This book presents a critical view of international law as an argumentative practice that aims to 'depoliticise' international relations. Drawing from a wide range of materials, Koskenniemi demonstrates how this effort fails as international law becomes vulnerable to the contrasting criticisms of being either an irrelevant moralist Utopia or a manipulable façade for State interests. He examines the conflicts and paradoxes inherent in the main strands of international law – sources, sovereignty, 'custom' and 'world order' – and shows how legal discourse about such subjects can be described in terms of a small number of argumentative rules.

From Apology to Utopia was originally published in English in Finland in 1989, and though it quickly became a classic, it has been out of print for some years. Cambridge University Press is proud to reissue this seminal text, together with a substantial, freshly written Epilogue in which the author both responds to critics of the original work, and reflects on the effect and significance of his 'deconstructive' approach today.

Martti Koskenniemi is Professor of International Law at the University of Helsinki and Global Professor of Law at New York University. He is also a member of the International Law Commission. His other publications include The Gentle Civilizer of Nations: The Rise and Fall of International Law 1870–1960.
FROM APOLOGY TO UTOPIA

The Structure of International Legal Argument

Reissue with a new Epilogue

MARTTI KOSKENNIEMI
All games have morals; and the game of Snakes and Ladders captures, as no other activity can hope to do, the eternal truth that for every ladder you climb, a snake is waiting just around the corner; and for every snake, a ladder will compensate. But it’s more than that; no mere carrot-and-stick affair; because implicit in the game is the unchanging twoness of things, the duality of up against down, good against evil; the solid rationality of ladders balances the occult sinuosities of the serpent; in the opposition of staircase and cobra we can see, metaphorically, all conceivable oppositions, Alpha against Omega, father against mother; here is the war of Mary and Musa, and the polarities of knees and nose . . . but I found . . . that the game lacked one crucial dimension, that of ambiguity – because, as events are about to show, it is also possible to slither down a ladder and climb to triumph on the venom of a snake.


For T & L & A
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This book was first published at a moment of enthusiasm about the spread of international cooperation and the rule of law in the world. Its central thesis – namely that international law reproduces the paradoxes and ambivalences of a liberal theory of politics – may have seemed awkward at a time when liberalism was just about to gain a knock-out victory over its alternatives. Little is left today of that enthusiasm. International institutions, multilateral diplomacy and indeed international law are widely seen to have failed to cope with the most pressing international problems. Instead, “liberalism” is now often associated with the expansion of a private, market-driven “globalization” or the spread of a rhetoric of “freedom” that instrumentalizes law for the advancement of particular values or interests. Examined from the outside, international law appears sidelined by the informal structures of private governance while, from the inside, its functional differentiation (“fragmentation”) has raised the question of whether any unifying centre remains in public international law that would still seem worthy of professional or ideological commitment.

And yet, the supple fabric of liberalism accounts for the persistent attraction of liberal themes. The virtues of sovereignty remain as palpable as its vices. The ideal of a consensually based legal order between equal and self-determining collectivities has retained its political appeal despite the theoretical, doctrinal and practical problems with the ideas of consent, self-determination and inter-state equality. It now seems to me that the concepts and structures of international law, elaborated in this book, are not something that political actors may choose to apply or ignore at will. They are the condition of possibility for the existence of something like a sphere of the “international” as one for asserting and contesting political power, making and challenging claims of right and legitimacy that may be analysed as claims about legal justice. If international law did not exist, political actors would need to invent it.

To be sure, the political effects and meaning of international law remain ambivalent. While the way international law is spoken, and
thus applied, reflects the profoundly inequitable constellation of power today, it also offers avenues of resistance and experimentation. It may be used to support and to challenge hegemony. Though it often empowers the “wrong” people and justifies the “bad” decision, this is by no means necessarily the case. In any case, suggestions to “do away” with international law seem to me both naive and ideological. They are naive because every aspect of the international world is always already “legalized”, that is, amenable for description and analysis by reference to legal concepts and categories. As Hans Kelsen and Hersch Lauterpacht once argued, there is no “outside-of-law”. If, as this book argues, every law is a “politics”, it is likewise true that every politics can become known, and effective, only as “law”, including above all a law that liberates some actors to decide in accordance with their preferences. The question is never whether or not to go by law but by which law or whose law. Which is why the assumption that there might be a sphere of “pure” non-law (of politics, economics, strategy, etc.) is ideological: with every political decision-maker, there comes a legal advisor, an expert in the language whose grammar is sketched in the following pages and whose assignment it is to enable the retreat of the decision-maker from the existential Angst of the decision to the comforting structures of the law. The challenge for us, legal experts, is to provide the right advice.

As my students know all too well, this book has been long out of print. I am therefore deeply grateful to Professor James Crawford and to Cambridge University Press for suggesting that it be reissued with only minor corrections of typographical errors and that I should write a substantial epilogue to reflect upon critiques and developments in the intervening years. The debts I have incurred during the years are too many to mention here. The original acknowledgements cover the most important ground: David, Tiina and my family continue to be the key participants in this venture. Colleagues and students in Helsinki, New York University, Geneva, Paris and other places have taught me many new things. I thank them all. The conversation continues.

