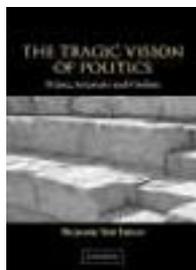


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The Tragic Vision of Politics

Ethics, Interests and Orders

Richard Ned Lebow

Book DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511491504>

Online ISBN: 9780511491504

Hardback ISBN: 9780521827539

Paperback ISBN: 9780521534857

Chapter

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Chapter DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511491504.007>

Cambridge University Press

6 Hans J. Morgenthau

The probing of the theorist of the moral pretension of the national interest puts him in an awkward position by making him suspect of being indifferent to all truth and morality. This is why there are so many ideologies and so few theories.

Hans J. Morgenthau¹

Hans Morgenthau is the intellectual father of postwar realism and arguably the most important international relations theorist of his generation. His textbook went through six editions, one of them posthumous, and was almost universally read by undergraduate and graduate students of international relations over a span of three decades. Because of Morgenthau, realism became the dominant paradigm in the field and maintained this position throughout the Cold War. In the 1980s, neorealism gained wide currency, and graduate students increasingly read Kenneth Waltz in lieu of Morgenthau as their introduction to the study of international relations.² In the aftermath of the Cold War, scholars interested in power and its consequences are looking to more traditional forms of realism for insights. Morgenthau and his ideas are once again timely and need to be put into historical and intellectual context for a new generation of readers.

Like Thucydides and Clausewitz, Morgenthau has been misinterpreted. Critics misread his insistence on the enduring and central importance of power in all political relationships as an endorsement of European-style *Realpolitik* and its axiom that might makes right.³ His

¹ *Politics in the Twentieth Century*, I, *The Decline of Democratic Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962), p. 60.

² Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1979). The *Social Sciences Citation Index* reveals 500 citations for Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* between 1986 and 1995. Morgenthau's highest count in this period was 364, for *Scientific Man vs. Power Politics* (London: Latimer House, 1947 [1946]). Cited in Nicholas Greenwood Onuf, *The Republican Legacy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 222–23.

³ Most of this criticism was made in the late 1940s and 1950s by scholars and activists committed to achieving world peace through world law. A more recent and equally misguided

advocates – and here I have in mind Kenneth Waltz and his disciples – purged his approach of its tensions and nuance in a misguided effort to construct a more scientific theory. In the pages that follow, I reconstruct the core of Morgenthau’s thinking about international relations and situate it in a discussion of his broader understanding of politics and human nature. I argue that power was the starting point – but by no means the end point – of his analysis of international affairs. He believed that successful foreign policy depended more on the quality of diplomacy than it did on military and other capabilities, and had to be tempered by ethical considerations. International relations theory could neither predict nor serve as a template for foreign policy, but it could provide a useful starting point for statesmen to structure the problems and choices they confronted. In the second half of the twentieth century, the most important goal of international relations theory was to enlighten statesmen about the need to transcend the national state and accept some form of supranational authority.

Biography

Unlike Thucydides and Clausewitz, Morgenthau had no military experience and was not a member of an elite family. He was born in 1904 in Coburg, in the duchy of Saxe-Coburg, into a middle-class Jewish family. Part of Bavaria after 1920, Coburg was a relatively prosperous small city of 20,000 with about 300 Jewish residents.⁴ Coburg’s Jews were overwhelmingly middle class and assimilated, and generally described themselves as *deutsche Staatsbürger jüdischen Glaubens* [Germans of the Jewish faith]. Morgenthau’s paternal grandfather was a rabbi, and his father, Ludwig, a doctor and a conservative nationalist, who gave him the middle name of Joachim after the kaiser’s youngest son. His father was cold, distant, “neurotic and oppressive,” and young Hans was relieved when he left to serve in the war. He was close to his mother, who was warm and protective

attempt to tar Morgenthau with the brush of *Realpolitik* is Jan Willem Honig, “Totalitarianism and Realism: Hans Morgenthau’s German Years,” in Benjamin Frankel, ed., *Roots of Realism* (Portland, Or.: Frank Cass, 1996), pp. 283–313. Honig reviews Morgenthau’s early legal writings, and exaggerates his idealism in this phase of his career. He also overdraws the similarities between Morgenthau’s later writings on realism and the works of German jurist nationalist, Carl Schmitt. A more convincing discussion of the relationship between the two is to be found in Martti Koskeniemi, *The Gentle Civilizer of Nations: The Rise and Fall of International Law 1870–1960* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), ch. 6.

⁴ Jürgen Erdmann, *Coburg, Bayern und das Reich, 1918–1933* (Coburg: Rossteutscher, 1969), pp. 79–158; N. F. Hayward and D. S. Morris, *The First Nazi Town* (Aldershot: Avebury, 1988), for Coburg between the wars.

and whom he credits with “saving him.” He spent all his holidays with his much beloved maternal grandparents in Munich.⁵

Coburg politics in the Weimar period were characterized by escalating tensions between the left-center *Zentrum*-SDP (Social Democratic Party) coalition and the nationalist right, in which the Nazis came to play a dominant role. Hitler made his first public speech in Coburg in October 1922, and helped to make anti-Semitism a prominent issue in the *Landtag* (provincial parliament) election of 1924. The *Völkischer Block*, an alliance of right-wing parties, won the election, and one of their campaign promises was to strip Jews of all their rights as citizens. In June 1929, in elections for the *Stadtrat* [municipal council], Coburg voted a Nazi majority into power and earned the dubious distinction of becoming the first Nazi-governed town in Germany.⁶

Morgenthau was the only Jewish student in the Ducal Gymnasium Casimirianum, and was constantly exposed to anti-Semitic taunts and punishment. In 1922, his fourth and penultimate year in Gymnasium, the school commemorated its founding by Prince Johann. By tradition, the outstanding student in the school laid a wreath of bay leaves at the foot of the prince’s statue, and Morgenthau was accorded this honor, much to the annoyance of many Coburg residents. On the day of the event leaflets appeared all over town denouncing him as a *gottverdammter Jude* [goddamn Jew]. The former prince, Carl Eduard, attended the ceremony and held his nose throughout Morgenthau’s speech, a well-known anti-Semitic gesture intended to suggest that all Jews stank.

Nobody would speak to me . . . And people would spit at me and shout at me. People would shake their fists at me and shout imprecations or antisemitic insults and so forth. It was absolutely terrible . . . probably the worse day of my life.⁷

Outside of school he fared no better. Forced by his father to join the German equivalent of the Boy Scouts, he was treated as a despised outsider. “I remember once, I marched in a group with people behind me and people in front of me. The people behind me would all spit on my back.”⁸ He could not wait to leave Coburg.

Morgenthau subsequently studied philosophy and law at the Universities of Frankfurt, Munich and Berlin. He practiced criminal and labor law in Frankfurt, and in 1931 was appointed acting president of the regional Labor Law Court. From 1932 to 1935, he taught public law at the

⁵ Interviews with Bernard Johnson, Hans J. Morgenthau Papers, Library of Congress, B208; Christoph Frei, *Hans J. Morgenthau: An Intellectual Biography* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2001 [1994]), pp. 12–16, citing additional materials.

⁶ Erdmann, *Coburg, Bayern und das Reich*, pp. 65–58.

⁷ Interviews with Bernard Johnson. ⁸ *Ibid.*

University of Geneva, and, unwilling to return to Nazi Germany, taught for a year in Madrid before emigrating to the United States. His first job was as an elevator boy, but he subsequently taught political science at Brooklyn College (1937–39), the University of Kansas City (1939–43), the University of Chicago (1943–71), The City College of New York (1971–75) and the New School for Social Research (1975–81). His most productive years were at the University of Chicago, where he became the Albert A. Michelson Distinguished Service Professor and a major intellectual figure on the campus.

Morgenthau was shy and reluctant to initiate conversations for fear of rejection, a neurosis he attributed to his earlier experiences in Germany.⁹ He enjoyed the company of other intellectuals and relished the free exchange of ideas, preferably with a Cuban cigar in his mouth and a brandy snifter in his hand. He was protective of his personal life, and questions about his German past were taboo. Late in life he decided it was important to record some of his younger experiences and produced a short, 16 page, “Fragment of an Intellectual Autobiography,” published in 1978. In it he acknowledged an early fascination with national liberation and war. During the Balkan War of 1912 he sympathized with Turkey’s enemies, read about the Bulgarian siege of the fortress of Adrianople and purchased the sheet music of the Bulgarian national anthem to play on the piano. As a teenager he was drawn to philosophy and literature and dreamed of becoming a writer, a professor or a poet. He entered the University of Frankfurt with the intention of studying philosophy but was disappointed by the narrow, “rationalistic pretenses” of his professors and went off to Munich to read law. His father would not let him study literature, and he chose law as a fallback because it “appeared to make the least demands on special skills and emotional commitment.” It gave him time to attend lectures on philosophy and literature. His autobiographical essay pays homage to the history and law professors who shaped his intellectual development and early legal career in Frankfurt.¹⁰

The most revealing part of this document is a lengthy excerpt from a senior German class assignment that Morgenthau wrote in *Gymnasium* in September 1922. He acknowledges an impending choice between two fields of activity. One in which “men year in year out, in eternally, repetitive, monotonous rhythm, sow and harvest, save and consume,” and become happy by raking in more than others. The other in which “men, too work indefatigably . . . in the service of a higher cause.” Here too

⁹ Interview with Bernard Johnson; Frei, *Hans J. Morgenthau*, pp. 22–25.

¹⁰ Hans J. Morgenthau, “Fragment of an Intellectual Autobiography: 1904–1932,” in Kenneth W. Thompson and Robert J. Myers, *A Tribute to Hans Morgenthau* (Washington, DC: New Republic Book Co., 1977), pp. 1–17.

happiness can be achieved, through “the virtue of the deed,” and its contribution to posterity. The idealistic Morgenthau wanted to “work in the service of a great idea, on behalf of an important goal.” He saw two obstacles in his path: his untested abilities, and Germany’s anti-Semitism. With respect to the former he took consolation in Goethe’s observation that “Our desires are presentiments of the abilities that lie within ourselves, harbingers of what we shall be able to accomplish.”¹¹

Morgenthau could not respond to anti-Semitism with the same optimism. He was embittered by the blatant bias of the socially dominant groups of German society who “sanction and promote social ostracism and brutal insults that are destructive of ties of love and friendship.” He felt doubly humiliated: by the insults to which he was directly exposed; and, indirectly, by the effects of a life time of such harassment on his parents and Jews of their generation. In what must have been a painful admission, he acknowledged that

Men who have gotten accustomed to submitting to insults in silence and to patiently bear injustices; who have learned to grovel and duck; who lost their self-respect – such men must have spoiled their character, they must have become hypocritical, false and untrue. The moral resistance of people whose sense of honor and justice is day by day trod underfoot is being slowly but fatally crushed...¹²

The young Morgenthau insisted that “Free, straight personalities grow only in pure, fresh air.” He vowed to struggle openly against anti-Semitism, never to accommodate to it. “The stronger the pressure from the outside becomes, the more violent and one-sided will be my reaction to this movement and its representatives.” He nevertheless imagined a time in the not too distant future when he might be “Embittered by loneliness... excluded from all the pleasures of youth, [and] expelled from my Fatherland.”¹³

The intellectual

Morgenthau’s experience in Germany encapsulates the Janus face of modernity. The spirit of rational inquiry, secularization and concomitant desires for upward mobility liberated human beings from social and physical constraints and offered them myriad ways to fulfill their individual and collective potential. These developments constituted a challenge to the existing order and generated acute insecurity among individuals and classes who were threatened by economic and social change. Both

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 2–3. ¹² *Ibid.*, p. 2. ¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

consequences of modernity were readily apparent in the Second Reich and the Weimar Republic. Economic development, education and national unification fostered prosperity, extraordinary artistic and scientific achievements and inclusion of Germany's Jews into the cultural and political life of the nation. The decline of traditional values, defeat in World War I and the twin economic hardships of inflation and depression provided fertile ground for revolutionary mass movements. The corresponding rise of anti-Semitism and the triumph of Hitler deprived Germany's Jews of their rights, their property, and ultimately, their lives, if they did not emigrate.

