viewing credibility as an emotional belief.

Kahneman and Tversky's prospect theory is the most influential behavioral theory of choice in the social sciences.[107] They discovered that how people think about a choice influences their attitude toward risk. When people think they are ahead (or in a domain of gain), they become risk averse; when they think they are behind (or in a domain of loss), they become risk acceptant. Prospect theory is a cognitive theory, but feelings are important: "The aggravation that one experiences in losing a sum of money appears to be greater than the pleasure associated with gaining the same amount."[108] Feelings carry utility: people hate losing more than they love winning and this predictably influences their choices. For example, given a choice between a sure gain of $900 and a 90 percent chance of $1,000, what would you do? Or, given a choice between a sure loss of $900 and a 90 percent chance of a loss of $1,000, what would you do? Most people view these gambles as different and bet accordingly: people typically take the sure gain but then risk a 10 percent chance of losing nothing.[109] Although the expected values of the outcomes are identical, convincing undergraduates that they "should" bet the same way in each gamble strikes them as so counterintuitive that it must be wrong. Because preferences are reference dependent, people focus on changes from the status quo: people feel differently when they view gambles as gains or losses and these feelings influence choices.

Finding that preferences are reference dependent is striking. It means that attitudes toward risk depend on feelings, not on the objective properties of a choice. By manipulating the presentation of a choice—so that, for example, one has a choice between a policy that results in 90 percent employment or a policy that results in 10 percent unemployment—one can manipulate attitudes toward risk. Identical problems should be viewed identically but are not because people pay more attention to changes from some reference point rather than changes to final states (of unemployment, for example). Even people who can see through simple framing effects succumb to them when the manipulation is less transparent.[110] The laboratory findings and applications to foreign-policy decision making point in the same direction: feelings influence risk assessments.[111]

A second reason to suspect that emotion influences risk springs from research that goes beyond framing effects to explore directly how feelings influence risk assessments. Slovic and his colleagues found that "people base their judgments of an activity or a technology not only on what they *think* about it but also on what

107. Kahneman and Tversky 1979.
108. Ibid., 279; see also Druckman and McDermott 2008.
109. Johnson-Laird and Oatley 2000, 463.
110. LeBoeuf and Shafir 2003.
111. See McDermott 2004b; and Mercer 2005a.

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they *feel* about it."[112] How one feels about a technology—does one like it or dislike it—influences how risky one thinks that technology is.[113] In this case, whether one likes or dislikes a technology determines both trust and perceptions of risk. Although benefit and risk tend to be positively related, people usually view what they dislike as risky, and what they like as less risky. The implication is that affect precedes and directs judgments of both risk and benefit.[114] Whereas supporters of nuclear power will see a near disaster as evidence that safety controls work, opponents will see it as evidence that nuclear power is dangerous.[115] Similarly, analysts opposed to the war in Iraq tended to view it as entailing high risks and low benefits, and analysts who supported the war tended to view it as entailing low risks but high benefits. Given the uncertainty of the situation—did Iraq have WMD?—it is likely that risk was as much a consequence as a cause of more general attitudes over the prospect of war.[116]

Although statistical manipulation in controlled experiments allows one to exclude the possibility that trust and perceptions of risk determine attitudes, it is possible that politically charged questions elicit strategic responses. It is also possible that well-trained analysts will not be subject to emotion's influence, although this is unlikely for two reasons. First, even cognitively complex people—such as those who enjoy intricate puzzles demanding elaborate cognitive processing—do not adhere to normative decision theory, and experts and nonexperts are equally likely to violate rationality norms.[117] Second, if emotion is necessary to rationality, then emotion must influence well-trained analysts.

