

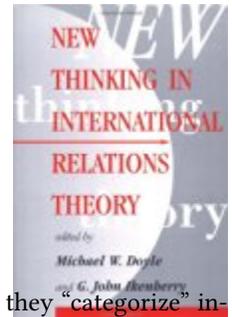
H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences



Michael W. Doyle, G. John Ikenberry, eds. *New Thinking in International Relations Theory*. Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1997. viii + 296 pp. \$25.00 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8133-9966-9.

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Doyle and Ikenberry have produced a timely sampler of emerging theories in international relations (“IR” to American scholars). The book is timely: it begins picking up the theoretical pieces shattered by the end of the Cold War. But it is only a sampler. Students looking for a comprehensive overview of recent IR theory would be well-advised to read this book alongside others that map out the terrain differently—or more systematically—to get a fuller picture.[1] Contributors presented papers at Princeton before publishing them here; unfortunately, a few major voices in IR theory were not represented.[2] Still, it would be hard to beat this book as a handy introduction to some of the main trends in current thinking about world politics.

No doubt about it: this book is well-timed, coming as it does in the late 1990s. As the editors note in their Preface and Introduction, both theorists and practitioners were surprised by the end of the United States-Soviet rivalry. Thus international relations journals in the 1990s were filled with reflections on the Big Surprise, discussions which took many different forms: arguments about the causes of Soviet collapse, speculations on why it was a surprise, and calls for new theories or research projects.[3] *New Thinking* distills some of these reflections and highlights the unity and diversity of current IR theory.

What unifies the field—and the present book—is the belief that “to understand international politics we need international theory” (p. 2). Doyle and Ikenberry attempt to find unity among a diverse set of contributions, selecting “authors and categories according to how they conceptualize the task of international political analysis... and how they categorize the important sources of change” (p. vii). The essays collected here do plenty of

“conceptualization”; unfortunately, they “categorize” international change less clearly, and with less unity.

Here is where the diversity of the volume, like that of any edited volume, creeps in. Several theoretical approaches get showcased, but the thematic focus on change gets blurred. The essays by Daniel Deudney, Matthew Evangelista, and Steven Weber do address the problem of international change directly. But others only touch on the problem indirectly. Deudney, in a stimulating essay, argues for a revival of classical geopolitical theory as the best way to account for change: change as the product of colliding material forces. By contrast, Evangelista and Weber locate the sources of change in domestic political structures (Evangelista) and historically emerging international institutions (Weber). Although the editors’ Conclusion attempts to weave these and other explanatory strands together, an overall tapestry fails to emerge at the end. The book never develops a coherent picture of international change. Which levels, which factors, should analysts of international change focus on? How do they fit together? The editors never answer.[4]

Instead, the essays collected here mainly show off recent trends in IR theory. They break down into three different types. Each type highlights the possible advantages or disadvantages of this book for graduate or undergraduate courses.

1. Personal Manifestos

Some of the essays offer defenses of particular theoretical traditions from individuals squarely within those traditions. Combining passion with erudition, and perhaps a few too many self-citations, these essays provide excellent introductions for undergraduates. For exam-

ple, James Der Derian's essay "Post-Theory: The Eternal Return of Ethics in International Relations" is one of the most accessible introductions to postmodern (or poststructural) theory available anywhere, coming from one of its leading practitioners. Calling for a "semiology of IR," Der Derian defends the "real-world" relevance of these approaches in these terms: "The instantaneity of communication, the ubiquity of the image, the flow of capital, the videographic speed of war have made the reality of world politics a transitory, technologically contingent phenomenon" (p. 64). Jean Bethke Elshtain's "Feminist Inquiry and International Relations" makes a similar call for the relevance of gender questions. But her synoptic overview of the literature reflects a healthy sense of balance: gender is important, but "No single standpoint or perspective, feminist or nonfeminist, gives us transparent pictures of reality" (p. 88). Like Der Derian, Elshtain defends a new approach to IR with clarity and grace.

