

Colin S. Gray. *Perspectives on Strategy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013. ISBN: 978-01-99-67427. Pp. 229. Hardcover. £ 63.00/ Paperback. £25.00.

Colin Gray's latest work, *Perspectives on Strategy*, written as a stand-alone companion to his earlier work, *The Strategy Bridge*, provides the reader with five perspectives from which to view strategy. Opening with a conceptual examination, this work proceeds to cover, in turn, ethics, culture, geography, and technology. These five viewpoints are, for Gray, not attempts at reducing strategy to five categories; rather, they are five select perspectives through which one can begin to understand Gray's 'whole house of strategy'. (p. 191)

Gray invites the reader to consider strategy as a complex human activity. Rejecting reductionist notions of simplifying strategy into neat compartments such as 'air strategy', 'naval strategy', and so on, Gray rightly asks the reader to consider strategy holistically, using five key perspectives as tools to achieve this. These perspectives make up the spine of the book, with each covered in turn, starting with the conceptual perspective before proceeding through ethics, culture, geography and technology. Yet, the author stresses that these perspectives are co-dependent approaches to the study of strategy. Indeed, for Gray 'readers are not invited to rank-order their preferences as if there could be conceptual, ethical, cultural, geographical, or technological approaches to strategy, considered as alternatives.' (p. 6) Gray's Venn diagram model of the study of strategy is stressed heavily throughout the book and is illustrated in the conclusion. (p. 193)

If this sounds complex it's because it is. Gray's book, due to the scale and scope of the topic, is not an easy read. Despite the clarity of the writing and the useful illustrative tables and diagrams, one must devote a significant amount of time to truly understand his work. It soon becomes clear, however that this is a work of enormous value, rewarding its reader with true insight from each of the perspectives and, crucially, not only into strategy as a subject, but into the landscape of the academia of strategic studies.

The author's purpose in *Perspectives* is not to pass judgement on policy, or advocate for a particular course of strategic action. Rather, Gray intends to educate, to provide readers with key platforms from which to glimpse strategy as a holistic concept. This educational purpose contributes somewhat to this book's density. Yet, Gray's work is complex for a very good reason – just as Gray rejects the reductionist arguments that over-simplify strategic studies into various 'types', *Perspectives* does not shy away from tackling complex issues with complex arguments.

A far-reaching text, Gray ranges between his five chosen perspectives with academic verve, bringing deep understanding to every one of his chapters. The chapter on ethics is particularly impressive – one finds oneself learning just as much about philosophy as one does about strategy (this is, certainly, part of Gray's holistic approach). Similarly, the author's discussion of technology is sharp and full of critique for those seeking a technical fix to war. Gray cleverly shows that, while technology is both ubiquitous and transformative in history, it does not move it forward alone. (p. 174) For Gray, technology is an enabling factor, not necessarily a decisive one.

Perspectives on Strategy covers a great deal of theoretical ground. Each of his five topic areas is hotly contested, with work ongoing to set out academic and intellectual norms. Yet, despite this acting as a magnifier to the difficult challenge that this book poses, readers will find themselves educated in a debate that, while ongoing and deeply complex, is now all the more engaging thanks to Colin Gray.

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