

Theory Talks

Presents

THEORY TALK #1

MICHAEL W. DOYLE ON MARKETS AND INSTITUTIONS

Theory Talks

is an interactive forum for discussion on actual International Relations-related topics for both students and specialists. Theory Talks frequently invites cutting-edge specialists in the field to open a debate, discuss current issues or elucidate a theory.

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Theory Talks opens with an interview with leading IR scholar Michael W. Doyle, who has published on issues varying from liberal peace to empires to the foundations for modern day IR theory and is known for its support of liberal democracy and international institutions. Michael Doyle is the Harold Brown Professor of International and Public Affairs, of Law and of Political Science at the Columbia University. Amongst others, Doyle was Assistant secretary-general and special adviser to United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan between 2001-2003.

What is, according to you, the biggest challenge in current IR?

I currently focus on the next big issues in International Relations: the legitimate use of force – be it preemptive or preventive – and the legitimacy of global governance of economic, political and social interactions between international actors.

What is your response to this challenge?

Well, to focus on the second issue, I very much think that the legitimacy of international institutions governing social and economic processes should be both broadened and deepened – it is not only desirable but necessary: markets, for example, do not work without institutions. Institutions help to surpass collective action problems of all kinds. But the challenge is to find the right scope these institutions, that is, to find a term that is acceptable to all.

How did you arrive at where you currently are in IR?

I have always tried to avoid the ivory tower that the academic world can represent, by also engaging in public policy. I have always done both, and will continue doing so. I enjoy the university very much, and public work as well, but I wouldn't like to give up either one of both.

What would it take for a student to become a specialist in IR?

If you leave aside that everything depends on the student, it's actually very simple: if you want to be an academic, you'll simply have to do a PhD and work hard; if you want to be involved in theory and practice, though, you should use that time to be involved in real-world issues as well. In one sense, being a scholar offers possibilities, since you can take a leave, during which you can dedicate yourself to other occupations.

The international system, as you have argued, has recently seen a proliferation of international law and human rights discourse but compliance seems to be subordinate to actor's interests. UN peacekeeping missions, for example, generally do not live up to expectations. How do we close the 'compliance gap' between objectives and action?

There are basically two options: you can either reduce commitments or develop institutions. The first option would imply that existing institutions 'curb their enthusiasm', by lessening our ambitions for multilateral projects like the United Nations, we would be able to make states comply with its exigencies. But then again, that would imply a tacit return to a Hobbes-like international system, and that doesn't seem very desirable to me. Instead, I think we should further develop institutions like the United Nations, adapt them to our fast-changing world so that cooperation becomes more streamlined. But developing institutions requires investment, and that is an acute policy issue in the case of the United Nations. Don't get me wrong – the UN already invests a lot in security and engages in a great deal of International Peacekeeping missions, but the problem is that investments are being dedicated to hard security issues and not to the peacekeeping. The US, having a big role in the UN, is too preoccupied with its own agenda; it invests in hard power, in soldiers, while peacekeeping requires a completely distinct training. Europe is better in managing its soft power, the multilateral aspect, but is not investing enough. The attractiveness access to its big markets represents, for example, has greatly influenced positive developments in the case of the Balkans, but in order to be effective, it should invest in a little more hard power at the service of peacekeeping.

You're well known for formulating what is known as 'Doyle's law', or the prediction based on Kant's Perpetual Peace, that liberal states do not go to war with each other. Since liberalism is increasingly becoming rule rather than exception, could you say anything about non-violent conflicting relationships?

Basically, I believe that any new state that embraces liberalism would be a great improvement for the international system. Liberal peace is sustainable. Just imagine countries like China and Russia taking the step to liberal democracy! That would influence the whole world in a very positive way. Competition is a very powerful dynamics, and as long as it precludes violent conflict, I would that a world with states competing over markets and technologies is the best possible outlook for the near future. And institutions, again, are responsible for streamlining these interactions.

If, like you say, China and Russia would embrace liberalism, they would also consume more. How should we respond to the increasing scarcity of natural resources like for example oil?

In a world that is pushing toward liberalism, we should assume that markets solve questions like petrol scarcity: it has its fascinating way of finding its way out. If demand increases for combustibles, technological innovation will hopefully discover alternatives. In that sense, I strongly believe that the market solves this kind of issues with the proverbial 'invisible hand' of Adam Smith.

Related items:

- [Faculty Profile of Michael W. Doyle](#)
- Read the first chapter from Doyle & Sambanis [*Making War and Building Peace: United Nations Peace Operations*](#) (Princeton University Press, 2006)