



Thought Leader: Michael Doyle

Thought Leaders Forum

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Transcript

As part of the Carnegie Council Centennial Thought Leaders Forum, Carnegie Council's Devin Stewart spoke with Michael W. Doyle, Harold Brown Professor of U.S. Foreign and Security Policy at Columbia University.

DEVIN STEWART: What is morally distinct about the age that we live in today? How would you define the time we live in?

MICHAEL DOYLE: I think what's truly morally distinct about it is that we have come to a stronger sense than ever before of a common humanity. There's a story told by many people in my field that comes from [Adam Smith](#), *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, which he published in 1759. You may have heard this story before. It's an account of what a person would feel like if he heard that on the next morning he would have his finger cut off. Smith speculates that he would be terrified and he wouldn't get a wink of sleep. But if he was told that, days before, hundreds of thousands of people had died in far remotest China, he wouldn't lose a wink of sleep, according to Smith. But there was one proviso to that. He says "unless he could see them."

What has changed in the modern world, from 1759 until today, is that we can now see our fellow members of the common human moral universe and we cannot be so blind. We can see the suffering. That's a big change that has taken place in the past couple of centuries.

DEVIN STEWART: Do you think that being able to see people and their experiences—is there a downside to it as well? For example, some people believe that technology and globalization are linking people in a more abstract way, and therefore they are less likely to do the right thing.

MICHAEL DOYLE: I tend to think that the links that are closer to our being able to see fellow human faces, which is why TV is an important part of the globalization of this moral space, are something that does make a difference. Words can impassion, and so can voice, but I think being able to see our fellow human beings makes a difference. We have iconic images of that, some horribly grim, maybe even exploitative. There's that horrendous photo of an infant with a vulture in East Africa that we all recall. It was nonetheless moving. We're worried about what the circumstances are, what in the world the photographer was doing. But we are still moved by it.

I think it's seeing our fellow human beings' faces that makes the difference. And I think this is hardwired, by the way. I'm elaborating a little bit on your question. I think that we have hardwired a sense of human sympathy and, to a certain degree, a sense of justice, a Golden Rule. Psychologists have found this even in infants before they could speak, that they feel the sense of justice and sympathy.

That's the good news. The bad news is that we also seem to have hardwired in us a degree of tribalism. That is, we're born with a sense of justice and fellow feeling, and we're also born with a sense of tribalism. Now, the good news in that last piece of bad news is that it doesn't appear to be

racial. This same study that I'm thinking about showed infants people with different skin color. It didn't make a bit of difference to them.

What did make a difference, apparently, was how the person sounded. This was a study, I think, done in Boston. As long as the infant was hearing, "Ah'll pahk the cah in the garage," they were very comfortable. As soon as they heard, "fuggedaboutit," or "ya'll," they felt very separate and distinct and concerned, afraid—maybe a little separated.

So we have a common moral sentiment that goes to all human beings, but we're tribally divided. That is a challenge for any conception of morality, more at the global than at the local scale.

DEVIN STEWART: Taking that idea, are you optimistic? Do you see things as getting worse or getting better today?

MICHAEL DOYLE: I'm an optimist. I think we can constrain the tribalism with good institutions that punish and reward people for appropriate behavior, and we can socialize to a certain extent, persuade them into expanding their sense of common identity, expanding on the word "we."

So I think we can change, and we have some powerful forces that are changing us today in the world—"today" now being the 20th and 21st centuries.

Interdependence is one of them. We are more closely tied together by economies, by climate, by transportation, and therefore by good things like culture and bad things like disease; and, at the same time, one of the significant institutional social accomplishments at the world scale in the past 70 years is the elaboration of the idea of human rights, which goes way, way back in human history and can be found in just about every religion—not the word "rights," but the notion of a human dignity. We have expanded it and defined it in the past 70 years to a conception that is universal, that includes all human beings.

We all know there is still plenty of hypocrisy around and still a good deal of tribalism. But we know that we are connected together more through interdependence and we have a baseline understanding of the goal of recognizing the common humanity of all human beings. Those are two of the things that make me somewhat optimistic.

DEVIN STEWART: Part of our project here is to ask scholars and thinkers to think about this notion of a global ethic that other philosophers have grappled with and dealt with in the past. What does a global ethic mean to you, if anything? Does it resonate with you? Is it applicable to today's world?

MICHAEL DOYLE: It does resonate with me. It's based right upon my previous observation. That is, the global ethic is the recognition both of our interdependence and our common humanity.

