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Deconfusing Morgenthau: moral inquiry and classical realism reconsidered

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Abstract. This article explores Jim George's claim that Hans Morgenthau's notion of political realism is founded upon a spectator theory of knowledge and that it discloses no meaningful distinction between theory and practice. An investigation of Morgenthau's understanding of scientific inquiry, the relation of theory and practice, and his views on American foreign policy suggests that both of these claims may be misplaced. Rather Morgenthau's realism is an authentic moral voice in the discourse of world politics which emphasizes the importance of judgment and the need to locate statecraft in historical, social, and political context. It is a realism that is representative of a rich moral tradition, one which orders, arranges, and prioritizes fundamental human values and which is concerned with how these values might be realized. This conclusion not only emancipates a valuable tradition of scholarship, it also raises important question about how we engage and organize the discipline of international relations and it suggests that some critical thinking spaces may provide a rather limited refuge for those wishing to go beyond Morgenthau and realism.

The 'strikingly unimpressive results'[1] yielded by 'scientific' theories of world politics has evoked a sense of crisis among persons who speculate on world affairs. That theorists employing scientific methods failed to forecast the end of the Cold War, the disintegration of the Soviet Union, and the character of the post-Cold War world has inspired postmodernists, poststructuralists, critical theorists, and feminists to re-examine how we think about world politics by emancipating and privileging 'silenced,' 'marginalized,' and 'oppressed,' voices and by concomitantly subverting traditional theory. It is believed that by subverting the realism[2] of 'foundational' figures like Hans Morgenthau, one casts doubt upon the entire canon of twentieth century realist thought. The purpose of this article is to examine Jim George's postmodern critique of Morgenthau's notion of realism and to consider the broader implications it might have for how we engage world politics. I could have chosen others, but Jim George's postmodern critique of Morgenthau's notion of realism has been as influential as any, and is as representative as most of that particular genre. It has also been suggested that postmodern writers like George have 'been largely ignored by traditionalists precisely because they write from a theoretical position that traditionalists do not accept as capable of providing "real" or "proper" knowledge'.[3] If this is the case, and let's for the moment assume there is some truth

* I would like to thank K. J. Holsti, Robert Jackson, Brian Job, Roger Spegele, the three anonymous reviewers and Michael Cox for their helpful suggestions and comments.

[1] John Lewis Gaddis, 'International Relations Theory and the End of the Cold War', *International Security*, 17 (1992/93), p. 53.

[2] The term 'realism' does not refer to neorealism or any other variant of structural realism.

[3] The point is made by Steve Smith in 'Positivism and Beyond', in Steve Smith, Ken Booth and Marysia Zalewski, *International Theory: Positivism and Beyond* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 33–4.

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in the claim, then this article should be seen as a (hopefully) serious attempt to take George and postmodernism more seriously than they seem to have been thus far by critics. If this then provokes a genuine debate, the purpose of writing what might be seen by some as a rather 'traditional' assessment of Morgenthau will have been worthwhile.

This investigation will begin by interrogating two of George's principal claims regarding Morgenthau: (1) there is no meaningful separation between realist theory and practice; and (2) he is a detached observer of a world 'out there'. We will proceed by exploring Morgenthau's notion of scientific inquiry, his understanding of the relationship of theory and practice, and his views on American foreign policy. It will become evident as a result of this investigation that George's critique does not satisfactorily sustain its claims.

Morgenthau (like George) appreciates the weaknesses of 'scientific' theory, insisting that human conduct must be understood in historical, social, and cultural context. He also emphasizes the centrality of judgment so that we may enter into the moral world and engage the problems, dilemmas, fears, and aspirations of human relations. But insofar as George and other critical voices are unaware of, or do not acknowledge, this face of realism, they do not create new thinking space, but close it; they do not emancipate knowledge, but subjugate it. Indeed, George does more to 'discipline' and 'marginalize' Morgenthau than to invite earnest debate and to encourage serious reflection on our world. Morgenthau's realism discloses an ethic of responsibility that is meant to secure fundamental values and not merely the means—power and security—to secure those values.[4] It is a realism that is keenly interested in power, but which also recognizes certain moral injunctions circumscribe the exercise of power and limit the means with which states may pursue national advantage.[5] Thus, it is important to revisit Morgenthau's realism, to reconsider its truths, and to recover a body of knowledge which discloses a rich moral tradition. But more significantly, reconsidering Morgenthau's ideas in light of George's critique provides reason to re-examine how we think about world politics and how we engage it as an academic subject.

The realist world 'out there'

Critical approaches to the study of world politics do not constitute a formal intellectual tradition: they share no common core normative problem (apart from a common opposition to modernity), rather they celebrate intellectual diversity—and perhaps even intellectual anarchy. This diversity complicates any attempt to issue a thoughtful rejoinder: responses are typically too general and they often read as if they are answering an undifferentiated body of thought. But these differences notwithstanding, George and David Campbell claim that critical voices share a common concern with: (1) the inadequacies of positivist approaches to knowledge; (2) undermining attempts to secure an independent foundation of knowledge; (3) the alleged linguistic construction of reality; and (4) how these foregoing concerns

[4] For a contrasting argument see Tarak Barkawi, 'Strategy as a Vocation: Weber, Morgenthau and Modern Strategic Studies', *Review of International Studies*, 24 (1998), pp. 159–84.

[5] Hans J. Morgenthau, 'The Twilight of International Morality', *Ethics*, 58 (1948), p. 80.

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confer meaning and identity in all aspects of social life.[6] George is an important voice in this critical enterprise, one which is representative of at least one consequential strand of postmodern thought: indeed he has been characterized by John Vasquez as 'one of a small band of scholars' (the others being Shapiro, Der Derian, Walker, Campbell and Klein) who have written 'under the post-structuralist label' and dared to challenge the prevailing orthodoxy.[7] He has also mounted what many see as a sweeping and sustained critique of traditional international relations scholarship, which includes not only Morgenthau and classical realism, but the English School and the most significant figure associated with structural realism, Kenneth Waltz.[8] George has been particularly scathing about Waltz and both of Waltz's major studies, *Theory of International Politics* and *Man, The State and War*. In his view, the influence of the two books stand as 'major indictments' of the IR community as a whole.[9] George has not been one to mince his words and consequently has become an influential voice, particularly among those engaged in the search for alternative approaches to world politics, for he raises several key ideas and questions about how we study world politics. His work therefore represents an important starting point for those wishing to acquaint themselves with a certain but influential strand of critical scholarship.

