



Agents, Structures and International Relations: Politics as Ontology (Cambridge Studies in International Relations)

By Colin Wight

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The agent-structure problem is a much discussed issue in the field of international relations. In his comprehensive 2006 analysis of this problem, Colin Wight deconstructs the accounts of structure and agency embedded within differing IR theories and, on the basis of this analysis, explores the implications of ontology - the metaphysical study of existence and reality. Wight argues that there are many gaps in IR theory that can only be understood by focusing on the ontological differences that construct the theoretical landscape. By integrating the treatment of the agent-structure problem in IR theory with that in social theory, Wight makes a positive contribution to the problem as an issue of concern to the wider human sciences. At the most fundamental level politics is concerned with competing visions of how the world is and how it should be, thus politics is ontology.

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Review

"This deeply learned, richly referenced book should become both the Hollis and Smith and the Lakatos and Musgrave of the next generation of serious IR scholars and teachers. ...Colin Wight ... helps heal recurring epistemological and methodological lesions within the disciplinary body of International Relations."

Hayward R. Alker, School of International Relations, University of Southern California and Adjunct Professor, The Watson Institute for International Studies at Brown University

"No one in International Relations is more philosophically aware than Colin Wight. The 'ontological investigations' Colin Wight undertakes in this magnificent book give scientific realism the depth needed to make sense of important issues: levels, emergent structures, causality and constitution, agency and identity, states as persons. Most of all, he sets up the agent-structure problem, not as a problem per se, but as a map for developing theories and choosing methods. Even if he doesn't change your mind, you will have to rethink almost everything." Nicholas Onuf, Professor Emeritus, Florida International University

"Colin Wight's book is a comprehensive tour de force in reviewing and assessing the ontological underpinnings of social and international theory. Importantly, it also explains why a general theory of international relations is not possible. Highly recommendable!" Heikki Patomäki, Department of Political Science, University of Helsinki and Research Director, Network Institute for Global Democratisation

About the Author

Colin Wight is Senior Lecturer in the Department of Politics at the University of Sheffield.

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