The ethic calls for us to attempt to realize those two understandings in more practical ways. It has to do with things like avoiding unnecessary violence, under circumstances under which we can, providing solidaristic assistance—for example, to the poor, or those who have been struck by disasters of one sort or another. It calls upon us to try to design institutions that reflect a common humanity in their basic principles.

These are all huge challenges. We—that is, we on the globe—disagree on ways to do that. But I think those are three ground principles that flow from our understanding of our common humanity and that we are tied together in a common fate.

DEVIN STEWART: What do you see as the biggest ethical challenge facing the planet? What concerns you most?

MICHAEL DOYLE: I think that's a very difficult question.

I think the biggest challenge we face today is that there's more than one challenge. Each of them makes unadulterated claims upon our activity, commitment, resources, attention. If there were just one, we would live in an easier world. But we don't.

We have claims that come at us, some long-term structural, some immediate and loud, that range from the problem of extreme poverty—that is, that 1.2 or so billion of our fellow human beings live on the rough equivalent of a dollar or so a day, which is a piece of currency. But the reality of that is that it means that they are not getting enough to eat to be healthy, not getting enough to eat to work up to their capacity, not getting enough to eat to learn and change. They lack shelter; they lack adequate protection from diseases and often, in some cases, violence.

So that's one problem, extreme poverty, which is a huge one.

But at the same time, we face—let's call them emergencies of inflicted violence, such as we witnessed recently in [Libya](#), are seeing today in the [eastern Congo](#) and in [Syria](#). Those, too, call out for our attention. We can't respond to those by saying, "Well, we're working on poverty right now." We don't have, let's call it the luxury, of stovepiping priorities. We have to work upon them all. That's, I think, the moral challenge that we face today, in today's world.

DEVIN STEWART: Basically, you're saying that all the problems are at the fore and it's going to be a challenge to prioritize. If we fail to address the problems, what can we expect?

MICHAEL DOYLE: If we fail, it depends on who the "we" is, sadly. That is, for North Americans, for Europeans, for Japanese, we face some challenges. There's long-term climate change, which will affect us all. We're right here in New York and we only have to remember just a few weeks ago what [happened](#) to our fellow citizens. You can't blame that directly on climate change, but climate change makes things like that more likely.

So we are not out of this world, but it's vastly different for us in those three worlds that I described of Western Europe, North America, and Japan, compared to people in Bangladesh or in Central Africa or in parts of India or—we could go around the world and find people that are vastly more vulnerable. They will suffer first if we fail to address these kinds of challenges.

We, too, as I mentioned, are still in the same boat. But what we will feel somewhere along the way, if we experience a long pattern of failure, will be an increasing overload on our moral consciousnesses. The question, then, is: Will we step up then and address questions, when they are much more difficult to address and much more costly; or will we act now, through better insight and commitment and good leadership? All of those will be necessary if we're going to act sooner rather than later.

DEVIN STEWART: What does moral leadership mean?

MICHAEL DOYLE: Moral leadership means recognizing the kind of global ethic that I described. On the one hand, it is intellectual or philosophical. But it's, at the same time, to be able to understand the very concrete circumstances of those for whom you are responsible. It's not a matter just of preaching. It's a matter of driving practical strategies, practical changes, whether policy or

institutions, that make it less costly, more feasible for your constituency to do something about that.

That, I think, is what moral leadership is about. It's not just being a good moral philosopher; it's being a very practical person who can understand how the world close to them works. I think that's very important.

DEVIN STEWART: We have this idea about the next 100 years, because we're about to turn 100 in 2014, 100 years from around the beginning of [World War I](#). We don't want to scare people by saying "make a prediction," because nobody wants to do that. But what would you like to see in the next 100 years?

MICHAEL DOYLE: I'd like to have us recognize the fact that, individually and jointly, we are responsible—this being the biggest, most global "we"—for the way the world evolves. But our circumstances—local, national, regional—differ quite considerably. So I'd like us to think about making progress in a variable way—that is, that each within our capacities will attempt to realize our joint responsibilities with the resources that we have available.

For example, it means, for the Europeans—who, in my mind, have gone furthest than any region has—to continue to develop their wonderful Union, which deservedly won the Nobel Peace Prize this past year, to have it survive the current [financial crises](#), continue to flourish as a zone of civilian success and peace, and be both a model for others and a source of assistance for others.

In other parts of the world, it means taking further steps. We here in North America can improve our free trade area. We can improve our immigration policies so that they are both more efficient and more fair, recognizing national differences, but also the legitimate aspiration of people to better their own lot, those of their communities, experience new environments.

