not only the breadth of the issues at stake but also how the arguments in the book may actually require moving beyond the theoretical boundaries it seeks to establish.

At the heart of these questions is the nature of authority and the sufficiency of seeing the hierarchical international order as an authority contract based on the provision of international order. Lake does not want to restrict the authority of dominant powers to simple accommodation based on the recognition of differential power. He, instead, casts it explicitly within the language of legitimacy. Legitimate authority comes with a “duty to comply” (p. 8). As he puts it, legitimate authority in IR emerges from a social contract “in which the dominant state provides a political order to the collection of individuals who compose the subordinate state, and those individuals confer rights on the dominant state to restrict their behavior and extract resources necessary to produce that order” (p. 8). This order need not be “fair” for it to be legitimate—though the benefits of order to all parties should not be disregarded lightly.

Yet, this clearly raises some difficult analytic and political questions that have long exercised contract theories of authority. To take only one illustration, despite his admonitions concerning the need to see sovereignty as divisible, Lake’s rendering of international authority relations remains resolutely state-centric. As he puts it, legitimate international authority is the result of a situation where “dominant states protect their subordinates by building a political order in which coercion is relatively rare and come to their aid in countering specific threats or actual violence” (p. 10). Left at a level of interstate relations where subordinate states were protected from unwanted predation, such a formulation might in some circumstances be objectionable. But what if one replaced “state” with “regime,” and “external” threats with “internal” ones? In this case, the provision of order for a regime and the recognition by that regime of the legitimacy of the dominant power and its claims in exchange for its assistance could occur at the same time that the regime repressed or killed sections (perhaps even large sections) of the subordinate population who rejected the legitimacy of the regime and its international “contract.” This repression could even occur with the covert collusion of coercive forces from the dominant state, a factor that Lake’s reliance on state-centric definitions of military domination elides.

A key question thus becomes “Who are the parties to this contract?” Would such a situation be legitimate for the oppressed sectors of the population? Would they have a “duty” to see it as such, and to whom would this duty be owed? One wonders, for example, whether the citizens of much of eastern Europe under Soviet domination would have concurred, something that was far from inconsequential in the politics at the end of the Cold War. The history of some of the less salubrious aspects of U.S. foreign policy over the past century cannot help but raise similar questions. To his credit, Lake briefly raises such issues (citing, for instance, the relationship between the United States and the Trujillo dictatorship in the Dominican Republic) in the book’s conclusion. However, his view that this calls for further research into the role of “intermediaries” as “brokers” (pp. 179–80) in dominant–subordinate relations seems to skirt the question of whether these brokers might also be “enforcers,” while eliding deeper questions concerning the parties to an international contract and the idea of a legitimate contract based only on an exchange of order for authority.

The arguments in Hierarchy in International Relations extend far beyond these issues. But as even this short survey shows, this is a book that successfully pushes the boundaries of IR theory: The directions in which it leads should provide the basis for fertile debate across the field.


— Ian Hurd, Northwestern University

In this long and wide-ranging book, Richard Ned Lebow delivers a valuable contribution to the study of international relations and international history. He takes positions on deep questions of social and political theory, charts a long overview of world history and its intellectual context, and massively expands the conceptual foundations of IR theory. His is a response to the generalizing claims of IR realists, the ahistorical economism of IR rationalism, and preference for cognitive rather than emotional content in constructivism. For all of that, his book does not argue against “science” as a method nor does it avoid generalization, and it strives to explain a large-scale understanding of the nature of human and social life and to derive from it a theory of international relations. It is an excellent book, serving many purposes: It is a model for how one might draw on philosophic texts to illuminate international relations; it gives a comprehensive alternative view of world politics to all of those focused on interstate relations and the anarchy problematique; and it identifies one way to “bring emotions back in” to IR. Along the way, it invests itself in many fights and takes on many antagonists, and is therefore sure to elicit much controversy and many rejoinders.