George's critique of traditional international relations scholarship is driven by his desire to question the foundations of 'totalizing narratives' and to emancipate knowledge that these narratives allegedly push to the margins. He argues that this activity 'must include an opposition to all processes that restrict peoples' lives to misery and basic survival, and to "any autocratic presumption of the right to rule, whether this presumption is defended with crude force or by appeal to some natural superiority given by gender, race, class or expertise"'.[10] He also rejects the notion of a 'sovereign voice' of knowledge and any fixed notion of truth: all knowledge is believed to be mediated by social, political, cultural, and personal factors. This claim assumes that there is no distinction between truth and power: discerning and articulating truth is a social process whereby the construction and discursive process of knowledge *is* power.[11]

Two aspects of George's critique of realism merit particular attention. The first concerns the positivist approach to knowing and framing knowledge, and how it conditions the way realists observe the world. Realists, in an effort to achieve scientific certainty, rely upon a 'dichotomized ontological logic that assumes into ritualized reality a distinction between a realm of empiricist "fact" and a realm of

[6] Jim George and David Campbell, 'Patterns of Dissent and Celebration of Difference: Critical Social Theory and International Relations', *International Studies Quarterly*, 34 (1990), p. 270. These voices do not constitute an intellectual tradition. They share no common normative problem and are unified, perhaps, only by a common opposition to modernity and a desire to emancipate 'disciplined' knowledge'.

[7] See John A. Vasquez, 'The Level of Analysis Problem Reconsidered', in Ken Booth and Steve Smith (eds.), *International Relations Theory Today* (Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995), p. 223.

[8] See Jim George, Discourses of Global Politics: A Critical (Re)Introduction to International Relations, (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 1994), chs. 3–5.

[9] See Jim George, 'Of Incarceration and Enclosure: Neorealism and the New/Old World Orders', *Millennium*, 22:2 (1993), pp. 197–234.

[10] Jim George, 'Understanding International Relations After the Cold War: Probing Beyond the Realist Legacy', in Michael J. Shapiro and Hayward Alker (eds.), *Challenging Boundaries: Global Flows, Territorial Identities* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), p. 68.

[11] George and Campbell, 'Patterns of Dissent', p. 281.

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"theorized" knowledge'.[12] The realist, according to George, obtains knowledge of the world by observing an external realm of facts which impose themselves upon the observer; and the scholar—who is separate from this world of facts—objectively explains them and thereby confers meaning and identity. Realist theory is constructed by observing the realm of external facts; and it is validated by retrospectively determining the extent to which the interpretation that the theory puts on the facts conforms with the realities of the world. Thus, realism is based upon a spectator construction of knowledge: '[a] genuine (positivist) Realist … is the observer of the world "out there"'.[13] By detaching themselves from the factual world, George insists that realists remove themselves from the historical, cultural, and linguistic context of human existence. Realism's commitment to this approach to knowledge produces a 'reality' which is both exclusionary and narrow.[14]

The second aspect of George's critique concerns the contention that realism is characteristic of modern international relations theory *as* practice. The notion that theory is practice reflects George's belief that realism is a textual tradition—a tradition become reality which is based upon a selective and contested reading of certain texts and which 'reduces highly complex historico-political phenomena to narrowly focused ahistorical rituals of thought and action'.[15] From the texts of Thucydides, Machiavelli, Hobbes, and Rousseau, realists claim to have discerned laws of world politics which transcend time, place, and personality; and following from this reading realists confront the immediacy and necessity of a 'real' and threatening anarchical world marked by an endemic struggle for power and survival, by asserting control over others in an effort to maintain order and security.

Conceiving realist theory as practice affirms realism as a set of rituals replete with predetermined means meant to achieve pre-given ends. These rituals subsume the concerns of individual human beings to the necessities imposed by an anarchical world 'out there' and which entail the use of violence in a commitment to an objectified ideal, such as maintaining the balance of power. Indeed, George argues that realism must discipline, order, and control the threatening Other for the common good; and, consequently, realist theory as practice reduces the art of statecraft to 'little more than a violent utilitarian ritual, carried out by autonomous, contingently related actors in an environment determined by anarchy'.[16] Thus, the response to Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait and the failure to prevent systematic murder in the Balkans is indicative of the unreflexive practice of realist power politics and a mechanical 'commitment to a simplistic grand theory of International Relations, honed during the early years of the Cold War and not seriously reflected upon since.'[17] Failure, in this context, is not attributable to an absence of imagination or to a lack of sensitivity toward complex problems. Rather the crucial point for George is that realism reduces complex issues so that it ignores the needs of ordinary human beings and recommends the use of violence and coercion which is not only necessary, but legitimate. Realism knows no other image

[12] George, 'Understanding International Relations', p. 40.
[13] George, *Discourses of Global Politics*, p. 12.
[14] Ibid., p. 12–18.
[15] Ibid., p. 4.
[16] Ibid., p. 223; and Jim George, 'Realist "Ethics", International Relations, and Postmodernism: Thinking Beyond the Egoism-Anarchy Thematic', *Millennium*, 24 (1995), p. 195.
[17] George, *Discourses of Global Politics*, pp. 2–8.

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of the world and it can conceive of no other: realists think and act in terms of, and in response to, the 'reality' of a world constructed in realism's own image.

The positivist philosophy of knowledge and realism's attendant representation of reality stands in striking contrast to George's approach to international relations. The world, George insists, 'is always an interpreted "thing", and it is always interpreted in conditions of disagreement and conflict, to one degree or another'.[18] As an interpreted realm, our world must be observed from within; that is, it must be interpreted in the context of social, historical, cultural, and linguistic discourse and practice. There can be no recourse to the objective facts, no appeal to scientific validity, we cannot fall back upon a foundational corpus of knowledge, and we cannot obtain legitimacy by appealing to some objective ideal, such as the national interest. For George, this understanding of knowledge represents a world in which human experience is located in political and normative contexts; it 'connects the scholar directly and unequivocally to that world and imposes upon scholarship a regime of self-reflection and critical awareness'.[19] Interpreting the world from within avoids the universal and ahistorical rituals of realism which indiscriminately disregard responsibility for human needs because of the necessities imposed by a threatening anarchical world 'out there'.

Morgenthau, positivism, and realist theory

The detached observer and the theory as practice themes appear throughout George's critique of Morgenthau's contribution to realist thought—a critique which seems to rely exclusively on a misreading of Morgenthau's six principles of political realism that appear in the opening chapter of *Politics Among Nations*. This critique centres on George's identification of a Verstehen-positivist paradox in Morgenthau's work, a paradox which leads him to conclude that Morgenthau is 'both classical hermeneutiscist and hard-nosed positivist'.[20] Morgenthau's hermeneutiscist dimension is revealed when he implores us to 'put ourselves in the position of a statesman who must meet a certain problem of foreign policy under certain circumstances'.[21] In this mode, Morgenthau is embedded in the realm of human experience, a realm where political action is grounded in the contingent circumstances of history, and the domain of personal, social, and cultural practice. But George contends that Morgenthau's positivist mode come into view when he asserts that '[p]olitical realism believes that politics, like society in general, is governed by objective laws that have their roots in human nature.'[22] And similarly, after exploring the alternatives of action from which a statesperson may choose, Morgenthau argues that '[i]t is the testing of this rational hypothesis against the actual facts and their consequences that gives theoretical meaning to the facts of international politics'.[23] This invoca-

[18] Ibid., p. 24.
[19] Ibid., p. 24.
[20] Ibid., p. 92.
[21] Hans J. Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations*, 6th edn., revised by Kenneth W. Thompson (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1985), p. 5.
[22] Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations*, p. 4.
[23] Ibid., *p. 5.*

