Jens Steffek. ***International Organization as Technocratic Utopia.*** Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021. Pp. 256. £75. ISBN 978-0-19-284557-3.

Among the reasons why interdisciplinary cooperation between international lawyers and international relations (IR) scholars tends to be rather fruitless, one suspects, is the circumstance that they rarely speak the same language, rarely use the same concepts in the same manner and often start from radically different premises. As the title of Jens Steffek's excellent book suggests, the focus for IR scholars looking to address international organizations (plural) rests firmly on some idea of international organization (singular): the single letter 's' marks a different mindset altogether. The focus on the singular has been – and is – a common staple of IR scholarship regardless of whether works were published in the 1920s,[1] 1950s[2] or 2010s.[3] There are exceptions,[4] to be sure, but the practice is remarkably robust. IR scholars tend to think of the world of international organizations as a matter of international organization, somehow conceiving international organizations as stemming from the same impulse and being connected to each other, not unlike the way in which the International Court of Justice tried (in vain) to link the United Nations (UN) to the specialized agencies in 1996 by introducing a principle of 'speciality', operating under the overall general authority of the UN.[5] The underlying impulse suggests something of a grand master plan underpinning the way in which the world is organized, trying to find regularity because the alternative (fragmented anarchy) may be too painful to bear. The choice on offer, so IR scholarship (whether realist or institutionalist) suggests, is a binary one: either we succumb to a Hobbesian anarchy where life is nasty, brutish and short or somehow there is a system available in which everything hangs together after all.

International lawyers, by contrast, tend to think of international organizations as more or less self-contained entities, establishing their own legal order,[6] with each and every one of them being, in essence, a 'thing between the parties' (*res inter alios acta*). It would be mildly alienating to find an international lawyer speaking of a broad idea of international organization (singular) in the IR sense, as a way of marking something more or less unified. Professional legal training trains scholars and observers into thinking in fragmented terms. If IR scholars seem to presuppose (however unwittingly) a grander scheme, organization top down, the international lawyer works

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[1]   P. Potter, *An Introduction to the Study of International Organization* (1922).

[2]   I. Claude, *Swords into Plowshares: The Problems and Progress of International Organization* (2nd edn, 1959).

[3]   L. Hooghe, T. Lenz and G. Marks, *A Theory of International Organization* (2019).

[4]   H.K. Jacobson, *Networks of Interdependence: International Organizations and the Global Political System* (2nd edn, 1984); M. Barnett and M. Finnemore, *Rules for the World: International Organizations in Global Politics* (2004). Note that the exceptions within international relations (IR) are typically scholars who are considered as constructivists, less burdened as these are by epistemic assumptions about the relevance of states.

[5]   Klabbers, 'Global Governance at the ICJ: Re-reading the WHA Opinion', 13 *Max Planck Yearbook of United Nations Law* (2009) 1.

[6]   L. Gasbarri, *The Concept of International Organization in International Law* (2021). Gasbarri, to be sure, looks at the legal concept *in abstracto*; hence, the singular 'organization'. Others had long ago already suggested looking for 'unity within diversity', according to the telling subtitle of H.G. Schermers and N.M. Blokker, *International Institutional Law* (6th edn, 2018).

bottom up, moving from individual organizations to, perhaps, some more general insights. This owes much to the circumstance that lawyers typically engage in practical reasoning (explaining individual events in their specific contexts), where social scientists usually aspire to 'scientific reasoning' (finding generalities, finding common patterns). And it helps explain why the comparative method is so deeply engrained in legal thought about international organizations and has been so popular ever since something of an academic discourse about international organizations started to emerge.[7]

While international organizations have been around for a century and a half, to the extent that the idea of international organizations has been studied as a political philosophy, it has typically focused on the singular 'organization'. Jacob ter Meulen's monumental work of a century ago oozes this mindset,[8] as does the more accessible recent study by Mark Mazower.[9] Somehow, if separate international organizations are considered, they are considered as elements of something bigger, as vehicles for 'governing the world'. The welcome contribution now made by Steffek, professor of transnational governance in Darmstadt and IR scholar by vocation with more or less constructivist sensibilities, aims to split the difference. The book's title still suggests an IR approach to the singular international organization, but the text itself makes clear that, mostly, the book concerns international organizations, the entities set up by states to manage common issues.