A third approach to emotion and risk compares risk assessments between people who have emotion and those who do not. Damasio conducted a gambling experiment in which he gave subjects a fixed amount of money and had them select cards from four decks.[118] Each card would either give subjects more money or take some away. The cards in decks A and B gave high rewards but higher penalties; the cards in decks C and D gave low rewards but lower penalties. Normal people quickly realize that decks A and B are "bad" decks and then draw primarily from decks C and D. However, Damasio's patients—people with diminished emotion but normal cognitive capacity—select primarily from the high reward/higher penalty decks until they, inevitably and repeatedly, go bankrupt. The patients understood the game, wanted to win, and even understood why they went bankrupt. They were able to "know" but not to "feel." Some patients knew they could no longer feel, but this knowledge did not prevent them from bankruptcy. The patients responded to the "here and now" rather than the future, which requires

112. Slovic et al. 2004, 315. Emphasis in original.
113. Poortinga and Pidgeon 2005; Finucane et al. 2000.
114. Slovic et al. 2004.
115. Finucane et al. 2000.
116. Jervis 2005.
117. Shafir and LeBoeuf 2002; Tetlock 2005.
118. Damasio 1994.

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mental images coupled with feelings. Without these images marked by feelings, people cannot choose effectively. The gambling experiment provides further evidence of emotion's role in risk assessments.

The preceding three approaches to risk indicate that the experience of emotion influences subjective probability. As two psychologists noted: "An event that is present to the senses cannot easily be doubted to exist."[119] Routinely doubting that one's feelings accurately capture one's environment will at best cause one to lose confidence in one's judgments. The experience of emotion makes the object of that emotion seem real and encourages a belief that the object is real. Whether one is afraid of genetically modified tomatoes, of nuclear power, or of terrorists, those feelings make the object of the fear seem real and influence the subjective perception of risk associated with those objects, events, or agents.

For example, in 2006, American and Israeli intelligence estimates on when Iran might acquire nuclear weapons differed. The Israelis believed that the Iranians might acquire nuclear weapons in two years and the Americans expected it to take five to ten years. Both groups relied on the same knowledge base and frequently consulted each other. The difference was over analysis and assessment, not information. When asked to explain the difference in estimates, John Negroponte, U.S. Director of National Intelligence, responded: "sometimes what the Israelis will do—and I think that perhaps because it's a more existential issue for them, they will give you the worst-case assessment."[120] Different conclusions based on the same evidence are irrational only if one believes in a naïve accommodation of beliefs to evidence. Suggesting that different "priors" explains the difference kicks the problem down the road: what explains the different priors? The Israelis and the Americans felt the threat of a nuclear-armed Iran differently and these different feelings were part of their assessments.

Persuasion

From Schelling's emphasis on the rationality of irrationality, Jervis's interest in how actors can feign emotion to advance their interests, to Sikkink and her colleagues' discussion of shaming others into adhering to human rights norms, it is commonly recognized that rational actors can persuade others using emotion.[121] One can (and should) use emotion as a tool, but emotion is more than a trick; it is fundamental to how people think and what they believe. For example, persuading actors to adhere to norms or to sanction norm violators often depends on emotion. Damasio discusses how patients who lose their ability to "feel" but retain their

119. Frijda and Mesquita 2000, 69.
120. Negroponte 2006.
121. See Schelling 1960; Jervis 1970; Finnemore and Sikkink 1998; and Risse and Sikkink 1999.

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cognitive skills no longer adhere to social norms.[122] They violate norms because they do not care—they feel neither embarrassment nor pride—or because they cannot imagine how others will feel if they are treated in a way that violates a social norm such as fairness.[123] Persuading actors that the use of nuclear weapons is illegitimate or that antipersonnel land mines should be banned depends in part on actors feeling that these weapons are illegitimate.[124] Just as credibility and justice are emotional beliefs, so are beliefs that norms should be created or upheld. Constructivists emphasize that persuading rational actors depends on argument, debate, evidence, logic, and deliberation.[125] It also depends on emotion.

