

Morality and U.S. Foreign Policy

Charles Frankel

The United States was never an isolationist country except in a Pickwickian sense of the term. It went through no period of excluding the outside world, as the Japanese did for two hundred years. On the contrary, the United States, in consequence of its openness to immigration, linked itself, between 1790 and 1920, ever more closely by ties of culture and blood to the various countries of Europe. It engaged in trade with them, allowed and invited their economic support in the task of settling and exploiting the American continent, and sent its upper-class children and its best writers, artists, and scientists on mandatory tours of Europe for the good of their souls. Culturally, ethnically, in its historical affinities, the United States has been perhaps the least isolated of nations. It is, indeed, as has often been remarked, *Europe*—reestablished on this continent, not in its separate national units, but as a single new unit and new breed. The isolationism of the United States insofar as it has existed has been specifically political and military, and even in these areas it has been sporadic and highly selective.

Thus, the United States declared itself, early in the nineteenth century, through the Monroe Doctrine, the military guarantor of the Western Hemisphere against further European infiltration. In the course of the nineteenth century the United States assured itself a secure hand and ample room in moving across the continent by conducting a war against Mexico. It

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bought Florida from Spain, vast territories from France, and Alaska from Russia. It became increasingly involved, through its traders, missionaries, and naval activities, with China. Its warships off Edo Bay forced the opening of Japan. And it ended the nineteenth century, like any nonisolationist country, by securing its distant Western flank through the occupation of the Philippines. This is not a record of quiescence, of keeping clear of foreign governments, or of failure to use American power affirmatively to advance practical American interests or to extend the nation's economic and military room for maneuver.

What then is meant by the common belief that, roughly between the times of Thomas Jefferson and Woodrow Wilson, the United States followed a policy of isolationism, and that it reverted to this policy in the period between the two world wars? Isolationism, it may be suggested, refers essentially to three aspects of American relations to the external world:

1. *Refusal to be a regular member of the European diplomatic bargaining system and to take part as a normal matter in its coalitions, negotiations, wars, and settlements.* To put this positively, isolationism is the putting into practice of Hegel's dictum, pronounced in 1828, that "America...is an ideal country for all those who are weary of the bric-a-brac of Old Europe."

2. *Unilateral acquisition and maintenance of secure borders and spheres of influence, using the prevailing system of international understandings as the framework and justification for this policy and relying, though without saying so, essentially on Britain, particularly its navy, to police those arrangements.* The symbolic act is James Monroe's, who declined to join with the British in a joint statement, as the British cabinet had suggested, but issued what came to be known as the Monroe Doctrine in the form of a unilateral declaration in 1823. If the only sanction behind this statement of protective responsibility for two continents, addressed to the powerful nations of the Holy

Alliance, had been the armed force that the small and scattered American Republic could put together, it would have been an act of laughable presumptuousness. The statement had teeth because it could be realistically assumed both by Americans and by the members of the Holy Alliance that the British, though they were not cosignatories of the statement, were nevertheless prepared to enforce it.

3. *A settled rationale for this policy of collecting the benefits of the international system while not paying the taxes to support it.* This rationale consisted in the doctrine that the interstate system of alliances, treaties, and negotiations was a European game, that the governments engaged in it were not people's governments based on consent or committed to the elevation of the free individual, and that the object of the entire system was not genuinely to abolish the evils of the international scene like war and lawlessness, but only to conduct a continuing political game of negotiation and balancing of powers. The United States, separated by an ocean and by a Constitution guaranteeing the rights of man, should not contribute, the doctrine maintained, to the perpetuation of a system. The posture has a striking resemblance to Thoreau's rationale for secession from the American body politic: "I simply wish to refuse allegiance to the state, to withdraw and stand aloof from it effectually...though I will make what use and get what advantage of her I can, as is usual in such cases."

Unlike Thoreau, however, who was only a private citizen, the United States Government could in fact half secede from the international system, particularly with the conveniently placed British navy to provide a feeling of security. Its isolationism did not prevent it from engaging in commercial relations or entering into intergovernmental understandings when it was expedient to do so. It consisted simply in the disposition—one-third conscious policy, one-third consecrated habit, one-third mere forgetfulness—to avoid anything but ad hoc and temporary involvement with the European diplomatic system of continuing negotiation, balancing and rebalancing of powers. It was not an imprudent way for the American nation to proceed from the point of view of its own self-interest. It thereby gained the advantages of the international peace-keeping system and suffered few of the costs. And it had a rationale for its own continental expansion and for its activities in the Caribbean and Latin America—the protection and spreading of free government; at the same time it also had a rationale for opposing European imperialism—opposition to the spreading of unfree government. One may call this doctrine "moralism" if one will. Yet the large service it performed to the cause of American interests, realistically construed, should not be overlooked.

While there are many explanations of the entrance of the United States into World War I, and the arguments still continue, indeed, as to whether it was a wise decision, it is reasonably plain that when America

abandoned its traditional military isolationism in 1917 the perception had grown on our leaders that the British shield was not so impregnable as had been supposed. Confronted with this situation, Woodrow Wilson envisaged our entry into the war as more than a makeshift operation. It was a step in earning the right and power to participate in the postwar settlement. And the function of that settlement was to install a new interstate system to replace the one whose failure was proved by the Great War. Britain could no longer, by itself, make balance-of-power politics work in Europe, nor could it protect the United States zones of economic and political autonomy. Accordingly, the United States would have to be a permanent part of the new system.