2. Research Agendas

Some of the essays present the author's work in progress, with less attention to summarizing existing or emerging thinking. These, to me, are the least valuable contributions to the volume. James DeNardo's essay describes his research on formal models of the Strategic Defense Initiative, but fails to convey the relevance and richness of formal modeling. Undergraduates will be put off by the formal terminology. This is a shame, because the debate over rational choice theory is not just a debate about methods; it involves real-life issues of what theory can and cannot do. DeNardo only engages these issues tangentially, before and after his detailed description of his current research.[5] Matthew Evangelista's chapter falls prey to a similar flaw: a narrow focus on domestic structure and case studies of Poland and Romania rather than connections to other theories of domestic-international politics—for example, the rich literature on two-level games.[6] These essays seem out of place—cautious, tentative, empirical—in what is generally a bold volume.

3. Overviews of the Literature

Three of the essays provide comprehensive overviews of international-theoretical traditions; each clocks in with over seventy-five endnotes. Graduate students would be more apt to embrace these, although it is possible to envision advanced undergraduate courses using them as introductions. First, Miles Kahler's "Inventing International Relations" is a tightly packed institutional history of international relations theorists. The

story could be told with more color, but he plots the basic trajectory of the entire field accurately. Second, Joseph Grieco's "Realist International Theory and the Study of World Politics" is a stunningly comprehensive accounting of the strengths and weaknesses of neorealism (hence the 119 endnotes). This is the best overview of neorealism—a school that follows the work of Berkeley's Kenneth Waltz—that I have seen. Finally, Steve Weber's "Institutions and Change" blends a discussion of his personal research agenda with a broader engagement of the dominant approaches to international institutions, an emerging interest for many in the field. For students at any level, these essays make the book worth buying.

In sum, this is another of those uneven edited volumes. But the high quality of most essays makes the book a worthwhile addition to the shelves of anyone interesting in sampling the latest flavors of IR theory.

Notes:

[1]. Other cuts at new IR theory, most from non-American standpoints: Steve Smith, "New Approaches to International Theory," in J. Baylis and Steve Smith (eds.), *The Globalization of World Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997). Ken Booth and Steve Smith (eds.), *International Relations Theory Today* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995). Scott Burchill and Andrew Linklater, *Theories of International Relations: Masters in the Making* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996). Iver B. Neumann and Ole Wæver (eds.), *The Future of International Relations* (New York: Routledge, 1997). A.J.R. Groom and Margot Light (eds.), *Contemporary International Relations: A Guide to Theory* (London: Pinter, 1994).

[2]. Alexander Wendt, then of Yale University and now at Dartmouth, is one of the leading "constructivist" scholars. Including him, or Columbia's John Ruggie, in the volume would have helped round out the selection of "new thinking." Even more puzzling, given Doyle's early discussion of Liberal approaches, is the absence of any self-styled "neo-liberals," for example, Robert Keohane.

[3]. John Lewis Gaddis, "International Relations Theory and the End of the Cold War," *International Security* 17 (Winter 1992/93), pp. 5-58. Ted Hopf, "Getting the End of the Cold War Wrong," *International Security* 18 (Fall 1993), pp. 202-08. Charles W. Kegley, "How did the Cold War Die? Principles for an Autopsy," *Mershon International Studies Review* 38 (1994), pp. 11-41. Michael E. Brown, Sean M. Lynn-Jones, and Steven E. Miller, *The Perils of Anarchy: Contemporary Realism and International Security* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995).

Daniel Deudney and G. John Ikenberry, "The International Sources of Soviet Change," *International Security* 16 (Winter 1991/92), pp. 74-118. Friedrich Kratochwil, "The Embarrassment of Changes: Neo-realism as the Science of Realpolitik Without Politics," *Review of International Studies* 19 (January 1993), pp. 63-80.

[4]. They come closest to answering these questions on pp. 277-78 of the "Conclusion." Alexander Wendt's work would help weave together the diverse strands they leave dangling. See Wendt, "Constructing International Politics," *International Security* 20 (Summer 1995), pp. 71-81.

[5]. See DeNardo's *The Amateur Strategist: Intuitive Deterrence Theories and the Politics of the Nuclear Arms Race* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995),

for a fascinating contrast between deductive deterrence theory and the real-world perceptions of policymakers. Sadly, his essay here draws very little from that provocative book.

[6]. Peter B. Evans, Harold K. Jacobson, and Robert D. Putnam (eds.), *Double-Edged Diplomacy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993). James A. Caporaso, "Across the Great Divide: Integrating Comparative and International Politics," *International Studies Quarterly* 41 (December 1997), pp. 563-92.

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