Morgenthau's *Gymnasium* essay recognized the two faces of modernity and their divergent implications for his future. His theoretical writings, beginning with shorter wartime pieces and culminating in *Scientific Man vs. Power Politics*, published in 1946, build on this understanding.¹⁴ The argument common to all these works is that modernity has encouraged a naive faith in the power of reason that has blinded well-meaning men to the darker side of human nature – with disastrous consequences for themselves, their institutions and the peace of the world. In an unpublished article, written on the eve of America's entry into the war, Morgenthau attributed isolationism to liberalism's rejection of power politics and its tendency to ignore or downplay the political element in both domestic and foreign politics. Anglo-American liberalism, in particular, "argues against war as something irrational, unreasonable, an aristocratic pastime or totalitarian atavism which has no place in the modern world."¹⁵ This ideology, he insisted, blinded liberals to the true nature of the fascist challenge and left their countries unprepared to deal with it.

Morgenthau's critique of liberalism was part of his broader assault on the Enlightenment. In *Scientific Man vs. Power Politics* he described the prerationalist age as aware of two forces – god and the devil – who struggled for dominance of the world. There was no expectation of progress, only of continuing and undecided conflict. From this everlasting conflict came a tragic sense of life. Christianity introduced the idea of progress; good would ultimately triumph over evil and the second coming would usher in a new paradise. The rationalist philosophy of the Enlightenment

¹⁴ Hans J. Morgenthau, "Liberalism and War," unpublished manuscript, 1941, Hans J. Morgenthau Papers, Library of Congress; Review of George Schwarzenberger, *Power Politics* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1941), in *American Journal of International Law* (April 1942), pp. 351–52; "The Limitations of Science and the Problem of Social Planning," *Ethics* 54: 3 (April 1944), pp. 174–85; "The Scientific Solution of Social Conflicts" (New York: Conference on Science, Philosophy and Religion and their Relations to the Democratic War of Life, 1945); *Scientific Man vs. Power Politics*, pp. 10, 174–78. Initially published by the University of Chicago Press in 1946.

¹⁵ "Liberalism and War," unpublished article, 1941, p. 7. Morgenthau Papers.

secularized this vision; progress in the form of man's mastery over nature and social organization now had the potential to produce a happy and just society. Remarkable success in harnessing nature for productive ends encouraged equal optimism about the efficacy of social engineering. Man and the world were assumed to be rational, an assumption, Morgenthau insisted, that was flatly contradicted by the experiences of the age.¹⁶

He considered the Enlightenment's misplaced faith in reason the underlying cause of the twentieth century's horrors. Reason undermined religion, and with it, the values and norms that had previously restrained individual and collective behavior. At the same time, it made possible advances in technology and social organization that brought about the modern industrial state. That state became the most exalted object of loyalty on the part of the individual, and the most effective organization for the exercise of power over the individual. "While the state is ideologically and physically incomparably more powerful than its citizens, it is free from all effective restraint from above. The state's collective desire for power is limited, aside from self-chosen limitations, only by the ruins of an old, and the rudiments of a new, normative order, both too feeble to offer more than a mere intimation of actual restraint."¹⁷

The power of the state, Morgenthau suggested, feeds on itself through a process of psychological transference. Impulses constrained by ethics and law are mobilized by the state for its own ends. By transferring their egotism to the nation, people gain vicarious release for their otherwise repressed impulses. What was formerly egotism, and ignoble and immoral, now became patriotism, and noble and altruistic. The Bolsheviks and Nazis took this process a step further, and encouraged direct violence by citizens against communities and classes they identified as enemies of the state. Elimination of the Kulaks, forced collectivization, Stalin's purges, World War II and the Holocaust were all the result of the transference of private impulses on to the state and the absence of any limits, domestic or international, on the exercise of state power.¹⁸

Morgenthau considered the absence of constraints on state power *the* defining characteristic of international politics in the twentieth century. The failure of well-meaning statesmen between the wars to grasp this reality greatly exacerbated its negative consequences. The Western democracies neither maintained their military power nor balanced against the threat posed by Germany, Italy and Japan. "They took refuge instead in meaningless pronouncements and agreements, non-aggression

¹⁶ Morgenthau, *Scientific Man vs. Power Politics*, pp. 10, 174–78. ¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 168.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 169. The psychological component of this analysis relied heavily on the earlier work of Morgenthau's Chicago colleague, Harold Lasswell, *World Politics and Personal Insecurity* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1935).

treaties, and international organizations that were incapable of collective action.”¹⁹ Misplaced faith in the efficacy of law, international agreements and the League of Nations encouraged aggressive states to encroach on their neighbors and launch a second and more costly world war.

This line of argument was hardly surprising coming from someone who had lived through the Great War, the Nazi rise to power, World War II and had lost family in the Holocaust.²⁰ Leo Strauss, a colleague and fellow German *émigré* whom Morgenthau helped to bring to the University of Chicago, was even more hostile to the Enlightenment. He saw the Nazis as the ultimate expression of rationalism, and sought to resurrect natural law as a defense against moral relativism. Similar arguments about the Enlightenment were made by Karl Popper, Jacob Talmon and Isaiah Berlin.²¹ But many pioneers of the behavioral revolution were also refugee scholars (e.g., Kurt Lewin, Oskar Morgenstern, Franz Neuman, Karl W. Deutsch).²² Personal, and often harrowing, encounters with communists and Nazis enhanced their faith in reason and belief that science was the best means of making the world a better and safer place. Morgenthau was troubled that so many of his colleagues, especially those with similar life experiences, clung to what he regarded the illusion of progress in international affairs. He turned to psychology for an explanation, and came to the conclusion that the modern mind cannot come “face with this immutable character of international politics. It revolts and takes refuge in the progressivist conviction that what was true in the past

¹⁹ Hans J. Morgenthau, *The Decline of Democratic Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), p. 66.

²⁰ Morgenthau’s friend, Reinhold Niebuhr, *Moral Man, Immoral Society: A Study in Ethics* (New York: Scribner’s, 1932), ch. 9, and “The Myth of World Government,” *The Nation*, 16 March 1949, and *The Structure of Nature and Empires* (New York: Scribner’s, 1959), also attacked the naive expectations of the Enlightenment, especially its belief in the power of reason to better the human condition. He had a strong belief in absolute values, and in the possibility of cooperation across social classes. See Robin W. Lovin, *Reinhold Niebuhr and Christian Realism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Richard W. Fox, “Reinhold Niebuhr and the Emergence of the Liberal Realist Faith, 1930–45,” *Review of Politics* 38 (April 1976), pp. 244–65. Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (New York: Continuum, 1944), p. 13, made a similar argument about the Nazis. “The Hitler youth is not a return to barbarism but the triumph of repressive equality, the disclosure through peers of the parity of the right to justice.” All of these arguments hark back to Hegel’s claim, in the *Phenomenology of the Spirit*, that the leveling effects of abstraction encouraged by the Enlightenment ultimately lead to the creation of the “herd.”

²¹ Karl Popper, *The Open Society and its Enemies* (London: Routledge, 1945); Jack Talmon, *The Origins of Totalitarian Democracy* (New York: Praeger, 1960); Isaiah Berlin, “Freedom and its Betrayal,” unpublished lecture, cited in Michael Ignatieff, *A Life: Isaiah Berlin* (New York: Vintage, 2000), pp. 201–03.

²² Lewis A. Coser, *Refugee Scholars in America: Their Impact and their Experience* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), provides brief personal and intellectual autobiographies of scholars on both sides of this divide.

cannot be true in the future; for, if it were, mankind would be in desperate straits.”²³

International relations

Morgenthau is best known for *Politics Among Nations*, the first edition of which appeared in 1948. It was intended to be an original theoretical statement and a text, and had an extraordinary print run. The sixth and posthumous edition, revised by Kenneth W. Thompson, appeared in 1985.²⁴ Reviews of the book were largely positive, and it quickly gained adoption in college courses around the country. Critics objected to the central place of power in the argument. Barrington Moore thought Morgenthau’s analysis had a “shaky psychological underpinning.” With no empirical evidence beyond questionable parallels with animal societies, he asserts that the drive for power is both strong and universal. He was also irritated “by the author’s device of substituting an apt quotation – preferably from an author dead at least a hundred years – for rigorous proof.”²⁵

The first edition of *Politics Among Nations* is another broadside against the early post-war hope – rapidly waning by the time Morgenthau’s book was published – that the struggle for power could be eliminated through international law and institutions.²⁶ The lust for power, according to Morgenthau, is an inherent quality of human beings and “inseparable from social life itself.” The struggle for power is, therefore, “a constitutive element of all human associations, from the family through fraternal and professional associations and local political organizations to the state.”²⁷

²³ Morgenthau, *Decline of Domestic Politics*, pp. 62–66.

²⁴ Hans J. Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1948).

²⁵ Barrington Moore, Jr., “Review of *Politics Among Nations*,” *American Sociological Review* 14 (April 1949), p. 326.

²⁶ On the so-called realist–idealist debate, see Cecelia Lynch, *Beyond Appeasement: Interpreting Interwar Peace Movement in World Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999); Brian C. Schmidt, “Anarchy, World Politics and the Birth of a Discipline: American International Relations, Pluralist Theory and the Myth of Interwar Idealism,” *International Relations* 16 (April 2002), pp. 9–32; Lucian M. Ashworth, “Did the Realist–Idealist Great Debate Ever Happen? A Revisionist History of International Relations,” *International Relations* 16 (April 2002), pp. 33–52. The consensus here is that Morgenthau and E. H. Carr offered a caricature of their opponents. Leonard Woolf, Konni Zilliacus, David Mitraný and Alfred Zimmern never ignored human nature or claimed that law was a panacea to international conflict. They were also among the earliest and most outspoken opponents of fascism.

²⁷ Morgenthau, *Scientific Man vs. Power Politics*, p. 16; Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations*, pp. 17–18. Martti Koskenniemi, private communication with author, 14 March 2002,

While “there is no escape from the evil of power,” context may mute its expression.²⁸ In many societies, norms, institutions and laws direct the struggle for power into ritualized and socially acceptable channels that prevent its otherwise violent and destructive consequences. In the international sphere, the struggle for power cannot so readily be tamed. The destructive potential of power politics can only be constrained by enlightened statesmen who work with rather than against the forces that motivate states.²⁹

All politics is a contest between those who want more and those who want to hold on to what they have. States, like individuals, seek to increase, maintain or demonstrate their power. A state that aims at acquiring more power, pursues a policy of “imperialism.” A state whose foreign policy has the goal of maintaining its power, pursues “a policy of the status quo.” A state can also choose to demonstrate power and pursue “a policy of prestige.” A policy of prestige is not an end in itself, but a strategy for supporting or challenging the status quo; its outward manifestations are easy to identify, but its underlying purpose may be difficult to fathom.³⁰

Morgenthau brackets his typology of states with several important caveats. All three foreign policies are simplistic representations of more complex patterns of behavior. The status quo can be challenged or defended with varying degrees of intensity; challengers are sometimes reconciled by accommodation, and defenders are sometimes willing to make minor adjustments in the status quo to accommodate them. Statesmen may be unaware of the actual character of their own foreign policy. They can pursue a policy of imperialism and convince themselves they are defending the status quo; the Roosevelt administration believed that its “Good Neighbor Policy” toward Latin America represented a shift in orientation, when in reality it substituted one method of domination for another. None of the three patterns of foreign policy are inherent attributes of states or types of states. Leaders adopt different policies in response to their circumstances and goals; there are no easy markers to help statesmen predict or identify the motives and policies of their neighbors.³¹

suggests that Morgenthau’s interest in power and the *Lustprinzip* reflect the influence of Nietzsche on him.

²⁸ Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations*, p. 172.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, *Decline of Democratic Politics*, p. 80.

³⁰ Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations*, 21–25, and the subsequent chapters devoted to the three foreign policies. Morgenthau had first introduced the threefold distinction among states in *La notion du ‘politique’ et la théorie des différends internationaux* (Paris: 1933), pp. 42ff., 61.

³¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 21–25, 58–60.