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tion of scientific method and authority represents, for George, a process by which 'the value-laden scholar is magically detached from the analytical equation'.[24] Thus, Morgenthau is no longer the scholar embedded within human experience: he is the external 'sovereign voice' observing the world 'out there.' Only then, George argues, does it become possible for the detached scholar to distinguish between what Morgenthau views as 'truth and opinion—between what is true objectively and rationally, supported by evidence and … what is only a subjective judgment, divorced from the facts as there are and informed by prejudice and wishful thinking'.[25]

The theory as practice theme follows from Morgenthau's specification of how the theoretical integrity of political realism is to be tested and judged. He insists that the value of a theory must be judged on logical and empirical terms: the theory must be consistent within itself and the facts ought to be consistent with the interpretation that the theory has put on them.[26] By these standards, realism is self-affirming: realism legitimates itself by defining reality and then it excludes from this reality all non-conforming knowledge and experience. This process of self-affirmation is underscored by Morgenthau's remark that realism 'must be judged not by some preconceived abstract principle or concept unrelated to reality, but by its purpose: to bring order and meaning to a mass of phenomena which without it would remain disconnected and unintelligible'.[27] For George, the implications of these standards of judgment and theoretical purpose are enormous: '[t]heory, in this sense … is simply a means to a pre-given end'.[28] And on this account, there is no distinction between theory and practice: realist theory is practice in a 'reality' defined by realism.

George maintains that, in spite of its hermeneutiscist dimension, Morgenthau's realism is thoroughly entangled in the principles of positivist social science. Realism, he argues, is founded upon a spectator theory of knowledge: the scholar watches and observes passively an already existing world 'out there'.[29] Therefore, knowledge and all derivative analysis is separated from human experience. And consequently, the realist cannot meaningfully speak to human concerns except to the extent that they are part of a common good which is defined in terms of objectified theoretical categories. Realism is limited further by its closed and self-affirming test of validity: legitimacy and authenticity is obtained when the facts confirm the interpretation that the theory has put on them. Thus, the purpose of realism, according to George, 'is to (retrospectively) bring "order and meaning" to a (factual) "mass of phenomena" that in contingent and unique form *exist independent of the theorist* [emphasis in original]'.[30] Hence, realist theory becomes practice; and as such, it prescribes predetermined rituals of response and action meant to achieve pre-given ends. George concludes by claiming that Morgenthau is responsible for not only 'orienting a whole generation of scholars toward the "objective laws" of politics at the

[24] George, *Discourses of Global Politics*, p. 93.
[25] Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations*, p. 4.
[26] Ibid., p. 4.
[27] Quoted in George, *Discourses of Global Politics*, p. 93. George's notes attribute this quote to the 5th edn. of *Politics Among Nations*, pp. 4–5, however, the passage actually appears on p. 3.
[28] George, *Discourses of Global Politics*, pp. 93–4.
[29] Ibid., p. 94.
[30] Ibid., p. 93.

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international level', but that he 'is, unequivocally, at the heart of scientific (positivist) realism'.[31]

Morgenthau and scientific inquiry

George's critique of Morgenthau's realism relies considerably upon the particular meaning of the word 'science'. But instead of exploring Morgenthau's unambiguous rejection of a science of politics, George focuses uncritically on his use of words like 'science', 'objective', and 'laws', and concludes that he is committed to the methods of positivist social science. Thus, he appears to be unaware of Morgenthau's contempt for those who favour replacing traditional institutions of international politics with a science of peace or politics. Morgenthau rejects the proposition that the problems of international politics amount to little more than scientific problems: these problems (the foremost being war) cannot be treated as mere technical problems awaiting 'solutions' which follow the increase of theoretical knowledge.[32]

The word 'science' is double-tongued: it has several meanings that are related but which are nonetheless distinct.[33] Scientific activity can refer narrowly to the scientific method whereby scholars formulate and test hypotheses in accordance with strict procedures of observation and verification. But the idea of science that best informs Morgenthau's thinking is one that refers to an organized body of knowledge which is both rigorous and systematic, and one which is free of sentimentalism and prejudice to the greatest extent possible. These dissimilar meanings lead to ambiguity whenever the meaning and purpose of science are questioned. This ambiguity is reason enough to probe George's critique of Morgenthau, especially since Morgenthau spent considerable time and effort stating his opposition to a 'scientism' which sees no limit to human knowledge; that is, a belief that the progress of science will, over time, uncover all that is unknowable.[34] Morgenthau distanced himself from this type of science—a science which he understood as positivism.

Morgenthau asserts that theoretical thinking, that is, scientific thinking, is one of the ways of 'realizing the specifically human in human existence'.[35] That is not to say that science is the only way that man can become conscious of himself: humanity can achieve this goal through religion, philosophy, art, poetry, literature, history, love, and power over man and nature. However, Morgenthau argues that historical circumstances sometimes favour some methods over others. In the modern era, science is favoured above all others; for '[w]e may live,' he proposes, 'in a condition in which man is capable of fulfilling his purpose only through the instrument of science, in which his human essence can be made visible only through

[31] Ibid., p. 94; also see George, 'Understanding International Relations', p. 44.
[32] Hans J. Morgenthau, 'Science of Peace: A Rationalist Utopia', *Social Research*, 42 (1975), pp. 24–34.
[33] This discussion is developed from Michael Oakeshott, *The Politics of Faith and the Politics of Scepticism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), pp. 12–18.
[34] See Hans J. Morgenthau, *Science: Servant or Master?* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1972). Many of the ideas contained in this volume are also found in *Scientific Man Versus Power Politics*. I have chosen to rely upon the former volume because it was published well after Morgenthau's notion of political realism had been articulated and refined. *Scientific Man* was published in 1946, two years prior to the first edition of *Politics Among Nations*.
[35] Morgenthau, *Science: Servant or Master?*, p. 1.

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rational, theoretically valid, systematic knowledge'.[36] But while Morgenthau believes that science may be the best way of realizing human purpose, he indicates that the meaning of science is not forever fixed.

The ancients justified science on account of its immanent value: the pursuit of knowledge was considered to be a valuable endeavour in itself. The ancient mind was disinterested in both the purpose of science and in the relative worth of knowledge. But the modern mind rejects the immanent justification of science because it is in search of useful knowledge. By judging knowledge in terms of its value, modern scientific inquiry is unavoidably imbued with purpose and function. The modern mind situates knowledge in hierarchical order: knowledge which meaningfully contributes to securing the admitted goods of society is valued above knowledge that does not. Thus, the modern mind asserts that the value of science transcends scientific inquiry itself insofar as it is intended to improve the moral and material condition of man.[37] And, consequently, the function and purpose of modern science is to achieve the 'good', or the ends of human activity.

