

Annual Nicolai Rubinstein Lecture in the History of  
Political Thought and Intellectual History 2015

# “Jus gentium — the power of a middle concept”

31 March, 6.30pm,  
ArtsTwo Lecture Theatre,  
ArtsTwo Building

by Professor Martti Koskenniemi (Helsinki)  
Chaired by Professor Quentin Skinner

The lecture will address the role of the locution “jus gentium” in early modern legal discourse. Situated between unchanging natural law and the (positive) law of the city, jus gentium operated between the 12th and 18th century above all to justify two types of practices: those that may be understood as giving expression to some contingent but universal need or pursuit, and those that have to do with the changing relations between political communities. It has, for example, been used to encompass the laws regulating inter-sovereign relations in war and peace, colonial expansion, commercial relations, and a plethora of practices that appear to exist everywhere (such as contracting and marriage). The talk will also address the relationship between the analysis of early modern political concepts (such as jus gentium) in the history of political thought and in histories of law and legal institutions. Particular attention will be directed to what could be called the structural and strategic demands of legal argument

Professor Martti Koskenniemi is Academy Professor and Director of the Erik Castrén Institute of International Law and Human Rights at the University of Helsinki, a Professorial Fellow at Melbourne Law School, and Centennial Professor at the London School of Economics and Political Science. He has held visiting professorships at New York University, the University of Cambridge, the University of Utrecht, Columbia University, the University of São Paulo, the University of Toronto, and the Universities of Paris I, II, X and XVI. He was a member of the Finnish diplomatic service from 1978 to 1994 and of the International Law Commission (UN) from 2002 to 2006. His main publications include *From Apology to Utopia: The Structure of International Legal Argument* (1989), *The Gentle Civilizer of Nations: The Rise and Fall of International Law 1870-1960* (2001), *The Politics of International Law* (2011), and *The Cambridge Companion to International Law* (2012, co-edited with Professor James Crawford). He is a graduate of the universities of Turku and Oxford, and holds the degree of Doctorate of Laws honoris causa from the Universities of Uppsala and Frankfurt. He is a Fellow of the British Academy. He is presently working on a history of international legal thought from the late middle ages to the nineteenth century.

## Further information

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