



Centre for Legal Theory  
Faculty of Law

# “Theorising International Order in the Mirror of Theology”

BY Associate Professor William Bain, National University of Singapore

MONDAY, 9 MARCH 2020

4.00PM TO 6.00PM

LEE SHERIDAN CONFERENCE ROOM

EU TONG SEN BUILDING, NUS LAW (BUKIT TIMAH CAMPUS)

## ABSTRACT

This talk will explore presuppositions of international order that originate in medieval theology. In doing so, it examines rival conceptions of order—immanent and imposed—that emerged out of a medieval dispute about the nature of God and the extent of his power. Particular emphasis will be placed on the transition from medieval to modern and the claim that continuity describes this transition as much as the more familiar discourse of change. The assimilation of medieval theological ideas into modern political and legal thought is illustrated in the context of Martin Luther, Hugo Grotius, and Thomas Hobbes. This provides the basis of an unacknowledged theological inheritance that underpins modern theories of international order. The language of system and society, as well as anarchy, balance of power, contractual international law, and constitutionalism, reflects the intellectual commitments of a particular tradition of medieval theology. This theological inheritance leads to a significant tension in contemporary international thought. An international order grounded in nothing more than human decision is precariously exposed to the whims of capricious power.

## ABOUT THE SPEAKER



William Bain's research and teaching interests focus on international relations theory, international political theory, and the history of international thought. He recently completed a research monograph, *Political Theology of International Order*, which will be published by Oxford University Press in April 2020. His earlier work explores the political theory of empire as it relates to the idea of trusteeship and its implications for contemporary international administration and statebuilding. The principal statement of this work appears in the research monograph, *Between Anarchy and Society: Trusteeship and the Obligations of Power* (OUP 2003). He is editor of and contributor to *Medieval Foundations of International Relations* (Routledge 2017) and *The Empire of Security and the Safety of the People* (Routledge 2006). He is also the author of

several articles and chapters on IR theory, particularly the English School approach, theories of security and the history of international thought. He is co-chief editor of *International Relations*. Prior to joining NUS, he held appointments at Aberystwyth University and University of Glasgow, and visiting positions at the University of Queensland, University of Cardiff, Université Libre de Bruxelles, and Masaryk University.

## Participation is by Invitation Only

Registration commences at 3.45pm. Light refreshments will be served.

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