

1 Hans J. Morgenthau in International Relations

The benefits to be had from transcending standard renditions of realism as being about crude inter-state power politics have recently been the subject of much debate. After having been proclaimed defunct at the beginning of the 1990s, efforts are now being undertaken to unearth the rich tradition of classical realism that has been lost to the scientific approach of subsequent structuralist, neo-realist approaches and the consequent fragmentation of the tradition.¹ Under the influence of rationalist social science, so the story goes, the European realism taken across the Atlantic by the likes of Hans J. Morgenthau (1904–80) had been transformed into an approach that was no longer based on anthropological foundations revolving around the innate drive for power in human nature, but on rational action expressed in empirical correlations and abstract models. Today, in a time in which a single superpower wages a War on Terror against a largely unidentifiable enemy, the gap between normative (US) foreign policy and International Relations theory is seen by many to be wider than ever before. Robert Kaplan's *Warrior Politics*, Robert Kagan's *Of Paradise and Power*, and Anatol Lieven and John Hulsman's *Ethical Realism* are just three popularistic examples of calls to revert the focus back from scientific theory construction to the 'art' of the realistic statesman, in an effort to link practical politics with ethical principles.²

1 S. Guzzini, *Realism in International Relations and International Political Economy: The Continuing Story of a Death Foretold* (London: Routledge, 1998).

2 R. Kaplan, *Warrior Politics: Why Leadership Demands a Pagan Ethos* (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 2002); R. Kagan, *Of Paradise and Power* (London: Atlantic Books, 2003); A. Lieven and J. Hulsman, *Ethical Realism: A Vision for America's Role in the World* (New York, NY: Vintage, 2007).

2 Morgenthau, Law and Realism

In the academic field of International Relations, there has been a comparable attempt to reinject the ethics of statecraft into the debate. Echoing earlier work by Greg Russell and Joel H. Rosenthal, Richard Ned Lebow's *The Tragic Vision of Politics* and Michael C. Williams' *The Realist Tradition and the Limits of International Relations* both challenge the adequacy of contemporary International Relations theory and call for a return to some of the fundamental underpinnings of realist thought.³ Lebow argues that neo-realist theory ignores the importance of justice and the centrality of ethics in foreign policy, thus remaining unaware that it is only through a combination of ethics and interests that order can be obtained. It is not 'hard-nosed egoism' that is most conducive to national security, he claims, but ethical behaviour. A detailed reading of three 'classical' realists – Thucydides, Carl von Clausewitz (1780–1831) and Morgenthau – is used to show to what extent questions of justice played an important role in the formulation of the realist position. Lebow attempts to challenge advocates of *Realpolitik* 'on home turf', by trying 'to persuade readers that ethics are not only instrumentally important, but that it is impossible to formulate interests intelligently outside of some language of justice'.⁴

Michael Williams writes in a similar vein, based on what he calls 'a deep dissatisfaction with the ways in which key figures in the history of political thought have been appropriated in much of International Relations, and the visions of Realism that have been associated with them'.⁵ Based on a reading of Morgenthau, Williams was induced to outline a type of realism, which he calls 'wilful' realism, that not only entails a more accurate interpretation of thinkers linked to the tradition, but one that also highlights 'their profound challenge to contemporary understandings of the Realist tradition and its place in International Relations theory today'.⁶ Williams identifies three defining features of wilful realism: scepticism, relationality and

3 G. Russell, *Hans J. Morgenthau and the Ethics of American Statecraft* (Baton Rouge, LA and London: Louisiana State University Press, 1990); J. H. Rosenthal, *Righteous Realists: Political Realism, Responsible Power, and American Culture in the Nuclear Age* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1991); R. N. Lebow, *The Tragic Vision of Politics: Ethics, Interests and Orders* (Cambridge University Press, 2003); M. C. Williams, *The Realist Tradition and the Limits of International Relations* (Cambridge University Press, 2005).

4 Lebow, *The Tragic Vision of Power Politics*, p. 16.

5 Williams, *The Realist Tradition*, p. 4. 6 *Ibid.*, p. 5.

power politics. Concerned with the politics of knowledge, wilful realism is sceptical of modern empiricism and rationalism, pointing instead to the limits of reason in the construction of political order. Its emphasis on knowledge also makes wilful realism focus on the constructive relational processes of Self and Other, warning against the dangers of slipping into the dualism of self-identification through antithetical opposition to the Other. Lastly, it argues that the sphere of politics is not only about the destructive potential of the struggle for power, but also about the productive possibilities of self-determination and the establishment of common interests. Williams then uses his vision of wilful realism to examine the link between an ethic of responsibility and the national interest, highlighting how such an understanding relates to recent neo-conservative strands in US foreign policy. Referring to the work of Morgenthau, Williams demonstrates how the national interest functions as a self-reflexive, rhetorical device used as an ethical practice for the construction of a politics of limits.