It is Morgenthau's understanding of the relationship between modern man and science that underpins his political realism. Modern man, according to Morgenthau, is caught between the desire to transcend himself and the reality that he can never do so. Human beings will always aspire and fail; they will fail because of their inherent imperfection. This idea represents the tragedy of modern man who is '[s]uspended between his aspirations, which he cannot fulfil, and his nature, which he cannot escape, [modern man] experiences the contrast between the longings of his mind and his actual condition as his personal, eminently human tragedy'.[38] Thus, human beings can endeavour to improve their moral and material condition but they can never permanently escape the tragedy of their existence because failure will always frustrate their efforts. For Morgenthau, this tragic condition demands that science be concerned with valuable knowledge, for '[t]he ultimate decisions that confront the scientific mind are … not intellectual but moral in nature'.[39] He argues further that modern science is fundamentally concerned with the responsibility of the scholar: '[s]cientific ability is not only the ability to distinguish true from false; it is first of all the ability to select from among the truths accessible to us those that ought to be known'.[40]

But Morgenthau feared that science had entered a state of moral crisis. The emancipatory promise of modern science disillusioned Morgenthau: he despaired that while the scientific enterprise had produced enormous material improvements for humanity, it had also created the tools with which totalitarian governments control their populations and the instruments of warfare that could destroy humanity in its totality. This state of affairs suggested to Morgenthau that science had lost its transcendent value and that those who were engaged in scientific inquiry were 'no longer aware of the need for such a transcendent orientation'.[41] They lost their ability to meaningfully judge knowledge; and, consequently, they removed science from some notion of morality. Morgenthau viewed this separation as a gross

[36] Ibid., p. 2.
[37] Ibid., pp. 6–8.
[38] Ibid., p. 9.
[39] Ibid., p. 10.
[40] Ibid., pp. 10–11.
[41] Ibid., p. 13.

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abrogation of scholarly responsibility: by springing free of the realm of human experience, science 'established its freedom from any moral limits whatsoever'.[42]

Morgenthau attributes the moral crisis of science to the positivist mode of inquiry. Tellingly, he argues that '[i]f according to the French philosopher Le Senne, "all philosophy is a novel which waits for action to make it into history", the positivist philosophy of science has demonstrated its purely fictional character'.[43] Morgenthau believed that positivism's promise of material improvement and moral perfection had decayed into an instrument whose purpose was primarily for acquiring, maintaining, and exercising power. He doubted positivism's ability to draw man into meaningful action and he doubted positivism's ability to engage questions concerning truth because it is unable to distinguish meaningfully between right and wrong. Science of this sort, Morgenthau claimed, is overly susceptible to corruption and is then transformed into little more than 'a political ideology that replaces the distinction between truth and error with that between what is politically effective and what is not'.[44]

Morgenthau associates the transformation of science into political ideology with theorists who are 'repelled by history; for history is the realm of the accidental, the contingent, the unpredictable. They are instead fascinated by the rational model of the natural sciences, which appears to be free of these blemishes that stand in the way of the thorough rationalization of international relations'.[45] This mode of inquiry abstracts from those qualities that resist rationalization; that is, those qualities which are responsible for moral dilemmas, intellectual uncertainty, and political risk. Morgenthau stresses that scholars who are aware of these qualities will inevitably experience moral, political, and intellectual frustration because human relations are susceptible to only a minimal level of rationalization and quantification. But Morgenthau insists that the positivist, by refusing to engage moral questions, experiences no such frustration:

> what the contemporary [positivist] theories of international relations endeavor to exorcise as deficiencies in view of an ideal, pervasively rational theory is in truth but the ineradicable qualities of the subject matter itself. A theory that does not take them into account transforms itself into a dogma, a kind of metaphysics, regardless in what empirical or mathematical garb it is clothed.[46]

Hence, the positivist theoretical enterprise redefines the relationship between theoretical reflection and the practice of world politics. The theoretical enterprise is no longer concerned with the problems of world politics; rather, it is transformed into an instrument with which members of the academic community enhance their personal power and explore noncontroversial theoretical questions.[47]

The pursuit of noncontroversial knowledge and personal aggrandizement indicated to Morgenthau an approach to science which cannot distinguish between significant and insignificant knowledge. Science of this type is not concerned with discerning and professing truth: it is the servant of political purpose. And as the

[42] Ibid., p. 13.
[43] Ibid., p. 13.
[44] Ibid., p. 14.
[45] Hans J. Morgenthau, 'Common Sense and Theories', *Truth and Power: Essays of a Decade, 1960–70* (New York: Praeger, 1970), p. 245.
[46] Morgenthau, 'Common Sense', pp. 245–6.
[47] Ibid., p. 247.

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servant of political purpose, all claims of neutrality and objectivity are disallowed. Indeed, Morgenthau patently rejects the idea of value-free science:

> all science, by distinguishing between what is and what is not worth knowing, derives from a generally implicit and unarticulated system of values. Thus science, by searching for and transmitting certain kinds of knowledge, conveys inevitably certain valuations about the meaning of the reality with which it is concerned. By distinguishing not only truth from error but also a truth worth knowing from one that is not, science provides man with certain standards of orientation that guide him in his journey through the otherwise bewildering variety of experiences. Thus through the distinctions it must make, science conveys not only objective knowledge but also the image of a meaningful world worth knowing selected from the many available.[48]

That Morgenthau rejects the notion of value-free science; that he argues that the essential purpose of science is to judge the value of knowledge; and his belief that the ultimate questions which confront the scientific enterprise are moral in nature, casts doubt upon George's claim that Morgenthau is a detached observer of an objectified and external world 'out there'.

The classical tradition and the limits of positivism

Morgenthau's insistence that proper scientific inquiry is concerned with investigating moral questions suggests that he encounters the world in a way which is remarkably similar to what Hedley Bull calls the classical approach. The classical approach to theorizing is grounded in philosophy, history, and law, and which, above all else, emphasizes the importance of judgment. This approach differs from the scientific approach which endeavours to construct and articulate theory that is validated by strict procedures of logical and empirical testing. The principal weakness of the scientific approach, Bull claims, is its inability to comprehend and engage moral questions. By stipulating exact standards of logical and empirical verification, those who employ the methods of the scientific approach essentially exclude moral questions—those questions which are susceptible to only temporary satisfaction and which 'can only be probed, clarified, reformulated, and tentatively answered from some arbitrary standpoint, according to the method of philosophy'.[49]

Bull emphasizes the centrality of judgment for the same reason as Morgenthau: only by exercising judgment can we speak meaningfully to the moral dilemmas of our world. They are concerned with fundamental human values, values such as order, justice, security, liberty, equality, and peace, and how these values might be secured. And indeed, they reject the proposition that moral questions are at the margins of world politics; moral questions are not a separate subject of study: they disclose the substance of all human relations. Thus, it is evident that Morgenthau and Bull are distinct voices participating in the same conversation: they 'seek to

[48] Morgenthau, *Science*, p. 16.
[49] Hedley Bull, 'International Theory: The Case for the Classical Approach', *World Politics*, 18 (1966), p. 361–6.