But it was to be a new system. Speaking extemporaneously in Colorado in 1919—it was the last speech he made before his disabling stroke—Wilson spoke of Gold Star mothers he had seen:

Why should they weep upon my hand and call down the blessings of God upon me? Because they...believe, and they rightly believe, their sons saved the liberty of the world. They believe that wrapped up with that liberty is the continuous protection of that liberty by the concerted powers of all civilized people....These men were crusaders...and all the world accepted them as crusaders, and their transcendent achievement has made all the world believe in America as it believes in no other nation organized in the modern world....I wish sane men in public life who are now opposing the settlement for which these men died...could feel the moral obligation that rests upon us not to go back on those boys, but to see the thing through, to see it through to the end and make good their redemption of the world. For nothing less depends upon this decision, nothing less than the liberation and salvation of the world.

Reading these words fifty years later, with our own disappointments and not Wilson's lying in our minds, they may seem the words not of a statesman but of a Presbyterian divine in an inflamed spiritual condition. But one must see Wilson's problem as he saw it. The old international system was dead, a new one was needed, and America had to be part of that system. But it could not be unless it was a redeemed system. For one who is not a Wilson scholar speculation as to the "real beliefs" in Wilson's mind would be fruitless. But if we look at the situation he faced, the external rationale for the stance he took is reasonably plain. America had to abandon a traditional position. The nation could be brought to do so only by invoking its traditional sense of itself, by appealing to its founding ideals and their universal meaning. Nor did Wilson have to contrive such an approach to the problem consciously. He did not choose to imitate the cadences of the biblical prophet.

They were his cadences, the cadences of the culture that made him.

And, almost as important, his American opponents shared, by and large, that same way of perceiving international affairs. They believed, too, that an unredeemed international system was not one in which the United States could participate. "The little group of willful men" around the first Senator Henry Cabot Lodge believed that only the old worn and wicked system was being restored. They thought the United States should stay out of it, just as, on the other hand, Wilson thought that there was no alternative to a radically reformed system and no way of creating an effective one without United States participation. The terms of the debate on both sides were the same, and they were continuous with the classic American tradition in foreign policy: scorn for mere balance-of-power politics and for the selfish nationalism and imperialism perceived to characterize the behavior of other nations; conviction that America's role must be uniquely that of protecting liberty, law, and moral principle.

It is in this context that the emergence of that approach to American foreign policy known as realism must be understood. The realists, chastened by the consequences of the combination of isolationism and high *pronunciamento* that characterized American policy during the long armistice of 1918-39, wanted the United States to become a member, permanent, dues-paying, active, of the interstate system of continuous negotiations. But they did not believe that this system would be or could be a redeemed system. They were internationalists who agreed, philosophically, with Henry Cabot Lodge's jaundiced estimate of the diplomatic world. They needed to put American participation in the international system, therefore, on a new basis. The outcome was realism. It was an effort to put American thinking about foreign affairs in a frame compatible with the country's conducting a long, unremitting diplomatic enterprise, lit occasionally by successes, darkened much more often by disappointments and frustrations, possibly keeping the planet from another holocaust, but never to be conceived as terminating in a final victory of Light over Darkness.



Janice Stapleton

The most influential spokesmen for the realists have been extraordinary men: George Kennan, Hans Morgenthau, and Reinhold Niebuhr. Gifted scholars and courageous public men, their realism is anything but the tired view that moral principles are for children and that nothing counts in

foreign affairs but success. Indeed, what has given their positions much of their attractiveness is the depth of their *moral* conviction that in foreign affairs we deal with the corruptions of human nature and must accept less than the ideal.

Kennan, an historian, a professional diplomat, a man of unusual sensitivities to cultural climates different from his own, has not been repelled merely on practical grounds by the American tendency to lecture others on the moralities. The tendency—so, at least, it seems to this observer—has cut him to the moral quick: He has seen it as a breach of basic principles of tolerance and respect for others. In his view it is not merely naiveté; it is contempt for human diversity, for the profusion of God's creation, to fail to see that the world cannot be governed in accordance with any particular nation's conception of right and wrong. Morgenthau, more the systematizer than Kennan, is explicit in his concern for rationality in foreign policy. He regards it as a moral norm, not simply a technical imperative, as an instrument for reducing human pain, and not only for achieving tactical victories. Finally, Niebuhr was to the realists, in Kennan's words, "the father of us all." No one who knew him or his writings could fail to see that he was animated by both an acute moral sensibility and a passion for justice.

Whatever one's judgment as to the soundness of the position they have taken, these realists opened the windows and let in air. They have put the pontificators on the defensive and made it more difficult to discuss every national choice as though it were one between Heaven and Hell. In clarity, candor, humility, and compassion for the condition of real human beings, in contrast to concern for impalpable and deceptive abstractions, they have raised the moral level of discussion by a considerable measure. That is one reason, perhaps the main reason, why they have won a following.

Yet the realists in foreign affairs, rather like their counterparts, "the legal realists" in jurisprudence, represent not a tight doctrine but an approach, a convergence of attitudes. They represent indeed the feeling that the realities of international relations are too complex and elusive to be caught by any doctrine. Nevertheless, seven major themes and guiding principles can be discerned in their writings and statements, which allow us to indicate the main drift of their position.

1. *All general principles, not only moral principles, are suspect in foreign policy.* This is particularly the emphasis in George Kennan's case. Aghast at the overextended interpretation of the containment doctrine as he had formulated it in his classic "Mr. X" article, he has come, over the years, to make a principle of the danger of abstract principles.