A number of other recent studies have also been exploring the value added of re-engaging with particular facets of classical realism, and Morgenthau is the common element throughout. Worth mentioning here are monographs by Vibeke Schou Tjalve and Seán Molloy. The first offers a synchronic reading of Morgenthau and the US theologian Reinhold Niebuhr (1882–1971) in order to develop ‘an ethical and political language for balancing responsibility and humility’ in US foreign policy, one that is akin to the republican sensitivities developed by the founding fathers of the United States.⁷ The second uses a reading of E. H. Carr (1892–1982), Morgenthau and Martin Wight (1913–1972) to ‘restore humanity’ to contemporary conceptualizations of realism by focusing on the inherited language, philosophies and meta-narratives that have ‘contained and constrained’ realism in International Relations theory.⁸ A further interesting monograph recently came from the pen of Robbie Shilliam, who explored the thought of Immanuel Kant (1724–1804), Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770–1831), Max Weber (1864–1920) and Morgenthau with the aim of illuminating the way these German thinkers tried to

7 V. S. Tjalve, *Realist Strategies of Republican Peace: Niebuhr, Morgenthau, and the Politics of Patriotic Dissent* (New York, NY and Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

8 S. Molloy, *The Hidden History of Realism: A Genealogy of Power Politics* (New York, NY and Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006).

4 Morgenthau, Law and Realism

reconcile the liberal project with realist thought within an historical context delineated by the problem of ‘alterity’, or ‘the interaction between differentially developed societies’.⁹ Morgenthau also plays a prominent role in Duncan Bell’s recent edited volume exploring ‘realist orientations’ in contemporary (international) political theory.¹⁰

Rediscovering the virtues of classical realist thought, then, has been a popular activity of late, both within narrower theoretical debates in International Relations, as well as in more general narratives about the requirements and prerequisites of sound foreign policy decision-making. Yet because of the inward-oriented means by which the field of International Relations tends to write its own ‘disciplinary’ history, the fact that ‘classical’ authors were writing in different socio-historical and disciplinary mindsets is often occluded. As this book seeks to demonstrate, the German and US legal theoretical debates out of which emerged the ‘realist theory of international politics’, based on ‘interest defined in terms of power’, are the missing context in the case of Morgenthau. Arguably, ignoring or downplaying the legal background on which Morgenthau’s ideas are founded is to the detriment of the stated purpose of rehabilitating the thought of such scholars precisely because of their intellectual richness and analytical depth.

Career prospects for German-Jewish jurists in US law schools were exceedingly limited in the 1930s and 1940s. The result was that many lawyers were forced to switch discipline and take up posts in Political Science, or in the newly created field of International Relations, which at the time spanned courses in international law, international organization, diplomatic history and international politics. Morgenthau was no exception to this trend, eventually becoming the Albert A. Michelson Distinguished Service Professor of Political Science and Modern History at the University of Chicago. This book sets out to show that what Morgenthau and a host of other émigré jurists brought across the Atlantic was not simply Bismarckian *Realpolitik* based on anthropological foundations revolving around the innate drive for power in human nature, but

9 R. Shilliam, *German Thought and International Relations: The Rise and Fall of a Liberal Project* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

10 D. S. Bell, *Political Thought and International Relations: Variations on a Realist Theme* (Oxford University Press, 2009).

a sophisticated understanding of the relationship between law and politics derived from the type of theoretical-historical analysis practiced by German *Staatsrechtslehre*. It is simply misleading to declare that Morgenthau, together with the likes of Hannah Arendt (1906–1975), Leo Strauss (1899–1973) and Herbert Marcuse (1898–1979), was one of the most influential refugee ‘political theorists and philosophers’.¹¹ Versed as he may have been in the literature, Morgenthau was not a political theorist, nor a philosopher. The unfortunate result of such generalizations is that potentially very useful appropriations of ‘classical’ thinkers for contemporary purposes are stunted by a lack of engagement with reference points and contexts that lie outside of, in this case, the International Relations sphere. Analysing Morgenthau’s work using the conceptual toolkit of International Relations theory alone, while at the same time calling for a greater emphasis on context, intellectual origins, and a more profound understanding of his thought, does not make for a particular effective – or useful – exercise.

