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# Crisis, Values, and the Purpose of Science: Morgenthau in Europe

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## Introduction

Shortly after finishing his *Habilitation* at the University of Geneva in 1934, Hans Morgenthau typed a lengthy manuscript entitled *Über den Sinn der Wissenschaft in dieser Zeit und über die Bestimmung des Menschen* (On the Purpose of Science in These Times and on Human Destiny). In the ever-growing literature on Morgenthau and classical realism at large, this manuscript has been underappreciated so far, even though it provided the foundation for a series of publications throughout Morgenthau's life in which he ferociously and even polemically defended a normative role of science in modern societies against the backdrop of the rise of behavioralism.<sup>1</sup> Most famous is certainly Morgenthau's first book in the United States, *Scientific Man vs. Power Politics* (see Hartmut Behr in this forum). Indeed, 40 years after Morgenthau had penned this manuscript in Geneva, he based the first part of *Science: Servant or Master* on it,<sup>2</sup> indicating that he 'never went much beyond, what he had basically said and formulated'<sup>3</sup> during his time in Europe.

Morgenthau wrote this piece during a time of great personal turmoil. His *Habilitation* was only deemed satisfactory by the university after a positive intervention by Hans Kelsen and his income dwindled as anti-Semitic German students refused to attend his lectures.<sup>4</sup> Since the situation became unbearable in Geneva, he sought employment in the United States, but neither the Academic Assistance Council nor the Rockefeller Foundation offered help. His fiancée, Irma Thormann, even wrote a desperate letter to her former professor in Berlin, Carl Landauer. At the beginning of 1935, when Thormann wrote the letter, Landauer lectured at Berkeley.<sup>5</sup> His discouraging reply reached her two months later,<sup>6</sup> but at that time it seemed that Morgenthau's fate had turned for the better. In March 1935, he was on his way to take up a position at the recently established *Instituto de Estudios Internacionales y Económicos* in Madrid. Shortly thereafter, however, the outbreak of the Civil War also vitiated this option, turning him into a 'double exile'.<sup>7</sup> Morgenthau's restless life in Europe epitomizes the larger developments that were about to shatter the entire world. 'The air, in which we dance, has changed and the ground is shaking. What used to be accepted by everyone turns into a matter of dispute and therefore into a matter of scholarly concern.'<sup>8</sup>

The rise of fascism throughout Europe was the tangible political effect of more fundamental metaphysical deficiencies that made Morgenthau question the role and scope of science.

This forum contribution further unravels these two concerns of Morgenthau: the crisis of modern societies and the purpose of science. This takes place through a discussion of the core claims of Morgenthau's manuscript by contextualizing it into European humanities and it is argued that these initial concerns helped him to formulate an ethics of responsibility in later years that still offers a contribution to today's International Relations (IR), as it asks for a reflective, democratic dimension in foreign policymaking. It is also demonstrated that Morgenthau, like many other émigré scholars, was a "traveler between all worlds", meaning that Morgenthau in America cannot be understood without having knowledge about Morgenthau in Europe.

### **The Crisis of Modern Societies and the Loss of Values**

For Morgenthau, the rise of ideologies during the first half of the twentieth century was caused by a lack of values in modern societies. He never fully elaborated the reasons for their disappearance and what values he was specifically talking about, but Christoph Frei argues that Morgenthau envisioned values similar to the sociologist Helmuth Plessner. For him, these values comprised, amongst others, empathy, peace, tolerance, democracy, and liberty.<sup>9</sup> However, an investigation into the reasons why Morgenthau might have refrained from providing an elaboration would go beyond the scope of this contribution. Therefore, it suffices to stress that a lack of these values endangers the political.