2. *Moral principles are the worst kind of general principles, for they add to the considerable dangers of universalism the aggravated dangers of zealotry and utopianism.* Hoist on the banner of ultimate right and

wrong, the foreign policy maker is unable to compromise. He will have a tendency to interpret every practical problem as an illustration of a basic moral choice. And thus he will drift into the interpretation of problems in outsize symbolic terms far outrunning any interpretation of their significance by concrete and practical standards. The symbols of eternal and ubiquitous confrontation, of a trial by combat in which the whole world was the scene of action and what was won by "them" was lost by "us," came to take precedence over considerations of mere money, geography, culture, or identifiable military or political challenge. Living this life of its own, like a cancer, the containment doctrine, universalized, moralized, took us by inexorable steps into Vietnam.

3. *Beyond their suspicion of universalism and moral zealotry the realists express a general skepticism about the flashier aspects of foreign affairs—the signing of treaties, the proclamation of peace by verbal agreement, the theatrical international meetings at which old adversaries embrace.* Again like the legal realists, who led a similar housecleaning expedition in the law, the foreign affairs realists think that what counts over the long run is not the law in the books—the treaties on the parchment pages—but the law in action—the day-to-day progress of professional negotiators in understanding one another, in ironing out issues under contention, and in rendering competing national interests less mutually threatening.

4. *As may have begun to emerge, the realists, to a not inconsiderable extent, have been spokesmen for the professionals in foreign policy.* Their approach, pragmatically viewed, means that greater freedom, more room for decision and maneuver, ought to be given to the nonpolitical, nonideological, permanent diplomatic corps. This facet of the realist approach is more pronounced in George Kennan and Walter Lippmann, who in many respects belonged to the realist movement, than it is in Charles Bohlen or Morgenthau or Niebuhr. Lippmann, in *The Political Philosophy*, spoke of the "malady" from which liberal democracies were suffering, the mistaken distribution of roles which assigned the electorate too much direct influence over foreign policy and prevented those who were best informed from exercising effective leadership.

5. *Realists have insisted on the dichotomy between morals and politics.* The principles by which men and women judge themselves in their private lives and personal relations are not applicable to the behavior of states or the conduct of people performing governmental roles. Hans Morgenthau has put the matter starkly: "Neither science nor ethics nor politics can resolve the conflict between politics and ethics into harmony.... To act successfully, that is, according to the rules of the political art, is political wisdom. To know with despair that the political act is inevitably evil, and to act nevertheless, is moral courage."

6. *Realists have insisted that foreign policy should be based on man as he is, not on man as a theoretician*

might desire him to be. Niebuhr used the Christian doctrines of history and human nature to make this point, stressing the incurable seed of corruption in all things human and the peculiar character of sin, which masks egoistical drives behind universalist creeds. Foreign policy realism, and particularly that of Niebuhr, must be seen against the background of the failed political faiths of the present century. It offered a framework for the belief that if people scaled down their moral demands, they might develop a foreign policy capable of accomplishing modest but decent purposes and of avoiding major disasters.

7. *Finally, the realists have stood for the reaffirmation of a picture of the interstate system that goes back in its essentials to Hobbes's notion that war is the natural state of man.* Peace, in sum, is essentially a negative condition—the interval between wars—and while it can, by arts of diplomacy, be indefinitely extended, the process of doing so is like the process of extending the length of human life: At the end one can only know that one has conducted a successful delaying operation. Professor Morgenthau has been the most systematic in codifying this approach to the theory and practice of international relations. He calls for the treatment of international politics rigorously in terms of "the concept of interest defined in terms of power," and asserts that in these terms international politics may be seen "as an independent sphere of action and understanding apart from other spheres, such as economics, ethics, aesthetics or religion."



Let us consider the principal tenets of the realist position one by one.

1. *The suspect character, in foreign policy, of all general principles.* Taken as a warning against overgeneralization and overcommitment, this is sound and necessary advice. Taken as a positive recommendation for conducting the foreign affairs of a powerful modern state, it fails on grounds of its unrealism.

First, in the interest of creating a climate of psychological security, other nations have to know, within reasonable limits, what to expect of the United States. If we do not give a hint as to our general intentions and standards of behavior, they will make these up for themselves, constructing them from what they perceive to be our behavior. If only to signal the nuances and qualifications that it wishes to have understood, a modern nation, particularly one from whose actions and inactions every other nation takes

cues, cannot afford not to make its own general statements of purpose. The imperatives may have been different when governments took their cues with regard to one another from the exchanges and understandings of professional diplomats meeting and talking intimately every day. But these professionals are no longer the *interlocuteurs valables* they once were; something more is needed to discern the effective policy of a democratic government than a daily conversation with its ambassador.

The centrality of this consideration in the mounting of an effective foreign policy for a world now moving pell-mell into the twenty-first century can hardly be overemphasized. The United States declared war on Spain in 1898 two days after Spain had acceded to the basic American demand that it correct its relations with Cuba. A primary reason, historians generally agree, was that William Randolph Hearst's *New York Journal* and its confrères in the yellow press had built up so much public hostility toward Spain that President McKinley's peaceful options had been narrowed if not foreclosed. Seventy-five years after that episode the world's nerve ends lie even more exposed to the media of communication. Decision-makers lose control of policy because powerful public reactions take over and divert the course of events into unforeseen or unwanted channels, and foreign governments find it difficult or impossible to read an ally's or adversary's intentions when they have to be discerned through the thick smoke screen erected by the press and television. In these conditions it becomes an indispensable prerequisite of stable relations with other governments that they know what our own government thinks are its guiding principles.