Then, in other parts of the world, it means other steps to resolving longstanding conflicts. It's so important in East Asia that these [maritime disputes](#) between China and Japan, and China and Vietnam, and China and the Philippines—China in a non-maritime, a land [dispute](#) with India—get resolved peacefully so that they can each invest their resources in domestic improvement, domestic welfare. And the United States, as an external power, has a role to play in that as well.

Each of these regions, if they keep moving towards working their several, their joint responsibilities, given the place that they are started—that's where I mean this variable institutional structure—would, for me, constitute real progress.

Some people might wish for world government. All of those are nice abstract ideals. But we're not even right now in a position to envisage what that might look like. But we can envisage a step-by-step, from this stone to the next stone, that's within the reach of our pace that would constitute progress. And we will wait and see where it goes. There's no reason to assume that it needs to lead to world government. We may solve our most vital problems well short of that, from an institutional point of view.

DEVIN STEWART: As you know, [Andrew Carnegie](#) was a big peace advocate. World peace, whatever that might mean, is it possible?

MICHAEL DOYLE: I think it definitely is possible. We have achieved regional peaces already.

The European Union just—in my view, rightfully—received the Nobel Peace Prize. It received it because of what it has accomplished, but also measured by what it used to be. We sometimes have

rosy pictures of Europe. Europe is one of the bloodiest pieces of geography that the globe has ever had. It is the cockpit of war after war after war, century after century, the two great global world wars. All of this is part of European history.

Now, since [World War II](#), first in the west and then expanding east, we now have a peace, which is never perfect, never absolute, but compared to most of what else occurs in international politics, gives the appearance of remarkable reliability, despite even the financial crises that they are going through. And that's a remarkable achievement. If the Europeans, the bloodiest piece of real estate on the planet, can achieve peace, that's a sign of, I think, hope for other regions which today are very far from that.

DEVIN STEWART: The responsibilities you talked about earlier, realizing our responsibilities, based on capacity—you might have already answered this question—who is ultimately responsible or accountable? Does it really just depend on capacity, or is it that we're all in this together, or are some people more responsible than others?

MICHAEL DOYLE: A bit of a combination. I think that we are each individually, as human beings on this planet, responsible for everything. But at the same time, that creates a set of totally inhuman moral demands on us. You and I sitting right here could make a difference to somebody who is being victimized outside of Damascus or, more likely, somebody who is experiencing malnutrition in a village in India or a village in Africa or many other parts of the world, and we could do so by writing everything in our income short of what it needs to keep our physical being together and some kind of roof over our heads.

But that just asks so much from each and every one of us that it's unrealistic. It would turn us into what one philosopher once called moral slaves. And our autonomy, our ability to create and define ourselves, is so much a part of what it makes for being a full human being, becoming a moral slave is something that would demean us in a certain way.

So I think we say that the way we need to recognize our true global responsibility—that we are responsible for everything—is through institutions. Institutions, in the broader sense of that term, can help us legitimately do our part—you know, to contribute, to pay our taxes, to provide contributions to an Oxfam or a Mercy Corps or some other well-intentioned and well-functioning international agency—under the premise that if we do two or three times our share, the global needs divided by our global population—we can say to ourselves that we're in a position where we're not doing enough but we're doing enough within the scope of what allows for the rest of a creative and meaningful life that we can live that life with a degree of reasonable good conscience. I think that's as little, and maybe as much, as we can ask.

DEVIN STEWART: Very thoughtful answer. Thank you, Michael.

Is the [Kantian](#) approach to international affairs the thing that you feel as a theorist and political scientist that you might be most well known for?

MICHAEL DOYLE: Probably. In the old social science measure of hits on articles or citations, that's probably the case, yes.

DEVIN STEWART: If you would, please explain it to us.

MICHAEL DOYLE: Sure.

It was inspired by this wonderful essay by [Immanuel Kant](#), which he published in 1795. He was trying to deal with a problem that he saw. He had been persuaded by other philosophers that world government was not only difficult but probably tyrannical, given our many separate identities and the difficulties of ruling across very long distances. But at the same time, he was outraged by the immense injustices and suffering of war, the ways in which war denied the duty that we all have to recognize the fact that every human being should be treated like an end, not a means. Recognizing that duty he thought to be one of the essential attributes of our claim to a moral conscious thinking existence. It was really important to him.

So war is horrible. World government is neither desirable nor possible.

He thought, "Could we imagine a peace that was self-executing, that was executing or self-actualizing, by independent states that would nonetheless be reliable enough that it would constitute a goal that one should work towards and that would provide a sufficient intellectual guarantee that it would be something that would be sensible, that was not only good, but doable?" And those two are naturally connected together.

