

religion and theology from the other side of the aisle, so to say. This wonderful book raises these and many more questions.

—Eduardo Mendieta

*Penn State University, University Park, Pennsylvania, USA*



Paul Kelly: *Conflict, War and Revolution: The Problem of Politics in International Political Thought*. (London: LSE Press, 2022. Pp. xii, 458.)

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The invitation to review Paul Kelly's latest book, *Conflict, War and Revolution*, landed on my desk at the perfect moment. Having recently committed to both teaching a class on war in the history of political thought and coediting a volume on noncanonical just war thinkers, I welcomed the opportunity to read Kelly's account of the role that considerations of violence have played in the constitution of international political theory. I was not to be disappointed. *Conflict, War and Revolution* is a very wise and thoughtfully compiled piece of work. Its greatest achievement—and this is no small feat—is to furnish the reader with compelling reasons for returning with fresh eyes to a selection of some very old, very familiar texts.

The substance of the book is nine chapter-length studies of key historical thinkers, from Thucydides to Carl Schmitt, on the subject of political violence. Each thinker is introduced as a representative of a particular paradigmatic approach to thinking about the relationship between conflict and the activity of politics, construed as an autonomous way of acting in the world. Kelly's analysis of their work is generous and open-textured, rather than reductive. Instead of trying to squeeze his subjects into a Procrustean narrative, he does his best to let them speak in their own voice. To achieve this, he orders his exegetical analyses around a trio of light-touch but disclosive thematic concerns: the relation between violence and politics, sensitivity to temporality and change, and the meaning and significance of history. Threaded through all nine chapters, these thematic concerns provide the book with a sense of unity and cohesiveness that is required in face of the sheer range of source material it tackles. Apart from this, Kelly is happy to permit the ideas canvassed in each chapter to lead us where they may. He is emphatic that the ideas covered in each chapter do not combine to form and should not be assimilated into some overarching narrative, logic, or truth. Rather, he suggests, they should be read as indicative of the diversity of ways our forebears have thought about the touchstone issues of international political life. As such, he

proposes, they furnish us with a working overview of the field of International Political Theory (IPT).

As one would expect from Kelly, the quality of the exegetical analysis is top-notch. The chapters are lengthy, but the easy manner with which they bring to life the ideas of a wide assortment of thinkers—Thucydides, Augustine, Machiavelli, Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, Clausewitz, Lenin and Mao, and Schmitt—is notable. His engagement with these figures strikes the right balance between, so to speak, working for them (i.e., showing how they thought about the world *in their own terms*) and working for us (i.e., showing the significance of their thought *for us*). The discussion of Augustine, to focus by way of example on the thinker I know best in the text, is masterful: erudite yet accessible, it has enough about it to satisfy the novice and specialist alike. Switching attention to the thinkers about whom I knew the least, the chapters on Rousseau and Schmitt are nicely set out and very informative; I am excited to work through them in a graduate classroom.

It is, however, the methodological element of the discussion that really grabs attention. Alongside David Boucher, Kelly has, over the years, had a lot of interesting things to say about the best way to approach the history of political thought. This book provides him with a vehicle to put these ideas into practice. Although respectful of the work done by Quentin Skinner and the contextualists, Kelly parts company from them in certain important respects. Chiefly, he expresses a certain amount of skepticism toward the proposition that a book can be explained by the circumstances of its production. Texts, he argues, are not reducible to their context. At least not wholly so. Kelly's own approach, then, is attentive to historical context, but not deferential to it. Inspired by Paul Ricoeur, he allows for the possibility that there can sometimes be a "surplus meaning in texts beyond authorial intention or the understanding of immediate audiences" (11). This is especially interesting for an IPT audience, for whom contextualism looms so large as to sometimes appear the only game in town.

What of the gaps in this book? They are not difficult to detect. There is not a woman in sight and non-Western thinkers appear in only one chapter of nine; instead, the usual suspects dominate. Is this, then, the book that we need at this moment in time? Just as IPT is finally getting to grips with the need to get out of the business of reproducing the canon of Western political thought, Kelly is here, *Godfather* style, to pull us right back in. He is not oblivious to this issue. In fact, he treats it at some length in the introductory chapter. There is no need to reprise his argument here, except to note that, even as he concedes the limitations of his approach, he also offers a spirited defense of it. "The main questions," he rallies, "are not in the choice of canonical texts but rather in how they have been read" (21). This counter is more defensive than persuasive, more likely to keep the tide at bay than change anyone's mind regarding how representation should be approached in the history of political thought. That said, Kelly's readiness to address these issues head-on is refreshing. Instead of deflecting

from them, he invites the reader to debate them. This goes a long way toward making *Conflict, War and Revolution* a book you can argue with—in the best possible way.

If, then, you are like me, in that you have a class on war in the history of political thought to design, or an edited book on a related topic to curate, this is the book for you. A triumph on its own terms, *Conflict, War and Revolution* is a very smart and engaging book that takes a vast topic and somehow makes it accessible without any dumbing down involved.

—Cian O’Driscoll

*Coral Bell School of Asia Pacific Affairs, Australian National University, Canberra, Australia*



Voula Tsouna: *Plato’s “Charmides”: An Interpretive Commentary*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022. Pp. 320.)

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There is much to commend in Voula Tsouna’s new book, *Plato’s “Charmides”: An Interpretive Commentary*. It is attentive to the dialogue’s historical context and dramatic situation; it is keenly aware of the interpretive controversies in the secondary literature; it illuminates useful connections between the *Charmides* and other Platonic dialogues; it provides in an appendix a complete translation of the *Charmides*. Such features make it a useful addition both for scholars who are working on the dialogue and for those who seek an introduction to scholarship on it.

It is surprising that Plato’s *Charmides* remains an underappreciated dialogue. It is the only dialogue to pursue the nature of a critically important virtue—*sōphrosunē* (translated variously as temperance, moderation, sound-mindedness, and discipline). More than any other dialogue, it explicitly raises the question: What is self-knowledge and why is it good to seek it? Socrates discusses this question with Critias and his young cousin Charmides, two members of the Thirty Tyrants whose violent deeds would be known to anyone in Plato’s audience. Why would Plato choose these figures to dramatize this investigation with Socrates? What attitude should we take towards the conversation between Socrates and these two figures? How do the political careers of Critias and Charmides inform the shape of the investigation and the conclusions readers should draw from it? Two opposing views can be found in the only full-length studies of the last twenty years: Tom Tuozzo’s *Plato’s “Charmides”* (Cambridge University Press, 2011) and David Levine’s *Profound Ignorance* (Lexington Books, 2016).