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## FROM APOLOGY TO UTOPIA

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*.

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The Structure of International Legal Argument

*Reissue with a new Epilogue*

MARTTI KOSKENIEMI



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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.

Salman Rushdie, *Midnight's Children* (Picador, London, 1981), p. 141

For T & L & A

## CONTENTS

<i>Preface to the reissue</i>	page	xiii
<i>Acknowledgements</i>		xv
<i>List of abbreviations</i>		xvii
Introduction		1
1 Objectivity in international law: conventional dilemmas		16
1.1 The identity of international law: the requirements of normativity and concreteness		17
1.2 Proving the objectivity of international law		23
1.2.1 A preliminary point: international law as problem-solution		24
1.2.2 Objectivity and the practice of legal problem-solution		28
1.2.2.1 The basic position: objectivity and the judicial function		28
1.2.2.2 The revised position: the doctrine of “relative indeterminacy”		36
1.2.3 Objectivity in hard cases: the forms of modern doctrine		41
1.3 The structure of international legal argument: the dynamics of contradiction		58
1.3.1 The descending and ascending patterns of justification		59

1.3.2	Indeterminacy as contradiction	60
1.3.3	The structure of international legal argument	67
1.4	Outline of the book	69
2	Doctrinal history: the liberal doctrine of politics and its effect on international law	71
2.1	The emergence and structure of the liberal doctrine of politics	74
2.1.1	The structure of liberalism	76
2.1.2	Liberalism and international law	89
2.2	Early scholarship	95
2.3	Classical scholarship	106
2.3.1	Early classicists: Vattel	108
2.3.2	The professionals	122
2.3.2.1	Two deviationists: Austin and Jellinek	125
2.3.2.2	Professional mainstream	130
2.3.2.3	The coherence of professional writing: historicism and proceduralization	143
2.4	Conclusion	154
3	The structure of modern doctrines	158
3.1	Modern interpretations of doctrine: descending and ascending arguments confirmed	159
3.2	Modern interpretations of practice	171
3.3	The relations of doctrine and practice reconsidered: four versions of modern doctrine	182
3.3.1	Rule-approach: Schwarzenberger	189
3.3.2	Scepticism: Morgenthau	197

## CONTENTS

ix

3.3.3	Policy-approach: McDougal	201
3.3.4	Idealism: Alvarez	209
3.4	Conclusions: descriptivism	218
4	Sovereignty	224
4.1	The structure of the problem: Schmitt v. Kelsen	226
4.1.1	The “legal” and the “pure fact” approaches	228
4.1.2	The continuing dispute about the extent and relevance of sovereignty	233
4.2	The meaning of sovereignty	240
4.3	The rise and fall of the legal approach: the temptation of analysis, domestic jurisdiction and the dilemma of interpretation	246
4.4	The rise and fall of the pure fact approach: Lotus principle	255
4.5	Constructivism: recourse to equity	258
4.6	Example: statehood and recognition	272
4.7	Example: territorial disputes	282
4.8	Conclusion on sovereignty	300
5	Sources	303
5.1	Sources theory	307
5.1.1	Consent v. justice	309
5.1.2	Tacit consent: a reconciliation?	325
5.2	Treaty interpretation	333
5.3	Unilateral declarations	345
5.4	Acquiescence and estoppel	355
5.5	The structure of sources doctrine: examples	364
5.5.1	Example 1: the <i>Status of South West Africa</i> opinion	365

5.5.2	Example 2: the <i>Reservations</i> opinion	368
5.5.3	Example 3: the <i>Admission</i> opinion	371
5.5.4	Example 4: the <i>Arbitral Award Case</i>	379
5.5.5	Example 5: the <i>Temple Case</i>	382
5.6	Conclusion on sources	385
6	Custom	388
6.1	Custom as general law: two perspectives	389
6.2	The identity of custom: the ascending and descending approaches	397
6.3	Conventional theory: the psychological and the material element and the circularity of the argument about custom	410
6.3.1	The rejection of pure materialism	411
6.3.2	The rejection of pure psychologism	414
6.3.2.1	The psychological element as the material one: collective unconscious	415
6.3.2.2	Tacit agreement	416
6.3.2.3	The psychological element as will and belief	417
6.3.2.4	The phenomenological claim and the consequences of psychologism	424
6.3.3	The re-emergence of materialism	427
6.3.4	The re-emergence of psychologism: the circle closes	431
6.4	Resulting dilemmas: general/particular, stability/change	438
6.4.1	General v. particular	438
6.4.2	Time and customary law: the antinomy of stability and change	450