Second, what is true for the foreign audience is at least as true for the domestic audience. For better or worse, a foreign policy will not be effective over the long run if public opinion does not support it; and since public opinion cannot be expected to have an informed judgment on each specific decision taken day-by-day, its assent has to be to the general tendency and direction of the policy—to its guiding principles. This is a prudential principle, but it is also one that goes to the integrity and vitality of a democratic system. When foreign military-political policy was not a major concern of citizens, it may have been possible to reserve a large area of discretion for foreign affairs professionals and say little or nothing to the public about the broad considerations of policy underlying their decisions. But the American citizen today is immediately affected in his everyday life by the price of oil, airplane hijackings in political causes, military appropriations and manpower demands, international monetary affairs, foreign aid programs, and the Turkish attitude toward poppies. Further, the press and television see to it that the citizen is also called upon to react, day after day, to matters whose practical bearing on his life may be somewhat more remote, such as the Cyprus controversy or the terrorism in Ulster.

None of these matters can be dealt with rationally if specialized knowledge and the professional skills of diplomacy are not brought to bear on them. But the professionals acquire authority to make decisions for a democracy only insofar as they make them within a broader consultative framework. This is a requirement of democracy *de jure* and *de facto*. The principles of democracy are denied when this doesn't happen, and the practical capacity of a government to make decisions that the country will accept and pay for is also diminished. But since consultation, of course, cannot be on the day-to-day decisions, it must be on the framework of policy. The framework, therefore, has to be made explicit.

Third, the agents of the policy themselves need some general principles. Foreign policy is sustained these days by large bureaucratic organizations. Consistency of action, proper preparation for contingencies, the critique or reevaluation of what is being done—all require more explicitness with regard to principles and purposes than the realist formulas condemning general formulas suggest. Indeed, do not the makers of policy at the very top also need principles? How else are they to articulate to themselves the reasons for their decisions? To be sure, they are likely to realize, if they are experienced men and women, that no single principle, not even two or three, will be adequate for navigating in international waters. In making decisions, principles have to be defined, limited, balanced against others, and put in some order of priority appropriate for the case at hand. But if decisions are to be made rationally, reasons have to be given that apply to more than the case at hand. Logically there is no way away from principles.

Realism, in sum, reaffirms the traditional wisdom of lawyers and diplomatists that holds it is a mistake to make a decision on broader grounds than are needed, because one will live to regret the straitjacket one has made for oneself. But it overstates the case. If we took some of its extreme statements literally, foreign policy would be turned into the cult of a secret guild.

2. *The enunciation of moral principles in foreign policy contexts encourages zealotry and utopianism.* Perhaps the greatest appeal of the realists lies in their spirit of toleration and moderation. They are men of peaceful and conciliatory intent, not doctrinaire, not prigs. Like Thomas Hobbes, they detest most of all the morally illuminated, the people who know the answer to every problem and believe it consists in resurrecting some moral platitude. In an age of rampaging political ideologies they speak for the utility of a dispassionate tone and a straightforward factual analysis in the formulation and conduct of foreign policy.

Once again they have their finger on an important truth, but their statement of it turns it into a dangerous half-truth. What makes moral principles irresponsible is their enunciation without regard to putting them into practice, or to their consequences if acted upon, or to their coherence with other moral principles to which

attention also has to be given. In other words, what makes moral principles dangerous is their treatment as absolutes, their immunization from criticism in the light of facts and possibilities. But it is no solution to this problem to suggest, "Look only at the facts; moral principles are distractions." Shorn of their aura of mystery and sanctimony, moral principles are simply guidelines to action. They help us to decide what to do. They are *moral*, not merely technical or pragmatic, because they help us to decide what to do not about evanescent or intermediate matters but about dearly prized values in which our civilization has deep investments and our own sense of identity and self-respect is involved. It is hard to believe that the realists have counseled the extrusion of moral considerations in *this* sense of the term. What they have wished to extrude, it may be assumed, is moral absolutism. It is not helpful to pursue this objective by what can be too easily construed as a general denigration of the value of moral principles to foreign policy.

It might be said, of course, that the difference between the realists' view and that expressed in the present essay is merely a matter of emphasis. Thus, in his trenchantly reasoned book *In Defense of the National Interest*, which warned effectively against the dangers of the cold war missionary spirit, Professor Morgenthau distinguished between three types of American foreign policy: "the realistic—thinking and acting in terms of power—represented by Alexander Hamilton; the ideological—thinking in terms of moral principles but acting in terms of power—represented by Thomas Jefferson and John Quincy Adams; and the moralistic—thinking and acting in terms of moral principles—represented by Woodrow Wilson." Perhaps only a question of degree separates this view from one which maintains, as the present essay does, that for a long period in the nineteenth century the American commitment to liberty, popular government, and disengagement from the evildoing of the Old World was compatible with an aggressive and power-oriented foreign policy, and indeed, for better or worse, helped explain and justify that policy.

Nevertheless, it is hard to avoid the impression that the realists' emphasis on power is more than merely a warning against utopianism. Professor Morgenthau's threefold distinction between realism, ideology, and moralism rests on the unexamined assumption that thinking in terms of morals and thinking in terms of power are inevitably two different things. It leaves out a fourth possibility—that thinking about morals and thinking about power may interact on each other so that the uses of power are guided by moral considerations even while moral principles are corrected and criticized in terms of their applicability to the realistic possibilities of life. Lacking this fourth possibility, Professor Morgenthau's argument has to cross a logical vacuum. He argues that the concept of national interest has moral dignity because, in the absence of an integrated international society, the hope for an at-

tainment of a minimum of moral values is "predicated upon the existence of national communities capable of preserving order and realizing moral values within the limits of their power." Accordingly, when a national community struggles for self-preservation, this has moral consequences. But this apparently tough-minded position contains a nest of unanswered questions. *Which* national communities shall be permitted to struggle for self-preservation? The Biafrans or federal Nigeria, the Scots or the United Kingdom? Are there reasonable limits to what may be done in the name of national self-preservation? Is there a point at which a struggle for the national interest—defined as self-preservation—destroys crucial moral values not only externally but internally? Indeed, what *is* a national community, and what does its self-preservation mean?