For Morgenthau the status quo is the benchmark against which all foreign policies can be assessed. The status quo is a well-established concept in legal-diplomatic practice; peace treaties often require combatants to evacuate foreign territory and to restore the *status quo ante bellum*. Morgenthau is more interested in the distribution of power in the aftermath of wars as codified in the territorial clauses of peace treaties, subsequent alliances or special bi- and multilateral treaties. Examples include the Treaty of Paris of 1815 and the Holy Alliance after the Napoleonic Wars, and the Treaties of Versailles and Petit Trianon following World War I. In each case, victors used these treaties and agreements to establish new states or frontiers and procedures for conducting international relations.³²

Morgenthau's use of peace treaties as reference points reflects his recognition that major shifts in territory and the creation and demise of states are almost always the result of war. War in turn is often the result of shifts in the balance of power in favor of rising powers with imperialist aims.³³ Such states can sometimes be accommodated peacefully; Great Britain gave way to the United States in the nineteenth century, and successfully transformed an adversary into an economic and political partner. More often, concessions whet the appetite of imperialist states and encourage new challenges that lead to war, as did appeasement of Italy and Germany in the 1930s.³⁴

The universality of the power drive means that the balance of power is "a general social phenomenon to be found on all levels of social interaction."³⁵ Individuals, groups and states inevitably combine to protect themselves and their interests from predators. The international balance of power is "only a particular manifestation of a general social principle to which all societies composed of autonomous units owe the autonomy of their component parts."³⁶ It can deter war when status quo powers can muster more military capability than imperialist challengers and demonstrate their resolve to go to war in defense of the status quo. Balancing can also intensify tensions and make war more likely. This is because neither the motives of states, their military capability or their willingness to use it in defense of the status quo can be assessed with certainty. States accordingly seek a margin of safety in their military capabilities. When opposing states or alliances do this, tensions and suspicions ratchet up – the baneful consequences of what John Herz would call

³² Ibid. ³³ Conversation with the author, October 1959.

³⁴ Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations*, pp. 43–45.

³⁵ Morgenthau, *Decline of Democratic Politics*, pp. 49, 81.

³⁶ Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations*, p. 125.

the “security dilemma.”³⁷ In this circumstance, status quo powers may be tempted to launch preventive wars to preserve their position against rising challengers. Morgenthau nevertheless considered the balance of power on the whole beneficial because even when it failed to prevent war it might limit its consequences and preserve the existence of states, small and large, that comprise the political system. He credited the balance with having served these ends throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.³⁸

Morgenthau has rightly been criticized for using several definitions of the balance of power without effectively distinguishing among them.³⁹ He uses the concept in the most general sense to describe the configuration of power at any given moment. He also uses it to describe the relative balance between status quo and imperialist states, a preponderance of power in favor of status quo states, or a policy aimed at achieving the latter. To compound this confusion, he is inconsistent in his expectations that status quo powers would balance against imperialist states. In *Politics Among Nations*, he asserts “that the balance of power and policies aimed at its preservation are not only inevitable, but an essential stabilizing factor in a society of sovereign nations.”⁴⁰ Elsewhere in this book, and in other publications, he describes the balance of power as only “a general tendency.” In the *Decline of Domestic Politics*, he observes that balancing does not occur automatically, but happens often enough to give “a repetitive character” to international politics, and this in turn allows for “theoretical systematization.”⁴¹ Some of these apparent contradictions can be reconciled if we recognize the distinction Morgenthau intended between the *principle* of the balance of power and the *practice* of balancing.⁴² The principle applied to all political situations, and balancing was thus a universally appropriate strategy. But balancing did not always occur, or achieve its ends, because of “the particular conditions under which the

³⁷ John Herz, “Idealist Internationalism and the Security Dilemma,” *World Politics* 2: 12 (1950), pp. 157–80.

³⁸ Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations*, pp. 155–59, 162–66.

³⁹ Ernest B. Haas, “The Balance of Power: Prescription, Concept, or Propaganda,” *World Politics* 5 (1953), pp. 442–77; Bruno Wasserman, “The Scientific Pretensions of Professor Morgenthau’s Theory of Power Politics,” *Australian Outlook* 12 (March 1959), pp. 55–70; Martin Wight, “The Balance of Power,” in Herbert Butterfield and Martin Wight, eds., *Diplomatic Investigations: Essays in the Theory of International Politics* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1966), pp. 149–75; Inis L. Claude, *Power and International Relations* (New York: Random House, 1962), pp. 25–37, identifies four different uses of the balance of power in *Politics Among Nations* and *In Defense of the National Interest*.

⁴⁰ Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations*, p. 125. Also, *Decline of Domestic Politics*, pp. 80–81.

⁴¹ Morgenthau, *The Decline of Democratic Politics*, p. 65.

⁴² Robert W. Tucker, “Professor Morgenthau’s Theory of Political ‘Realism,’” *American Political Science Review* 46 (March 1952), pp. 214–24; Wasserman, “The Scientific Pretensions of Professor Morgenthau’s Theory of Power Politics,” pp. 55–70.

principle must operate in a society of sovereign states.”⁴³ Leaders might fail to grasp the nature or severity of a challenge, lack the capability or will to oppose an imperialist state, be constrained by domestic or foreign circumstances from collaborating with other status quo powers, or decide to pursue a policy of appeasement.

Morgenthau analyzed the general conditions under which a balance of power is most likely to promote peace and stability. It was most successful, he maintained, in the seventeenth through nineteenth centuries when there were many great and not so great powers, which allowed many possible combinations of alignment. Britain frequently played the role of balancer and gave considerable naval and financial support to the status quo powers. The existence of a colonial frontier also permitted compensation at the expense of third parties outside of the system. But most important of all was the sense of community that constrained the ends and means of power. In the tradition of Montesquieu, Voltaire, Burke and Kant, Morgenthau understood Europe to be something more than a collection of autonomous states motivated by pure self-interest. It was “one great republic” with common standards of “politeness and cultivation” and a common “system of arts, and laws, and manners.” As a consequence, the “mutual influence of fear and shame imposed moderation on the actions of states and their leaders and instilled in all of them “some common sense of honor and justice.” However much leaders desired to increase their power at the expense of their neighbors, they limited their ambitions, because for the most part they recognized the right of the others to exist and the fundamental legitimacy of the international political order.⁴⁴

For Morgenthau, the success of the balance of power for the better part of three centuries was less a function of the distribution of capabilities than it was the underlying values and sense of community that bound together the actors in the system. When the European value consensus broke down, as it did from the first partition of Poland through the Napoleonic Wars, the balance of power no longer functioned to preserve

⁴³ Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations*, p. 125.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 159–66, 270–84; Hans J. Morgenthau, *In Defense of the National Interest: A Critical Examination of American Foreign Policy* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1982 [1951]), pp. 60–61. Similar arguments were subsequently made by the so-called English school, especially Hedley Bull, *The Anarchical Society: A Study of Order in World Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977). See also John Gerard Ruggie, “International Regimes, Transactions, and Change: Embedded Liberalism in the Post-war Economic Order,” *International Organization* 36 (Spring 1982), pp. 379–415, and Friedrich V. Kratochwil and John Gerard Ruggie, “International Organization: A State of the Art on the Art of the State,” in Edward D. Mansfield, ed., *International Organization: A Reader* (New York: Harper Collins, 1994), pp. 4–19.

the peace or integrity of the members of the system.⁴⁵ The consensus broke down again in the twentieth century with even more disastrous consequences. At mid-century, Morgenthau was deeply pessimistic about the future. The balance of power was at its nadir. There were two great powers instead of many, Britain no longer had the capability to play the role of balancer, the colonial frontier had disappeared and one of the principal powers rejected the very premises of the international order. International politics had been reduced “to the primitive spectacle of two giants eyeing each other with watchful suspicion.”⁴⁶

Morgenthau’s theory is descriptive *and* prescriptive. “Realism,” he insists in *Politics Among Nations*, is superior to “idealist” approaches on both counts. It is more rigorous because its axioms are logically derived from its starting assumptions. It is empirically valid because “the facts as they are actually lend themselves to the interpretation the theory has put upon them.”⁴⁷ Morgenthau makes much of the latter claim, contrasting his theory with “idealist” theories and related strategies that fly in the face of political reality. He offers Neville Chamberlain’s strategy of appeasement as a paradigmatic example. In doing so, he risks being hoist on his own petard. Woodrow Wilson’s pursuit of idealist goals at the Versailles peace conference, or British and French appeasement of Germany, followed by half-hearted attempts at balancing after Hitler occupied Czechoslovakia in March 1939, indicate that leaders do not always pursue realist foreign policies. Morgenthau considered this kind of criticism beside the point; the purpose of *Politics Among Nations* was not an “indiscriminate description of political reality,” but an attempt to develop a “rational theory of politics.” The balance of power was “an ideal system,” and in his more pessimistic moments Morgenthau was willing to admit that it was “scarcely found in reality.” Realism provided a benchmark against which actual policies could be understood and evaluated. For the same reason, it contained a strong normative element. It was a “theoretical construct” of a fully rational and informed foreign policy that “experience can never completely achieve,” but which can be used as a guide for making and assessing policy.⁴⁸

Morgenthau’s rejoinder is far from satisfactory. He made unabashed empirical claims for his theory, and behavior at variance is anomalous. All

⁴⁵ Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations*, pp. 160–66; Morgenthau, *In Defense of the National Interest*, p. 60. Paul W. Schroder, “A. J. P. Taylor’s International System,” *International History Review* 23 (March 2001), pp. 3–27, makes the same point.

⁴⁶ Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations*, p. 285.

⁴⁷ Hans J. Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations*, 3rd ed. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1960), p. 1.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 8; Morgenthau, *Decline of Domestic Politics*, p. 49.

social theories encounter anomalies, and the telling question is whether Morgenthau's theory provides a better account of international behavior than competitors. Morgenthau would insist on a second empirical criterion: the outcome of foreign policies at odds with realism. He maintained that "idealist" policies fail to promote peace and stability. But two decades later, we shall see, he was equally critical of realist approaches that failed to recognize moral and practical limitations on power. Most of us would probably agree that appeasement, as practiced by the Western democracies in the 1930s, rewarded Hitler's appetite for aggression and helped to provoke a long and costly war. Woodrow Wilson's policies find more support in the scholarly community, although all but his most ardent supporters admit that he may have been naive in the execution of some of his most important initiatives. A good case nevertheless can be made for the principles he espoused; the peace and prosperity of present-day Europe rest on a foundation of national self-determination, democratic government and international organization. Morgenthau conceded as much late in his career.

Realism vs. neorealism

International relations scholars of the neopositivist persuasion find Morgenthau stimulating but frustrating. They are impressed by his efforts to build a deductive theory but are put off by his invocation of causes at multiple levels of analysis and failure to present his theory in the categories and language of modern social science. Kenneth Waltz sought to overcome these "weaknesses" in his *Theory of International Politics*.⁴⁹ Any comparison of their approaches should start with their respective understanding of power.⁵⁰

For Morgenthau, politics is about power. "The concept of interest defined in terms of power" sets politics apart as an autonomous sphere and made possible a theory of international relations.⁵¹ He conceives of power as an intangible quality that had many diverse components.⁵² Waltz appears to agree; he offers a definition of power almost identical to Morgenthau's. But he goes on to assert the overwhelming importance of material capabilities, especially military capabilities, because "force remains the final arbiter" of international affairs. The superpowers are "set apart from the others . . . by their ability to exploit military technology

⁴⁹ Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*.

⁵⁰ For a more extensive critique of Waltz, see Richard Ned Lebow and Thomas Risse-Kappen, *International Relations Theory and the End of the Cold War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), chs. 1 and 2.

⁵¹ Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations*, 3rd ed., p. 5. ⁵² *Ibid.*, pp. 131, 180–81.

on a large scale and at the scientific frontiers.”⁵³ Morgenthau, by comparison, describes “armed strength” as the most important *material* component of power. National power has material *and* political components, among them territory, population, national resources, industrial capacity, military preparedness, national character, morale and the quality of diplomacy and government. None of these attributes translate directly into power because power is “a psychological relation[ship]” that gives those who exercise it control over certain actions of others “through the influence which the former exert over the latter’s minds.” “Of all the factors which make for the power of a nation, the most important is the quality of diplomacy.” The other attributes of national power are the raw materials out of which the power of a nation is fashioned. Diplomacy “combines those different factors into an integrated whole, gives them direction and weight, and awakens their slumbering potentialities by giving them the breath of actual power.”⁵⁴

Politics Among Nations offers many examples of states whose political power far exceeded their material capabilities because they had astute leaders (e.g., Germany between 1935 and 1939), and states whose power was well below what might have been expected due to incompetent leaders or domestic divisions (e.g., the United States between the wars, France in 1940). Morgenthau believed that power was so much a function of leadership and morale that explanations or predictions based on estimates of material capability were meaningless. Even in extreme cases, where giants confronted pygmies, material capabilities did not always determine behavior or outcomes. It had been utterly impractical for Melos to resist Athens, but the Melians did so with fatal consequences because they were moved by honor and inspired by their leaders. The Greeks, outnumbered on land and at sea, defeated the Persian invader, just as Israel, in 1947–48 and again, in 1967, overcame adversaries with vastly greater material capabilities because of their internal cohesion, organizational capability and astute leadership.⁵⁵

Morgenthau recognized that the strategies and tactics that leaders used to transform the potential attributes of power into influence are just as important – and far more intellectually interesting – than the attributes themselves. If power is “a psychological relationship,” leaders need to know not only what resources are at their disposal but which ones to use and how to use them in any given circumstance. It follows that there is no absolute measure of state power, because it is always relative and

⁵³ Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, pp. 131, 153, 180–81.