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comprehend the human condition and the values fundamental to it … as well as the political arrangements and public policies necessary for their realization'.[50]

The classical approach, as Robert Jackson explains, is an inclusive approach to the study of world politics: the theorist, who can never be entirely separated from the realm of human experience, is situated inside the subject. Conversely, positivist social science situates the theorist outside the subject: human experience is external to the person who is observing it, much as the natural world is separate from the social world.[51] Jackson argues that the classical tradition includes the *verstehen* school of social science—an approach which disavows positivism and emphasizes the importance of interpretation. He adds that the classical approach 'is not fundamentally at odds with social science theories of international relations. It accommodates humanist social science and only excludes strictly positivist social science'.[52] This separation of the classical and the (positivist) scientific approaches is particularly problematic for George; for his critique of Morgenthau is dependent on demonstrating that Morgenthau is a 'hard-nosed' positivist.

George conceives of no such distinction between 'strict positivism' and the classical approach. In fact, he sees 'strict positivism' and the classical approach as parts of the same tradition. He concedes that the British realist and international society perspectives—particularly those of Martin Wight and Hedley Bull—are more sensitive in tone than their North American counterparts, but '[a]t the fundamental discursive level … there is no great difference between the British (and Anglophile) positions and the pseudoscientific approach of American Realism'.[53] Wight and Bull employ the same universalizing strategies as positivist realism: they mistakenly attempt to describe the way the world 'is', whether in terms of recurrence, repetition, and necessity of action or in the context of international anarchy.[54] Therefore, George concludes that, despite their differences, members of the 'English School' remain committed, like their American realist counterparts, to describing and explaining a world 'out there'.

This conclusion suggests that George's critique of Morgenthau may be dependent on an overly broad understanding of 'positivism'. Positivism is not a unified and wholly coherent philosophy: many positivisms differ substantially in their scope and content. For example, Martin Hollis describes a behaviouralism which employs the quantitative and statistical techniques of the natural sciences and an empiricism which claims to know the world by way of observation. While both of these methods are positivist of sorts, empiricism opposes the behaviouralist belief in a

[50] See also, Robert H. Jackson, 'Is There a Classical Theory?', in Steve Smith, Ken Booth, and Marysia Zalewski (eds.), *International Theory: Positivism and Beyond* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 203–4.

[51] Jackson, 'Is There a Classical Theory?', p. 208.

[52] Ibid., p. 208.

[53] George recognizes this much insofar as he views Morgenthau and the so-called British realists—E.H. Carr, Martin Wight, and Hedley Bull—as members of the same traditionalist intellectual tradition. As well, George's use of the word 'pseudoscientific' is odd in this context because a central purpose of his work is to demonstrate that the approach of Morgenthau and, indeed, of all realists is not just partially or quasi-scientific, but definitely scientific. See George, *Discourses of Global Politics*, p. 35, fn 22, p. 80.

[54] George, *Discourses of Global Politics*, p. 81; Martin Wight, 'Why Is There No International Theory?', in Herbert Butterfield and Martin Wight (eds.), *Diplomatic Investigations* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1966); and Hedley Bull, 'Society and Anarchy in International Relations', in Herbert Butterfield and Martin Wight (eds.), *Diplomatic Investigations* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1966).

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world that is waiting to be discovered.[55] That the different strands of positivism disclose fundamental differences raises important questions about the currency of George's category 'positivism'. Positivists admittedly share some things in common but it is doubtful that these commonalities bear the weight of George's criticisms. This is particularly the case when we recall that Morgenthau and Bull, figures whom George describes as positivists, not only did not consider themselves to be positivists, but spent considerable time and effort speaking against the fallacy of positivism. Thus, George's usage of the word 'positivism' may be, at best, divested of useful meaning and, at worst, employed as a pejorative label which is meant to impute something which it does not.

However, George's critique need not be so dependent on the meaning of positivism. His critique depends on the claim that, as detached observers of a world 'out there,' realists reify anarchy, necessity of action, the balance of power, the state, and the states system as permanent characteristics of world politics. They define the way the world 'is' to the exclusion of all other possibilities. George attributes this alleged propensity to observe the world from an external viewpoint to the methods of positivist social science. Thus, how the world is observed is more important than the character of one's positivism. Presumably George would find all detached observers of the world objectionable, regardless of the strength of their positivist credentials. And, ultimately, who is or who is not a positivist is not imminently crucial; rather what is at stake is whether or not theorists like Morgenthau objectify the world as external observers.

Rather than relying upon the diffuse idea of positivism, it is more profitable to make use of the distinction that Martin Hollis and Steve Smith draw between the natural science and the historical intellectual traditions. The natural science tradition, or the outsider's account, postulates the unity of the social and natural worlds; and it emphasizes the importance of explanation in the attempt to identify general laws of the social world. Conversely, the insider's account pursues a strategy of historical interpretation which seeks to understand the thoughts, motives, values, and actions of human subjects.[56] Although Hollis and Smith (mistakenly, as I shall indicate below) locate Morgenthau in the natural science tradition, their distinction between inside and outside theory is a better way of assessing Morgenthau's realism than George's reliance upon the contested meaning of positivism.

The scientific enterprise, as Morgenthau understands it, is one way of realizing human purpose. It is a normative activity: it is a tool of judgment that, when properly practised, may be used to discern what is significant, useful, and which improves the human condition. Therefore, the scientific enterprise is concerned with judging contending moral claims—claims that are expressed in terms of values, norms, and rules which cannot be external to human experience. Values, norms, and rules are historical evidence of human activity. There is no external viewpoint from which to judge them: their meaning, standing, and purpose are internal to some tradition, some place, and some time. Exercising judgment entails deliberation in historical, social, and political context. It requires the recognition and understanding

[55] Martin Hollis, 'The Last Post?', in Steve Smith, Ken Booth, and Marysia Zalewski (eds.), *International Theory: Positivism and Beyond* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 302–3.

[56] Martin Hollis and Steve Smith, *Explaining and Understanding International Relations* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), pp. 1–4.

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of a family of ideas which are intelligible only in human experience; for the meaning of human conduct, something which is never clear or easy to understand, is surely obscure and remote without some knowledge of norms, rules, values, rights, obligations, virtue, consequences, motives, and the historical circumstances in which we find them. Thus, moral questions are not susceptible to definitive satisfaction. Our answers do not constitute permanent laws, rather they relate to a particular situation in a particular time and place: they necessarily must be tentative, conditional, and always open to challenge and revision.

Morgenthau's notion of scientific inquiry and his awareness of the finite nature of knowledge disallows the possibility of timeless laws that govern the social world. For Morgenthau, scientific inquiry relies upon an organized and systematic body of knowledge in the attempt to understand what is unknown but knowable. However, he claims that the mistake of rationalistic positivism is its failure to comprehend the connection between science and philosophy. Positivism is not aware of the unknowable and it knows no limits to human knowledge: it maintains that there is nothing in principle preventing science from uncovering all that is presently unknown. Morgenthau denies that science can uncover all that is unknown. As scientific inquiry penetrates more deeply into the unknown, he argues, it becomes increasingly evident that what is empirically unknown may be unknowable; and as science explores the unknown, it enters into the world of philosophical thinking—a world which steadily erodes standards of empirical objectivity. Indeed, he believes that 'genuine science, seeking to penetrate the mystery, is on the road to philosophy; the closer it comes to the core of the mystery, the more the knowable blends into the unknowable'.[57] Scientific inquiry of this sort does not permit us to observe the world as detached observers; rather it obliges us to be situated inside our world. Morgenthau's commitment to this type of scientific inquiry indicates that he engages the world from within and it suggests incoherence in George's critique.

