

## Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace

Fifth edition, revised  
by Hans J. Morgenthau  
(Knopf; xxviii + 650 pp.; \$18.95)

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The publication of the fifth edition, revised, of Hans J. Morgenthau's *Politics Among Nations* is a measure of the enduring quality of the author's contribution to the study of international relations. The thirty years that span the publication of the first and latest editions, although they did not include a major war, witnessed history's most dangerous and persistent crises in international relations. No body of thought and analysis purporting to explain the nature of international life could have faced a more profound test. The successive editions of *Politics Among Nations* trace the author's intellectual responses and adjustments to the changing times. Morgenthau also evaluates the policies of the major powers in the light of the assumptions and principles he laid down so clearly, and for many so compellingly, in the first edition. In the preface to the second edition (1954) he acknowledged the changes demanded by "developments during the last six years in the intellectual climate of the United States, the conditions of world politics, and the mind of the author." His first edition, he recalled, had been a frontal attack on the misperceptions that had led to the threat of totalitarianism and, finally, to world war. With the evolution of more realistic approaches to world politics in the postwar era, that battle had been largely won; the second edition, therefore, did not require polemics to balance the erroneous assumptions of the other side.

In 1954 the bipolar structure of international politics was no longer so dominant. New forces in Europe, Africa, and Asia had added complexity and created strong cross-currents in international life. The author was compelled to inte-

grate such important developments as NATO, containment, and the Korean War into his theoretical framework, to rethink such concepts as national power, cultural imperialism, world public opinion, disarmament, collective security, and peaceful change in the light of cold war developments. The third edition in 1960 included additional changes in emphasis, but again without compromising the basic assumptions of the original theoretical structure. In the later editions Morgenthau continued to bring the book up to date, noting finally the profound changes that came with the Western recognition of the territorial status quo in Europe and the evolution of an independent role for China, Japan, and Germany in world politics—the decline, in short, of the cold war.

In the preface to the fourth edition (1967) Morgenthau confronted the increasingly fashionable behavioral approaches to the study of international politics. "What is decisive for the success or failure of a theory," he wrote, "is the contribution it makes to our knowledge and understanding of phenomena which are worth knowing and understanding. It is by its results that a theory must be judged, not by its epistemological pretenses and methodological innovations . . . . Nothing I have read and learned in recent years has dissuaded me from my conviction that the theoretical understanding of international politics is possible only within relatively narrow limits and that the present attempts at a thorough rationalization of international theory are likely to be as futile as those which have preceded them since the seventeenth century. These attempts run counter to the nature of the empirical world they are

dealing with, and are likely to issue in the dogmatism which overwhelms reality for the sake of rational consistency."

From the beginning Morgenthau sought to understand and interpret that empirical world. His theoretical framework rests on the foundation of historical experience, common sense, and the wisdom of the ages. *Politics Among Nations* is replete with examples of the author's use of history to establish the existence and validity of some essential proposition. The following paragraph illustrates the cosmopolitan nature of international life in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries by noting the propensity of diplomats to accept gifts from other sovereigns:

"The desire for material gain especially provided for this aristocratic society a common bond that was stronger than the ties of dynastic or national loyalty. Thus it was proper and common for a government to pay the foreign minister or diplomat of another country a pension; that is, a bribe. Lord Robert Cecil, the Minister of Elizabeth, received one from Spain. Sir Henry Wotton, the British Ambassador to Venice in the seventeenth century, accepted one from Savoy while applying for one from Spain. The documents which the French revolutionary government published in 1793 show that France subsidized Austrian statesmen between 1757 and 1769 to the tune of 82,652,479 livres, with the Austrian Chancellor Kaunitz receiving 100,000. Nor was it regarded any less proper or less usual for a government to compensate foreign statesmen for their cooperation in the conclusion of treaties. In 1716, French Cardinal Dubois offered British Minister Stanhope 600,000 livres for an alliance with France. He reported that, while not accepting the proposition at that time, Stanhope 'listened graciously without being displeased.' After the conclusion of the Treaty of Basel of 1795, by which Prussia withdrew from the war against France, Prussian Minister Hardenberg received from the French government valuables worth 30,000 francs and complained of the insignificance of the gift. In 1801, the Margrave of Baden spent 500,000 francs in the form of 'diplomatic presents,' of which French Foreign Minister Talleyrand received 150,000. It was generally intended to give him only 100,000 but the amount was increased

after it had become known that he had received from Prussia a snuffbox worth 66,000 francs as well as 100,000 francs in cash."

