

Realism Reconsidered: The Legacy of Hans J. Morgenthau in International Relations, Michael C. Williams, ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 232 pp., \$99 cloth, \$45 paper.

Sixty years ago Hans Morgenthau published his landmark work, *Politics Among Nations*, which systematized the notion of political realism. In 2005 the book entered its seventh edition, and it remains one of the most widely known and most commonly misunderstood texts in the field of international relations. Though Morgenthau's famous "six principles of political realism" did not make their first appearance until the second edition in 1954, the book was a rousing success on its original 1948 publication.

However, with the arrival in 1979 of Kenneth Waltz's *Theory of International Politics*, Morgenthau's text was overtaken in the classroom by Waltz's amoral, and arguably more simplistic, neorealism. A decade later, the end of the Cold War and the start of the so-called American era led many to a search for a more "moral" approach to foreign policy. But as the 1990s progressed, this search led not to a rediscovery of Morgenthau—whose political realism was itself dismissed as cynical and amoral—but rather to a resurgence of liberalism in international relations, and the further development of constructivist, normative, and critical approaches.

Morgenthau's realism then met its antithesis in American neoconservatism. The neoconservatives were dissatisfied with the amorality of neorealism, and many viewed the Clinton administration's policies as insufficiently muscular. While in exile from government, they developed a theory of foreign policy that amounted to the exact opposite of Morgenthau's principles. Whereas Morgenthau had cautioned against so-called moralism in foreign policy, favoring prudence and a conservative approach based on the rational pursuit of interests defined in terms of power, the neoconservatives argued that America had a special *duty* to spread democracy and freedom across the world. Applied in practice, this rival theory led ostensibly to the Iraq war, an ironic side effect of which has been to once again increase both scholarly and lay interest in political realism, and in Morgenthau's work and legacy in particular.

It is this context that makes Michael Williams's edited volume, *Realism Reconsidered*, particularly timely. The book takes a critical look at the history of scholarship on Morgenthau's formulation of political realism, with an eye toward synthesizing

his theories with contemporary topics and theoretical debates. The chapters examine various aspects of Morgenthau's work, paying special attention not only to *Politics Among Nations* but also to his earlier classic, *Scientific Man vs. Power Politics* (1946). Consequently, the book seems best suited for a reader with at least a passing knowledge of these texts.

Though not explicitly arranged in this way, the book can be divided into two thematic sections. The first half primarily discusses Morgenthau's theoretical concepts and intellectual history. For instance, Chris Brown and William E. Scheuerman both author chapters dealing with Morgenthau's personal and intellectual relationship with the controversial German jurist Carl Schmitt; and Anthony F. Lang, Jr., contributes a particularly interesting chapter on Aristotle's influence on Morgenthau. The second half focuses on Morgenthau's relationship to specific policies and problems in world politics and history. Richard Little offers an analysis of the balance of power in *Politics Among Nations*; Michael Cox discusses Morgenthau and the purported failure of realism to predict the end of the Cold War; and Williams himself offers an excellent discussion of neo-conservatism and realism.

Though the book contains chapters written by ten authors, a few common arguments run throughout. First, the authors note the frequent misrepresentation of Morgenthau's realism, which portrays it as an amoral or even immoral theoretical approach; they argue that Morgenthau is a much more complicated thinker than his critics suggest. On this theme, Williams writes that it is a "remarkably narrow account [of Morgenthau] that has come to dominate discussions of his realism in IR today" (p. 230).

Second, the authors argue that Morgenthau's work does not contradict contemporary constructivist international relations theories; indeed, they suggest that though Morgenthau would himself likely not have chosen the term, perhaps even his own work has strong constructivist elements. Lang goes even further, proposing "a reading of Morgenthau that corresponds . . . to certain constructivist strands in IR theory," and is "more attuned to critical theory than the realism with which he is so often associated" (p. 37).

The authors generally analyze a particular aspect of Morgenthau's thinking, or particular policy or idea to which he responded, in order to make a case for a new understanding of his thinking along more complicated, often constructivist, lines. This method is not surprising considering that seven of the ten authors are based at British universities, where constructivist and critical theories have arguably become the dominant approaches to international relations theory.

Overall, Williams and his contributors make an exciting and innovative contribution to Morgenthau scholarship. The authors use interesting and lesser-known sources, and vivid examples, to show or speculate about Morgenthau's positions on a range of topics. Though there has been much work on Morgenthau and the problem of international morality, there has not been a volume that ties Morgenthau so directly into constructivist theory, even if here the move is accomplished in a subtle way.

Reading into and beyond the famous six principles, Morgenthau's brand of realism, and classical realism more broadly, seem to embody a powerful (if anti-perfectionist) moral sensibility. Indeed, there is a sense in which classical realism and neo-conservatism are linked in view of the

importance of morality for understanding both. Yet while neoconservatism centers on what Michael Oakeshott might have labeled a “politics of faith,” classical realism is an embodiment of a “politics of skepticism.” In recent years, dissatisfaction with (*insufficiently* moral) neorealism and (*incorrectly* moral) neoconservatism has led scholars to look elsewhere for moral guidance in world politics, and there has thus been renewed interest in the normative aspects of Morgenthau’s work. But while the recent return of Morgenthau to the agenda

can most clearly be attributed to dissatisfactions with neorealism and neoconservatism, an unexpected side effect has been to open up his work to those who were never realists to begin with—constructivists, normative scholars, and critical theorists—with an enriching effect all around.

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