Realism

In general terms, realism implies having a certain, sober outlook on a particular set of circumstances, without being influenced by interests or preferences, or misled by ephemera of one sort or another.¹² Although varyingly employed, realism is a position that can be found in the visual arts, in literature and in various strands of philosophical thought. In political theory, realism is generally identified with an approach focusing on the sources, modalities and effects of power. In International Relations theory, realism posits that international politics involves self-interested actors operating in a self-help system with no overarching authority.

Realism is a relational concept, in that a claim to being ‘realist’ defines itself and is evaluated with regard to an opposing conception

11 As does P. G. Kielmansegg, ‘Introduction’, in P. G. Kielmansegg, H. Mewes and E. Glaser-Schmidt (eds.), *Hannah Arendt and Leo Strauss: German Emigrés and American Political Thought after World War II* (Washington, DC: The German Historical Institute and Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 1–8, at 1.

12 See Duncan Bell’s useful discussion of realism in his ‘Introduction: Under an Empty Sky – Realism and Political Theory’, in Bell (ed.), *Political Thought and International Relations*, pp. 1–25, at 1.

that is less realistic, i.e. idealistic or utopian.¹³ This is also reflected in the status of realism in International Relations. In his important book, *The Power of Power Politics*, John A. Vasquez demonstrates empirically that the realist paradigm has indeed dominated the field since the early 1950s, showing how it has guided theory construction, data-making and research.¹⁴ And even if many contemporary theoretical approaches advocated or applied in journal articles or monographs differ sharply from realist assumptions, that fact is made clear precisely in explicit contradistinction to realism. As Jeffrey W. Legro and Andrew Moravcsik write, realism remains ‘the primary or alternative theory in virtually every major textbook and article addressing general theories of world politics, particularly in security affairs’.¹⁵

Of course, realism in International Relations is far from anything resembling a coherent and unified theoretical framework: not only is there a temporal split between classical realism (Morgenthau), neo-realism (Waltz)¹⁶ and even postclassical realism,¹⁷ but the literature also distinguishes between the offensive realism of John J. Mearsheimer and Robert Gilpin and the defensive realism of Kenneth N. Waltz, Robert Jervis and others.¹⁸ Yet the overall salience of realist theories has meant that the position and function of realism in International Relations has been the subject of continued discussion, and is part of a discourse on what Steve Smith calls the

13 On this point, see B. S. Chimni, *International Law and World Order: A Critique of Contemporary Approaches* (New Delhi: SAGE Publications, 1993), p. 30.

14 J. H. Vasquez, *The Power of Power Politics: From Classical Realism to Neotraditionalism* (Cambridge University Press, 1998).

15 J. W. Legro and A. Moravcsik, ‘Is Anybody Still a Realist?’, *International Security*, 24 (1995), pp. 5–55, at 5.

16 The neo-realism of Waltz is often equated with structural realism, although some leading members of the English School have tried to draw a distinction; see B. Buzan, C. Jones and R. Little, *The Logic of Anarchy: Neorealism to Structural Realism* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1993).

17 See S. G. Brooks, ‘Dueling Realisms’, *International Organization*, 51 (1997), pp. 445–77.

18 J. H. Mearsheimer, ‘Back to the Future: Instability in Europe after the Cold War’, *International Security*, 15 (1991), pp. 5–57; J. H. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York, NY: W.W. Norton, 2001); R. Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics* (Cambridge University Press, 1981); K. N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1979); R. Jervis, ‘Cooperation under the Security Dilemma’, *World Politics*, 30 (1978), pp. 167–214. For an overview of some of the literature on these, and other strands of realism, see G. H. Snyder, ‘Mearsheimer’s World – Offensive Realism and the Struggle for Security. A Review Essay’, *International Security*, 27 (2002), pp. 149–73, at 149–50.

'self-images' of International Relations theory.¹⁹ A widely accepted characterization of the field of International Relations involves the chronological division of its history into dominant theoretical positions, with the periods of transition marking 'great debates'. Thus one supposedly witnessed the first great debate between idealism and realism in the 1930s and 1940s, and the second between realism/traditionalism and behaviouralism in the 1950s and 1960s. Recently, there has been talk of a third debate between positivism and post-positivism, or what are effectively post-modernist approaches.