Helsinki, 6 May 2005
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Writing this book was made possible by a three-year grant from the Academy of Finland during 1985–1987 and a corresponding leave of absence given by my employer, the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland. Within the latter, the continuous support for my academic pursuits given by my superiors Eero Kekomäki, Director for Legal Affairs and Holger Rotkirch, Director for Administrative Affairs, has been invaluable. My colleagues at the section for public international law have without complaint carried the additional work entailed by my academic folly. During the years – a much longer time than the grant – several academic and professional friends and colleagues have discussed with me many of the issues which I raise in this book. Unscrupulously, I have disturbed diplomats, judges of the International Court of Justice, professors of international law, legal theory and philosophy with my problems. I thank them, too.

The most important intellectual support has come from professor David Kennedy, Harvard Law School. His unorthodox work – which is frequently referred to in the course of the book – contains what can only be regarded as the most significant contribution to international legal scholarship by a contemporary lawyer. I am grateful for his numerous comments on my earlier work and for his unfailing encouragement. Whatever merit this book may have is due to my having been able to acquaint myself with him and his work.

Several people have provided technical help. The personnel of the Library of Parliament in Helsinki gave invaluable professional assistance during my three-year stay with them. Tiina Astola read the successive drafts and her comments on form and substance are reflected throughout. My two research assistants, Tuula Svinhufvud and Jaana Törnönen-Nwoko checked the notes and collected the bibliography efficiently and with care. Director of Publication, Anna-Liisa Laurila was instrumental in having publication arranged with Lakimiesliiton Kustannus. Kari Takamaa from the Library of the Law Faculty in Helsinki gave me...
access to books which would otherwise have been difficult to get hold of. Several institutions provided financial support. These included Suomen kulttuurirahaston Varsinais-Suomen rahasto, Turun yliopistosaatiö and Oskar Öflunds stiftelse.

Helsinki, 18 September 1988
ABBREVIATIONS

AFDI  Annuaire français de droit international
AJIL  American Journal of International Law
Arch. de philo. du droit  Archives de philosophie du droit
Arch.VR  Archiv des Völkerrechts
ARSP  Archiv für Rechts- und Sozialphilosophie
Buffalo L.R.  Buffalo Law Review
BYIL  British Year Book of International Law
Calif. L.R.  California Law Review
Can.YIL  Canadian Yearbook of International Law
Cardozo L.R.  Cardozo Law Review
CLP  Current Legal Problems
Columbia J. of Transnat’l Law  Columbia Journal of Transnational Law
CSCE  Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe
ECHR  European Court of Human Rights
EJIL  European Journal of International Law
FYBIL  Finnish Yearbook of International Law
GYIL  German Yearbook of International Law
Harv.IIJ  Harvard International Law Journal
Harvard L.R.  Harvard Law Review
ICJ  International Court of Justice
ICLQ  International and Comparative Law Quarterly
IIL  Institute of International Law
IIIL  Indian Journal of International Law
ILA  International Law Association
ILC  International Law Commission
ILM  International Legal Materials
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<td>ILR</td>
<td>International Law Reports</td>
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<tr>
<td>Int’l Org.</td>
<td>International Organization</td>
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<tr>
<td>Iran-US CT</td>
<td>Iran-United States Claims Tribunal</td>
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<tr>
<td>JFT</td>
<td>Tidskrift utgivn av Juridiska Föreningen i Finland</td>
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<tr>
<td>JIR</td>
<td>Jahrbuch für Internationales Recht</td>
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<td>KOIG</td>
<td>Kansainoikeus – Ius Gentium</td>
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<td>LJIL</td>
<td>Leiden Journal of International Law</td>
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<td>LM</td>
<td>Lakimies</td>
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<tr>
<td>Neth.YBIL</td>
<td>Netherlands Yearbook of International Law</td>
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<td>NTIR</td>
<td>Nordisk Tidsskrift for International Ret</td>
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<tr>
<td>NtvIR</td>
<td>Nederlands Tijdschrift voor Internationaal Recht</td>
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<tr>
<td>OAS</td>
<td>Organization of American States</td>
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<tr>
<td>Oxford JLS</td>
<td>Oxford Journal of Legal Studies</td>
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<tr>
<td>ÖZöRV</td>
<td>Österreichische Zeitschrift für öffentliches Recht und Völkerrecht</td>
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<tr>
<td>PCIJ</td>
<td>Permanent Court of International Justice</td>
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<tr>
<td>RBDI</td>
<td>Revue belge de droit international public</td>
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<tr>
<td>RCADI</td>
<td>Recueil des Cours de l’Academie de Droit International</td>
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<td>Reports</td>
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<td>RGDP</td>
<td>Revue générale de droit international public</td>
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<td>RITD</td>
<td>Revue internationale de théorie du droit</td>
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<td>Procès-verbaux PCIJ</td>
<td>Advisory Committee of Jurists, Procès-verbaux of the Proceedings of the Committee, 16 June – 21 July with Annexes</td>
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<td>SC</td>
<td>Security Council</td>
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<td>Schw.JB</td>
<td>Schweizerisches Jahrbuch für internationales Recht</td>
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<td>Stanford L.R.</td>
<td>Stanford Law Review</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNCLOS</td>
<td>United Nations Conference (Convention) on the Law of the Sea</td>
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<td>United Nations General Assembly</td>
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<td>UNRIAA</td>
<td>United Nations Reports of International Arbitral Awards</td>
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<td>Yale L.J.</td>
<td>Yale Law Journal</td>
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<tr>
<td>YILC</td>
<td>Yearbook of the International Law Commission</td>
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<tr>
<td>ZaöRV</td>
<td>Zeitschrift für ausländisches öffentliches Recht und Völkerrecht</td>
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