⁵⁴ Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations*, 1st ed., pp. 14, 105.

⁵⁵ These two examples come from Morgenthau lectures at the University of Chicago in 1960 and The City College of the City University of New York in 1973.

situation specific. States possess different strengths and weaknesses and distributions of capabilities, and what gives one influence over another may not confer the same advantage over other states or with the same state in a different context. Influence might usefully be compared to the children's game of rock, scissors and paper. Each of the two protagonists makes a fist behind its back and decides whether to be a rock, scissors or a piece of paper. At the count of three, they thrust out and open their fist and reveal one (rock), two (scissors) or three (paper) fingers. The rock triumphs over the scissors because it can smash them, but is trumped by the paper that wraps the rock. The scissors in turn defeat the paper because of its ability to cut it. The game highlights the relational nature of power. The American rock (nuclear and local conventional superiority) triumphed in Cuba because Khrushchev was desperate to avoid a humiliating military defeat. But American compellence failed against North Vietnam because Hanoi, although at a serious military disadvantage, did not fear war. North Vietnamese paper (willingness to suffer) wrapped the American rock. Theories of international relations, and especially those of deterrence and compellence, need to consider capabilities – and counter-capabilities – beyond usable military force. Policymakers in turn must remember that material capabilities only translate into bargaining leverage when they enable one actor to inflict meaningful loss or confer meaningful gain on another. Power is intransitive.

The successful exercise of power demands a sophisticated understanding of the goals, susceptibilities and vulnerabilities of allies, adversaries and third parties. Like Thucydides, Morgenthau believed that power is most effective when masked. “Man is born to seek power, yet his actual condition makes him a slave to the power of others.”⁵⁶ Human beings repress this unpleasant truth, and those who want to exercise power must help them do so. Clever leaders come up with justifications or invoke ideologies that make “interests and power relations . . . appear as something different than what they actually are.” Whenever possible, they must convince others who must submit to their will that they are acting in their own interest or that of the community.⁵⁷ For all of these reasons, Morgenthau insisted that “What is required for mastery of international politics is not the rationality of the engineer but the wisdom and moral strength of the statesman.”⁵⁸ Martti Koskenniemi observes with justification that for all Morgenthau's claims to have developed a sociological theory of international relations, he never deviated from his belief that

⁵⁶ Morgenthau, *Scientific Man vs. Power Politics*, p. 145.

⁵⁷ Morgenthau, *The Decline of Democratic Politics*, p. 59.

⁵⁸ Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations*, p. 172.

all important outcomes depended on the ethical sensibility and good judgment of leaders.⁵⁹

Power was the currency of international relations, but, unlike money, it could not be given numerical value and counted. Here too, the judgment of statesmen was critical. Morgenthau argued that it was easier to calculate the balance of power when there are only two major powers, and that alliances, and defections from them, are less important in bipolar systems because of the greater relative power of the two poles. Morgenthau's thinking about the structure of the international system evolved over the decades, but at no point did he consider polarity the most important determinant of peace or war. The first edition of *Politics Among Nations* noted the gradual decline in the number of sovereign states and great powers since the Thirty Years War and how, after 1945, only three states qualified as great powers on the basis of their material capabilities. A few years later, Morgenthau calculated that only two great powers were left because Britain had become distinctly inferior in power to both the United States and the Soviet Union. If Russian power had a weight of seventy on a scale, the United States had a weight of one hundred, to which Britain contributed a weight of ten and other allies, twenty. The power of the United States and the Soviet Union had become so "overwhelming" in comparison to allies and third parties that "through their own preponderant weight they determine the balance of power between them." The balance of power could no longer be "decisively affected" by changes in the alignments of their allies, at least for the foreseeable future. Nor could a lesser power readily defect from alliances, because "the two giants" had the power to "hold them there even against their will."⁶⁰

Morgenthau argued that in the eighteenth century, when alliances were flexible and unreliable, and when defections could have serious, if not decisive, consequences for the power balance, the great powers had to exercise "constant vigilance, circumspection and caution."⁶¹ In a bipolar world – a concept introduced by William T. R. Fox in 1944, but not used by Morgenthau until 1950 – the two superpowers were so powerful relative to other states that they did not have to worry about the possible consequences of allied defections or shifts in alliances.⁶² The flexibility of the balance of power and its restraining influence upon power aspirations

⁵⁹ Koskenniemi, *The Gentle Civilizer of Nations*, p. 467.

⁶⁰ Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations*, 1st ed., pp. 270–74; *In Defense of the National Interest*, pp. 48, 52–54.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 273.

⁶² Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations*, pp. 270–78. William T. R. Fox, *The Super-Powers* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1944). For Morgenthau's uses of the term bipolarity, see *In Defense of the National Interest*, p. 45, *Politics Among Nations*, 2nd ed. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1954), Table of Contents and p. 325.

of the main protagonists had disappeared. The superpowers were free to define their respective positions as vital interests and engage each other with every means at their disposal in every arena in which they competed. In this novel situation, “the give and take of compromise becomes a weakness which neither side is able to afford.”⁶³ Under bipolarity, Clausewitz’s classic dictum had been reversed, because “the art of diplomacy is transformed into a variety of the art of warfare.”⁶⁴

Morgenthau was clearly uncomfortable with the pessimistic implications of his analysis, and sought to hold out a ray of hope for the future. “The changed structure of the balance of power has made the hostile opposition of two gigantic power blocs possible,” he argued, “but it has not made it inevitable.” Bipolarity has the potential for “unheard-of good as well as for unprecedented evil.” Morgenthau buttresses this claim with a long quote from the seventeenth-century French philosopher, François Fénelon – one of those long-dead “authorities” to whom Barrington Moore objected – who hypothesized that an equilibrium between two major powers should reconcile both to the status quo and thereby preserve the integrity of smaller powers. Morgenthau worried that the character of modern war and nationalist universalism would prevent these putative advantages from being realized.⁶⁵

In the third edition of *Politics Among Nations*, Morgenthau recognized additional incentives for superpower restraint. He speculated that the experience of the Korean War might have taught Moscow and Washington that they had to adapt their policies to the wishes of their allies “if they wanted to draw the maximum of strength from their support.”⁶⁶ The emergence of a number of newly independent and unaligned states might also serve the cause of restraint.⁶⁷ The second and third editions continued to describe bipolarity as on the whole inimical to peace.⁶⁸ In the fifth edition, published in 1972, Morgenthau expressed cautious optimism. Détente, explicit recognition of the territorial status quo in Europe, a corresponding decline in ideological confrontation, the emergence of third forces (e.g., Japan, China, West Germany), and the damaging effects of Vietnam on American power had made both superpowers more cautious and respectful of the status quo. For all practical purposes, their

⁶³ Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations*, p. 285.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 270–86, 430. Quote on p. 285. In *Defense of the National Interest*, pp. 45–52, repeats the arguments of *Politics Among Nations* cited in this paragraph, sometimes word for word.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 285–86, and “World Politics in the Mid-Twentieth Century,” *Review of Politics* 19 (April 1948), pp. 154–73.

⁶⁶ Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations*, 3rd ed., p. 351.

⁶⁷ Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations*, 2nd ed., Preface and p. 337; 3rd ed., pp. 351–52.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 2nd ed., p. 338, 3rd ed., pp. 362–63.

de facto acceptance of the postwar division of Europe had ended the Cold War.⁶⁹

Because of his emphasis on power and the balance of power, Morgenthau is commonly considered a structural theorist. In contrast to neorealism, his theory considers state-level attributes to be of critical importance. He also considered agency decisive at every level of interaction. Morgenthau characterized states as status quo, imperialist and prestige-seeking, but considered these orientations fluid and not inherent attributes of states or their regimes. The relevant chapters in *Politics Among Nations* indicate that they are a function of circumstances; rising powers are more likely to be imperialist, while declining powers are almost certain to be defenders of the status quo. States like post-World War I Germany, which have been deprived of territory but not the industrial base or population that gives them the potential to become great powers again, will be imperialist regardless of the character of their governments. Foreign policy orientations also reflect leadership choices. The Second German Reich under Bismarck was a status quo power, a policy that changed dramatically under his successors, and was unrelated to any significant change in the balance of power.⁷⁰

Foreign policy orientations give rise to a balance of power, but the pattern of alignments is far from mechanical. This too depends on the choices made by leaders. The balance of power is more likely to preserve the peace when status quo powers possess a preponderance of power. This requires leaders of status quo powers to recognize the imperialist designs of would-be challengers and muster the resolve and diplomatic skill to forge an alliance powerful enough to hold them in check. Leaders of imperialist states must allow themselves to be deterred; they must exercise restraint when they are outgunned by an opposing coalition of status quo powers. The failure of status quo *and* imperialist leaders to behave appropriately was responsible for World War II and the system transformation it brought about.⁷¹ Morgenthau believed that key decisions by the superpowers and third parties would also determine the consequences and future of bipolarity. Peace and stability did not depend on the nuclear balance, but on the moral quality of leaders and their willingness to place the common goal of survival over the pursuit of unilateral advantage.⁷² Bipolarity could give way to multipolarity if China, Japan and West Germany acquired nuclear weapons. This too was a decision independent of the balance of power.⁷³

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 5th ed., 1972, preface, pp. 355–56 still reflect the pessimism of earlier editions.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 1st ed., chs. 2–4. ⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² *Ibid.*, pp. 285–86. ⁷³ *Ibid.*, 5th ed., Preface and pp. 252–53.

Neorealists describe anarchy as the defining characteristic of the international system; it makes international politics a “self-help” system and qualitatively different from domestic politics. Morgenthau acknowledged differences between domestic and international politics; “cultural uniformity, technological unification, external pressure, and, above all, a hierarchic political organization,” combined to make polities more stable and less subject to violent change than “the international order.”⁷⁴ He nevertheless recognized that states varied enormously in their cohesion and ran the gamut from the highly integrated and peaceful societies of Scandinavia to the Hobbesian worlds of civil war Russia, Stalin’s Soviet Union and Hitler’s Germany. An enormous potential for violence existed in domestic societies, just as the potential for harmony existed in international life. “The difference between domestic and international politics in this respect is one of degree and not of kind.”⁷⁵

Morgenthau would have accused neorealists of basing their theory on a narrow slice of human experience.⁷⁶ He considered the twentieth century atypical because there were fewer limitations on state power than “at almost any time since the Thirty Years War.” International politics had not always been this way and was “not likely to be so forever.”⁷⁷ The second big difference was nuclear weapons. They “transcend the ability of any nation-state” to control and harness them, and rendered the sovereign nation state an atavism.⁷⁸ The late twentieth-century world required “a principle of political organization transcending the nation-state and commensurate with the potentialities for good or evil of nuclear power itself.” While Waltz and neorealists sought to explain the status quo, Morgenthau struggled to look beyond it. The primary responsibility of statesmen was to avoid a nuclear Holocaust, and the task of international relations theorists was to help them to by laying the groundwork “for a new international order radically different from that which preceded it.”⁷⁹

Ethics and politics

In *Scientific Man vs. Power Politics*, Morgenthau offers a rather confusing discussion of ethics in which he describes three different views of public morality. The traditional approach of *Salus publica suprema lex* acknowledges that states can temporarily set aside normal legal, and perhaps,

⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 21; *Scientific Man vs. Power Politics*, p. 105.

⁷⁵ Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations*, p. 21.

⁷⁶ Morgenthau, *The Decline of Democratic Politics*, p. 47; Norman A. Graebner, “Morgenthau as Historian,” in Thompson and Myers, eds., *Truth and Tragedy*, pp. 66–76.