The starting point of the book is a conceptualization of human affairs that puts at the front of things the emotions (or motives) of “appetite,” “spirit,” “reason,” and “fear.” Emotion is a productive new theme in IR theory, and it is treated very differently by different scholars, including Jonathan Mercer and Andrew A. G. Ross. Lebow suggests that these emotions motivate human action and produce its patterns, complexities, and contradictions. For instance, behind the leadership failures that led to World War I lie
the pursuit of self-esteem and honor (i.e., spirit) of the individual leaders. Similarly, the differences among the international societies of ancient Greece, medieval Europe, and the twentieth century reflect differences concerning how the societies value and prioritize spirit, appetite, and reason (and, consequently, the place of “fear” in the political life of the society). The book runs along tracks defined by these terms: Lebow says that “[r]eason combined with positive affect in the form of affection builds empathy”; “reason divorced from emotional commitments . . . can intensify conflict and prevent the emergence of . . . communities that enable actors to . . . satisfy their spirit” (p. 514); fear “comes to the fore in proportion to reason’s loss of control over spirit and appetite” (p. 113); spirit is the drive for self-esteem, measured according to the prevailing metrics of honors in the society (p. 61). The descriptions and definitions of these motives and emotions are drawn from the writings of ancient Greece, and the book makes an enormous contribution in its long and satisfying discussion of the relevance of these resources for thinking about world politics today.

Having constructed this “framework” with emotions at its center, Lebow turns to extruding it into the shapes and patterns recognizable as international politics. It is this move that presents the book’s greatest challenge. Social orders vary based on which of spirit, reason, or appetite is privileged, or in what combination the three are inscribed in society. There are, therefore, several ideal types of (international) order, according to the author, and each has characteristic features: Where reason dominates spirit and appetite, these latter two are constrained and the result is a kind of reign of “self-restraint,” which, he says, is relatively stable and productive; appetite-based worlds tend toward rapacity and selfishness, and these, he says, include the typical models of liberalism, realism, and Marxism; spirit-based societies center on the pursuit of honor, which is by nature hierarchical and competitive, and these are unstable and tend to collapse inward from spiraling, costly competitions for status within the elite.

The scientific ambitions of the book are worth noting, for they contradict some people’s assumption that IR informed by humanism and history must refuse to play by the rules of “science.” In talking about the range of combinations of the basic emotions, Lebow maintains that “[b]y identifying roughly where societies reside within [the mixture of motives,] we can infer important things about their politics, including the basis and degree of cooperation, the nature of conflict and the frequency of violence or war, and actors’ propensity for risk-taking. With a large number of cases we could determine the distribution of societies across time and cultures to see if certain mixtures of motives were more common and stable than other configurations” (pp. 510–11). Lebow is confident that transhistorical generalizations can make sense, and that there is an underlying sense to be read out of history. The accomplishment of the book is in part that it provides a novel set of generalizations on which to focus, and it suggests that the standard paradigms of IR theory have so far given us but a very narrow slice of a much broader universe of possibilities.

There is much to argue with in the book. Among other issues, why these emotions or motives and not others? What is gained by finding that leaders’ relationship to status and honor were important motivations in launching both world wars of the twentieth century if we assume from the start that the need for honor is a universal human drive? In a conceptualization where human emotions are the key forces, what are these things we call “states”? Do they even exist? But even asking these questions is testament to the success of the book: It provokes a rethinking of international relations along entirely new lines, lines about which we will want to know more. Lebow revives classical thinking for IR theory, provides a model for thinking about change rather than stability as the natural condition of international relations, and sketches three ideal-type worlds of international order that are completely different from the standard IR models. This is a book worth reading, and one whose impact will endure.


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— Samuel Barkin, University of Florida

Just over a decade ago, Gideon Rose coined the term “neoclassical realism” to describe an emerging body of work in the realist tradition that attempted to marry the structural worldview of neorealism with the foreign policy analysis of classical realism. The name stuck, and neoclassical realism has become a distinct and discrete research tradition within the broader rubric of realist theory. While there are many scholars working on specific theories within this tradition, however, there has to date been no clear attempt to systematically define neoclassical realism, to determine its core assumptions, and to review the state of, and breadth of, the tradition. Steven E. Lobell, Norrin M. Ripsman, and Jeffrey Taliaferro set out to do just that in this volume. As such, Neoclassical Realism is a state-of-the-art review of this approach, with chapters by many of the key figures in the tradition. It is thus necessary reading for students both of realism and of foreign policymaking.

Neoclassical realism begins from the neorealist premise that the international system, and anarchy, constrain the foreign policy options of states, and that states that do not respond to the security imperatives of the system are punished by the system. But it also accepts Kenneth Waltz’s dictum that neorealism is not a theory of foreign policy. The key question for neoclassical realists is how we explain foreign policy behavior that diverges from the demands of