Rational Persuasion

Although rationalists and constructivists emphasize evidence as important to persuasion, neither acknowledges that rational people use emotion as evidence. If one cares about territory for its symbolic value, then focusing on the absence of intrinsic value (or offering monetary compensation) will likely fail.[126] Symbols are powerful because of their connection to emotion, and neglecting that emotion makes persuasion less effective. If a state seeks nuclear weapons for their prestige, then attempts to belittle or punish that state are likely to backfire.[127] If people are angry about cartoons depicting the Prophet Mohamed, then appealing to Voltaire or the Danish Constitution will not assuage the anger.[128] Providing information that neglects the source of one's concern is unlikely to address the problem and is likely to only reinforce initial beliefs.[129]

Knowing how rational people think, rather than imagining how they ought to think, should help analysts better understand persuasion. For example, Jervis developed Schelling's insight that costly signals convey credibility, but with the caveat that cost is not a natural feature of the environment but determined by one's beliefs and theories. He proposed that a leader might be able to increase the credibility of an otherwise incredible signal by risking a domestic audience's electoral punishment if the leader is caught bluffing.[130] Rationalists engaged Jervis's argument, but not his qualifications.[131] In their rush from subjective beliefs, rationalists assume identical interpretations of cost, which is like assuming everyone shares the same religion. The news anchor of the U.S. backed Arab language television network, al-Hurra, illustrates the point when he greeted his station's predominately Muslim

122. Damasio 1994.
123. Bhatt and Camerer 2005.
124. See Schelling 2006; and Price 1998.
125. See Checkel 2001; Johnston 2005; and Risse 2000.
126. Hassner 2006/07.
127. Hymans 2006.
128. *Washington Post*, 16 February 2006, A1.
129. Poortinga and Pidgeon 2005, 207.
130. Jervis 1970, 74–76.
131. For an example and review, see Weeks 2008.

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audience on Easter by declaring, "Jesus is risen today!"[132] Knowing one's audience is important to persuasion.

Knowing an audience means knowing their perspective. Although emotion helps capture perspective, many analysts discount emotion as irrational. A top U.S. military officer believes that Arabs are more emotional than Westerners,[133] and an influential analyst of the Middle East suggests that the dominant emotions among Muslims in the Middle East are anger, frustration, disappointment, disillusionment, disaffection, despair, and rage, as well as humiliation and smoldering resentment.[134] Compare that image of Arab rage with this Iraqi insurgent's perspective: "Iraqi Shia are superior to Iranians because Iraqi Shia are moral, good, compassionate and emotionally sensitive."[135] Although I suspect love and trust are more important within Arab societies than rage and anger, the connotation that Arabs are especially emotional and therefore irrational has no foundation; culturally sanctioned expression of emotion reveals one's culture, not one's rationality. No contradiction exists between Osama Bin Laden being passionate and successful: after eight years of war Al Qaeda remains a threat. Emotion provides perspective and passion shows commitment; neither indicates irrationality.

Attending to emotion sharpens assessments of another's beliefs and helps to predict their preferences. Rational models assume stable preferences: beliefs before a crisis and beliefs during a crisis should change only if one acquires new information of the other's resolution (perhaps due to audience costs). Rational actors do not think this way. Preferences are reference dependent (so that what one wants is part of the process rather than the outcome): feelings inform preferences. Walt makes a similar point when he notes that in some cases "neither leaders nor publics know how resolved they are until *after* the crisis is under way."[136] Pricing in future resolve demands imagining how adversaries will feel once a remote chance of war becomes palpable. Rational actors do not merely consult utility, they experience it.

Process is crucial to preference formation. If utility is experienced as well as consulted, then attending to experience should be central to persuasion. For example, how people experience a war can determine its outcome. After a U.S. airstrike killed up to ninety Afghan civilians, a local man said of the Americans: "They bombard us, they hate us, they kill us. God will punish them."[137] In a counterinsurgency, feelings of justice, dignity, and anger are crucial to the outcome, which depends on the local population trusting the counterinsurgents' commitments. Feeling that Americans have Iraqi best interests at heart is necessary for building trust, which is one reason the U.S. defense of Iraq's Oil Ministry (but not

132. *Washington Post*, 23 June 2008, A1.
133. *New York Times*, 1 April 2003, B6.
134. Pollack 2008, 133, 142.
135. Interrogator's paraphrase in Felter and Fishman 2008, 40.
136. Walt 1999, 34. Emphasis in original.
137. Quoted in *New York Times*, 3 September 2008, A10.