⁷⁷ Morgenthau, *Decline of Democratic Politics*, pp. 60, 59.

⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 76. ⁷⁹ Ibid.

other norms as well, to protect the republic. He somewhat inaccurately associates Machiavelli and Hobbes with this view, and the European tradition of *Realpolitik*.⁸⁰ From the time of the Greeks, he insists, it was widely acknowledged that people were not allowed to act in the political sphere as they pleased. State actions had to conform to a higher standard of morality than simple interest. In modern times, he continues, two distinct strategies developed to reconcile private and public morality. Wilsonian liberalism sought to compel states to conform to the standards of private morality through the application of international law. This effort failed, as Morgenthau believed any such effort must, and helped to bring about the kind of aggressive behavior it was expected to prevent. Lenin and the Bolsheviks embraced a third strategy: they justified state actions in terms of the beneficial ends they were intended to achieve. Behavior at odds with conventional standards of private morality was legitimized with reference to a higher principle. Morgenthau dismissed this strategy, what philosophers call “consequentialist ethics,” as a perfidious sleight of hand because we can never know the longer-term consequences of our actions. The claim that the end justifies the means is nothing more than an attempt to escape moral responsibility.⁸¹ *Pace* Kant, Morgenthau clearly subscribes to a “deontological” view of ethics, although he nowhere makes this explicit.

For Morgenthau, politics is “the paradigm and the prototype of all possible corruption.” It “is a struggle for power over men,” and “degrades man” by using him as a means to achieve fundamentally corrupt ends. As this is equally true of domestic and international politics, there is no basis for a double moral standard. “One and the same ethical stand applies to the private and public sphere.”⁸² Morgenthau is adamant that morality – defined in the Hegelian sense in terms of the historically significant conventions of the epoch – should limit both the ends that power seeks and the means employed to achieve those ends. Certain ends and means are unacceptable because of the opprobrium that attaches to them. Morality puts the stamp of its approval on other ends and means. It not only makes them more acceptable, but more attainable because of the positive value others attach to them.⁸³

Morality has prescriptive and descriptive value. It defines a code of behavior that states *ought* to follow but not infrequently violate. It is

⁸⁰ Morgenthau did not consider Machiavelli the forerunner of power politics. He merely gave advice on how to succeed in politics without glorifying power or those who exercise it. “Philosophy of International Relations,” Lecture Notes, 1952, Hans J. Morgenthau Papers, Container 81.

⁸¹ Morgenthau, *Scientific Man vs. Power Politics*, pp. 151–68. ⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 167.

⁸³ Morgenthau, *The Decline of Democratic Politics*, p. 59.

descriptive in that foreign policy often conforms to the prevalent moral code, even when it conflicts with short-term interests or has power-related costs. States routinely “refuse to consider certain ends or to use certain means, either altogether or under certain circumstances, not because in the light of expediency they appear impractical or unwise, but because certain moral rules interpose an absolute barrier.”⁸⁴ Leaders also recognize that policies that reflect existing moral codes are more likely to gain at home and abroad.

Morgenthau’s commitment to ethical imperatives might appear puzzling in light of his rejection of Wilsonian liberalism and assertions that politics is about power. He vehemently denied any contradiction, and criticized E. H. Carr for trying to divorce power from morality.⁸⁵ Wilson’s error was not his concern for morality, but his failure to grasp the immutable character of human beings and the role of power in domestic and international politics. It is proper and realistic to be bound by moral constraints, but naive and dangerous to believe that morality, expressed through law and international institutions, can consistently restrain the pursuit of relative advantage.⁸⁶ Any analysis of international morality must “guard against the two extremes either of overrating the influence of ethics upon international politics or of denying that statesmen and diplomats are moved by anything else but considerations of material power.”⁸⁷

During the Vietnam War, Morgenthau made an interesting admission about the centrality of power in his theory of international relations. Politics was undeniably about power, but in the 1940s he had emphasized it to the point of excluding other features of politics as a reaction to the liberal idealist emphasis on law and morality. This had been a strategic as much as an intellectual choice. “When the times tend to depreciate the elements of power,” he wrote in 1966, international relations theory

must stress its importance. When the times incline toward a monistic conception of power in the general scheme of things, it must show its limitations. When the times conceive of power primarily in military terms, it must call attention to the variety of factors which go into the power equation and, more particularly, to the subtle psychological relations of which the web of power is fashioned.

⁸⁴ Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations*, 1st ed., pp. 174–75.

⁸⁵ Hans J. Morgenthau, “The Political Science of E. H. Carr,” *World Politics* 1 (October 1948), pp. 127–34.

⁸⁶ Hans J. Morgenthau, *La réalité des normes, en particulier des normes du droit international. Fondements d’une théorie des normes* (Paris: 1934), and “Théorie des sanctions internationales,” *Revue de droit international et de législation comparé*, 3rd series, 16 (1935), pp. 474–503, 809–836.

⁸⁷ Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations*, 1st ed., p. 174.

When the reality of power is being lost sight of over its moral and legal limitations, it must point to that reality. When law and morality are judged as nothing, it must assign them their rightful place.⁸⁸

By the mid-sixties, the political culture of national security in the United States had undergone an about-face. The role of morality and law now needed to be brought to the attention of policymakers and theorists alike.

Following Kant and Hans Kelsen, Morgenthau treated law as a system of norms (*nomos*), and argued that international society had evolved to encompass a wide range of norms that states for the most part obeyed.⁸⁹ “The influence of civilization [has made] some policies that are desirable and feasible ethically reprehensible and, hence, normally impossible of execution.”⁹⁰ *Politics Among Nations* devotes a chapter to restraints on the use of violence that emerged since the Thirty Years War. These include the understanding that war is a struggle between competing armed forces, and not a contest between entire populations; conventions that protect prisoners of war and keep them from being tortured or killed; the prohibition of certain weapons, and limitations on the use of others; the responsibilities and rights of neutrals; and general acceptance of the view that violence should be restricted to the minimum level compatible with the goals of war. Laws and conventions also proscribe behavior (e.g., territorial violations, bugging embassies) in which states routinely engage. “The protestations of innocence or of moral justification by which accusations in such matters are uniformly met” are, Morgenthau maintains, “indirect recognition of the legitimacy of these limitations.”⁹¹ He considered the twentieth century enigmatic in this respect; more new norms had been created by international treaties than ever before, but adherence to norms of all kinds had declined. International morality had reached its high-water point in the eighteenth century, and had receded subsequently in response to the rise of nationalism and the growing dependence of leaders on public opinion.⁹²

Morgenthau’s concern for ethics undergirded his opposition to the Indochina war. He was an early critic of American intervention and equally skeptical of subsequent escalations. Beginning in November 1963 he produced a steady stream of articles for *Commentary* and the *New Republic* as well as letters to the editors of the *Washington Post*

⁸⁸ Hans J. Morgenthau, “The Purpose of Political Science,” in James C. Charlesworth, ed., *A Design for Political Science: Scope, Objectives and Methods* (Philadelphia: American Academy of Political and Social Science, 1966), p. 77.

⁸⁹ Morgenthau, *La réalité des normes*, makes the case for three types of norms: morality, customs (*moeurs*) and law. Legal norms were the only type of norms that regulated relations among states and would have more weight if supported by these other norms.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 176–77. ⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 180. ⁹² *Ibid.*

and *New York Times*.⁹³ Behind the scenes, he provided anti-war arguments to Frank Church, one of the principal Senate opponents of intervention.⁹⁴ Morgenthau was deeply troubled that American policy-makers had jettisoned idealism only to adopt European-style *Realpolitik*. Vietnam was being fought in the name of realism, but represented a perversion of that philosophy. Realism had a moral basis. It was not merely a self-serving justification for the status quo.⁹⁵ Morgenthau's opposition to Vietnam cost him the much coveted presidency of the American Political Science Association; its conservative pro-war administrator quietly mobilized pro-war professors to block his nomination.

In 1965, Morgenthau published a book on Vietnam in which he excoriated American intervention on practical and moral grounds. He insisted that the use of military force to shore up an unpopular, oppressive government of absentee landlords was certain to fail. It was an "improvident and foolish use of power" that would inevitably lead to a "serious loss of prestige."⁹⁶ A "foreign power" has no business "defending the status quo against a national and social revolution."⁹⁷ Morgenthau was particularly offended by Washington's military strategy. "Counterinsurgency" was a "mechanical connivance" that differed from traditional warfare in that it was directed against the population rather than identifiable armed forces.

⁹³ Hans J. Morgenthau, "The Impotence of American Power," *Commentary* 36 (November 1963), pp. 384–86; Letter to the *Washington Post* (a rejoinder to an earlier article by Zbigniew Brzezinski in favor of military intervention in Vietnam, 15 March 1964); "We are Deluding Ourselves in Vietnam," *New York Times Magazine*, 18 April 1965, pp. 24, 85–87; "Russia, the US and Vietnam," *The New Republic*, 1 May 1965, pp. 12–13; unpublished letter to the *New York Times*, 18 August 1965, Morgenthau Papers, container 43; "Johnson's Dilemma: The Alternatives Now in Vietnam," *The New Republic*, 28 May 1966, pp. 12–16; "Truth and Power: The Intellectual and the Johnson Administration," *The New Republic*, 26 November 1966, pp. 8–14; "To Intervene or Not to Intervene," *Foreign Affairs* 45 (April 1967), pp. 425–36; "Bundy's Doctrine of War Without End," *The New Republic*, 2 November 1968, pp. 18–20; "Between Hanoi and Saigon: Kissinger's Next Test," *The New Leader*, 13 November 1972, pp. 5–6; "The New Escalation in Vietnam," *The New Republic*, 20 May 1972, pp. 9–11; "Explaining the Failures of US Foreign Policy: Three Paradoxes," *The New Republic*, 11 October 1975, pp. 15–18.

⁹⁴ On 31 December 1964, Morgenthau urged Church to pressure the administration to seek a withdrawal by means of a neutralization agreement. In January 1967, he provided Church with a critique of a Department of Defense film justifying American intervention. This letter and subsequent correspondence between Morgenthau, Church and the Senator's office is in containers 12 and 43 of the Morgenthau Papers.

⁹⁵ Richard A. Falk, "Normative Constraints on Statecraft: Some Comments on Morgenthau's Perspective," and Marcus Raskin, "The Idealism of a Realist," Thompson and Myers, eds., *Truth and Tragedy*, pp. 77–84, 85–94.

⁹⁶ Hans J. Morgenthau, *Vietnam and the United States* (Washington, DC: Public Affairs Press, 1965), Preface, p. 12.

⁹⁷ Hans J. Morgenthau, "US Misadventure in Vietnam," *Current History* 54 (January 1968), pp. 29–30; Hans J. Morgenthau, *A New Foreign Policy for the United States* (New York: Praeger, 1969), pp. 134–35.

“Military action aimed at the destruction of guerrilla forces entailed the destruction of entire villages, people and crops alike.”⁹⁸

When air and ground operations did not produce the expected results, Washington sent more forces, carried out more extensive air operations, bombed Hanoi and Haiphong and extended the ground and air war into the rest of Indochina. Morgenthau worried – needlessly, as it turned out – that such escalation risked a wider war with China and the Soviet Union. He was equally disturbed by the moral implications of escalation. If South Vietnam survived long enough, he conceded, the United States might compel the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese to halt their military campaign in the South. Victory would not be achieved by breaking the enemy’s will to resist, but “by killing so many of the enemy that there is nobody left to resist.” Such a strategy was a perversion of Clausewitz, who conceived of killing in war as a means to bend or break an adversary’s will. In Vietnam, “killing becomes an end in itself.” The physical elimination of the enemy and victory “become synonymous.” Hence, the “body count,” however fictitious, became the metric of success.⁹⁹

Morgenthau warned that “No civilized nation” could wage such a war “without suffering incalculable moral damage.” The resulting opprobrium would be all the more severe because most of the world saw no military or political benefit that could warrant the kind of widespread, indiscriminate killing and destruction the United States was inflicting on Indochina. Such behavior stood in sharp contrast to American claims to be “a novel experiment in government, morally superior to those that went before it,” and made a mockery of its claim to be “performing a uniquely beneficial mission not only for itself but for all mankind.”¹⁰⁰ Vietnam was costing the United States its *hēgemonia*.