In the case of societies survival is a slippery term to define. In terms of blood lines the Mayans survive in Mexico. In terms of philosophy, drama, and a conception of citizenship the ancient Greeks survive. In terms of vigorous communal life the Basques, Bretons, Welsh, and Zulus survive, but not one has political sovereignty. After the Nazi conquest France retained a version of sovereignty, but in the eyes of many of its own people it had sacrificed what was most worth preserving in the country. In sum, the definition of the national interest that is the be-all and end-all of policy is radically incomplete unless a deliberate choice is made of the characteristics that are held to be definitive of the society and worth preserving.

This requires a moral judgment. Not even the preservation of national sovereignty is a self-sufficient goal. Would an America that retained its sovereignty only by rejecting constitutional government, practicing *apartheid*, and turning loose a secret police be preferable to an America that was a province of a foreign land, but one which protected traditional American rights? Obviously this is an extreme case. But it shows that the problem, logically, is one of the relation of means to ends, and that we can take no end so much for granted we do not ask what is done in its name. People have been known to ruin a country in the name, after all, of defending it. A man who would stand for anything his government does can be charged not with love of his country but with contempt for it.

3. *The preference for genuine working understandings over dramatic agreements on paper.* No stronger point, in my estimation, has been made by the realists. It would benefit, however, from two qualifications.

The first is that the working understandings must be spelled out, in the contemporary world, not only in the day-to-day cooperation of professional diplomats but in the far broader patterns of conduct worked out in international business and trade, in philanthropies and technical assistance, and in scientific, cultural, and artistic partnerships. With the exception of the higher orders of the Church and the very top of the international intelligentsia, professional diplomats were once the only effective transnational community. That is not

true now, and an effective "structure of peace" cannot be built by them alone.

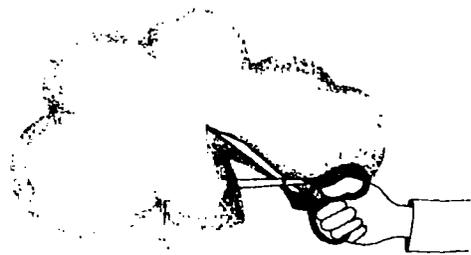
The second qualification follows. The evolution of working understandings along a broad spectrum of transnational activities is indeed the substance of progress in foreign affairs. Spectacular agreements by chiefs of state or their principal ministers on forms of words are superficial in comparison. However, progress in effective transnational cooperation is facilitated by government actions that signal new opportunities and alter the legal and psychological settings. Summity can easily be overdone, to the point, indeed, of being little more than an expensive form of theatre. But the writers of treaties and the participants in publicized conferences still have indispensable work to do. Symbolic gestures are messages. The international arena requires them.

4. *The emphasis on professionalism in foreign policy.* The professionals in foreign policy have indeed had in the United States much less than the respect to which they are entitled. Perhaps no group in the country has had to put up with more vicious and ignorant abuse than the Foreign Service, and it has come from every side—left, center, and right. Nevertheless, the idea of increasing the power of the professional corps of foreign service officers, as against the power of the committees of Congress or of the President and his appointees, does not recommend itself as having a practical political future. Nor does it fit the conventional canons of elective government. And beyond these difficulties it contends with two others.

The first is that professional diplomats often know foreign countries better than their own and lack the powers of communication to touch base effectively with the citizenry at home. They must lean on politicians if only to receive help in transmitting their professional judgments, and politicians are unlikely to perform this service while refraining from exercising influence over those judgments. As Charles Bohlen, the professionals' professional, observed: "The most carefully thought-out plans of the experts, even though one hundred percent correct in theory, will fail without broad public support. The good leader in foreign affairs formulates his policy on expert advice and creates a climate of public opinion to support it." It is others who create and maintain this climate of support for the professional. He remains, therefore, essentially an advisor and an executor of other people's wills. His room for maneuver and his power of translating policy into practice may be considerable, but he is not a legislator, not even a judge, and his authority is mainly derivative from that of his patron. The patron will, in the end, call the tune.

The second difficulty in the translation of respect for professionalism into an operative governmental policy is that the professionals do not themselves perform as a unified group with a common judgment. The failure to note the significance of this fact is one of the basic gaps in the argument by Walter Lippmann in his in-

fluent *The Public Philosophy*. He there complains that the foreign policy élite, the people capable of making knowledgeable decisions, are not permitted to make them. But, as it happens, they are not of one mind. The sticky practical problem is to decide whose counsel to follow. How shall that be done? And by whom? And shall it be done without checking with those responsible for the orchestration of tax policies, economic programs, conservation, education, and all the other matters with which a government deals? An old political dream, as old as Plato, is to get rid of politics itself, to do away with pressures, accommodations, bargains, and the entire messy problem of deciding intractable issues by imprecise standards, and to substitute the cool authoritative judgment of those who know the "true" and the "good" and have no motive but to serve them. Oddly, something that looks a little bit like that utopian dream lurks in the realist desire to give the professionals more elbow room.