Steffek's work is perhaps best seen as an exercise in intellectual history or, perhaps better yet, an exercise in the history of political ideas. He does not go into the work of any particular international organization and pays little attention to *praxis* in the field, but he is the first (to my knowledge) to explore how people have been thinking about international organizations as vehicles of expert governance, a tradition he refers to as 'technocratic internationalism'. This philosophy of technocratic internationalism promises to take the politics out of politics: it promises to replace the violence of politics with the orderliness of administration. Much of the inspiration, or legitimation perhaps,[10] comes from Max Weber, the argument being that the bureaucratization of international politics through international organizations fits a more general preoccupation with technocratic governance.[11]

Steffek is far too sophisticated a scholar to suggest that international technocracy forms a coherent body of thought, going through a natural progression of episodes and ending up with the sort of governance by indicators and goals currently in vogue. Still, the book is structured around a rough periodization, with Steffek carefully

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7   P. Reinsch, *Public International Unions, Their Work and Organization: A Study in International Administrative Law* (1911).
8   J. ter Meulen, *Der Gedanke der internationalen Organisation in seiner Entwicklung*, 2 vols (1917, 1929).
9   M. Mazower, *Governing the World* (2012).
10   Some of the organizations known for technocracy preceded Max Weber, after all, and Steffek himself locates the start of the pioneering phase well before Weber's time.
11   M. Weber, *Economy and Society*, 2 vols (1968, transl. Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich).

suggesting that the history of international technocracy can be captured in four phases, to date. First, starting with the Congress of Vienna and lasting until World War I, he identifies a pioneering phase. This was followed, in the interbellum, by a utopian phase. After World War II, technocracy hogged the limelight and reached its high point, while from the 1970s onwards, it started to disintegrate, although some elements remain. In illustrating the succession of positions, he discusses the work of a large number of thinkers, scholars and (sometimes) practitioners, fleshing out both their positions and the development of thinking about technocratic internationalism with subtlety and sophistication.

From his own vantage point, this periodization is plausible enough, but, like all attempts at periodization, it is vulnerable to alternative readings. Some might suggest that Steffek's utopian period actually largely morphed into the period of high popularity following World War II, and some might hold that, far from having diminished, technocratic governance has never been more popular than in the early 21st century in political practice. Many international organizations produce handbooks and manuals on how best to do things within their policy domains; many organizations measure member state performance by using indicators, benchmarking and advocating 'best practices' – all suggestive, however vaguely perhaps, of technocracy in one form or another.[12] One does not have to be a Foucauldian (although it probably helps) to realize that all this entails the exercise of power and thus cannot be considered technocracy in pure form (a-political, as early writers about international organizations would have it), but, then again, technocracy in pure form is difficult to imagine at any rate. Steffek would be the first to agree that technocratic governance marks power – and, thus, politics – in disguise. Negotiating a treaty is overt politics; producing a manual is much more covert but may be just as effective, if not more.

International Organization as Technocratic Utopia does not deal with the *praxis* of governance by international organizations. The book stays firmly within the literature, providing an insightful overview of the diversity of authors wedded to intelligent analysis of their works, but it stops short of moving into the real world – however conceptualized. It does not look at what international organizations do, or could be doing, or should be doing but, instead, charts the trajectory of writings about international organization and of the advocacy of technocracy. This makes the book sometimes a mildly meandering read: authors pass the scene, to be replaced by others and yet others, with some (David Mitrany, Ernst Haas) returning elsewhere once their work has further developed. The periodization helps to structure the book, but blissfully does not provide a straitjacket, coming closer to a seatbelt perhaps: offering something to hold things into place, but with sufficient flexibility to allow for movement.

Steffek's refusal to see technocracy as a coherent body of thought also allows him to discuss various different strands in some detail. Thus, the chapter on pioneers visits many of the thinkers of the late 19th century, many of whom were lawyers by

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[12]   A useful recent contribution is A. Littoz-Monnet (ed.), *The Politics of Expertise in International Organizations: How International Bureaucracies Produce and Mobilize Knowledge* (2017).

training and wrote about the legal aspects of international organizations. This should not come as a surprise: IR as an independent discipline hardly existed at the time, so familiar names such as Gustave Moynier, Piotr Kazansky and especially Paul Reinsch are discussed. In fact, Reinsch was not only a pioneer of international organizations law but also of IR, having produced one of the very first systematic textbooks in 1900.[13] The book then changes register, with the utopian strand being discussed mainly around the work of Roumanian-born social scientist Mitrany, persuasively pictured by Steffek as a catalyzing figure rather than a founding father. But other names too are resurrected, including Arthur Salter, Pitman Potter and a certain Jean Monnet who, after all, earned some of his spurs while being in office at the League of Nations. Leonard Woolf (Virginia's husband) receives a page or two for his 1916 book *International Government*, but, in particular, Mitrany's work is dissected, with Steffek plausibly noting a well-nigh inescapable connection between Mitrany's functionalism (related to, but distinct from, the functionalism dominating legal thought about international organizations[14]) and technocratic governance.