Morgenthau elaborated this theme in a subsequent article in the *New Republic* in which he accused the United States of trying to suppress the symptoms of instability rather than addressing its causes. Throughout the Third World, and especially in Vietnam, successive administrations had consistently supported the side of repression in an on-going struggle over social, economic and political reform. American leaders pursued short-term stability at the expense of their long-term interests. “The United States has found itself consistently on the wrong side of the great issues, which in retrospect will appear to have put their stamp upon the present period of history.”¹⁰¹

⁹⁸ Morgenthau, *A New Foreign Policy for the United States*, pp. 134–35.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 137. ¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 137–38.

¹⁰¹ Morgenthau, “Explaining the Failures of US Foreign Policy.” In a 1974 letter to the *New York Times*, 10 October 1974, protesting American involvement in the coup in Chile, Morgenthau referred to the United States as “the foremost counterrevolutionary power on earth.”

There was also a domestic component to Vietnam. Leaders of democracies are frequently pulled in opposite directions by state and political interests. Postwar American presidents had repeatedly mobilized public opinion to support foreign policies based on uncompromising opposition to world communism. Over time, this strategy made the government the prisoner of the passions it had aroused and had compelled it to intervene in Vietnam. It threatened to destroy the give and take of “pluralistic debate through which errors can be corrected and the wrong policies set right.”¹⁰² There had been no meaningful public debate prior to American intervention, and once committed, it became impossible for the Johnson administration to extricate itself when its policy had failed. The decline of American democracy was at its core a problem of ethics.

In his lectures and conversations, Morgenthau drew the parallel between the ill-fated Athenian expedition in Sicily and the United States in Vietnam. Both failures were attributable to hubris and the lack of prudence it engendered. The biggest difference between the two conflicts, Morgenthau hastened to point out, was that Thucydides thought that a more serious effort by Athens to reinforce and support its military operation in Sicily might have resulted in victory. By 1967, Morgenthau was adamant that further buildups of American forces could not materially affect the outcome, and that the only way to end the war, in the absence of wise leadership, was through domestic opposition that would convince the Congress to halt funding for the war.¹⁰³

Morgenthau saw obvious parallels in the methods and goals of ethics and international relations theory. Philosophers and theorists alike should search for underlying, universal truths through the study of history, and adapt them to contemporary circumstances. It is the task “for every age, and particularly a scientific one, to rediscover and reformulate the perennial problems of political ethics and to answer them in the light of the experience of the age.”¹⁰⁴ In ethics as in politics, Morgenthau attempted to perform this service for his adopted country.

War, peace and system transformation

One of the tragedies of the post-World War I era, Morgenthau maintained, was that Wilsonians read the limited success of law in restricting violence as evidence that international agreements could outlaw war and resolve, or at least regulate, the kinds of conflicts that had led to war in the past.

¹⁰² Hans J. Morgenthau, *Truth and Power: Essays of a Decade, 1960–1970* (New York: Praeger, 1970), pp. 40–44.

¹⁰³ Conversations with Hans Morgenthau, 1961–78.

¹⁰⁴ Morgenthau, *Scientific Man vs. Power Politics*, p. 146.

American and British foreign policy reflected these ideals at a time when Germany, Italy and Japan were riding roughshod over all civilized values and practices. This juxtaposition of naivete and evil brought about World War II.¹⁰⁵

At mid-century, Morgenthau feared that the world had escaped the frying pan of fascism only to risk the fire of nuclear conflagration. He agreed with Bernard Brodie that the atomic bomb had changed the nature of warfare.¹⁰⁶ As it required “only a limited number of atomic bombs to destroy the military potential of the United States,” war against a nuclear-capable Soviet Union would be irrational no matter how much damage the American air force could inflict on that country.¹⁰⁷ Morgenthau reasoned that nuclear weapons were “the only real revolution which has occurred in the structure of international relations since the beginning of history” because they radically changed the relationship between the means and ends of foreign policy. War between nuclear powers was no longer an extension of politics by other means but mutual suicide.¹⁰⁸ Morgenthau worried that the superpowers, although they recognized this truth, would back themselves against the wall or lose control in a crisis and stumble into a catastrophic war.¹⁰⁹

The principal threat to peace was political. The superpowers were “imbued with the crusading spirit of the new moral force of nationalistic universalism,” and “face each other in inflexible opposition.” They had transformed what should have been a run-of-the-mill power struggle into a Manichean conflict between good and evil in which persuasion had become “tantamount to trickery, compromise means treason, and the threat of force spells war.”¹¹⁰ Unlike many of his colleagues, Morgenthau was equally critical of the United States. American leaders confused their professed values and morality. Their foreign policy had become increasingly divorced from any conception of the national interest and had assumed the character of a crusade in the name of universal, but really parochial,

¹⁰⁵ Morgenthau, “Liberalism and War”; “Review of *Power Politics*”; *Politics Among Nations*, 1st ed., Part 9.

¹⁰⁶ Bernard Brodie, *The Absolute Weapon: Atomic Power and World Order* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1946), is cited in the bibliography of the first edition of *Politics Among Nations*.

¹⁰⁷ Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations*, 1st ed., p. 319; “World Politics in the Mid-Twentieth Century,” pp. 154–73.

¹⁰⁸ Morgenthau, *The Decline of Democratic Politics*, p. 76; *Politics Among Nations*, 3rd ed., p. 326, also noted the mass destructive potential of bacteriological weapons.

¹⁰⁹ Hans J. Morgenthau to Helen Fuller, managing editor of the *New Republic*, 24 December 1956, commenting on his article published in the *New Republic* on 10 and 17 December 1956, Morgenthau Papers, container 43; “Has Atomic War Really Become Impossible?,” *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* 12 (January 1956), pp. 7–9.

¹¹⁰ Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations*, 1st ed., p. 430.

values. McCarthyism and Vietnam were indications of the extent to which American leaders and public opinion had become “equally hostile to the middle ground of subtle distinctions, complex choices, and precarious manipulations, which is the proper sphere of foreign policy.”¹¹¹

By the early 1970s Morgenthau thought the threat of nuclear war had receded but considered the overall problem of world peace no closer to solution.¹¹² He remained convinced that attempts to banish war through laws and international agreements were doomed to failure so long as the fundamental character of international relations remained unchanged. “To improve the world one must work with existing forces, not against them.” In keeping with his tragic understanding of politics, Morgenthau maintained that moral principles can never fully be realized, but only approximated through the ever temporary balance of interests and equally precarious management of conflicts. A wise statesman “aims at achievement of the lesser evil rather than of the absolute good.”¹¹³ “Power,” Morgenthau acknowledged, “is a crude and unreliable method of limiting the aspirations for power on the international scene,” but the balance of power may be a good *short-term* strategy for preserving the peace.¹¹⁴ For the same reason, he became a strong, public advocate of nuclear arms control in light of the near-term impossibility of nuclear disarmament.¹¹⁵

An enduring solution to the problem of war required a fundamental transformation of the international system. In 1948, Morgenthau castigated fellow realist E. H. Carr for wanting to substitute the “utopia of supranationalism for liberal internationalism.”¹¹⁶ He gradually moved in

¹¹¹ Morgenthau, *Vietnam and the United States*, p. 81.

¹¹² Francis Boyle, *World Politics and International Law* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1985), pp. 72–73, reports an interview with Morgenthau on 10 November 1979 in which he expressed great pessimism about the future. He told Boyle that “In my opinion the world is moving ineluctably towards a third world war – a strategic nuclear war. I do not believe that anything can be done to prevent it.” This statement stands in sharp contrast to his published statements and other conversations, and Morgenthau himself confessed that “I am in a pessimistic mood today, so perhaps you should come back at another time and ask me that question again.”

¹¹³ Morgenthau, *Decline of Democratic Politics*, p. 80.

¹¹⁴ Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations*, 1st ed., p. 169.

¹¹⁵ Letter to the *New York Times*, 19 June 1969, describing a speech of President Richard Nixon as a demagogic attack on the concept of arms control. Morgenthau distinguishes between conventional and nuclear arms control, and argues that “Mr. Nixon is completely wrong with respect to nuclear weapons, for the conventional modes of thought are not applicable to them. While conventional arms control and disarmament indeed depend upon the settlement of issues which give rise to the arms race in the first place, nuclear arms control and disarmament are rational necessities regardless of the settlement of international conflicts, once both adversaries have reached the optimum of nuclear sufficiency.”

¹¹⁶ Morgenthau, “The Political Science of E. H. Carr,” *World Politics* 1 (October 1948), pp. 127–34.

that direction himself because he came to believe that sovereign nation states could not cope with nuclear weapons and the threat to human survival they posed. By 1962, he would insist that the long-term well-being of the human race required “a principle of political organization transcending the nation-state.”¹¹⁷ His commitment to some form of supranational authority deepened in the 1970s. Humanity was now threatened by a population explosion, world hunger and environmental degradation in addition to the continuing danger of a nuclear Holocaust. Nation states seemed incapable of ameliorating any of these problems.¹¹⁸ But if they were so zealous about safeguarding their sovereignty, how could the international system possibly evolve toward a new order? Progress would only take place, Morgenthau reasoned, when enough national leaders became convinced that it was in their respective national interests. In the 1950s, he was dubious about the virtues of European federation, and the Schumann Plan in particular. He insisted at the time that the key to a European peace was “the calculated and determined intervention on the part of the United States.”¹¹⁹ By the 1960s he had reversed himself, and considered the European Coal and Steel Community a striking example of what was possible when leaders reconceptualized their interests. The process of European integration illustrated the apparent paradox that “what is historically conditioned in the idea of the national interest can be overcome only through the promotion in concert of the national interest of a number of nations.”¹²⁰

For Morgenthau, the European Community did not reflect a change in the distribution of power but in the organizing principles of a regional system. He hoped that state sovereignty would be superseded by some kind of supranational authority, ultimately, on a global basis. He never elaborated any institutional framework or seriously addressed the problem of transformation, but remained adamant that learning would have to be the catalyst for such a transformation. The national interest is a fluid concept, and leaders’ understandings of it change over time. The failures of the past and the challenges of the present might convince leaders that

¹¹⁷ Morgenthau, *Decline of American Politics*, pp. 75–76.

¹¹⁸ Kenneth W. Thompson, “Introduction,” in Morgenthau, *In Defense of the National Interest*, p. v; personal communications with Hans Morgenthau.

¹¹⁹ “Building a European Federation,” reprinted from 46 *Proceedings of the American Society of International Law* (1952), pp. 130–34. Morgenthau reviews efforts to create a European peace through the Schumann Plan. Aims to bind Germany to France. Key is a viable balance of power, which “cannot be created by preaching the virtues of European federation, but only by the calculated and determined intervention on the part of the United States.”

¹²⁰ Morgenthau, *Decline of American Politics* p. 93. *Decline of Democratic Politics* was published in 1962, but this essay was originally published in 1958 in *Decline of American Politics*.

national interests are better served by less, rather than more sovereignty. In the long run, ideas trump structure. Morgenthau was a Weberian at heart.

He would have been pleased by Gorbachev's foreign policy revolution. He would have explained it, and the subsequent rapprochement of Russia and the West in terms of learning and the changed conception of the national interest that it promoted. He would have been greatly amused by the efforts of neorealists, caught off-guard by these developments, to attribute them *ex post facto* to changes in the balance of power.

Morgenthau on theory

Scientific Man vs. Power Politics appeared at the beginning of the postwar "behavioral revolution" and represents one of the most cogent contemporary critiques of efforts to construct predictive theories in political science. Toward this end, Morgenthau drew on the writings of Max Weber and other participants in the turn of the century *Methodenstreit*, made analogies to quantum physics and advanced arguments that will resonate with contemporary reflexivists.¹²¹

Morgenthau insisted that the social world differed from the physical world in fundamental ways that confounded attempts to determine causation and make predictions. There was no single cause in the social sphere that would produce a given outcome under a wide range of circumstances. Single causes invariably had multiple, often contradictory, effects depending on the circumstances. Similar outcomes could also have multiple, different causes. It was impossible "to foresee with any degree of certainty which effects will be brought about by this particular cause, nor is it possible to state in retrospect with any degree of certainty what particular cause has produced this effect."¹²²

Social complexity was attributable in large part to the reflexive nature of human beings. Unlike atoms, people had goals, emotions and histories that affected their understanding and responses to external stimuli. Social behavior is a composite of many human actions, and groups of people will react differently to an identical stimulus under different physical, psychological and social conditions.¹²³ Social complexity is also the outcome of the multiplicity of stimuli that act on individuals and groups and make it impossible to isolate any one stimulus and test its effects. Every

¹²¹ Morgenthau reaffirmed his epistemology two decades later in "Common Sense and Theories of International Relations," *International Affairs* 21 (Summer 1967), pp. 207–14.