Morgenthau's science and theory as practice

Morgenthau sees an important separation of theory and practice but he does not discount the possibility that they can be functionally related. He conceives theoretical thinking and practical action as being separated by their contrasting purpose and approach to the world: theory attempts to make sense of the empirical world by observation whereas practice engages this world in an attempt to change it. Thus, Morgenthau argues that for all the mysteries that theory might uncover, it cannot change the world. Theory entails no action; and as such, theory is inferior to practical action such as politics.[58] But this distinction is confused when science loses its transcendent purpose and becomes an instrument to acquire and demonstrate power. For Morgenthau, positivism exemplifies this type of science, a science that serves the interests of someone or some institution.

Morgenthau characterizes the positivist belief in scientific progress as being misleading and even fraudulent. Rather than responding to the spectre of nuclear

[57] Morgenthau, *Science*, pp. 61–2.
[58] Ibid., pp. 34–7.

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annihilation and environmental degradation, positivists aimlessly accumulate knowledge in the belief that the progression of science amounts to the concomitant progress of humanity.[59] Indeed, he claims, they respond to these dangers with ideologically infected theory which is not concerned with truth *per se*; for the purpose of ideology 'is always not to understand reality as it actually is, but to morally justify and intellectually rationalize the position and interest of a particular individual or group with regard to that reality. Thus political science becomes the ideological servant of whichever political force is willing and able to avail itself of its service'.[60] For Morgenthau, scientific activity of this type is the ideological servant of political power: it obliterates the distinction between theoretical knowledge and practical action, and it cannot furnish meaningful answers to the problems of his world.

But to assert that there is a necessary functional relationship between theory and practice is to suggest that the deficiencies of political action stem from a paucity of theoretical knowledge. However, Morgenthau observes that theoretical knowledge does not entail a commensurate increase in successful political action; rather the deficiencies of political action are attributable to a lack of moral will and courage to do what must be done. He emphasizes that political will—which dominates the realm of action—is not disclosed in scientific theory, rather it is informed by a type of wisdom.[61] This type of wisdom is not susceptible to precise formulation; it cannot be learned by rote and applied mechanically. And nor can it be formulated into procedures which can be written down for others to learn. This type of wisdom is obtained in the traditional way of doing things in the practical world: it can be imparted or acquired only in the practical realm of human experience.[62] So it is with Morgenthau's notion of political will: '[p]olitical wisdom, understood as sound political judgment, cannot be learned; it is a gift of nature … As such, it can be deepened and developed by example, experience, and study. But it cannot be acquired through deliberate effort by those from whom nature has withheld it'.[63] Thus, for Morgenthau, the relationship between political will and political action obviates a certain functional relationship between theory and practice.

Morgenthau's conception of political will might not, however, fundamentally undermine George's claim that realism imposes upon human relations a totalizing uniformity which reduces the range of political action to a narrowly defined set of rituals meant to achieve pre-given ends.[64] The construction of realist theory may pre-emptively circumscribe choices prior to the invocation of political will. But if realist theory as practice dominated discursive practice during the Cold War, and if it is, in fact, a ritualistic theory, then we may expect political action during the Cold War to reasonably correspond with Morgenthau's principles of realism. This is especially the case since George considers Morgenthau as someone 'who did so much to establish the psychological and intellectual grounds for US foreign policy' during this historical period.[65] Indeed, George argues that realist theory as practice

[59] Ibid., pp. 46–7.
[60] Ibid., p. 50.
[61] Ibid., p. 45.
[62] For further discussion see Michael Oakeshott, 'Rationalism in Politics', *Rationalism in Politics and Other Essays* (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1991), pp. 12–16.
[63] Morgenthau, *Science*, p. 45.
[64] George, 'Realist "Ethics"', p. 207.
[65] Ibid., p. 205.

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so dominated mainstream thinking during the Cold War that Western strategists could conceive of no alternative to objectifying and demonizing the Cold War Other. Hence, realism saw 'no strategic or humanitarian value in seeking a more sensitive dialogue with the Soviet enemy, nor was there any other rational choice for Western policy planners than arms racing, proxy war fighting, deterrence strategy, support for neofascist thuggery, and Vietnam'.[66] Thus, for George, US foreign policy during the Cold War ignored complex historico-political distinctions by indiscriminately opposing communism, revolutions, and social movements which threatened American (realist) 'reality'.

Morgenthau and the practice of statecraft during the Cold War

The indiscriminate universalism and the ritualistic mode of conduct that George ascribes to realist theory as practice is far from evident in Morgenthau's assessment of American foreign policy. Throughout the Cold War, he persistently warned against founding US foreign policy upon the principles of globalism, indiscriminate opposition to communism, and the concomitant practice of military intervention. American foreign policy, he observes, has vacillated between indiscriminate isolationism and an equally indiscriminate globalism. In its globalist manifestation, American foreign policy encounters the world without qualification; and it is, consequently, unable to cope intelligibly with the dilemmas, contradictions, and the imperfections of human activity. A globalist disposition, Morgenthau insists, is 'hostile to that middle ground of subtle distinctions, complex choices, and precarious manipulations which is the proper sphere of foreign policy'.[67]

Morgenthau equates the uniform and absolute disposition of the globalist perspective with moral crusading. The character of this crusading spirit is disclosed in Woodrow Wilson's and Lyndon Johnson's determination to bestow the blessings of the American society to the entire world. Democracy and modernization were not viewed as experiments of a particular time and place, rather they were invested with a quality of salvation which must be spread throughout the world.[68] Morgenthau viewed with contempt those persons who endeavoured to impose the lessons of American experience on others. Thus, he attributed to the error of globalism the American struggle against communism—a great power struggle turned moral crusade which pits the good of American democracy against the totalitarian evil of the Soviet Union. Communism, Morgenthau argues, is not a monolithic entity; rather it is an ideological instrument with which the Soviet Union and China, for example, may secure traditional interests which predate communism.[69] But the failure to recognize the discordant nature of communism engendered the popular Cold War idea that any gain for communism entailed a commensurate loss for the US. Therefore, all revolution was equated with communist revolution and considerations of circumstance were quickly discarded in favour of the simple but appealing

[66] George, *Discourses of Global Politics*, p. 224.
[67] Hans J. Morgenthau, *A New Foreign Policy for the United States* (New York: Praeger, 1969), p. 15, 81.
[68] Ibid., pp. 14–5, 81–4.
[69] Hans J. Morgenthau, 'War With China', *Vietnam and the United States* (Washington, DC: Public Affairs Press, 1965), p. 55.

