

Review - History of International Political Theory: Ontologies of the International

Written by E-International Relations

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Hartmut Behr's *A History of International Political Theory: Ontologies of the International* is a fascinating critical reconsideration of how generations of political thinkers have appraised the interplay between universal and particular interests among the relations of states in their understandings of "the world" from Western antiquity through the present-day. This richly nuanced and comprehensive analysis of the many epistemological and ontological complexities in disciplined thinking about "international" affairs will be essential reading for anyone wanting to understand how these complexities affect our moral reasoning and political decisions about war and peace, identity and difference, locality and globality as humanity deals with the strategic challenges of the twenty-first century.

The book brings together a genealogy of thoughts on peace, war and ethics in Western political philosophy highlighting their legacies for contemporary theories on International Relations.

Behr breaks his structure up into five parts, making for an accessible and deftly structured route into what is at the outset an advanced and often complicated text.

The first and second sections are devoted to the study of universal and universalistic thinking from antiquity to the end of the 18th Century. This provides the reader with the necessary historical and theoretical roadmap with which to consider the larger themes of the book. The reader will emerge richer in their understanding of Greek and Roman antiquity – via consideration of Thucydides and Cicero, and equally rich as Behr navigates forward into the era of Augustine and Aquinas.

The third section begins with a discussion of Hegel, marking the shift from universal and universalistic thinking to particularism, which leads naturally into the fourth section, which deals with a critique of the 'triumph' of particularism in the 20th Century. This twin section is indispensable for students of political theory and international relations. The skill with which Behr travels through Machiavelli, Hobbes and Kant (for example) are well worth the endeavor, alone.

The final section is an incredibly broad and multifaceted conclusion to the book, drawing on the differentiation between the universal, universalistic, and universalized. Also it elaborates to consider whether the historical decline of notions of universalities in international political thought and international relations theory involve and signify a loss of ethics in the modern world.

Throughout this book, the reader discovers important arguments against some of the mainstream narratives of International Relations, such as the contextualization of neo-realism in Hegelian philosophy rather than in an ostensibly realist tradition of international political thought. On an ontological and epistemological level, this book argues for a reinvention of universalistic notions in international and global politics to overcome the politics of 'national interest' and their perennial self-affirmations through violence, egocentrism, and war.

Taking the relationship between universalism and particularism as his starting point, Behr provides a panoramic historical vision of international political theory. In its attempt to reconstruct a philosophical genealogy of war and peace, and a renewed ethics, this original and remarkably wide-ranging book is as challenging as it is ambitious: it

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deserves widespread attention across International Relations and beyond.

HARTMUT BEHR is Professor of International Politics at Newcastle University, UK. He is the author of 'Zuwanderungspolitik im Nationalstaat' (1998) and 'Entterritoriale Politik' (2004) and has published widely in international journals such as the European Journal of International Relations, Review of International Studies, Geopolitics, Journal of Politics, International Political Economy, Zeitschrift fuer Internationale Beziehungen (ZIB).