At the time when Morgenthau wrote this manuscript during the mid-1930s, the conceptualization of the political was one of his main intellectual concerns. While at previous publications Morgenthau settled for relatively vague and ambiguous terms, like 'coloring'<sup>10</sup> and 'tone'<sup>11</sup>, to characterize the political, in this later manuscript he provided a more concise definition. He argued that the political was 'a universal force that is inherent in every human and that necessarily focuses on others, while at the same time it only comes into being in interpersonal relationships.'<sup>12</sup> These interpersonal relationships evolve as antagonistic and topical exchanges that Morgenthau termed 'discussions'<sup>13</sup>, resulting in what William Galston calls 'arena[s] of contestation'<sup>14</sup>. People express their interests and aim to convince others about the righteousness of their perspectives. In these non-violent discussions, people gain knowledge about themselves as well as about the life-worlds they

inhibit and shape through their actions. Realizing their individual capabilities and experiencing power<sup>15</sup> through acting together, people eventually develop their identities. It is for this reason that, following Morgenthau, Europeans consider political actions more highly than philosophical contemplation.

However, the lack of values threatens the political, as they are necessary prerequisites for humans to be able to act in the first place.<sup>16</sup> In a later publication, Morgenthau explained this connection as follows: 'our knowledge of what justice demands is predicated upon our knowledge of what the world is like and what it is for, of a hierarchy of values reflecting the objective order of the world.'<sup>17</sup> Since values have disappeared in modern societies, people can only decide what is 'convenient and what is not, but [they can no longer judge] between good and bad.'<sup>18</sup> In other words, people lose the ability to contribute to the construction of their life-worlds, as the inability to judge renders them incapable of acting.

To avoid depolitization in modern societies, values have to be reestablished. This, however, can only be achieved through individual contemplation.<sup>19</sup> For Morgenthau, many people lacked the will and the strength to endure the solitariness of contemplation. It is this aspect that Morgenthau considered to be fundamental for human tragedy. Since Richard Ned Lebow's study on *The Tragic Vision of Politics*, the tragic element in Morgenthau's thought has repeatedly attracted scholarly interest, but this aspect of it has received limited interest so far.<sup>20</sup> Attempting to rejuvenate human abilities to act through contemplation is for most humans a daunting task because they fear that through self-reflection their commonly held assumptions could be shattered (*Erschütterung der Seele*).<sup>21</sup> This is caused by two interrelated developments. Since people are created in the 'image of God', they have a 'vision of perfection'<sup>22</sup> and try to attain it. However, in the course of their quest, they realize that this is impossible because humans are tied to a specific time and space which is why they can never accumulate absolute knowledge.<sup>23</sup> Realizing the futility of their ambitions, many people renounce from their quest out of fear to be incapable of bearing the vacuity of their existence.

Refraining from contemplation, people imagine a reality in collectivity that soothes their fears, as the labor lawyer Hugo Sinzheimer acknowledged in a letter to his former clerk Morgenthau shortly before the Nazis gained power in Germany: 'the political metaphysics and the belief in miracles, i.e. the absolute fear of reality, blurs the mind of Germans.'<sup>24</sup> Drawing on the work of Karl Mannheim, Morgenthau saw in this fear of facing the initial

emptiness the cause for the rise of ideologies in modern societies throughout Europe.<sup>25</sup> Unsurprisingly, recent scholarship argues that

‘the main objection of the realist critiques against the liberal zeitgeist is that it is based on particular forms of “wishful thinking” and on (mostly pseudo-religious) moral and political “illusions” that systematically eclipse the actual realities of social and political, and also of intellectual, life.’<sup>26</sup>

However, ideologies are not deliberate attempts to create an illusion of reality and to purposefully disorient people, but they are the product of frenzied, collective processes in whose course the full scope of human meaninglessness is concealed. As Morgenthau put it later in a further unpublished manuscript: ‘being imperfect and striving toward perfection, man ought not to be alone. For while the companionship of others cannot make him perfect, it can supplement his imperfection and give him the illusion of being perfect.’<sup>27</sup>

