Classical Theory in International Relations

Classical political theorists such as Thucydides, Kant, Rousseau, Smith, Hegel, Grotius, Mill, Locke and Clausewitz are often employed to explain and justify contemporary international politics and are seen to constitute the different schools of thought in the discipline. However, traditional interpretations frequently ignore the intellectual and historical context in which these thinkers were writing as well as the lineages through which they came to be appropriated in International Relations. This collection of essays provides alternative interpretations sensitive to these political and intellectual contexts and to the trajectory of their appropriation. The political, sociological, anthropological, legal, economic, philosophical and normative dimensions are shown to be constitutive, not just of classical theories, but of international thought and practice in the contemporary world. Moreover, they challenge traditional accounts of timeless debates and schools of thought and provide new conceptions of core issues such as sovereignty, morality, law, property, imperialism and agency.

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For Benjamin
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While I was developing a new course on Classical Political Theory and International Relations at the University of Sussex, it became clear to me that there were numerous excellent and critical treatments of classical theorists in International Relations, albeit widely dispersed and difficult to get hold of. This state of affairs, I felt, was unsatisfactory not only because it effectively removed this literature from a broader audience but also because it obscured the fact that reflection on the role of classical theory has been an ongoing and systematic concern within the discipline of International Relations. Moreover, as the contributions to this book demonstrate, engagement with classical theory in the discipline is neither reduced to a particular intellectual or political position nor to certain ‘issue areas’. It is hoped that this book will help to make this literature more readily available as well as to demonstrate its systematic and quite foundational nature for all areas of international thought.

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Brighton
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