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the National Museum) and the refusal to disclaim an interest in permanent U.S. military bases contributed to the U.S. debacle.[138] Little slights can make a difference. Iraqi soldiers complained bitterly about the MREs, which contain pork: "We throw everything away but the biscuits."[139] Big slights matter more. Iraqis in Falluja were so angry at the United States that half of those to whom the Marines offered compensation for the wrongful death of family members rejected the offer.[140] In this case, Iraqi preferences to reject an offer that would increase their economic utility are as rational as a player in the ultimatum game that prefers to punish a jerk rather than accept an unfair offer.

Even when the goal is killing not persuasion, understanding another's perspective is crucial. How much risk one accepts to obtain an objective depends on how strongly one feels. Resolve is an emotion. Demoralizing or frightening an enemy will undermine the enemy's battlefield effectiveness. In general, one does not want to make the enemy feel outrage or have feelings that encourage bravery. An attempt to intimidate or frighten insurgents in Falluja by blasting music such as "Back in Black" by the band AC/DC is counterproductive if it elicits fury rather than fear. An Iraqi business owner remarked that the music interfered with the Imam's call for prayers: "That will increase the hatred against the Americans."[141] A nineteen-year-old Falluja resident also complained that the noise interfered with prayers and added: "They are killing us to the music."[142] Emotion can be important when using brute force; it is always important when the objective is persuasion.

Persuading Terrorists

"If you want to influence someone, you have to touch their emotions," said a U.S. officer directing psychological operations.[143] Yet touching the right emotions in the right way demands understanding another's beliefs. James critiqued the methodological imperative to reduce all things to measurable parts. James rejected the "demand for atoms of feelings" because "the actual contents of our minds are always representations of some kind of an *ensemble*."[144] One experiences feelings as a whole not as discrete parts, which is why a focus on emotional beliefs rather than on specific emotions is sensible. For example, an advocate of using ridicule against terrorist leaders applauded the Pentagon's release of a video that showed terrorist leader Abu Musab al-Zarqawi fumbling with an Amer-

138. A majority of all Iraqi ethnic groups (and 77 percent of all respondents) believe the United States plans to have permanent military bases in Iraq. See Program on International Policy Attitudes 2006.
139. Quoted in *New York Times*, 27 December 2004, A8.
140. Packer 2005, 223.
141. Quoted in *New York Times*, 17 November 2004, A13.
142. Ibid.
143. Col. James A. Treadwell quoted in *Washington Post*, 11 June 2005, D1.
144. James 1884a, 11. Emphasis in original.

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ican M-249 automatic weapon: "In Arab and Muslim societies, pride and shame are felt much more profoundly than they are in Western culture. To find video like this that can cut him down to size and discredit him is a real way of fighting terrorism."[145] Instead of focusing on specific emotions such as pride and shame, one should focus on emotional beliefs such as trust and credibility. If one trusts al-Zarqawi (or distrusts the Americans), then one could watch the video and conclude that he was not incompetent, but winning: he looked healthy, was wearing clean clothes, and held a gun captured from a U.S. soldier. Even if the alternative interpretation was unavailable, it would be easy to disbelieve the video as an American fabrication.[146] Feelings are not discrete objects for manipulation. They are not soloists but part of an ensemble best captured in beliefs.