### **The Purpose of Science**

For Morgenthau, there were two ways for science to deal with this lack of values and the subsequent depolitization in modern societies. Science could either pursue an ‘immanent’ or a ‘transcendent’ strategy.<sup>28</sup> The first strategy – immanent science – is not concerned with these developments because values do not play a role for this kind of science. This is because immanent scientists only engage in empirical, policy-oriented studies that do not question the socio-political and cultural life-worlds they are operating in. As a consequence, ‘science [turns] into an ideological doctrine of justification’<sup>29</sup>, as immanent science sustains the socio-political *status quo*, instead of offering a critical corrective. For Morgenthau, such attempts to establish a value-free science, however, were futile because science would lose its societal function of supporting people in their quests to make decisions and engage with their peers.<sup>30</sup> The extensive criticism for behavioral sciences that Morgenthau offered in this manuscript anticipates his more substantial, often polemically presented concerns that he repeatedly voiced in the United States.<sup>31</sup> The essence of his criticism in the United States, however, remained the same. Morgenthau was skeptical of behavioralism, as it focuses merely on empirically verifiable structures, rather than considering the human condition of politics. For this reason, he promoted an IR-theory that considered

‘the difference between a photograph and a painted portrait. The photograph shows everything that can be seen by the naked eye. The painted portrait does not show everything that can be seen by the naked eye, but it shows one thing that the naked eye cannot see: the human essence.’<sup>32</sup>

The second strategy – transcendent science – was, therefore, the only viable option for Morgenthau. Science had to aspire to a metaphysics, but not in the sense of Mannheim’s world postulate (*Weltwollung*) – hence, a fixed, normative set of ontological assumptions – as for Morgenthau this would lead to attempts to reify these assumptions through social planning, as expounded in one of his first publications in the United States.<sup>33</sup> Rather, science as metaphysics meant for Morgenthau that it had to act as ‘an interpreter of the imaginable’<sup>34</sup> by making people aware of the myriad of socio-political and cultural constellations that submerge into their specific life-worlds at a given time. Consequently, this form of science asks people to be able to endure (*leiden*) because they not only realize the limits of their physical abilities to mold their life-worlds, but they also understand the limits of their intellect to acquire absolute knowledge. As for Morgenthau, most people seek ways to conceal the prospects of their imperfection, so transcendent science has to be prepared to be marginalized in public. As Morgenthau put it in the mid-1950s:

‘[a] political science which is true to its moral commitment ought ... to be an unpopular undertaking ... it cannot help being a subversive and revolutionary force with regard to certain vested interests – intellectual, political, economic, social in general. For it must sit in continuous judgment upon political man and political society, measuring their truth ... By doing so, it is not only an embarrassment to society intellectually, but it becomes also a political threat to the defenders or the opponents of the *status quo* or to both; for the social conventions about power, which political science cannot help subjecting to a critical – and often destructive – examination, are one of the main sources from which the claims to power, and hence power itself, derive.’<sup>35</sup>

However, becoming aware of the intellectual and physical limits of human existence, Morgenthau argued that people should not give in to them, but should engage with these limits, learning to accept human fallibility. This willful engagement with reality – to allude to Michael Williams's term<sup>36</sup> – rests on Morgenthau's reading of Mannheim's seminal *Ideology and Utopia*, as it is in this book that he encountered the spatio-temporal conditionality of knowledge. This concept helped him to realize that, although absolute knowledge and consequently a universal objectivity are inconceivable, science does not have to concede to relativism. This is because objectivity is still possible, albeit tied to the specific socio-political and cultural constellations that inform individual perspectives.<sup>37</sup> Embracing this form of objectivity as an academic standard, however, requires from its bearers (self)reflexivity and intellectual modesty towards other viewpoints. This means that transcendent scientists have to be willing to constantly review their own perspectives in the light of new knowledge brought about by the ever-changing constellations. This also means that intellectual contributions of others cannot be dismissed *per se*, but have to be carefully assessed and accepted as legitimate attempts to provide meaning to life-worlds. Through these arduous, long-term processes, scientists can fulfill their societal role by re-establishing values through which society at large regains its capacity to act.<sup>38</sup> In other words, for Morgenthau, while immanent science faces the danger of providing the intellectual justification to enforce ideological constraints, only transcendent science can re-instill the capacity to act in people and the political can be reestablished and sustained.

