

As laid out in their “Introduction” section, fully titled “Introduction—Emerging philosophies of polar law,” Bunikowski and Hemmings both point to the lack of writings that explore the philosophical underpinnings of the legal regimes governing the Arctic and Antarctic. The mere fact that they wish to engage in the Herculean task of explicitly elucidating the philosophy of such a rapidly growing area as polar law is a testament to the scope of this publication, despite its relatively contained length of 186 pages. The putting of pen to paper, so to speak, on this topic, begins with a framing of the issues and perspectives that have always been at the heart of the expert debates regarding the governance regimes of both poles. Such a task sometimes may put a discipline on a wrong track or stifle debate within the community. Fortunately, this publication serves as a delightful appetizer to (purposefully, in my view) only temporarily sate the academic cravings of those who are seeking knowledge of polar legal scholarship.

While these regions have international, domestic and/or Indigenous legal regimes controlling them, I regard as correct the editors’ choice of leaving the analysis of the specific philosophical perspectives underpinning each of these regimes to the various contributors in the four sections of this book. By doing so, not only do the editors avoid the task of having too heavy a hand in a forced narrative or perspective, but they also allow for “Polar Law Philosophy” to be inherently a science of critical thought. Rather than creating a tome of foundational principles in which the poles are viewed, such as the current status quo of predominantly Anglo/Western positivist or Enlightenment-based legal principles, the editors allow each author to expound on critiques, debates and/or forgotten perspectives on this status quo. Thus, this editorial choice gives the benefit of both advancing the philosophical study of polar law by way of schools of thought that may be applied on a global scale, such as Baruchello’s life-value onto-axiology to maximize the common good of the Arctic or Mancilla’s decolonization theory of Antarctica, and allowing new perspectives to take shape that are unique to the region, such as the Sámi Indigenous ontological beliefs regarding their sacred sites or the Chthonic Arctic legal tradition as stated by Husa (via Bunikowski).

By operating a conscientious choice of articles, the editors avoid overwhelming new readers with a high barrier to entry, while still giving seasoned academics something new to ponder and/or pontificate on in later articles. The editors also successfully advance the philosophy of polar law beyond an embryonic stage and into the realm of extensive critical thought

through these careful choices, thus making follow-on contributions desirable insofar as the text reads as a “call to arms” on letting the field grow rather than claiming to be a definitive text on the subject.

The titles of the collection’s four sections, “Fundamental concepts of the philosophies of Polar law,” “Western legal framings,” “Indigenous and non-Western framings,” and “The environment,” help to narrow down and frame conceptually the ambitious scope of the work. The introductory articles, penned by the editors of the publication and with each of them writing on his pole of expertise, give a concise and solid background commentary on the contemporary legal structures of each region, while also priming the reader for critiques that are to come in the later articles. Bunikowski’s review of the Arctic reads as a bit more cerebral, but this is due to the fact that he has a much broader and ‘patchwork’ system of legal pluralism to discuss and make accessible to the reader. He also introduces what is perhaps the largest contributions to the field that this publication has to offer: Indigenous legal thought. As Bunikowski states:

*Paradoxically and idiosyncratically, cosmology(ies), beliefs, art and shamanism matter greatly for philosophy of law in the Arctic. It is interesting that that, usually, philosophy of law in the West or elsewhere is not interested in such issues, but philosophy of law in the Arctic pays attention to them. (38).*

Given that “cosmology and indigenous customary laws in the Arctic are very interconnected,” (Id.) it is no surprise that the strongest articles contribute heavily to this lesser explored philosophical grounding. Heinämäki et al.’s contribution on legal non-recognition of Sámi’s interconnectedness to the land in Finland and Svensson’s “*contra cultural*” piece regarding assimilation stand out as examples of what makes the Arctic a unique region to explore from a legal-philosophical viewpoint. Both articles from “The environment” section, which could easily be placed in the “Indigenous and non-Western framings” section, build on these works by further exploring Russian Indigenous people’s mental, physical, and spiritual struggles with an industrializing Russian Arctic, as well as the major impact Indigenous peoples have in preserving biodiversity and their well-spring of ideas that they can offer to the world at-large.

Although Baruchello’s article comes earlier in the contribution, given that it is indubitably a

“Western framing” of sorts, it makes nonetheless a valiant attempt to reconcile the major problems of this legal pluralism in the Arctic through the legal instruments that are currently enacted thereby, as well as through the underlying philosophical criteria offered by life-value onto-axiology. “Life-value” is a value-maximizing binomial reflecting humanity’s universal vital needs as the foundation for the common good, which finds inspiration primarily in the works by Canadian philosopher John McMurdy, but that can also be threaded through neo-Thomism, the works of St. Thomas Aquinas, and even the ancient musings of Aristotle.

My praise of the Arctic pole’s representation in this work is not meant to detract from the Antarctic contributions; it is merely the reality that the Antarctic remains devoid of many fundamental questions regarding indigeneity and its consequences that renders it far less multi-faceted. Despite this, Mancilla’s claim as to the continued colonization of Antarctica and the detriment of the developing world rings true. Coady et al.’s piece regarding the philosophy of science through the lens of whaling in the Southern Ocean not only provides an amazingly deep insight into the controversial “Whaling in the Antarctic” ICJ case, but also explores the question of “what is science?”—not only in the region but for the world at-large. Its analysis of this question, using the lens of the Antarctic, is the most solution-based article in the book and is a must-read for international law scholars.

The only criticism I have to offer, beyond perhaps some articles’ ordering and labeling, is that the book may have bitten off more than it can chew, though that may well be the point. By leaving its readers wanting more and knowing that the philosophy of polar law is a newly explored field, the target audience will surely want to contribute their own perspectives and thoughts. In all, the book serves as an academic lighthouse off in the distance, calling others to come in from the snow and build upon the solid the foundation put together in this kaleidoscopic buffet of a work.