Steffek makes the broader point though that technocracy is potentially compatible with different political projects in his fourth chapter, discussing the thought of Giuseppe de Michelis, closely allied to Italian fascism, and the French socialist (later turned Nazi sympathizer) Francis Delaisi. Both are relatively obscure figures in the history of technocratic thought (let alone political thought generally), but Steffek makes a plausible case that their thoughts, on both ends of the regular political spectrum, are quite compatible with technocracy. By the same token, and at least as intriguingly, Steffek observes that many early IR realists, Hans Morgenthau and E.H. Carr among them, were able to reconcile realism with technocracy in their minds. Morgenthau bought wholesale into the Kantian peace thesis: functional integration through technocracy would over time come to supplant national loyalties. Carr, in turn, made much of the utility of planned economies – a manifestation of technocracy *par excellence*.

Carr was not alone in this: the increasing emphasis on welfare after World War II, when 'planning' and 'collective management' were temporarily not seen as four-letter words, played in the hands of technocratic thought. Accordingly, Steffek pays attention to the work(s) not only of practitioner academics such as Alva and Gunnar Myrdal (involved with the UN and the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization and Nobel laureates both of them) but also Clarence Wilfred Jenks (briefly the International Labour Organization's director-general, well-known to international lawyers as the author of many works and often regarded as a leading theorist of international organizations law[15]) and Walter Hallstein, the first president of the European Commission of what was then the European Economic Community.

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[13]   On Reinsch, see further Klabbers, 'The Emergence of Functionalism in International Institutional Law: Colonial Inspirations', 25 *European Journal of International Law* (*EJIL*) (2014) 645.

[14]   Klabbers, 'The EJIL Foreword: The Transformation of International Organizations Law', 26 *EJIL* (2015) 9.

[15]   Sinclair, 'C. Wilfred Jenks and the Futures of International Organizations Law', 31 *EJIL* (2020) 525.

By the 1970s, however, the climate had changed. Technocracy had come to be questioned for its blind spots, including its problematic relationship with democracy. The likes of Michel Foucault and Jürgen Habermas, in their different ways, formulated critiques of rational technocracy, which led many to argue for a reform of international organizations, perhaps most of all an influential observer such as Tom Weiss, who started his career with an important study of the international bureaucracy[16] and has never ceased to advocate for both the relevance of international organizations and the need to improve them.[17]

Steffek's main conclusion is that the rise and fall of technocratic governance need to be understood as resulting from the tension between a desire for self-government and expert government. This should not come as a surprise – most international organizations lawyers will intuitively have understood much the same, and Steffek's conclusion has more than a passing resemblance to traditional legal dichotomies, such as public versus private, domestic versus international or sovereignty versus world community. The great merit of Steffek's work resides not so much in his conclusion but, rather, in the preceding insightful discussions (and sometimes excavations) of thinkers about both international organization and international organizations. One may quibble with the periodization and hope for a further analysis of organizational practices as well, but it is usually the fate of pioneering works that they give rise to further ideas, qualifications and inspirations, and, by that yardstick, *International Organization as Technocratic Utopia* measures as an unqualified success. This is compulsory reading for anyone interested in international organizations (plural) as well as international organization (singular).

Jan Klabbers

University of Helsinki, Finland
Email: *jan.klabbers@helsinki.fi*

Gavin Sullivan. ***The Law of the List: UN Counterterrorism Sanctions and the Politics of Global Security Law***. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020. Pp. 371. £99. ISBN: 9781108491921 (hardback). £25. ISBN: 9781108741323 (paperback).

With *The Law of the List*, Gavin Sullivan delivers a thought-provoking account of the politics of global security law, focusing on the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) sanctions regime that was originally established by Security Council Resolution 1267 – that is, 'the List'. Drawing on his background as a human rights lawyer involved in the

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16 T. Weiss, *International Bureaucracy: An Analysis of the Operation of Functional and Global International Secretariats* (1975).

17 Exemplary is T. Weiss, *What's Wrong with the United Nations and How to Fix It* (2009). Weiss is also the co-founder and co-editor of the Global Institutions book series for Routledge, with 155 titles having been published to date.