Evidently, in this early manuscript, Morgenthau still promotes an elitist understanding of science and concedes a key societal role to it, as he had learned in the study of Friedrich Nietzsche.<sup>39</sup> Without science, people would be incapable of regaining their ability to act, for it is only scientists that have the qualities to face human meaninglessness and transcend it. This viewpoint only gradually changed after his emigration to the United States, causing recent scholarship to question Morgenthau's ability to critically reflect upon his own perspective.<sup>40</sup> Still, particularly after his relocation to New York in the late 1960s, Morgenthau adapted the role of science, partly because he became acquainted with Hannah Arendt's democratic scholarship. Since then, Morgenthau conceded a more supportive role to science in the public realm. Scientists were no longer the sole guardians of the political in modern societies, but it takes the concerted efforts of everybody to retain responsibility for their own life-worlds.<sup>41</sup> In this scenario, scientists have a supportive role, helping people to

formulate their interests and develop empathy towards other, potentially diverging, viewpoints in public discourses (see Douglas Klusmeyer in this forum).

## **Conclusion**

Originating out of this and other unpublished intellectual exercises that Morgenthau wrote in Europe, it is this latter aspect of helping people to willfully take responsibility for their life-worlds that makes his work still relevant for contemporary IR. Consequently, Morgenthau's ethics of responsibility played a crucial role that brought about the revival of classical realism.<sup>42</sup>

Facing current policy dilemmas, Morgenthau's ethics asks for a shift in policymaking and even a reconsideration of its purpose, demonstrating that 'what is important is not so much what public discourse is about as the way in which public discourse takes place.'<sup>43</sup> Morgenthau's ethics does not allow drawing on 'ontological blueprints'<sup>44</sup> to detect social laws upon which the current socio-political *status quo* can be consolidated.<sup>45</sup> Hence, this ethics criticizes policymaking that turns questions of politics into issues of administration, as it implies that solutions to these practical dilemmas are to be found in the establishment of extensive bureaucracies, rather than engaging with their contested nature.

To avoid this development, which obstructs people from participating in policymaking processes and leaves it in the hands of a 'scientific elite'<sup>46</sup>, Morgenthau's ethics of responsibility encourages a 'politics as applied ethics'<sup>47</sup>, as we find it in the writings of Raymond Geuss. This means that dissenting positions need to be able to be voiced during decision-making processes. Furthermore, their development must be actively encouraged and sustained in a political realm. In doing so, policymaking remains a democratic process that requires from politicians and the involved public to be able to face dissent and eventually to seek compromises.<sup>48</sup> Policymaking is thereby removed from the hidden hallways of governmental bureaucracies and invites active participation from the entire public, which has to willfully take responsibility for their interests and actions. It also implies that politicians have to take responsibility, for which Morgenthau had found an early role model in Gustav Stresemann, the long term Weimar Republic Minister of Foreign Affairs.<sup>49</sup> Outcomes of policymaking processes can no longer be disguised as scientific-technological constraints, but are acknowledged as compromises which have arisen out of complex, collective negotiations. In these processes, politicians play an important role, as it is their

task to collate the various interests in society. Politicians also have to ponder on these interests and then pursue policy decisions that benefit the most.

To achieve this ethics of responsibility, science has to be transcendent, which also means that it has an educational mission (*Bildungsauftrag*) for society at large. For Morgenthau, this mission cannot be fulfilled through the bureaucratization of universities, which turns students into consumers of academic degrees.<sup>50</sup> Rather, this educational mission has to evolve as continuous support for people to seize opportunities to embrace their responsibilities. This means that the educational mission of science lies in contributing to establishing political fora that provide the space for people to engage in discussions through which societal change can be initiated. In this process, scientists have to be committed to “intellectual honesty” [that] seeks truth while truth is unsettling and disharmonious.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See for example Hans J. Morgenthau, “Das Problem der amerikanischen Universität”, *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, January 10 1938, p. 5; *Scientific Man vs. Power Politics* (London: Latimer House, 1947); *Science: Servant or Master?* (New York: New American Library, 1972).

<sup>2</sup> Morgenthau, *Science*, p. xxi.