What he came up with was the idea of a hypothetical peace treaty. It starts out with a series of preliminary articles that are designed to create better understanding, enhanced respect, a little bit more trust amongst existing member states thought to be in what was otherwise a state of war, where everyone was suspiciously looking at each and every one and the duties of the statesman were national security first, but they could begin to do a bit of trust building, a bit of confidence building, to use a modern metaphor.

If those were then tried, it opened up the possibility of call it a constitutional convention, where well-meaning statespersons could come together—he had in mind monarchs in the first instance—and pledge to subscribe to three definitive articles, which, if they were fulfilled, would give each and every one of them the expectation that they could live together in a future of peace. The three articles were:

- First, that each of these states would be a republican government, by which he meant that there would be a separation of power between the executive and the judiciary and the legislative. That contributes to deliberation. It allows a state to be more rational, more careful, less overcome by passions or particular self-interest.

Secondly, it would be a representative government, one that represented the citizens of the country, that, to speak modern social science, would tend to align the interests of the ruler with those that he—or possibly (though not for Kant, we have to mention) she—would represent. The idea that one could engage in wars, as he saw some monarchs doing, on the basis of whims or self-interest or pure glory of the monarch or to support arms industries or to make militaries happy, would be much, much less likely, because the state would respond to the representative institutions, and the mass of the people would be the cannon fodder. They would have to pay all the taxes. They would be much less likely to get into unnecessary wars of one sort or another that would gratify the interests of the monarch.

So that was step one. It created a rational republican state responsive to a representative assembly, advantaged by a deliberative scheme of constitutionalism.

- Step two: He thought they should have a formal pledge to each other, that they would live at peace in ways that respected the rights that each individual had to live at peace, and this would create a reliable legal commitment that would be made. This commitment would be credible because it would

be made by these republican states that were, he thought, responsive and ones that could recognize the common rights of all individuals amongst these fellow republican states, because each and every one of these states represented those free citizens and acted through them. So one created a credible legal commitment based upon the kinds of institutions these were and the kinds of ideological or moral commitments these states had to the common rights of all human beings.

- The third thing he wanted to do—he knew that these separate nations, separate states, knew relatively little about each other, they would have sometimes false nationalistic understandings. So he thought it was very important that they come into contact with each other under legitimate circumstances. Legitimate circumstances—this is what he calls his third law—were those of cosmopolitan respect. That is, they were voluntary. States would trade with each other if they wanted to. They would welcome investors, if you will, or what we would now call tourists, visitors who would come on the matter of individual choice because they were curious, because they thought they might—he had read Adam Smith—be advantaged by trading with each other. They would all have a potentially superior standard of living to what they would have if they had no trade.

And he thought there was a duty, recognizing the common humanity, that if somebody was in desperate straits of their life, he would be welcomed on the shores of another country and not expelled. This is a principle that, two centuries or so later, gets embodied in the [refugee convention](#) of 1951, the principle of *non-refoulement*, which means that somebody who has a legitimate fear of persecution can't be expelled once they arrive at the shores or across the border of a country.

So these three things together he thought would establish a reliable peace—that is, republican institutions; a commitment to peace based upon a recognition of the common rights of all human beings, those that are now reliably especially represented by republican states; and third, a cosmopolitan order of, he thought, ever-increasing contact in the way of trade, tourists, and other exchanges of scholars and individuals, so that we would come to a better and better understanding of our common humanity and respect for the differences, legitimate differences, of our culture. He thought this would provide a reliable basis for peace amongst these fellow republican states.

It didn't end the problem of war, because some states would not be willing to join this scheme of peace. That is, they wouldn't be willing to become republican. They wouldn't be willing to pledge a commitment to international law. They wouldn't contemplate the cosmopolitan law of mutual respect and exchange. But for those that did, this constituted a peace, a separate peace, amongst them that he thought, over time—even though he thought it would collapse every once in a while—over the longest period of time, would be likely to grow.

He's not just a constitution designer. He's certainly not a political scientist. For him, this philosophic exercise, the real purpose of it was to provide the moral grounds for which statesmen should strive to attain peace, because it was hypothetically possible. And that's what that wonderful little essay was all about.

DEVIN STEWART: Perfect, Michael. That's fantastic. That was extremely clear. Thank you so much.

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"What has changed in the modern world is that we can now see our fellow members of the common human moral universe and we cannot be so blind. We can see the suffering. That's a big change that has taken place in the past couple of centuries."

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