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slogan: 'stop communism'. Morgenthau rejected without reservation the indiscriminate opposition to communism, for '[i]t is ideologically consistent, but politically and militarily foolish, to oppose a Communist government for no other reason than that it is Communist, and to support a non-Communist government, regardless of its relations with the Soviet Union or China'.[70] He feared that moral crusading would impose obligations upon the US that it could not possibly hope to satisfy; and the failure to honour national obligations, he argued, would do greater harm to American interests and prestige than the failure to stop the advance of communism in all places. Thus, Morgenthau adamantly insisted that in order to minimize the risk that communism presented to American interests, a sound foreign policy must carefully evaluate each communist government and movement.[71]

The American crusade against communism promoted an interventionist policy that, according to Morgenthau, mistakenly ignored cogent political and social factors and which reduced the problem of world revolution to one which was exclusively military in nature. The danger, he argues, of conceiving problems purely in military terms is that it may obscure political failure, even in cases where military action is successful. Nowhere is Morgenthau's injunction against indiscriminate intervention more prescient than in the context of the Vietnam War. He opposed the war in Vietnam on the premise that it proceeded from the assumption that communism is unacceptable in all forms and in all places, and from the belief that communism must be opposed with military power. For Morgenthau, the debacle of Vietnam embodied the fallacy and, indeed, danger of American globalism, and its inchoate (crusading) commitment to free the world from communism. US policymakers, in their passion to halt the spread of communism, did not seriously investigate the circumstances of the insurgency in South Vietnam and they lost sight of the limits of American power. Had they done so, they might have reached Morgenthau's conclusion that the problem in Vietnam had domestic origins rather than markings of some global communist conspiracy.[72] Prophetically, Morgenthau warned in 1964 that 'only humiliation and catastrophe await us as long as we persist in our simple-minded combination of indiscriminate ideological opposition to all Communist governments with peripheral military containment of a potentially great power'.[73]

But Morgenthau's insistence upon cautious consideration, thoughtful reflection, and prudent deliberation of power, interest, circumstance is lost upon George who asserts that Morgenthau's 'only rationale for opposition to Vietnam was an instrumental one, based on a *means/ends calculation* which reasoned that the US intervention in Vietnam was wrong because it did not represent the efficient functioning of "national interest" [italics in original]'.[74] Morgenthau does make reference to what appears to be instrumental thinking. For example, he suggests that '[i]t is the

[70] Hans J. Morgenthau, 'The Realities of Containment', *Vietnam and the United States* (Washington, DC: Public Affairs Press, 1965), p. 47.
[71] Hans J. Morgenthau, 'Another Korea?', *Vietnam and the United States* (Washington, DC: Public Affairs Press, 1965), p. 33; Hans J. Morgenthau, 'Shadow and Substance of Power', *Vietnam and the United States* (Washington, DC: Public Affairs Press, 1965), pp. 11–12; and Morgenthau, *A New Foreign Policy for the United States*, pp. 7–9.
[72] Hans J. Morgenthau, 'We Are Deluding Ourselves', *Vietnam and the United States* (Washington, DC: Public Affairs Press, 1965), p. 69.
[73] Morgenthau, 'Realities,' p. 49.
[74] George, 'Realist "Ethics"', p. 205.

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task of statesmanship not to oppose what cannot be opposed without a chance of success, but to bend it to one's own interests'.[75] But Morgenthau's invocation of the national interest is first and foremost concerned with values; that is, those things and ideas in which human beings invest *moral* value. He justifies his opposition to the war by appealing to moral principle rather than instrumental calculation. In traditional war, he observes, killing is normally a means to an end; but in Vietnam, success is measured in terms of a 'body count'. Hence, killing is an end in itself. But no civilized country, he argues, 'can wage such a war without suffering incalculable moral damage. The damage is particularly grave since the nation can see no plausible or political benefit that could justify killing for killing's sake'.[76]

By invoking the language of justification, Morgenthau is offering a reason that speaks to right conduct; that is, something which is invested with moral value. Thus, Morgenthau does not oppose the Vietnam War because intervention was more likely to fail than succeed; rather he opposes the war because he believed that intervention in Vietnam would most likely fail, and by failing, it presented an unacceptable risk to fundamental American values. Thus, Morgenthau concludes that the expedition in Vietnam is politically aimless, militarily unpromising, and morally dubious; indeed, he considers it

> a creeping, persistent debacle, more insidious for not being spectacular, conjuring up immense risks and narrowing with every step the avenues of escape. Not the least of the risks we are facing is neither political nor military. It is the risk to ourselves, to our identity, to our mission in the world, to our very existence as a great nation.[77]

Morgenthau's repeated and relentless injunctions against founding foreign policy upon abstract and universalized principles renders problematic George's claim that realism reduces the complexity of human existence to a series of crude and ahistorical rituals of thought and action and that it reduces the practice of statecraft to little more than a utilitarian calculation in which predetermined means are employed to achieve pre-given ends. Morgenthau states unequivocally: '[i]t has been the besetting weakness of America's conception of its global mission from Wilson to Johnson that it has endeavored to separate the American achievements from its uniquely American roots and to erect it into a principle of universal applicability'.[78] The practice of statecraft, he maintains, is irremediably tied to the circumstances of human experience; and it is properly guided by a type of wisdom or judgment which carefully weighs rights, obligations, values, and the circumstances in which one finds them. On this view, the practice of statecraft is not guided by pre-given rituals of thought and action, but by studied deliberation, reflection, and caution.

Deconfusing political realism

Morgenthau's realism is a great deal more complex and nuanced than George allows. Political realism, as Morgenthau understands it, does not specify general laws of

[75] Morgenthau, 'We Are Deluding Ourselves', p. 67.
[76] Morgenthau, *A New Foreign Policy for the United States*, p. 138.
[77] Ibid., p. 138; and Morgenthau, 'Shadow and Substance of Power', p. 19.
[78] Morgenthau, *A New Foreign Policy for the United States*, p. 107.
[79] Morgenthau, 'Common Sense and Theories', p. 245.

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human conduct and nor does it claim scientific validity. For Morgenthau, knowledge of world politics is conditional: it is bounded by the finite nature of human knowledge. And it is precisely because the relations of states are accidental, contingent, and unpredictable that foreign policy decisions must be made in the context of socially constructed and thereby constantly changing rules, norms, values, and institutions. Thus, the 'objective laws' of political realism must be subject to tests of reason and experience.[79]

Morgenthau warns that while discrete historical events often disclose similarities, we must carefully distinguish between what is typical and what is unique in each situation because of a certain uniqueness of every historical event. By properly exercising our faculties of judgment it is possible to discern from the circumstances of particular situations lessons from history which transcend a specific historical epoch.[80] Judgment of this sort is not compatible with permanent laws of human conduct; for the imperfect nature of human judgment permits us to draw the wrong lesson from history, to make the wrong analogy, and to make the wrong decision. And in the absence of a true law to guide statecraft, statespersons can get it wrong just as easily as they can get it right.

