

# Symposium Introduction: The Concrete Utopia of Human Rights

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This week, Völkerrechtsblog hosts a symposium on Wolfgang Kaleck's newly published [book](#) *Die konkrete Utopie der Menschenrechte*. The book discusses the history and present of the legal struggle for human rights. It puts emphasis on the current challenges, but also celebrates the successes of human rights advocacy. Based on his broad practical experience as a director of the European Center for Constitutional and Human Rights ([ECCHR](#)), Kaleck with his book aims to reach not only a professional audience, but also a broader public, raising the awareness for the importance of human rights work.

We are interested in exploring the issues of the book in a conversation which spans academic and public perspectives, and which bridges the German and the English discourse. Human rights in the past decades have been a focal point of hope as well as critique. Human rights law is key to many social struggles of the present, yet the triumph of human rights has also been criticized as creating new blind spots and insufficiently tackling global economic inequality. Besides that, the relationship of human rights as a legal and as a political vocabulary is object of continuous reflections. Human rights courts are facing challenges in how their rulings are respected. At the same time, strategic litigation regularly combines the political fight for human rights with legal struggles, supporting cases that would otherwise not have been brought, and understanding the legal proceedings as part of a wider public process. Those are the various questions underlying Wolfgang Kaleck's book and subject of the present contributions.

The symposium engages with Kaleck's book from different perspectives: It starts with a post by [Christian Berger](#) and [Magdalena Baran-Szo#tys](#) (Vienna), who read Kaleck's book in light of feminist critiques of human rights. In the next post, [Janne Mende](#) (Heidelberg) focuses on various forms of complexity regarding human rights and analyses how the book illustrates and explains the multifaceted reality of human rights work. In a further contribution, [Maurice Stierl](#) (Warwick) addresses the borders of human rights by looking at the ambivalences of the law, with a particular focus on migration and human rights. [Raphael Oidtmann](#) in his post then discusses the role of international criminal law for human rights protection. A post by [Wolfgang Kaleck](#) will conclude the symposium, responding to the contributions and the points they raise.

As always, you are welcome to comment with your own thoughts and additional ideas – we would love to hear from you. Völkerrechtsblog wishes you an interesting reading!