Knowing that feelings constitute credibility should encourage actors to consider how someone who feels differently might differently interpret another's behavior. After Iraq's crushing military defeat in 1991, a top official of the administration of President George H. W. Bush expressed confidence that "no one in Iraq can get the idea 5 or 10 or 15 years from now that they might win the next time if only they had a better air force."[147] Yet Saddam Hussein viewed Iraq's defeat differently. He was convinced that the Republican Guard performed well by avoiding annihilation and turned the tactics of the first war into Iraqi doctrine for the second war.[148] He thought Bush's decision to stop the war short of Baghdad revealed the strength of his forces, confirmed his view of U.S. sensitivity to casualties, and he came to believe that Iraq won the war.[149] When Saddam yielded to international pressure and withdrew the two divisions he sent to the border of Kuwait (in October 1994), the international community congratulated the United States and the U.N. Security Council for their rapid and resolute response. Saddam thought the response showed only weakness. He was ready to invade Kuwait and the best the international community could do was send him "a memo."[150] Emotion makes it difficult to consider the perspective of others (because feelings are evidence for one's belief), but crucial to do so (because emotion helps explain why the perspective of others is often so different). Although predicting the specific content of these beliefs was probably impossible, predicting their direction—will one view another's commitment as credible—is predictable and can be helpful in deciding what to do.

Emotion can drive beliefs in surprising directions. Would-be terrorist Jose Padilla's desire to create nuclear weapons led him to believe that he could separate plutonium by rapidly swinging a bucket filled with nuclear material over his head,

145. J. Michael Waller quoted in *New York Times*, 6 May 2006, A7.
146. See "U.S. Government Takes Liberties with Facts in Documents Seeking Help Against Terrorists," *Associated Press*, 3 January 2002.
147. *New York Times*, 23 February 1991, 1.
148. Woods 2006, 43, 47.
149. See *New York Times*, 12 March 2006, 1; and Woods 2006, 8–9.
150. Saddam Hussein quoted in Woods 2006, 14.

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and Saddam's hatred of Jews might explain why his security services told him that the popular cartoon character Pokémon meant in Hebrew "I am Jewish."[151] But emotion's influence can also lead to robust and general expectations. For example, how will terrorists such as Bin Laden explain U.S. behavior and how will that explanation influence his behavior? Some observers, such as Senator Kay Bailey Hutchison, fear a U.S. defeat in Iraq will shatter U.S. credibility with allies and adversaries: "What enemy would ever fear us? What ally would ever trust us, if we just leave without any regard to the circumstances on the ground, without any regard to al-Qaida?"[152] The belief that a defeat in Iraq will embolden the enemy and lead to more challenges insufficiently weighs the extent to which credibility is an emotional belief.

Terrorists own U.S. credibility; they decide whether to believe U.S. commitments, and they will select and interpret evidence that suits their needs.[153] If public statements are believable, then ample evidence exists that Bin Laden will interpret any U.S. retreat as a sign of irresolution and any U.S. victory as a sign of irresolution.[154] In some cases, one's support or opposition to another's policy—not specific examples of another's resolution—explains one's beliefs. For example, no country is more subject to American ridicule for being irresolute than France: "Did you see the new bomb the government came up with? It weighs 21,000 pounds. The Air Force tested this bomb in Florida and the bomb blast was so strong at Disneyworld 25 French tourists surrendered."[155] A belief that France is a U.S. ally but opposes U.S. interests—44 percent of Americans view France (compared to 50 percent who view China) as either "not friendly" or "unfriendly"[156]—probably drives the popular American view of the French as irresolute, not an assessment of French military action at Verdun, Vietnam, Algeria, or Afghanistan. Because credibility is an emotional belief, how someone feels—both about the target of their assessment and about their own needs and desires—influences credibility's construction.

The policy implication is clear: do not attempt to persuade terrorists of one's credibility. Passionate actors are committed to a cause and this can lead them to interpretations that may seem strange or incorrect or even self-defeating, but the selection and interpretation of evidence is theirs to make. Recounting his seven months as a captive of the Haqqani faction of the Taliban, a reporter observed:

> Seven years after 9/11, they continued to insist that the attacks were hatched by American and Israeli intelligence agencies to create a pretext for the United States to enslave the Muslim world.... Americans invaded Afghanistan to enrich themselves, they argued, not to help Afghans. They ignored the fact

151. See *New York Times*, 10 September 2006, 1; and Woods 2006, 5.
152. Hutchison 2007.
153. Mercer 1996.
154. Shannon and Dennis 2007.
155. Leno 2003.
156. Harris Poll 2006.