The accuracy of such depictions has increasingly been called into question. As Duncan Bell points out, '[e]ven a minimally contextualist reading of the respective periods demonstrates that the "debates" are illusory anachronisms, based on an inaccurate interpretation of the scope, coherence and interests of the field'.²⁰ Indeed, as Peter Wilson has shown, the first great debate between idealism and realism did not actually take place,²¹ and discussion between traditionalists and behaviouralists was confined to a brief exchange of views between Hedley Bull and Morton A. Kaplan in the journal *World Politics* in 1966.²² In short, one can only agree with Ole Wæver that 'the way the discipline [of International Relations] usually reflects its own development falls embarrassingly behind standards developed in sociology of science and historiography'.²³

None of this should really surprise us, however. In its efforts to attain the status of an academic discipline, the field of International Relations has, right from the start, attempted to define its existence through a stringent categorization of its supposed content: no pigeon-holes, no discipline. Debates between seemingly opposing theoretical views are a way of constituting disciplinary knowledge through

19 S. Smith, 'The Self-Images of a Discipline: A Genealogy of International Relations Theory', in K. Booth and S. Smith (eds.), *International Relations Theory Today* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995), pp. 1–37.

20 D. S. Bell, 'Political Theory and the Functions of Intellectual History: A Response to Emmanuel Navon', *Review of International Studies*, 29 (2003), pp. 151–60, at 154.

21 P. Wilson, 'The Myth of the "First Great Debate"', *Review of International Studies*, 24 (1998), pp. 1–15.

22 H. Bull, 'International Theory: The Case for a Classical Approach', *World Politics*, 18 (1966), pp. 361–77; M. A. Kaplan, 'The New Great Debate: Traditionalism vs. Science in International Relations', *World Politics*, 19 (1966), pp. 1–20.

23 O. Wæver, 'The Sociology of a Not So International Discipline: American and European Developments in International Relations', *International Organization*, 52 (1998), pp. 687–727, at 689.

processes of ‘field construction’ and ‘boundary work’.²⁴ This work is necessarily exclusionist, as it ‘entails the development of both arguments to justify particular divisions of knowledge and the strategies to use in constructing and maintaining them’.²⁵ The result of this is two-fold. On the one hand, the field is depicted as made up of a number of schools of thought, characterized by means of overly simplistic conceptualizations of opposing positions (realism–idealism, for instance). As Richard K. Ashley writes, ‘[e]very great scholarly movement has its own lore, its own collectively recalled creation myths, its ritualized understandings of the titanic struggles fought and challenges still to be overcome in establishing and maintaining its paramountcy’.²⁶ On the other hand, these schools of thought stake out their terrain by establishing themselves as ‘traditions’, through recourse to ‘classical’ authors deemed to have already analysed the relations between political entities in a way compatible with that particular theory of international politics. Whether this was really the case – one need only think of realism’s appropriation of Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679) – is not the issue. Morgenthau is thus also taken to be part of a realist canon stretching all the way back to Thucydides, with certain transcending themes they supposedly shared forming the basis for realist theorizing.

Part of the current rehabilitation of classical realism, undertaken in good interpretivist fashion, is therefore also the initiation of new debates on how the likes of Thucydides, Thomas Hobbes, Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778) and Morgenthau ought to be appropriated for the benefit of the ‘canon’, and whether we are doing justice to their work by doing so. There is a growing unease with the way classical authors continue to be claimed by proponents of a particular tradition, with little appreciation for the gaping chasm between standard renditions and a more nuanced, contextualized reading of works considered part of that canon. The following chapters share this unease, not only with standard renditions, but with the apparent unwillingness of many of these ‘new’, ‘contextualized’

24 E. Messer-Davidow, D. R. Shumway and D. J. Sylvan, ‘Introduction: Disciplinary Ways of Knowing’ in Messer-Davidow, Shumway and Sylvan (eds.), *Knowledges: Historical and Critical Studies in Disciplinarity* (Charlottesville, VA and London: University Press of Virginia, 1993), pp. 1–21.

25 *Ibid.*, p. 9.

26 R. K. Ashley, ‘The Poverty of Neorealism’, *International Organization*, 38 (1984), pp. 225–86, at 230.

readings – indeed, almost all of the new readings of Morgenthau – to move beyond the Political Science-oriented field of International Relations. Rehabilitating Morgenthau requires us to engage with the discourses he was part of, even if this means delving into German and US public law debates.