## CONTENTS

xi

6.5	Strategy of closure: custom as bilateral equity	461
6.5.1	Bilateralization	462
6.5.2	Recourse to equity	467
7	Variations of world order: the structure of international legal argument	474
7.1	The sense of the legal project: towards community or independence?	475
7.2	The failure of legal formality: examples	484
7.3	Reversibility and the structure of international legal argument	503
8	Beyond objectivism	513
8.1	The unfoundedness of objectivism	513
8.1.1	The structure of legal argument revisited	513
8.1.2	A fundamental dilemma: ideas/facts	516
8.1.3	Ideas and facts in international law: the problem of method	519
8.1.3.1	The interpretation of facts: the relations of law and society reconsidered	522
8.1.3.2	The interpretation of ideas: the problem of language	527
8.2	Nihilism, critical theory and international law	533
8.3	Routines and contexts: a tentative reconstruction	548
8.3.1	Routines: from legal technique to normative practice	549
8.3.2	Contexts: from interpretation to imagination	557
	Epilogue (2005)	562
1	A retrospective	562

2	The descriptive project: towards a grammar of international law	563
2.1	What a grammar is	566
2.2	The grammar articulated: sovereignty and sources	573
2.2.1	Sovereignty	576
2.2.2	Sources	583
2.2.3	Conclusions on grammar: from rules and processes to decisions	588
3	The normative project: from grammar to critique	589
3.1	The nature of indeterminacy	590
3.2	Grammar and the social world: the role of antagonism and conflict	596
3.3	Structural bias	600
4	Conclusion	615
	<i>Bibliography and Table of cases</i>	618
A	<i>Books and monographs</i>	618
A.1	<i>Philosophy, social and legal theory and method</i>	618
A.2	<i>International law and international relations: general works</i>	628
A.3	<i>International law: particular subjects</i>	636
B	<i>Articles</i>	641
C	<i>Table of cases</i>	670
C.1	<i>Permanent Court of International Justice (Series A &amp; B)</i>	670
C.2	<i>International Court of Justice</i>	671
C.3	<i>Other cases</i>	673
	<i>Index</i>	676

Cambridge University Press  
0521838061 - From Apology to Utopia: The Structure of International Legal  
Argument  
Martti Koskenniemi  
Frontmatter  
[More information](#)

---

## PREFACE TO THE REISSUE

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

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[More information](#)

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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*

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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 Törrönen-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

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Martti Koskenniemi  
Frontmatter  
[More information](#)

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xvi

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*Helsinki, 18 September 1988*

## ABBREVIATIONS

AFDI	Annuaire français de droit international
AJIL	American Journal of International Law
Am.U.J.Int'l L. & Pol'y	American University Journal of International Law and Policy
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
CSCCE	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.IJL	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
IJIL	Indian Journal of International Law
ILA	International Law Association
ILC	International Law Commission
ILM	International Legal Materials

ILR	International Law Reports
Int'l Org.	International Organization
Iran-US CT	Iran-United States Claims Tribunal
JFT	Tidskrift utgiven av Juridiska Föreningen i Finland
JIR	Jahrbuch für Internationales Recht
KOIG	Kansainoikeus – Ius Gentium
LJIL	Leiden Journal of International Law
LM	Lakimies
Neth.YBIL	Netherlands Yearbook of International Law
NTIR	Nordisk Tidsskrift for International Ret
NtvIR	Nederlands Tijdschrift voor Internationaal Recht
OAS	Organization of American States
Oxford JLS	Oxford Journal of Legal Studies
ÖZöRV	Österreichische Zeitschrift für öffentliches Recht und Völkerrecht
PCIJ	Permanent Court of International Justice
RBDI	Revue belge de droit international public
RCADI	Recueil des Cours de l'Académie de Droit International
RDI	Revue de droit international
Reports	Reports of Judgements, Advisory Opinions and Orders of the International Court of Justice
Res.	Resolution
Rev.Int.Stud.	Review of International Studies
RGDIP	Revue générale de droit international public
RITD	Revue internationale de théorie du droit
Procès-verbaux PCIJ	Advisory Committee of Jurists, Procès-verbaux of the Proceedings of the Committee, 16 June – 21 July with Annexes
SC	Security Council
Schw.JB	Schweizerisches Jahrbuch für internationales Recht
Stanford L.R.	Stanford Law Review
UNCLOS	United Nations Conference (Convention) on the Law of the Sea

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---

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

xix

UNGA	United Nations General Assembly
UNRIAA	United Nations Reports of International Arbitral Awards
Yale L.J.	Yale Law Journal
YILC	Yearbook of the International Law Commission
ZaöRV	Zeitschrift für ausländisches öffentliches Recht und Völkerrecht