

Nile Global Academia

Global Trends Course lecture on Theories of IR

What is Liberalism?

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What is a theory?

- **Theory** is a system of ideas intended to explain something, especially based on general principles or established ideas
- A **Theory** is a hypothesis or lenses of viewing issues/facts from different perspectives, **so that we can explain the existing and predict future phenomena**
- Theories have assumptions or basis of their own views on various issues of the socio-cultural, economic and political

Theories in International Relations

- Theories of international relations allow us **to understand and try to make sense of the world around us** through various lenses
- IR theories are guiding approaches to study or examine the international relations as a whole
- Whoever is the actor in IR there are always human beings in international politics
- So, let's start by defining the **human nature and state of nature**

What is Human & State of nature?

- IR theories started describing the **Human Nature** before analyzing how state or government works
 - Thus, since **IR is determined by the behavior or interests of actors (mainly humans)** it is necessary to see the philosophical views of liberalism on the nature of human beings
 - how people function, or how human beings behave in a State of Nature?
- **What is State of Nature?** It is the hypothetical life of people before societies came into existence

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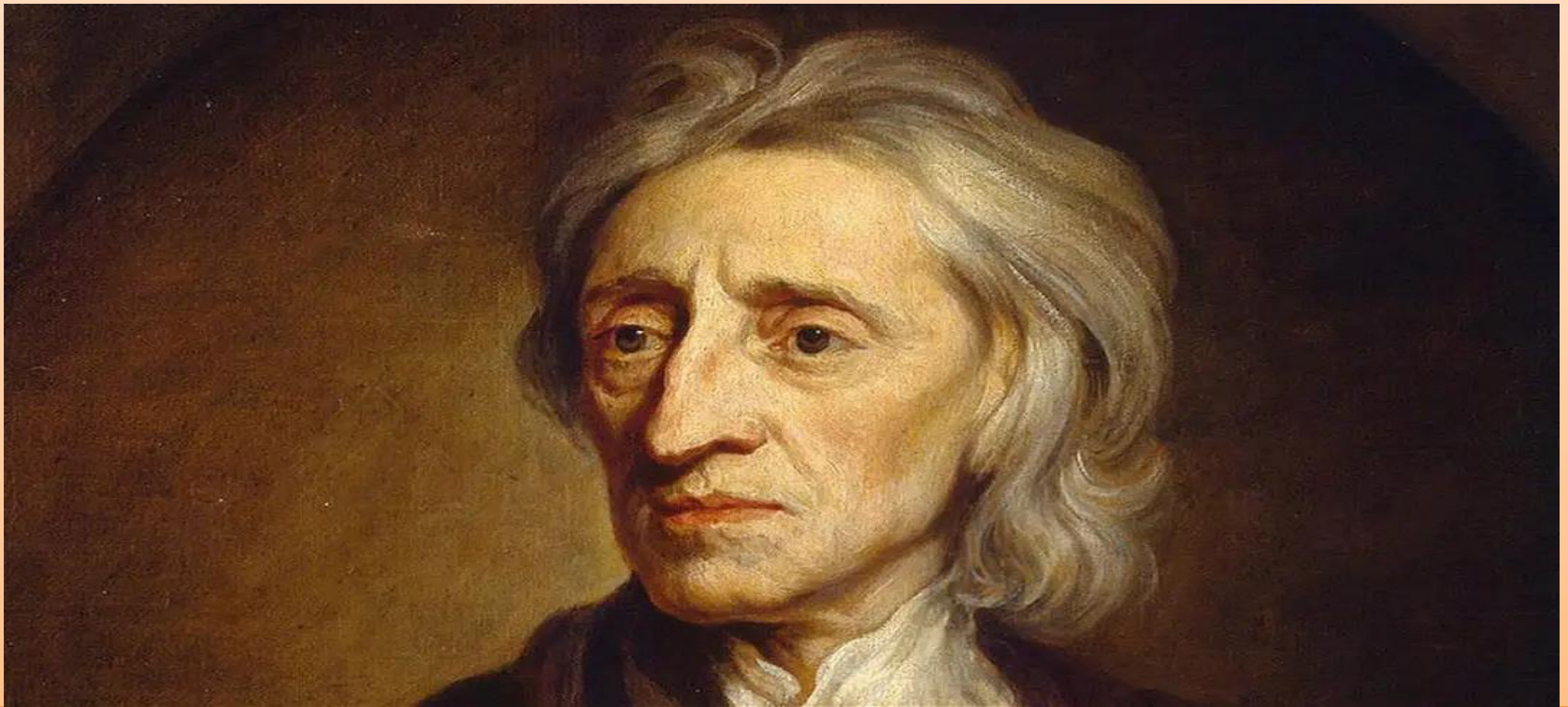
- **State of nature** refers to a condition in which there is no established political authority
- In a nutshell, **State of nature** refers a time **(i.e. believed to be an imaginary)** where there was no a modern civil society, government or state
- John Locke believes human beings in 'state of nature' were in **a state of perfect/complete freedom, good will, peaceful, mutual assistance;** where no one harms the other because it was governed by **Law of Nature**

Continued...