Clearly the problem in the use of history is that of separating the similar from the unique. The test of judgment, both for the scholar and for the statesman, is the accuracy they exhibit in detecting similarities and differences in political situations. Events not identical can still be similar enough to establish a principle of human behavior. Perhaps a dozen examples do not constitute a universal rule of conduct, but the excerpt above underscores the larger point that eighteenth century diplomats, unlike those of the present century, reflected in their conduct the existence of an international order of shared beliefs, purposes, assumptions, and modes of behavior.

Countless writers have contributed substantially to an understanding of politics among nations; the perceptive observations and analyses of many appear in the pages of Morgenthau's successive editions. Among them are Demosthenes, Thucydides, Frederick the Great, Edmund Burke, George Washington, Alexander Hamilton, Bolingbroke, John Stuart Mill, Max Weber, Lord Salisbury, Theodore Roosevelt, William Graham Sumner, and Winston Churchill, as well as many other practicing statesmen. Behind Morgenthau's historical conceptualizations is logic and common sense of major proportions, as well as the realization that precedence and wisdom do not always guide the behavior of nations. Principles cannot be universal in operation, nor will any system permit scientific predictability. National leaders have demonstrated a remarkable capacity to ignore or misinterpret reality and to pursue with vigor policies that could terminate only in disaster. It is clear why Morgenthau rejects the counsels of perfection that characterize much of the behavioral writing.

Morgenthau asserts the simple proposition that any theory of international relations must be consistent with the facts and within itself. What renders such a theory possible, he believes, is the existence in human society of objective laws that have their roots in human nature, laws that can be understood and embodied in a rational theory that reflects the objective laws. Morgen-

thau's fundamental assumption, which he attributes to the nature of man and of nations, is that nations act on the basis of interests and power, and that these elements transcend in importance any judgment regarding motives or sentiment. Interests, limited by evaluations of power, alone can save nations from moral excesses and political folly, for governments must reasonably subordinate all standards to those that reflect political reality.

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Morgenthau has erected his theoretical framework, not only on the assumption of an international struggle for power among major powers, but also on a thorough evaluation of national power itself—its elements, nature, and uses. If the struggle for power, with all of its complexity and justifications, is the foundation of international life, how can society limit the use of power in the broader interest of peace and stability? The author answers that question in detail by moving through the full spectrum of efforts that human beings have exerted to that end. He begins with the oldest form of limitation on national ambition—the states' historic reliance on the balance of power. If a fluid balancing system placed enormous limits on national power, it never achieved perfection or prevented wars. Accurate judgments of interest and power were simply too elusive.

But Morgenthau sees even less hope for peace with international morality and world public opinion as limiting factors, largely because the nature of international life denies them a real existence. Nor does he find an answer to the use of force in international law;

conflict among sovereign nations rests on questions that are political, not judicial. Morgenthau analyzes limitations on the use of force such as disarmament, judicial settlements, peaceful change, international government, and a world state. He finds all of them wanting. History and experience have demonstrated the ineffectiveness of all non-power devices to eliminate international aggression. Given the persistence of force in international life, Morgenthau returns to the one method of limitation that conforms to the twin realities of sovereignty and power—accommodation through traditional private diplomacy. Any international system that rests its hope for peace on the wisdom and astuteness of national leaders may possess few guarantees against war, but in a world of sovereign nations there is no other.

In the preface to his second edition Morgenthau quoted the plea Montesquieu addressed to the readers of *The Spirit of the Laws*: "I beg one favor of my readers, which I fear will not be granted to me; that is, that they will not judge by a few hours' reading of the labor of twenty years; that they will approve or condemn the book entire, and not a few particular phrases. If they would search into the design of the author, they can do it in no other way so completely as by searching into the design of the work." The statement is especially applicable to *Politics Among Nations*, for it is a work of remarkable erudition. The many criticisms leveled at it have questioned some secondary aspects of the book; this reviewer has, on occasion, dissented from some of its assumptions and conclusions. But Morgenthau's theoretical framework—beginning with the basic assumption that international politics is indeed a struggle for power, advantage, and prestige, then continuing through an entire spectrum of rational conclusions drawn from that assumption—is too well grounded in political and intellectual history to be disposed of readily by any opposing structure. The initial formulation, presented so simply and logically in the first edition, has withstood thirty years of experiences that have tested every assumption. The conclusions of the first edition, in the broad truths they proclaimed, stand unscathed. Nations will settle their differences through realistic negotiation or they will not settle them at all.