



Forbidden Fruit: Counterfactuals and International Relations

By Richard Ned Lebow

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Could World War I have been averted if Franz Ferdinand and his wife hadn't been murdered by Serbian nationalists in 1914? What if Ronald Reagan had been killed by Hinckley's bullet? Would the Cold War have ended as it did? In *Forbidden Fruit*, Richard Ned Lebow develops protocols for conducting robust counterfactual thought experiments and uses them to probe the causes and contingency of transformative international developments like World War I and the end of the Cold War. He uses experiments, surveys, and a short story to explore why policymakers, historians, and international relations scholars are so resistant to the contingency and indeterminism inherent in open-ended, nonlinear systems. Most controversially, Lebow argues that the difference between counterfactual and so-called factual arguments is misleading, as both can be evidence-rich and logically persuasive. A must-read for social scientists, *Forbidden Fruit* also examines the binary between fact and fiction and the use of counterfactuals in fictional works like Philip Roth's *The Plot Against America* to understand complex causation and its implications for who we are and what we think makes the social world work.

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Editorial Review

Review

"If nothing else, *Forbidden Fruit* shows how, through counterfactual, alternative thinking, a resounding acknowledgement of the arts can be achieved."--**David Marx, *David Marx Reviews***

"I have benefited enormously from Ned Lebow's learning, imagination and intellectual effort, and am sure that many readers will feel the same way towards this judicious, yet daring, scholarly contribution to the study of history and international relations."--**Hidemi Suganami, *International Affairs***

From the Back Cover

"Forbidden Fruit is the kind of border-busting book that takes scholars to places they would otherwise never find, let alone inhabit. Some of those places are well outside our comfort zones, so be prepared to be infuriated. Then get over it. *Forbidden Fruit* will help you become more creative, self-aware, and careful, and in doing so it will make you a better social scientist."--**Colin Elman, Maxwell School of Syracuse University**

"Forbidden Fruit provides a fascinating study of the use and misuse of counterfactual analysis. Lebow demonstrates the ubiquity of counterfactual assumptions and the importance of making them carefully. He outlines clear criteria for constructing and assessing counterfactuals, and offers practical suggestions for balancing conflicting cognitive biases to improve assessments of historical pasts and probable futures. This book deserves the attention of anyone who predicts, explains, thinks, or invests."--**Andrew Bennett, Georgetown University**

"Lebow uses counterfactual reasoning to probe the limits of international relations theory and to push us to think more carefully about how we understand causation. He seeks to convince a field still dominated by systemic and structural theorists that more attention needs to be paid to contingency, multiple causal factors, and the interaction and confluence of factors. Lebow illustrates how overconfident and indeterminate most international relations theory actually is."--**Richard Herrmann, Ohio State University**

"Forbidden Fruit is a wonderful book. Lebow is a prominent social scientist, exceedingly well versed in methodological issues and deeply immersed in social psychology. He does an excellent job of demonstrating that counterfactual reasoning is indispensable to theory-driven social science and the writing of good history. Lebow is a gifted storyteller. His conclusions feel like they are as inevitable as they are surprising."--**Nicholas Onuf, professor emeritus, Florida International University**

About the Author

Richard Ned Lebow is the James O. Freedman Presidential Professor of Government at Dartmouth College and the Centennial Professor of International Relations at the London School of Economics and Political Science. His many books include "A Cultural Theory of International Relations" and "We All Lost the Cold War" (Princeton).

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