An example may illustrate this deficiency further. The most notable attempt to date to construct a critical disciplinary history of the field of International Relations is Brian C. Schmidt's *The Political Discourse of Anarchy*.²⁷ The rationale of Schmidt's approach, which he calls 'critical internal discursive history', is that the field itself, and not the general political universe, is the most appropriate context for reconstructing the 'actual conversation among political scientists and other professional scholars who institutionally thought of themselves as participating in a formalized academic setting devoted to the study of international politics'.²⁸ While this may indeed serve his purpose well, what it also does, however, is occlude the intellectual baggage that many of these conversing scholars brought along before entering the field and engaging in its discourse. This is particularly so in the case of the German-Jewish émigrés who were to populate US International Relations departments in the 1940s. Schmidt only takes a scholar into account once he has entered the discourse, without considering that person's intellectual development. While Schmidt does seem to be aware of this dilemma, he arguably fails to problematize it sufficiently in his analysis.

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John Vasquez's empirical analysis of classical realism also highlighted the centrality of Morgenthau's textbook, *Politics Among Nations*, in the development of the realist position in International Relations, asserting that, '[w]ith the advantage of hindsight, there can be no doubt that Morgenthau's work was the single most important vehicle for establishing the dominance of the realist paradigm within the field'.²⁹ Yet in a sense, the Morgenthau reception seems to follow an intellectual version of Gresham's law: Morgenthau continues to

27 B. C. Schmidt, *The Political Discourse of Anarchy: A Disciplinary History of International Relations* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1998).

28 *Ibid.*, p. 1.

29 Vasquez, *The Power of Power Politics*, p. 36.

be cited as a part of a realist canon, but not necessarily for reasons with a higher intrinsic value. As Michael C. Williams writes, ‘it is difficult to escape the impression that for several decades Morgenthau was more often cited than read, and that in the process he has been reduced by both his supporters and his critics primarily to an implacable opponent of liberalism and an advocate of power politics’.³⁰ Even more recent efforts to rehabilitate the ‘real’ thought of those belonging to the tradition continue to block out, misunderstand or simply overlook crucial elements of the intellectual environments of those they are studying. Yes, Morgenthau is indeed worth rereading, but not necessarily for the reasons usually stated.

Morgenthau is above all remembered as the author of one of the most successful textbooks in International Relations, *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*.³¹ First published in 1948, *Politics Among Nations* was explicitly designed to be an undergraduate text – its closest competitor, which *Politics Among Nations* indeed came to replace, as Morgenthau never tired of pointing out, was Frederick L. Schuman’s *International Politics*.³² An almost immediate success, *Politics Among Nations* went through a variety of reprints and editions – a process that, since Morgenthau’s death, has been judiciously upheld by his student, assistant and then colleague and friend, Kenneth W. Thompson.³³

By February 1962, *Politics Among Nations* had sold 75,100 copies³⁴ and made its author famous for the ‘Realist Theory of

30 Williams, *The Realist Tradition*, p. 82.

31 H. J. Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace* (New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 1948).

32 F. L. Schuman, *International Politics: An Introduction to the Western State System* (New York, NY: McGraw-Hill, 1933). See, for instance, the letter from Morgenthau to John T. Hawes of Alfred A. Knopf, dated 15 October 1953, HJM-Container 126. Indeed, Morgenthau originally wanted his book to be called ‘International Politics’ as well, but this met with ‘strong objections’ from Schuman, who was also publishing all his books with Alfred A. Knopf. See the letter from Roger W. Shugg, Editor at Alfred A. Knopf, to Morgenthau, dated 19 June 1946, HJM-Container 121.

33 See O. Jutersonke, ‘Book Review Essay: Morgenthau and the Return to Ethics in a Realist Theory of Power Politics’, *Cooperation and Conflict*, 41 (2006), pp. 463–9. *Politics Among Nations* was first published by Alfred A. Knopf in 1948, and reprinted eight times before a second, revised and enlarged edition came out in 1954 (reprinted six times), a third in 1960 (reprinted eight times), a fourth in 1967 (reprinted three times) and a fifth in 1973 (all published with Alfred A. Knopf). Kenneth W. Thompson then posthumously published a sixth edition in 1985, a brief edition in 1992, and, with W. David Clinton, a seventh edition in 2006 (with McGraw-Hill, Boston, MA).

34 Cited in a letter from Joseph G. Sutton of Alfred A. Knopf to Hans Morgenthau, dated 12 April 1962, HJM-Container 121.