It is in the context of judgment that we ought to understand Morgenthau's principles of political realism. Political realism, like properly conceived scientific inquiry, is a tool of judgment. Whereas scientific inquiry is meant to improve the general moral and material condition of humanity, political realism is meant to improve the condition of humanity in the realm of world politics. Thus, the principles of political realism are not immutable laws of human conduct; they are more like maxims that are intended to aid the judgment of the practitioner of international politics. Imagining realism as a set of maxims meant to aid judgment precludes all appeals to scientific validity. A maxim, according to Michael Oakeshott, is a general statement relating to what is usually expected or what is normally agreed to be desirable in human conduct. Maxims are not statements which assert that something will happen; rather they are concerned with the probability that something is likely to happen. Similarly, Morgenthau asserts that a theory of international relations 'can state … the likely consequences of choosing one alternative as opposed to another and the conditions under which one alternative is more likely to occur and be successful than the other'; however, he qualifies this claim by stating that theory 'cannot say, with any degree of certainty, which of the alternatives is the correct one and will actually occur'.[81] Thus, Morgenthau's principles, like Oakeshott's maxims, cannot be disproved; they cannot be refuted by demonstrating that their major premise is not always true or that their prescriptive conclusion is uncertain. We contest maxims by advancing arguments that are, on balance, more convincing.[82] That is why Morgenthau disclaimed 'scientist theories' which transform 'nations into stereotyped "actors" engaging in equally stereotyped

[80] Morgenthau, *A New Foreign Policy for the United States*, p. 144.
[81] Hans J. Morgenthau, 'The Intellectual and Political Functions of a Theory of International Relations', in Horace V. Harrison (ed.), *The Role of Theory in International Relations* (Princeton, NJ: D. Van Nostrand, 1964), pp. 109, 111.
[82] Michael Oakeshott, 'Political Discourse', *Rationalism in Politics and Other Essays* (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1991), p. 79.

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symmetric or asymmetric relations'.[83] The relations of states are a product of human activity; and the contingent, that is, historical, nature of human relations precludes any reasonable claim of theoretical prediction. And because these positivist theories neglect history, Morgenthau consigns them all to the same fate: 'they must fail both as guides for theoretical understanding and as precepts for action'.[84]

Understanding the principles of realism as maxims discloses its fundamentally normative character: realism is but one of several moral voices in a realm of human relations we call world politics. And when understood as an authentic moral voice, George's claim that practitioners of realism abrogate responsibility to an objectified national interest, balance of power, state, or states system becomes difficult to sustain. These institutions disclose a moral character. They are institutions in which human beings invest value; and they have real consequences, for real people. We are not, as Hollis asserts, walking artifacts of our personal, social, political, and cultural attributes; and nor is reality constructed exclusively in these terms. The games nations play are surely socially constructed but their consequences are very real.[85] And it is the consequences of these games—games that secure or threaten what human beings value—that attract Morgenthau's attention.

The institutions which George mistakenly characterizes as 'objectified' actually disclose the moral character of Morgenthau's realism. These institutions are, no doubt, concrete entities in some sense, but they are also part of political discourse—a discourse which is distinctive of the realm of international politics. They are part of a specialized vocabulary which is used to persuade one of the 'good or the harm to be expected to follow, or not to follow, from a proposed course of action'.[86] These institutions impart moral significance: they are related to fundamental human values such as order, justice, and security, and they are employed in political discourse in a way so as to propose a particular course of action which may realize these values. Therefore, to justify a course of action in terms of the national interest or the balance of power is not to abrogate responsibility: it is to speak directly to the concerns of ordinary human beings. Thus, disagreement over what is in the national interest in a particular situation does not devalue its usefulness as a concept. Disagreement should not only come as no surprise, it ought to be expected. For disagreement over what is in the national interest indicates only that there are different ways of realizing fundamental human values.

To conclude, it is evident that George's critique of Morgenthau rings hollow, as his claim that Morgenthau is a spectator of a world 'out there' and that there is no meaningful distinction between Morgenthau's theory and practice is not entirely convincing. Indeed, Morgenthau is concerned not with demonstrating and exercising power for its own sake, but with exercising power in a way which improves the moral and material condition of humanity. But short of acknowledging this moral orientation, 'critical' projects of subversion serve only to 'discipline' and 'subjugate' his ideas. And by pushing Morgenthau to the margins of international inquiry they do not enrich the conversation of world politics, they close thinking space, they limit

[83] Morgenthau, 'The Intellectual and Political Functions of a Theory of International Relations', pp. 104–5.
[84] Ibid., pp. 104–6.
[85] Hollis, 'The Last Post?', p. 308.
[86] Oakeshott, 'Political Discourse', p. 80.

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possibilities, and they silence debate. It is important not to subvert Morgenthau's realism, but to recover its knowledge and wisdom. Realism is but one avenue on which to enter the moral world of human relations. And like other authentic moral voices, realism organizes and arranges fundamental values in a particular way; it provides insight into certain problems of human conduct; and it proposes particular ways of making sense of our world. Morgenthau's realism is representative of a rich moral tradition which presents one of many possible ways of entering into a particular realm of human relations.

But the implications of this conclusion are more profound than merely establishing George's misreading of Morgenthau and recovering a forgotten body of knowledge: it shapes how we think about world politics and how we engage it as an academic subject. Morgenthau shares George's concern with the shortcomings of positivist social science, the need to engage the world in historical, social, political, and cultural context, and the need to practice statecraft in a way that recognizes the importance of responsibility, right, and obligation. Thus, the thinking spaces which George and other critical voices endeavour to open may provide a rather limited refuge for those wishing to go beyond Morgenthau and realism. And it raises important questions about whom we call a realist, a postmodernist, or a student of any other theoretical school. R.B.J. Walker and Richard Ashley, for example, disclose more sympathy for certain aspects of realist thought than many observers might allow.[87] Similarly, Martin Wight claims that a quintessential classical realist such as George Kennan is actually a Grotian rationalist and that Morgenthau is partially a rationalist. But Wight also asserts that Morgenthau is also fundamentally a realist; like George, he alleges that Morgenthau believes that power creates morality and that he endorses justification by success.[88] This conclusion also suggests that the prevailing theoretical organization of the discipline may better reflect pedagogical preference and convenience than authentic difference, and it may cast doubt upon the value of organizing it in any such fashion at all. But these apparent confusions are not really confusions at all: they only remind us that our disciplinary categories and modes of organization are also socially constructed according to some criteria of value and purpose. Thus, it might be just worthwhile to organize the study of world politics in the context of unit of analysis, core normative problem, world image, moral disposition, degrees of optimism and pessimism, or as Hollis and Smith suggest, in terms of how the scholar engages the world. And as we attempt to organize our theories in some coherent fashion, investigate methodological issues, and ask questions about how we ask questions, we ought not lose sight of the conversation of human relations. Voices like Morgenthau disclose a rich moral tradition, a tradition that like all others, orders, arranges, and prioritizes fundamental human values in a way that proposes how human beings ought to best live alongside other human beings.

[87] See R.B.J. Walker, *Inside/Outside: International Theory as Political Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); and Richard K. Ashley, 'The Poverty of Neorealism', in Robert O. Keohane (ed.), *Neorealism and Its Critics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986).

[88] Martin Wight, *International Theory: The Three Traditions* (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1991), p. 267.

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