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> that the United States helped build hundreds of miles of paved roads in Afghanistan and more than a thousand schools and health clinics. My captors denied widespread news reports that the Taliban burned down scores of newly built schools to prevent girls from getting an education. . . . Nothing I said, though, seemed to change their minds.[157]

If average decision makers are quick to see and embrace confirming evidence, are slow to spot (but quick to discount) disconfirming evidence and use ambiguity to reinforce their beliefs, it seems likely that actors with strong points of view will do the same. A sustained record of what some Americans might view as resolute U.S. behavior is likely to elicit a different interpretation from the Taliban or, for example, from Saddam, who might have viewed the United States as irresolute for abandoning Vietnam after taking a "mere" 58,000 dead, whereas he was willing to sacrifice 51,000 Iraqis in one battle.[158] Attempting to persuade Saddam of U.S. resolve would have been costly and irresponsible.

Passionate actors defeat attempts at persuasion not only with their selection and interpretation of evidence, but also with the certainty that comes with passion. An emotional belief involves certainty beyond evidence; the stronger the feelings the more compelling the evidence for one's beliefs. For these reasons, U.S. demonstrations of resolve are unlikely to influence how terrorists construct U.S. credibility. Resolution in the face of terrorist threats often makes sense and winning wars is, of course, better than losing them, but the suggestion that to deter future challenges one must show resolve to impress terrorists of one's credibility is a bad bet.

Conclusion

Getting lost in the psychology of emotion is easy but avoidable. The most important observation—that emotion and cognition meet in beliefs and that this rendezvous is necessary for rationality—permits analysts to rethink concepts such as credibility and to better understand emotion's influence. Emotion is not a mysterious, irrational, idiosyncratic force. When emotion constitutes and strengthens beliefs it has predictable effects. First, because emotion is an assimilation mechanism, it helps with the selection and interpretation of evidence. Emotion gives one a point of view that can help (or hurt) with analysis and helps to make these interpretations predictable. For example, suggesting that the more you dislike me, the less you will believe my promise to help you is intuitive, as is the observation that

157. David Rhode, "Held by the Taliban: Inside the Islamic Emirate," *New York Times*, 19 October 2009, A1; Rhode, "Held by the Taliban: 'You Have Atomic Bombs, but We Have Suicide Bombers,'" *New York Times*, 20 October 2009, A1.

158. Woods 2006, viii. Compare to Soviet leaders' surprise that the United States would take so many dead for a war the Soviets viewed as peripheral to U.S. interests. See Hopf 1994.

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feelings of like and dislike predictably influence risk assessment, and that even a little ambiguity permits people to interpret behavior in ways that make them feel better rather than worse. Second, wise strategic choice depends on the ability to experience emotion. An inability to experience emotion (and thus imagine the emotion in others), or assuming that emotion is merely a consequence of beliefs or a source of irrationality, undermine one's analysis. Third, emotion carries utility, which means that people care about process as well as outcome. Treating people with dignity and respect influences their beliefs about a given outcome. Finally, emotion is important to persuasion because credibility is an emotional belief. Terrorists are passionate actors and they will explain behavior that touches on their concerns in ways that defeat U.S. efforts to manage its credibility. Attending to how specific actors feel about the United States will tell analysts more about U.S. credibility with those actors than will a focus on the capability of the U.S. military, the U.S. interest in oil, or Americans' belief in their own resolution. Knowing that emotion constitutes beliefs should influence how one assesses beliefs and attempts to influence those beliefs. These observations do not solve problems of assessing or influencing credibility, but sometimes helping a little can be a lot.

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