¹²² Morgenthau, *Scientific Man vs. Power Politics*, p. 112. ¹²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 112–13.

stimulus, present and past, ripples through the organism or body politic and affects its frame of references, sensitivity to information, emotional state, repertory and behavior. Because all so-called causes “are interwoven with the crosscurrents and intricacies of social causation,” the best the social sciences can do is to “present a series of hypothetical possibilities, each of which may occur under certain conditions – and which of them will actually occur is anybody’s guess.”¹²⁴

Morgenthau maintained that the process of social inquiry differed in important ways from research into the natural world. Macro physical phenomena could be studied from a distance; a geologist could fly over a desert and take photographs without disturbing a single grain of sand. The social scientist stands in the streams of social causation as an acting and reacting agent. “What he sees and what he does are determined by his position in those streams; and by revealing what he sees in terms of his science he directly intervenes in the social processes.” Gallup polls transcend theoretical analysis and influence how people vote. Karl Marx’s writings about class struggle and proletarian revolution influenced Russian intellectuals and helped to bring about a revolution. Marx’s writings might also convince Western capitalists to treat their workers differently and make revolution less likely. Social knowledge becomes a stimulus for behavior and can change the way people act. Morgenthau thought the social world more like that part of the physical world governed by the laws of quantum mechanics, in which any human attempt to measure the location, spin or charge of particles significantly affects these same parameters.¹²⁵

The social world shapes social inquiry. Investigators are products of their cultures and epochs. They are subjected to all kinds of pressures emanating from groups and society as a whole, that largely “determine the objects, methods, and results of scientific investigation.” Influence of this kind is not limited to contracts and research grants. The government, directly, and through the universities, disposes of a wide range of professional rewards that help to determine the status of professors.¹²⁶ Social science is a reflection of the power structure, and, not surprisingly, its findings most often justify that structure and buttress its legitimacy. “Truth itself becomes relative to social interests and emotions.” Claims of objectivity indicate how little awareness social scientists have of their real role in society. Few investigators have the ability and courage to step outside their cultures or challenge the institutions upon which they depend

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 114–15; *Decline of American Politics*, p. 71.

¹²⁵ Morgenthau, *Scientific Man vs. Power Politics*, pp. 123–26.

¹²⁶ Morgenthau, “The Purpose of Political Science,” pp. 71–72.

for publication, tenure, salary increases and other forms of professional recognition.¹²⁷

Because prediction is impossible, social scientists fall back on explanation. “They prove that France was bound to fall in 1940 because of certain trends in her social and political structure which were obvious to anyone. Yet nobody was able to predict before the event that those trends would materialize instead of others which were quite as much in the public eye. The seeming proof that what happened was bound to happen argues *post hoc ergo propter hoc* and has no scientific value.”¹²⁸ Morgenthau was bemused by how events, some of which were, or would, have been rejected as impossible beforehand because they were at odds with reigning theories, were made consistent with those same theories in retrospect. By such sleights of hand the social scientists indulge their “inveterate tendency to stick to their assumptions and to suffer constant defeat from experience rather than to change their assumptions in the light of contradicting facts.”¹²⁹

For someone who disparaged prediction, Morgenthau made two of his own that seem right on the money six decades later. He expected social science to “retreat ever more from contact with the empirical world into a realm of self-sufficient abstractions.” It would become a new form of scholasticism that “dissolves the substance of knowledge into the processes of knowing.” Social scientists would “think about how to think and to conceptualize about concepts, regressing ever further from empirical reality until [they] find the logical consummation of [their] endeavors in mathematical symbols and other formal relations.” Their patently false claims to objectivity would sooner or later provoke a strong reaction among a younger generation of academics who “would take flight in a subjective dogmatism that identifies the perspective and preferences of the observer with . . . the truth.”¹³⁰ The social science parody of modernism – would provoke postmodernism.

A quintessential feature of the Enlightenment from Voltaire on was its rejection of the past as an unrelieved record of error and superstition. Morgenthau lamented that behavioral social science, and rationalism more generally, threw out the baby with the bath water when they turned their backs on the cumulative wisdom of humankind. Hostility to history introduced a dichotomy between political science and political philosophy, and Morgenthau correctly foresaw that political science

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 140–44. ¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 120.

¹²⁹ Morgenthau, *The Decline of Democratic Politics*, p. 282.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 28, 44. In 1940, Morgenthau, “Positivism, Functionalism and International Law,” *American Journal of International Law* 34 (1940), pp. 260–84, had used similar language to make a similar prediction of positivist international law.

departments would marginalize or gradually eliminate political philosophy courses and faculty. This would make political theory sterile by cutting it off from contact with current issues, and deprive political science of a working knowledge of the Western tradition.¹³¹ History and political theory were both essential to political science because the real task of theory is “to separate in the intellectual tradition at their disposal that which is historically conditioned from that which is true regardless of time and place, to pose again the perennial problems of politics, and to reformulate the perennial truths of politics, in the light of the contemporary experience.”¹³²

Morgenthau had a very different conception of theory than his behavioralist colleagues, and one that was strikingly reminiscent of Clausewitz. Because social reality is “complicated, incongruous and concrete,” the best reason and empirical analysis can do is “discover universal motives and strategies associated with them that give rise to certain patterns of behavior.” These patterns are never determined because all politics is contextual (*Standortsgebunden*) and depends on the subjective understandings, goals and skills of actors.¹³³ Abstract theories, moreover, are never ends in themselves, but means toward framing foreign policy choices. Theories, even valid ones, are only the *starting points* for such analysis. They provide conceptual categories and tools of analysis that investigators can use to analyze specific cases, and alert them to the possibility that certain kinds of behavior may occur. To understand or forecast actual behavior, investigators must ask additional questions specific to the case and independent of the theory; even physical theories require knowledge of initial conditions. We must work back and forth between the general and the specific in an attempt to develop a better understanding of the world.

The deeper purpose of social science, and of international relations theory, is to identify problems and propose and evaluate possible solutions to them and bring this knowledge to the attention of the public and policymakers. “All good theory,” Morgenthau insisted, “is practical theory, which intervenes in a concrete political situation with the purpose of change through action.”¹³⁴

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 3–4. ¹³² Morgenthau, *The Decline of Democratic Politics*, p. 48.

¹³³ Morgenthau’s use of the terms *Standortsgebundenheit* (situational determination) and *Sitz im Leben* (seat in life) reflect the influence of the historicist, Wilhelm Dilthey, *Der Aufbau der geschichtlichen Welt in den Geisteswissenschaften* (Stuttgart: Teubner, 1958). The sociology of knowledge, to which Morgenthau was exposed in his university years, reflected this perspective and the importance of a historical frame of reference in understanding social behavior. On the relationship between historicism and sociology, see H. Stuart Hughes, *Consciousness and Society* (New York: Knopf, 1958), esp. pp. 183ff.

¹³⁴ Morgenthau, *Scientific Man vs. Power Politics*, pp. 72–73, 119–22.

Morgenthau among nations

Morgenthau scholars disagree about the relative importance and continuity of his German and American experiences. Christoph Frei argues for the primacy of Morgenthau's European experiences and the continuity of his writings. He interprets his American books on international politics as extensions of his European investigations into international law.¹³⁵ Jan Willem Honig emphasizes the debt that Morgenthau, and American realism more generally, owe to German totalitarian ideologies.¹³⁶ Martti Koskenniemi also stresses Morgenthau's intellectual debt to Carl Schmidt, and finds striking similarities in their objections to international law and the "decadence" of twentieth-century liberalism.¹³⁷ Andreas Söllner sees a sharp break between the German and American Morgenthau; the Weimar liberal became a postwar conservative.¹³⁸ Niels Amstrup adopts a middle position; he finds the genesis of some of Morgenthau's postwar concepts in his prewar writings.¹³⁹

None of these interpretations adequately capture the evolution of Morgenthau's thinking about ethics, politics and international affairs. Koskenniemi and Amstrup are the closest to the mark. Morgenthau's prewar writings already disparaged the naivete of those who believed that war could effectively be outlawed. He was adamant that states will always disagree about the proper organizing principles of the international environment, and that disputes with "high political content" cannot be resolved by judicial means. He also developed the three-fold characterization of states out to change the status quo, maintain it or just display their power.¹⁴⁰ In a more fundamental sense, all of Morgenthau's written work reveals a continuous commitment to social justice and world order, but some discontinuities in the means by which these ends might be achieved.

Morgenthau was a self-conscious amalgam of three different cultural traditions: Jewish, German and American. He began his 1922 *Gymnasium* essay by observing that his "relationship to the social environment is

¹³⁵ Frei, *Hans J. Morgenthau*, chs. 5–8.

¹³⁶ Honig, "Totalitarianism and Realism."

¹³⁷ Koskenniemi, *The Gentle Civilizer of Nations*, pp. 459–65.

¹³⁸ Andreas Söllner, "Hans J. Morgenthau: ein deutscher Konservativer in Amerika?," in Rainer Erb and Michael Schmidt, eds., *Antisemitismus und jüdische Geschichte: Studien zu Ehren von Herbert A. Strauss* (Berlin: Wissenschaftlicher Autorenverlag, 1987), pp. 243–66.

¹³⁹ Niels Amstrup, "The 'Early' Morgenthau: A Comment on the Intellectual Origins of Realism," *Cooperation and Conflict* 13 (1978), pp. 163–75; personal communication with the author.

¹⁴⁰ Hans J. Morgenthau, *La notion du "politique" et la théorie des différends internationaux* (Paris: Sirey, 1933).

determined by three facts: I am a German, I am a Jew, and I have matured in the period following the war.” He was a self-identified Jew in Germany and America, and proud of his heritage, although he led a secular life.¹⁴¹ Judaism puts great emphasis on social justice and communal solidarity. A grandson of a rabbi, Morgenthau imbibed these values, and they were reflected in his commitment to dedicate his life to do something worthwhile for humanity.¹⁴² This commitment helped to sustain and motivate Morgenthau during the most difficult periods of his life in Germany, subsequent emigration and long search for personal and professional security.

Morgenthau’s *Gymnasium* essay expressed concern that it might not be possible to reconcile his religious-cultural and national identities. Unlike many of his contemporaries, he was unwilling to hide or renounce his Jewish identity or otherwise accommodate to bigotry. He suffered keenly from the practical and psychological consequences of rejection in Coburg. He must have encountered prejudice on a daily basis in Munich and Frankfurt as well, as anti-Semitism became increasingly pronounced during the course of the 1920s. By the time he left Germany, less than a year before Hitler came to power, the worst fear expressed in his essay had materialized; he was *ausgeschlossen* and *ausgetossen* [excluded and expelled].¹⁴³ The experience of being driven from his homeland by prejudice deepened his commitment to social justice.

The cultural and intellectual milieu of the Weimar Republic constituted the second strand of Morgenthau’s development. Here, German and Jew came together. The French revolution had made it possible for Jews to become full citizens and participants in the national culture while retaining their traditional religious affiliation. Elsewhere in Europe, Jews struggled to achieve similar rights and supported political movements and parties that promised to make this possible. For Morgenthau, it was natural for Jews to adopt “the optimistic outlook that the emancipation of German Jewry though the application of liberal principles was tantamount to the permanent solution of the Jewish problem in Germany.”

¹⁴¹ Morgenthau was involved with Jewish questions throughout his career and was a strong supporter of Israel. He engaged in a public polemic with C. L. Sulzberger, who wrote a column in the *New York Times* on 1 July 1970 in which he argued that Jews were just a religious sect, and that if the Soviet Union treated them that way the “Jewish problem” would diminish. Morgenthau objected strenuously in a letter to the editor published on 7 July. His draft letter was an even more strongly worded defense of the concept of Jewish nationality, of Zionism and of Soviet Zionists. Morgenthau Papers, container 43.

¹⁴² Morgenthau, “Fragment of an Intellectual Autobiography,” pp. 1–4.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 2. Quotation from the German original, “Was ich von meiner Zukunft erhoffe, und worauf sich diese Hoffnung gründet,” September 1922.