5. *The dichotomy between morals and politics.* The realist states a general truth which applies to far more than foreign policy. That truth is that the moral rules that apply to people performing complex social roles are not the same as those applying to people in their more intimate personal or familial relations.

There are at least three reasons why the morality appropriate to the performance of a formalized social role and the morality of small-scale, face-to-face relations are different. First, the role is usually specialized; second, it is fiduciary—the decision-maker is acting for others; third, large numbers of people, usually unknown to the decision-maker, are likely to be affected. Rules for behavior in such a domain are properly different from those for settings in which the actor is acting for himself, in which he can directly observe the consequences, and in which the primary people affected are people he knows personally and lives with in a variety of situations. In stressing that there are differences between the morality of large-scale social relations and the morality of the home and neighborhood, political realism has had a valid point. Building peace in the world is not the same sort of process as organizing a community picnic.

But this truth is obscured when it is stated as a conflict between the realm of morals and the nonmoral realm of politics. What is involved is a collision between different sets of moral rules, not the extrusion of morality from one domain. A major source of this confusion is the unstated presupposition that morality or ethics stand only for the traditional maxims of face-to-face relations. Professor Morgenthau, for example, defines morality in terms of the classic Kantian precept that every person should be treated as an end and never as a means. It is an opaque maxim at best, which cannot be applied, except by tortuous casuistry, to contemporary conditions of work, exchange, or social regulation. The unintended but unavoidable consequence of using such a precept is to imprison the moral outlook of society within a perspective attuned to conditions long since changed, and to cut off large areas of human life from the control of reasoned moral standards. In this way morality is condemned *a priori* and by definition to be ineffective.

This habit of restricting the meaning of morality to a narrow and traditional frame is a major obstacle to the humane improvement of complex social institutions. For example, the habit, derived from codes designed for face-to-face relations, of thinking that liability for injuries done to others must require specific fault, long impeded the adoption of legal reforms like strict liability and no-fault insurance. Similarly, the traditional notion that one owes family and friends special loyalty is today an obstacle, in many countries, to the establishment of competent civil services. More broadly still, the habit of insisting that the norms applicable to intimate relations are the only moral norms is a principal reason why large areas of social life in our rapidly changing world are normatively unregulated. This fallacy is implicit in Professor Morgenthau's separation of ethics from politics. International affairs are simply a particularly pertinent and poignant illustration of the problem of resolving conflicts of moral standards. They are not a domain where people have no choice but to be immoral.

What are we to make of statements like Professor Morgenthau's to the effect that "the political act is inevitably evil"? In the ordinary use of the word evil the statement is false: political acts aren't *inevitably* evil. A successful negotiation staving off a bloody war, a nuclear test-ban treaty, an international agreement to combat malaria are none of them evil in the everyday language of everyday people. The only explanation for this otherwise puzzling statement is that Professor Morgenthau is using the word in an esoteric way. He means, one must presume, that in negotiating an end to a war or arriving at international agreements some people's interests will be adversely affected, that forms of bargaining will probably take place which would not be appropriate in a roomful of old friends, and that some moral values will be treated as less important than other. In sum, choosing, weighing, balancing, and blending take place. But to call this

"evil" is to reserve the word "good" for only those kinds of behavior where we know exactly what the right thing to do is, and don't need to think about the matter at all. It saves the word "good" for the behavior of gods.

Yet the author does not believe he states merely an inference from what Professor Morgenthau says. The following passage from his writing, one of many that might be offered, indicates that he takes this position explicitly:

The very act of acting destroys our moral integrity....Why is this so with respect to all actions and particularly so with respect to political actions? First of all...the human intellect is unable to calculate and to control completely the results of human action...[Second], the demands which life in society makes on our good intentions surpass our faculty to satisfy them all. While satisfying one, we must neglect others, and the satisfaction of one may even imply the positive violation of another....Whatever choice we make, we must do evil while we try to do good, for we must abandon one moral end in favor of another. While trying to render to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's, we will at best strike a precarious balance which will ever waver between both, never completely satisfying either. In the extreme, we will abandon one completely in order fully to satisfy the other. The typical solution, however, will be a compromise which puts the struggle at rest without putting conscience at ease (*Scientific Man Versus Power Politics*).

This must regrettably be called not political realism but moral melodramatics. Professor Morgenthau is pointing only to the fact that man cannot have or do everything he wants, that he must choose, and that he must do so though inadequately informed and equipped. To turn these not entirely recondite facts into evidence for the proposition that politics is no place for ethics is a resounding *non sequitur*. Human fallibility and choice are not evil. They are the conditions that make the moral life, and therefore both good and evil, possible.

In sum, the utopianism in realism keeps rearing its head. Realism takes a standard of good applicable to immortal and omniscient beings, and then, because it does not find this standard attainable in the international arena, pronounces action in that arena inevitably evil. But is there not something wrong with a standard which, in relation to the arena where the most fateful decisions about life, death, pride, liberty, justice, and the distribution of wealth are taken, yields the result that considerations of right and wrong are somehow out of bounds? The desideratum is not tough-sounding statements about "immoral society." It is the evolution of moral standards appropriate to the limits and possibilities of international relations.