<sup>3</sup> John Herz, “Letter to the Morgenthau Conference”, in Christian Hacke, Gottfried-Karl Kindermann, and Kai M. Schellhorn, eds., *The Heritage, Challenge and Future of Realism: In Memoriam Hans J. Morgenthau (1904-1980)* (Göttingen: V&R, 2005), p. 25.

<sup>4</sup> Hans J. Morgenthau, “Postscript to the Transaction Edition: Bernard Johnson’s Interview with Hans J. Morgenthau”, in Kenneth W. Thompson and Robert J. Myers, eds., *Truth and Tragedy. A Tribute to Hans J. Morgenthau* (New Brunswick: Transaction, 1984), pp. 353-4.

<sup>5</sup> Irma Thormann, “Letter to Carl Landauer”, January 18 1935 (Leo Baeck Institute Archives, Hans Morgenthau Collection, Container 2, Folder 9).

<sup>6</sup> Carl Landauer, “Letter to Irma Thormann”, March 25 1935 (Leo Baeck Institute Archives, Hans Morgenthau Collection, Container 2, Folder 9).

<sup>7</sup> Felix Frankfurter, “Letter to Nathan Greene”, December 9 1937 (Container 22, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, DC).

<sup>8</sup> Hans J. Morgenthau, *Über den Sinn der Wissenschaft in dieser Zeit und über die Bestimmung des Menschen*, 1934 (Container 151, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, DC), p. ii.

<sup>9</sup> Christoph Frei, *Hans J. Morgenthau. An Intellectual Biography* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2001), p. 167.

<sup>10</sup> Hans J. Morgenthau, *Die internationale Rechtspflege, ihr Wesen und ihre Grenzen* (Leipzig: Robert Noske, 1929), p. 67.

<sup>11</sup> Hans J. Morgenthau, *The Concept of the Political* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), p. 101.

<sup>12</sup> Morgenthau, *Über den Sinn der Wissenschaft*, p. 33.

<sup>13</sup> Morgenthau, *The Concept of the Political*, p. 126.

<sup>14</sup> William A. Galston, “Realism in Political Theory”, *European Journal of Political Theory* 9, no. 4 (2010), p. 391.

<sup>15</sup> Felix Rösch, “Pouvoir, Puissance, and Politics: Hans Morgenthau’s Dualistic Concept of Power?”, *Review of International Studies* 40, no. 2 (2014).

<sup>16</sup> Morgenthau, *Über den Sinn der Wissenschaft*, pp. 37 and 51.

<sup>17</sup> Hans J. Morgenthau, “On Trying to be Just”, *Commentary* (May 1963), p. 421.

<sup>18</sup> Morgenthau, *Über den Sinn der Wissenschaft*, p. 30.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 79.

<sup>20</sup> Richard Ned Lebow, *The Tragic Vision of Politics. Ethics, Interests, and Orders* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), also Douglas Klusmeyer, “Beyond Tragedy: Hannah Arendt and Hans Morgenthau on Responsibility, Evil, and Political Ethics”, *International Studies Review* 11, no. 2 (2009); Mark Chou,

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“Morgenthau, the Tragic. On Tragedy and the Transition from Scientific Man to Politics among Nations”, *Telos* 157 (2011); Konstantinos Kostagiannis, “Hans Morgenthau and the Tragedy of the Nation-State”, *International History Review* 36, no. 3 (2014).

<sup>21</sup> Morgenthau, *Über den Sinn der Wissenschaft*, p. 74.

<sup>22</sup> Hans J. Morgenthau, “The Significance of Being Alone”, n.d., p. 2 (Leo Baeck Institute Archives, Hans Morgenthau Collection, Container 4, Folder 6).

<sup>23</sup> Morgenthau, *Über den Sinn der Wissenschaft*, p. 64.

<sup>24</sup> Hugo Sinzheimer, “Letter to Hans J. Morgenthau”, March 11 1932 (Container 197, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, DC).

<sup>25</sup> Morgenthau, *Über den Sinn der Wissenschaft*, pp. 54-5.