When rabid nationalism threatened the fruits of emancipation, many Jews clung desperately to liberalism as a psychological defense.¹⁴⁴

The German Morgenthau was squarely in the liberal Jewish tradition. Looking back on his university experience he remembered that it was “impossible to visualize the ignorance, confusion, meanness and general moral and intellectual degradation that dominated German public life and upon which the authority of great scholars bestowed a semblance of moral and intellectual legitimacy.” Max Weber was an exception, and “was everything most of his colleagues pretended to be but were not.” Morgenthau also admired Professor Karl Rothenbücher and attended his lectures on Weber’s political and social philosophy. Rothenbücher lacked Weber’s ability for creative synthesis, but “approached political problems with the same detachment, objectivity, and penetrating intelligence in which Weber excelled.” Morgenthau was moved by his extraordinary courage. Following the unsuccessful Nazi putsch of November 1923, Rothenbücher wrote a pamphlet excoriating Bavarian prime minister Gustav von Kahr for his initial support of the Nazis. He became a marked man, and died prematurely in 1932.¹⁴⁵

Morgenthau’s short legal career gave practical and academic expression to his liberal commitments. In Frankfurt, he had several professional possibilities but chose to clerk for Hugo Sinzheimer, a prominent Social Democrat who had helped to draft the Weimar constitution and expose the “stab-in-the-back” legend.¹⁴⁶ Morgenthau was not so much attracted to labor law as he was to Sinzheimer who was “passionately and eloquently devoted to the legally defined interests of the underdog – the worker exploited and abused and the innocent helplessly caught in the spiderweb of criminal law.”¹⁴⁷ The labor court was an eye opener for Morgenthau. He regularly stood in for his mentor, and was occasionally asked to serve as a temporary member of the court. He was appalled to discover how partisan and hostile to the Republic some of the judges were, and how deeply ingrained their anti-Semitism was. He learned the sobering lesson that “What was decisive was not the merits of the legal interpretation, but the distribution of political power.”¹⁴⁸ This micro encounter with politics, and the Weimar experience more generally, stripped away his liberal illusions and convinced him that power and self-aggrandizement

¹⁴⁴ Hans J. Morgenthau, “The Tragedy of German-Jewish Liberalism,” originally given as The Leo Baeck Memorial Lecture in 1961; *Decline of Democratic Politics*, pp. 247–56, quote on p. 249.

¹⁴⁵ Morgenthau, “Fragment of an Intellectual Autobiography,” pp. 8–9.

¹⁴⁶ Ernst Fraenkel, “Hugo Sinzheimer,” in Falk Esche and Frank Grube, eds., *Reformismus und Pluralismus: Materialien zu einer ungeschriebenen politischen Autobiographie* (Hamburg: Hoffmann and Campe, 1973), pp. 131–42.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 9–10. ¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 9–12.

lay at the heart of politics. It was probably not coincidental that during this period – the late 1920s – he immersed himself in the writings of Freud and Nietzsche, and read and annotated the complete works of the latter. Morgenthau was personally depressed at the time, and confided to his diary that he found solace in Nietzsche and his concept of *Blick des Sehers* – the free, analytic spirit who has the courage to look deeply into the soul. It seems evident that Morgenthau hoped to model himself on such a Promethean hero.¹⁴⁹

Through Sinzheimer, Morgenthau met prominent Weimar intellectuals, including Martin Buber, Otto Kahn-Freund, Franz Neuman and Paul Tillich. He also came to know the leading luminaries of the Frankfurt School (*Institut der Sozialforschung*), but was put off by what he considered their preoccupation with fine points of Marxist theory at a time when the Republic was under acute threat from the extremist forces on the right and the left.¹⁵⁰ Morgenthau's own scholarly publications in this period, which others have analyzed in detail, addressed the role of international law and its relationship to politics.¹⁵¹ His 1929 dissertation, *Die internationale Rechtspflege, ihr Wesen und ihre Grenzen* [The International Administration of Justice: Its Character and Limits], was a response to the arguments of Carl Schmitt, a noted conservative intellectual and international lawyer.¹⁵² Morgenthau sought to answer the question of why so few international conflicts were resolved by legal means. He distinguished between disputes [*Streitigkeiten*] that lend themselves to legal language and resolution, and tensions [*Spannungen*] that cannot be redressed by legal means because the goals of at least one of the parties demanded a change in legal rights or transformation of the legal order.¹⁵³ He found that even in *Streitigkeiten*, states often refused to bring their disputes before third party mediators or courts on the grounds of honor and vital interest.

Morgenthau's second book, published in Paris in 1933, continued his attack on the positivist distinction between the political and the legal. He argued that law stood in sharp contrast to the will to power [*volonté de puissance*], and could not maintain order when imperialist powers were on the rise and status quo powers on the decline.¹⁵⁴ His third and final

¹⁴⁹ Frei, *Hans J. Morgenthau*, pp. 95–113.

¹⁵⁰ Morgenthau, "Fragment of an Intellectual Autobiography," p. 14.

¹⁵¹ Frei, *Hans J. Morgenthau*, chs. 5–7; Honig, "Totalitarianism and Realism"; Koskenniemi, *The Gentle Civilizer of Nations*, pp. 440–65.

¹⁵² Hans J. Morgenthau, *Die internationale Rechtspflege, ihr Wesen und ihre Grenzen* (Leipzig: Noske, 1929). The 1934, 2nd ed., of Carl Schmitt, *Das Begriff der Politischen*, is available in English with an introduction by George Schwab and a foreword by Tracy B. Strong, *The Concept of the Political* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1966).

¹⁵³ Morgenthau, *Die internationale Rechtspflege*, pp. 73–84.

¹⁵⁴ Morgenthau, *La notion du "politique" et la théorie des différends internationaux*; Frei, *Hans J. Morgenthau*, chs. 5–6; Koskenniemi, *The Gentle Civilizer of Nations*, pp. 453–55.

prewar book, *La réalité des normes*, was published in Geneva in 1934. It addressed the problem of sanctions, and its argument was deeply influenced by, but also critical of, Hans Kelsen's abstract approach to international law. He submitted it as his *Habilitationschrift* at the University of Geneva, but it was rejected by the first examination board. A second board, chaired by Hans Kelsen, whose formalist conceptions Morgenthau attacked in his book, accepted the manuscript primarily because the ever-magnanimous Kelsen made such a strong statement on Morgenthau's behalf.¹⁵⁵ Morgenthau's last major work on international law was an article, written after he had taken up residence in Kansas City. It was highly critical, not of international law *per se*, but of unreasonable expectations so many scholars and liberal politicians had of its ability to regulate international conflicts. Morgenthau lamented that they paid "almost no attention to the psychological and sociological laws governing the actions of men in the international sphere."¹⁵⁶

Andreas Söllner considers Morgenthau a Weimar liberal and American conservative. This is a fundamental misreading of Morgenthau's intellectual and political orientation in the United States. His rejection of rationalism made him appear conservative, or even reactionary. This stance and his general political pessimism were most pronounced in his early postwar works, notably *Scientific Man vs. Power Politics*. Morgenthau's views underwent considerable evolution, and by the 1970s he had become much more optimistic about the prospects of avoiding nuclear war, restoring America's purpose and even transforming the international system. His optimism was based on his renewed belief in the power of experience and reason to serve as engines for progress.

Morgenthau wrote *Scientific Man vs. Power Politics* in the immediate aftermath of the worst irruption of barbarism spawned by Western civilization. Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia rode roughshod over laws, norms and conventions intended to restrain hateful and self-destructive passions. His marginal life in Germany, academic humiliation in Geneva, loss of position and possessions in Madrid, anxious wanderings in Europe in search of a visa to a safe haven, struggles to survive economically in New York and Kansas City and loss of family, including grandparents, in the Holocaust, darkened his mood and sapped his faith in human reason. But Morgenthau was too intellectually curious, reflective and open-minded to allow his *Weltanschauung* to ossify. His intellectual growth did not stop with his early postwar books, but continued throughout his career. I described his changing views of the Cold War, and how by the 1970s he

¹⁵⁵ Frei, *Hans J. Morgenthau*, pp. 45–49.

¹⁵⁶ Morgenthau, "Positivism, Functionalism and International Law," pp. 261–84.

became convinced that the conflict had been resolved *de facto* by mutual acceptance of the postwar political and territorial status quo in Europe. He also regarded with interest and approval Western European efforts to build a more peaceful continent on the twin foundations of parliamentary democracy and supranational institutions. Both transformations, he explicitly recognized, were based on learning and reason.

Morgenthau's rekindled optimism was also the result of his experiences in his adopted homeland. Quotidian life in America, especially in the Middle West, helped to restore his faith in human beings and their ability to create and sustain a productive, egalitarian, tolerant and largely peaceful society. *The Purpose of American Politics*, published in 1960, is a biting critique of Cold War American leadership, but its opening chapters are a paean of praise to America's experiment with democracy. The conclusion is a reaffirmation of Morgenthau's faith in the political system. His idealism had reasserted itself, but in a more sophisticated form that might be described as a synthesis of his European and American experiences. He was painfully aware that the practice of American politics and foreign policy did not live up to its ideals. He considered McCarthyism a prominent but temporary failure of the American system, and racism a more enduring and fundamental contradiction of the country's purpose. In 1964 he wrote that "the unequal condition of the American Negro" was "an endemic denial of the purpose for which the United States was created . . ." ¹⁵⁷ Vietnam was another big failure, and, as we have seen, it prompted lectures, articles and a book in which he diagnosed the causes of intervention, some of them structural. But he came to regard the domestic crisis provoked by the war as a catalyst for positive social and political change, especially in the area of civil rights. ¹⁵⁸ An early and ardent supporter of the civil rights movement and an early and outspoken critic of Vietnam and member of a score of liberal-activist organizations cannot be described as a conservative. ¹⁵⁹

Morgenthau's mature theoretical work also represents a creative and thoughtful synthesis of Europe and America. His European experience taught him that status quo powers needed the military capability to deter or defeat adversaries intent on expanding their territory or imposing their social systems through conquest. From his reading of European history and experience of American politics he learned that the wide dispersion

¹⁵⁷ Hans J. Morgenthau, "The Coming Test of Democracy," *Commentary* (January 1964), pp. 61–63.

¹⁵⁸ Conversations with Morgenthau.

¹⁵⁹ Morgenthau belonged to Academic Committee on Soviet Jewry, the Kurdish–American Society, Americans for Democratic Action, Council for a Livable World, National Council for Civic Responsibility, Turn Toward Peace.

of power and authority and the operation of a balance of power among these actors was the most efficacious mechanism for maintaining liberty and advancing the public welfare. He recognized that balances did not automatically form when their material conditions were present, but depended on the understanding and political skill of actors. It was the responsibility of international relations specialists to make actors aware of their interests in general and how they applied in specific instances.

Politics Among Nations can be read as an attempt to apply the *Federalist Papers* and the American Constitution to international relations. Both documents represent self-conscious attempts to harness “private vice” to build “public virtue” through separation of powers, checks and balances and representative institutions. Morgenthau made the analogy explicit in his lectures where he attributed the success of democratic societies to their checks and balances and talked at length about the need to apply the same principles, although not in institutional form, to international relations.¹⁶⁰ These principles appealed to Morgenthau because in his view they were based on a realistic understanding of the nearly universal human drives for power and self-aggrandizement and the corrupting consequences of all authority.

America taught Morgenthau a more important lesson than constitutional engineering: it is possible to create a society that minimizes violent conflict by providing security and equal opportunity to its citizens. Here too, he tried to extrapolate from the American experience to the international environment. A secure international order, like its domestic counterpart, would depend on

social pressure which is able to contain the selfish tendencies in human nature within socially tolerable bounds; conditions of life creating a social equilibrium which tends to minimize the psychological causes of social conflict, such as insecurity, fear, and aggressiveness; and, finally, a moral climate which allows man to expect at least an approximation to justice here and now and thus offers a substitute for strife as a means to achieve justice.¹⁶¹

Morgenthau welcomed progress toward these goals in Western societies and looked forward to the day when these conditions might become realized on a regional and even global scale.

¹⁶⁰ “Philosophy of International Relations,” Lecture notes, 1952, pp. 55–58, Morgenthau Papers, container 81.

¹⁶¹ Morgenthau, *Scientific Man vs. Power Politics*. 183.