6. *Foreign policy should be based on man as he is and not as the policy-maker would like him to be.* Again, it would seem, realism has pushed a sound point too far. There are, no doubt, people who think that peace can be achieved if only the Good or Enlightened take over from the Wicked or Unenlightened. Others, though not so naive, appear to hope that mankind can achieve in the international arena what it has not yet achieved, with some scattered exceptions, in smaller forms of social organizations, e.g., a secure system of law and order equitably administered, religious and racial tolerance, and a division of the world's goods to which no significant group makes objection. Excessive hopes, which people around the world have entertained, and which have been repeatedly shattered in this century, have often caused great damage. It is a distortion of historical perspective, a kind of preoccupation with the American case alone, to identify such vaulting idealism with Wilsonianism alone, but it is understandable that the realists should take some of Wilson's rhetoric as a symbol of such hopes and that they should warn against them.

However, the inverted utopianism in the realist vision has pushed this valid insight astray. The words Niebuhr employed to explain the intractable facts of the international scene are words like sin and human corruption, belonging to an otherworldly morality. It is perhaps natural to revert to such words given to us by the religious tradition, but their use tends to do precisely what the realists condemn. Statements about foreign policy are absorbed into a framework designed to deal with the religious alternatives of damnation and redemption. Reading Woodrow Wilson and then reading Niebuhr, one recognizes the same language and preoccupations. Wilson often talked as though he believed that God had given His people a progressive mission on earth. In reaction, Niebuhr warned that the essence of sin was to mistake an earthly perspective or possibility for a divine one. But the disagreement was between two profoundly religious men speaking on a religious theme. If we wish to break foreign policy thinking free from evangelical horizons, the desirable strategy is to use a language without such religious overtones and less conducive to the fallacy of supposing that since heaven is unattainable we must put up forever with hell or purgatory. The language of Niebuhr, and even of Morgenthau, when he speaks of "the very act of acting" as destroying "our moral integrity," belongs to the tradition of evangelicalism; it is merely its brokenhearted version.

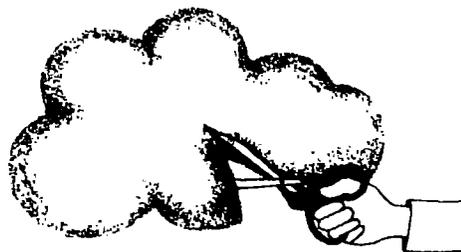
A classic example of an alternative language is Spinoza's entirely naturalistic discussion of the goodness and evil of mankind in the political arena. He wrote in his *Political Treatise*:

I have labored carefully not to mock, lament, or execrate, but to understand human actions; and to this end I have looked upon passions such as love, hatred, anger, envy, ambition, pity, and the other

perturbations of the mind not in the light of vices of human nature, but as properties just as pertinent to it as are heat, cold, storm, thunder, and the like to the nature of the atmosphere, which phenomena, though inconvenient, are yet necessary, and have fixed causes.

Spinoza's description of political man was unillusioned. But he did not use transcendental standards, applicable to a world before the Fall, in order to condemn men and political institutions for being what they are. Spinoza, though he believed that "vices will exist as long as men do," and though he understood that statesmen must be practical and said they have a duty to be so, did not conclude that this reduced ethics to a subordinate role. The object of a good ordering of public affairs was to insure that those who administered these affairs, "whether guided by reason or passion, cannot be led to act treacherously or basely." These are moral concerns.

It should be noted, too, that although man has vices, it is also man who makes the judgment that he has vices. The "reality" of human affairs, surely the "reality" of international politics, is not constituted only by the presence of fear, cupidity, greed, and envy. Aspiration is present and a glimmering of reason, mutual comprehension, and human fraternity. Only a passion can conquer a passion, Spinoza remarked. *That* is realism. It is passion—other people's passion and his own—that destroys the foreign policy technician's plans and predictions, and reveals him, in the end, to be a closet thinker. If the fiercer and more unregenerate passions that lead to the greatest disasters in international affairs are to be controlled, a foreign policy needs animating ideals; it needs hopes which, though not unrealistic, are generous. The realists in international affairs, with their emphasis on limits, not possibilities, do not meet this need. A nation's foreign policy requires an animating idea behind it. A nation like the United States requires an idea that the future is not condemned to repeat the past.



7. *The emphasis on international relations as rivalry-relations, and on the object of foreign policy as the pursuit of the national interest.* It is superfluous to say that rivalry is a constant of foreign affairs. But in reviewing the picture of international politics to which the realist approach tends, one is reminded of David Hume's response to philosophers whose desire to be unillusioned led them to portray human nature as

overwhelmingly selfish: "The descriptions which certain philosophers delight so much to form of mankind in this particular are as wide of nature as any accounts of monsters which we meet with in fables and romance." As Hume pointed out, though self-love is perhaps the strongest single emotion in most people, the combination of their other feelings—for example, their love of their families, their desire for the respect of their fellows, their concern, in consequence of communal traditions and education, for the institutions and aspirations of their society—is often sufficient to override self-love. The ultimate problem of education and social arrangements is to create conditions in which this desirable balance among the emotions is normal.

May not international relations be approached from a similar point of view? It would not be less realistic than the realistic view; it would only be more open to the variety of relationships across the borders that actually exist, and to the possibilities of cultivating the more desirable of them. For it is not the case that the international scene is only a system of competing national sovereignties. International business, the arts, cinema, and sciences, ideologies, philanthropies, cultures and countercultures, medicine, religion, social ideals like liberty and equality—all cross borders. Transnational communities, formal and informal, active or latent, have been formed around all these interests and activities. In relation to such communities frontiers are anachronisms and give misleading notions of the facts. And the sovereign state is relatively ineffective in shutting off this transnational and many-sided exchange and cooperation. Not even the homeopathic measures adopted by the Soviet Union have been entirely successful.

