

## BOOK REVIEWS

*International Society: Diverse Ethical Perspectives*. Edited by DAVID R. MAPEL and TERRY NARDIN. [Princeton NJ.: Princeton University Press. 1998. x + 263 pp. ISBN 0-691-05771-0. £27.50]

ALTHOUGH there has been a considerable amount of activity in recent years seeking to establish the terms for cohabitation between international lawyers and international relations persons, not much has come of it. Usually, even at its most ambitious, theorising about international law touches only a small part of the field of interest of international relations. Where there is “bigger picture” conjecture by international lawyers, the work scarcely seems to be international law at all. Inevitably, recent theoretical visions of international law have run the considerable risk of dissolving the line between law and politics—if international law is law, it is not important or, if it is important, it is not law.

It is, therefore, welcome to read a collection of essays by prominent philosophers of international relations which gives so much attention to international law that one of the authors wonders whether the contributions might have given too great a stress to it. These imaginative and marvellously economical essays address various approaches to the idea of international society. They come largely from the liberal tradition, though three are religious commentaries: Jewish, Christian and Islamic. We move, to adopt Professor Koskenniemi’s categories, from “apologist” to “utopian” accounts of international society, the more utopian they are, the more the concerns of the State as a discrete entity are diluted. The aspirational programmes of Professor Teson, writing about “Kant’s International Liberalism”, result in the claim that force may be used against non-liberal regimes “to rescue victims of brutal oppression” and of Professor Barry, giving a cosmopolitan perspective, in the contention that there “will have to be” military intervention to replace unjust regimes. That this is where such reasoning takes us is sufficient cause for doubt about the utility of transferring reasoning directed to conditions within a single State to a world of States. Professor Miller’s critique of Barry’s paper is convincing—there is more than one way to pursue the cosmopolitan project and States must be allowed the space to make their choices. Miller’s position, as I take it, puts more stress on co-operation than coercion and concedes that human rights represent a minimum standard rather than the ultimate statement of justice.

The essays of Dr Charvet on contract theory and of Professor Nardin on a positivist approach to international society will strike the greatest resonance with international lawyers. For Nardin, the law defines the nature of international society, without which there is nothing. For Charvet, contract depends upon consent and aspirational arguments are useful only to the extent that they are persuasive of co-operative action of those whose co-operation is essential. It is the concern of all the papers that a just society cannot be built on the discrepancies in material resources which currently divide States or people. Remedying this situation requires the participation of the rich States. That participation cannot be taken for granted, even, and this is the ultimate difficulty for the Kantians, Laberge and Teson, from liberal States. Professor Mapel’s succinct summary recognises this obstacle. International law assumes only a minimum order while the great problems confronted by these essays are worked out. As I think he acknowledges, international law, as we presently understand it, cannot make things greatly better; it has a hard enough task trying to prevent them getting any worse.

This is a collection of concentrated learning and intelligent debate. While the debate is essentially one of philosophers, the learning is accessible to international lawyers and they should take advantage of its attractive availability in this book.

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