- Thus, liberalists believe human beings are *morally good, willing, cooperative, optimist, positive, and seek higher goals collectively*
 - Locke believes breaking the law of nature brings state of war
- Locke also advocates for **social contract** (between the ruled/civil society and the rulers/governments)
- The contract is made with **the consent of the people, and government can be ousted by popular will**

John Locke, the father of Liberalism

John Locke (1632-1704) is an English philosopher, physician, influential **Enlightenment (era of reason & basis for foundations liberalism) thinker** and a father of liberalism; who advocated for natural rights namely “life, liberty, property rights” and a government based on people’s consent



Assumptions of liberalism in IR

■ Liberalism is also known as idealism

- Feasibility of peace
- Interdependence
- Rejection of power politics
- Liberal institutionalism
- Cooperation
- Mutual benefit
- Absence of pure anarchism

✓ For liberalists the situation of anarchism or absence of an overarching authority does not mean that we are in a constant state of war, **anarchy can be regulated by economic interdependence or liberal institutionalism**

Liberalism as an Ideology

➤ Liberalism as a political and economic **ideology/doctrine**

has the following values:

- Individualistic/individual freedom
- Free market oriented/capitalism economy
- International trade
- Interdependence and cooperation
- Collective security
- Existence of multi-actors besides state

Criticisms of Liberalism

❑ Criticisms/limitations

- Criticized for being very idealistic/utopian
- Has brought cultural imperialism
- Created and maintained, exploitative relations between the developed and the developing world
 - or between rich and poor person/states
 - Dependency than interdependency

Liberalism as a theory in IR

- Liberalism in international relation was referred to as a 'utopian'
- Liberalism has optimistic view of human nature that argues human beings are innately good, believe in peace and harmony
 - Cooperation is possible and conflict can be resolved peacefully
- Immanuel Kant has also contributed to liberalism, by his democratic peace theory and by the idea of perpetual peace
- Unlike undemocratic regimes, the more democrat states the more peaceful they become

Continued...

- States that shared liberal values should have no reason for going to war against one another
- Permanent cessation/ending of war is possible
- Liberalists believe the **pursuit for power leads to war**
- The existence of **democracy and free trade would promote collectivist aspirations in place of the conflicting relations**
- **Collective security advocated to replace alliances**

League of Nations as a guardian for peace

- In 1918, the US President Woodrow Wilson addressed his **‘14 Points’** to the US Congress in the last year of the WWI
- As he presented his ideas for a rebuilt world beyond the war, **the last of his points was to create a general association of nations, which became the League of Nations**
- And IR as academic study has believed as it had the potential to contribute to the prevention of war and the establishment of peace

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✓ The Fourteen points of Woodrow Wilson



President Wilson's Fourteen Points

1. Open diplomacy
2. Freedom of the Seas
3. Removal of economic barriers
4. Reduction of armaments
5. Adjustment of colonial claims
6. Conquered territories in Russia
7. Preservation of Belgian sovereignty
8. Restoration of French territory
9. Redrawing of Italian frontiers
10. Division of Austria-Hungary
11. Redrawing of Balkan boundaries
12. Limitations on Turkey
13. Establishment of an independent Poland
14. Creation of an Association of Nations

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- In the 1920s, the League of Nations was created **to oversee affairs between states and maintaining international peace**
- The League would function as the guarantor of international order and would be the organ that states could settle their differences
- Any deviance or being against of the accepted norm from international law would be dealt with collectively in the name of a commonly held interest in the **maintenance of peace and security**
- However, **when WWII erupted liberal values were highly challenged whether international peace is attainable**

The role of International Law in IR

- Liberals also argue that international law offers a mechanism by which cooperation among states is possible
- **International law performs two different functions;**
 - It provides mechanisms for cross-border interactions, and
 - It shapes the values and goals these interactions are pursuing

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- In short, the purpose of international law is **to regulate the conducts of governments and the behaviors of individuals within states**
- For instance, we have International human rights law which regulate states' behavior in their treatment of human rights
- Today, we have more than 190 states, international institutions, MNCs and financial institutions, networks of individuals, and NGOs **participating in the international legal processes and IR in general**

A note on Liberalism!

- Scott Burchill (1996) suggested that:
 - the prospects for the elimination of war lay with a preference for democracy over aristocracy, free trade over autarky, and collective security over the balance of power system

Next lecture: What is Realism?



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