Nor are common interests, occupations, and ideas the only things that interrupt the play of national rivalries. The common problems of the nations do so as well. The oil crisis, the world food shortage, the indifference of pollutants in the air and water to national boundaries, the international character of inflation, the "North-South" difficulties in tariffs, trade, and movements of population are all problems which no nation can solve by itself. If realism represents an interest in survival, then it is unrealistic to suppose that twentieth-century affairs are susceptible to being managed by outworn national policies and institutions created to take care of rivalry and little else.

The narrow terms of national self-interest made more sense, at least *prima facie*, in the nineteenth century, when military power was less hideous, nations were less interdependent, and the status quo better established and accepted. In such conditions foreign policies exclusively concerned with maintaining the balance of power among major sovereign states—an essentially status quo enterprise—were intelligible. Today, when powers of destruction are almost unlimited, when change is constant and accelerating, and when the fates of so many societies are inevi-

tably interwoven, new conditions for international cooperation need to be constructed. This requires more clearly formulated basic principles than when the desideratum was simply to maintain a status quo.

The degree to which common dangers can today force otherwise hostile nations together is illustrated by the two-sided effect of nuclear armaments on the world scene. On one side we have what Herbert Butterfield, the noted British historian, has called "the predicament of Hobbesian fear": "If you imagine yourself locked in a room with another person with whom you have often been on the most bitterly hostile terms in the past, and suppose that each of you has a pistol, you may find yourself in a predicament in which both of you would like to throw the pistols out of the window, yet it defeats the intelligence to find a way of doing it." On the other side, however, as the slow but perceptible movement toward disentanglement from this predicament shows, the cost and the terror of nuclear armament have created common interest in peace and accommodation stretching across sectors of both the Soviet and American governments as well as their populations.

The realist emphasis on the rivalries in the interstate system, in short, confuses a part of the international scene, although admittedly a most important part, with the whole. Attention is thereby diverted from those aspects of international affairs moving toward new forms of transnationalism and internationalism. Practitioners of the philosophy of realism—Mr. Kissinger is an example—can properly be criticized for not paying sufficient attention to the problems of international economic governance that have been created by the transnational movement of corporations, investments, technicians, and currencies. It is hard to think of any actions in the past decade, other than the Vietnam war, which have more greatly damaged our international position or the economies of the world than the brusque unilateral decisions taken by Secretary John Connally and the Nixon Administration regarding the dollar and the trade deficit. In the present world setting talk about the inevitability of national rivalries is like doctors sitting around and sagely predicting everyone's death. It does not deal with the problem at hand.

Nor is it clear what the term "national interest" means when it is used as Mr. Morgenthau uses it, to name the defining object of foreign policy. It is an algebraic formula. The phrase was more useful as a technical term of diplomacy when diplomats were the servants of dynasties with identifiable family lines. The imperatives it defined were those involved with keeping a large, rich family going—a lustrous family name, more money, more land, sound marriages, dependable retainers, a household service on whose competence and loyalty the family could count. Even so, difficult judgments had to be made as to what the best interests of the client were. But in principle one could turn to the permanent head of the family to ask his decision. Things are different if one is superintend-

ing the external policy of a large heterogeneous nation and of a democratic one led by a figure whose expected term of office is four or eight years.

Even a nation's geographic position remains fixed only in an abstract sense. The realities of distance, resources, needs, military dangers, and opportunities are all affected by changes in technology, population movements, and other circumstances. In the definition of national interests even more elusive considerations are pertinent—the military intentions of others, the minimal economic standards that have to be preserved domestically, the traditional objectives of the nation, the extent and nature of what is perceived as a “congenial” political-cultural environment. Not one of these can be given concrete meaning without making value judgments. Among the variety of competing concerns felt and expressed in the nation, decision-makers must select by deliberate choice or by default those which in their judgment are most important to its well-being. A national interest is not a chart pinned to the wall from which one takes one's sense of direction. The heart of the decision-making process, in which the professional foreign service officer inescapably plays a part, is not the finding of the best means to serve a national interest already perfectly known and understood. It is the determining of that interest itself: the reassessment of the nation's resources, needs, commitments, traditions, and political and cultural horizons—in short, its calendar of values.

In its most systematic form, that given to it by Professor Morgenthau, the doctrine of political realism, it appears to this writer, is an ideol-

ogy whose consequence, though not intended, is to justify a posture of professional privilege, of immunity from decisions about ends and principles. In making the central concept of international politics “the concept of interest defined in terms of power” Professor Morgenthau attempts to establish both a clearly defined *theory* of politics separate from other spheres, “such as economics, ethics, aesthetics or religion,” and also a separate “*sphere of action*.” Political realism, he says, has “a normative element....It considers a rational foreign policy [i.e., one that maximizes the national interest defined in terms of power] to be a good foreign policy.” The fallacy in this position is illustrated by the scene in Molière's *Les Femmes Savantes* in which ladies impressed by their knowledge of the newly discovered laws of gravitation lecture a servant for being so foolish as to have fallen down. When an economist says that economic fluctuations are rendered intelligible by making the concept of profit-maximization central, that is a piece of economic theory; when he says that businessmen are “irrational” or follow a bad policy when they let ethics, aesthetics, religion, or politics affect their behavior, that is a value judgment dressed up as a scientific finding. Nobody is under an obligation, moral or otherwise, to behave in accordance with the rules that students of society lay down in order to make their fields of study systematically intelligible. Nor is there a conceptual sleight of hand by which, when a diplomat or soldier offers his judgment as to what is in the best interest of the nation, he can be let off the moral hook and treated as a mere technician. *Realpolitik* is a version of morals; it is not a leave of absence from morals.