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978-0-521-69188-8 - A Cultural Theory of International Relations

Richard Ned Lebow

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A CULTURAL THEORY OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

In this exciting new volume, Richard Ned Lebow introduces his own constructivist theory of political order and international relations based on theories of motives and identity formation drawn from the ancient Greeks. His theory stresses the human need for self-esteem, and shows how it influences political behavior at every level of social aggregation. Lebow develops ideal-type worlds associated with four motives: appetite, spirit, reason and fear, and demonstrates how each generates a different logic concerning cooperation, conflict and risk-taking. Expanding and documenting the utility of his theory in a series of historical case studies, ranging from classical Greece to the war in Iraq, he presents a novel explanation for the rise of the state and the causes of war, and offers a reformulation of prospect theory. This is a novel theory of politics by one of the world's leading scholars of international relations.

RICHARD NED LEBOW is James O. Freedman Presidential Professor of Government at Dartmouth College and Centennial Professor of International Relations at the London School of Economics and Political Science. He is the author of *The Tragic Vision of Politics* (Cambridge, 2003) which was the winner of the Alexander L. George Book Award of the International Society of Political Psychology, 2005.

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

To Carol, Kate, Andrew, Eli and David

CONTENTS

<i>List of figures and tables</i>	<i>page</i>	viii
<i>Acknowledgments</i>		ix
1	Introduction	1
2	Fear, interest and honor	43
3	The spirit and its expression	122
4	The ancient world	165
5	Medieval Europe	222
6	From Sun King to Revolution	262
7	Imperialism and World War I	305
8	World War II	371
9	Hitler to Bush and beyond	439
10	General findings and conclusions	505
	<i>Bibliography</i>	571
	<i>Index</i>	741

FIGURES AND TABLES

Figures

9.1 System transformation	<i>page</i> 498
10.1 Motives	510
10.2 Fear	511
10.3 Identity	564

Tables

2.1 Foundational assumptions	59
2.2 The spirit	64
2.3 Motives, emotions, goals and means	90
7.1 Prospect theory	367
10.1 Prospect theory	537

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

In *The Tragic Vision of Politics* I attempt to develop a new ontology for social science that assumes change as the norm, and attempts to study and track it in terms of the series of compromises that actors make with respect to key and often conflicting values. I argue that these compromises are inherently unstable and that changes in any one of them can be dampened or amplified as they interact with other accommodations and work their way through the system. In this volume I build on this ontology to develop a theory of international relations embedded in a proto-theory or political order. In a follow-on volume I hope to develop a full-blown theory of political order drawing on the findings of this study and additional research.

If orders are unstable and constantly evolving, so are theories. My theory of international relations has been and remains a work in progress, although it has progressed far enough to warrant publication. I expect that feedback will push me to think further about my theory and to introduce changes in the course of writing the follow-on volume. My theory builds on works of social science, history, philosophy and literature and has compelled me to turn to colleagues for help in understanding relevant works and controversies in these several fields. Once again I have been struck by the interest and generosity of so many colleagues in different fields. Without their initial guidance and subsequent willingness to read and comment on drafts I could not have attempted, let alone completed, this project.

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

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xi

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