<sup>26</sup> Hans-Jörg Sigwart, “The Logic of Legitimacy: Ethics in Political Realism”, *Review of Politics* 75, no. 3 (2013), p. 413.

<sup>27</sup> Morgenthau, “The Significance of Being Alone”, p. 2.

<sup>28</sup> Morgenthau, *Über den Sinn der Wissenschaft*, p. 2.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 55.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 12-3.

<sup>31</sup> For example Hans J. Morgenthau, *Scientific Man vs. Power Politics*; “The Nature and Limits of a Theory of International Relations”, in William T.R. Fox, ed., *Theoretical Aspects of International Relations* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1959); “Modern Science and Political Power”, *Columbia Law Review* 64, no. 8 (1964); “The Purpose of Political Science”, in James C. Charlesworth, ed., *A Design for Political Science: Scope, Objectives, and Methods* (Philadelphia: American Academy of Political and Social Science, 1966).

<sup>32</sup> Hans J. Morgenthau, “The Limits of Practicability in the Social Sciences. Section IV.B of the Steering Committee on the Social Science and Values Project Report”, 1949, p. 6 (Container 74, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, DC).

<sup>33</sup> Hans J. Morgenthau, “The Limitations of Science and the Problem of Social Planning”, *Ethics* 54, no. 3 (1944).

<sup>34</sup> Morgenthau, *Über den Sinn der Wissenschaft*, p. 69.

<sup>35</sup> Hans J. Morgenthau, “Reflections on the State of Political Science”, *Review of Politics* 17, no. 4 (1955); pp. 446-7.

<sup>36</sup> Michael C. Williams, *The Realist Tradition and the Limits of International Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

<sup>37</sup> Morgenthau, *Über den Sinn der Wissenschaft*, p. 20.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 79-80.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 77.

<sup>40</sup> Daniel Levine, “Why Hans Morgenthau was Not a Critical Theorist (and Why Contemporary IR Realists Should Care)”, *International Relations* 27, no. 1 (2013).

<sup>41</sup> Felix Rösch, “The Human Condition of Politics: Considering the Legacy of Hans J. Morgenthau for International Relations”, *Journal of International Political Theory* 9, no. 1 (2013).

<sup>42</sup> Sigwart, “The Logic of Legitimacy”, p. 408; also Douglas Klusmeyer, “The American Republic, Executive Power and the National Security State”, *Journal of International Political Theory* 7, no. 1 (2011) and Vibeke Schou Tjalve and Michael C. Williams, “Reviving the Rhetoric of Realism: Politics and Responsibility in Grand Strategy”, *Security Studies* 24, no. 1 (2015).

<sup>43</sup> Hannah Arendt, in Seyla Benhabib, “Feminist Theory and Hannah Arendt’s Concept of Public Space”, *History of the Human Sciences* 6, no. 2 (1993), p. 105.

<sup>44</sup> Andrew Ross, “Realism, Emotion, and Dynamic Allegiances in Global Politics”, *International Theory* 5, no. 2 (2013), p. 277.

<sup>45</sup> Morgenthau, *Über den Sinn der Wissenschaft*, p. 77.

<sup>46</sup> Hans J. Morgenthau, “Der Watergate-Geist nur scheinot?”, *Der Spiegel* 5 (1975), p. 78.

<sup>47</sup> Raymond Geuss, *Philosophy and Real Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), p. 9.

<sup>48</sup> Sigwart, “The Logic of Legitimacy”, p. 431-2.

<sup>49</sup> Hans J. Morgenthau, “Stresemann als Schöpfer der deutschen Völkerrechtspolitik”, *Die Justiz* 5, no. 3 (1930).

<sup>50</sup> Morgenthau, *Über den Sinn der Wissenschaft*, p. 77. For a contemporary critique, see for example Meera Sabaratnam, “Staging a Battle, Losing the Wars? International Studies, ‘Science’ and the Neoliberalisation of the University”, *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 43, no. 3 (2015), pp. 978-9.

<sup>51</sup> Sigwart, “The Logic of Legitimacy”, p. 429.