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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Revisiting the 'darker side' of democratic peace: Morgenthau, reflexivity, and the role of scholars in times of deception

Haro L. Karkour

Politics and International Relations, Cardiff University, Cardiff, UK
Email: karkourh@cardiff.ac.uk

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Abstract

While critical literature sought to expand the agenda of a reflexive approach to democratic peace, it does not explain how reflexivity can be carried to the public, particularly in times of public deception, and what practical tools theorists hold, qua public intellectuals, to advance this objective. This article argues that classical realism, Hans Morgenthau's work in particular, can amend this lacuna. Morgenthau's signpost of 'interest defined in terms of power' arms critical scholars with an important tool to retain the premises of Kantian democratic peace; that is, it helps preserve an open public sphere where the public can deliberate the nation's fundamental interests and values spatio-temporally, and offer democratic control. The significance of this contribution is twofold: first, public reflexivity is key in times of deception because in these times scholars who seek to influence elites find themselves in the paradoxical position of renouncing reflexivity or risking irrelevance. Second, in the absence of an open public sphere where social solidarity and meaning can be formed spatio-temporally, deception feeds into an environment of mistrust and alienation that renders democracy ripe for demagogues.

Keywords: classical realism; democratic peace; IR theory; reflexivity; deception

Critical scholars critiqued liberal democratic peace theory for drawing on a neo-positivist methodology that lacked reflexivity and offered ideological rationalisation to US imperial wars.[1] Following the 2003 Iraq War, critical literature on democratic peace offered the richest source in the discipline for discussions about the scholars' responsibility, and how to discharge it by reflexivity.[2] There

[1]Tarak Barkawi and Mark Laffey, 'The imperial peace: Democracy, force and globalization', *European Journal of International Relations*, 5:4 (1999), pp. 403–34; Anna Geis and Wolfgang Wagner, 'How far is it from Königsberg to Kandahar? Democratic peace and democratic violence in International Relations', *Review of International Studies*, 37:4 (2011), pp. 1555–77; Beate Jahn, 'Barbarian thoughts: Imperialism in the philosophy of John Stuart Mill', *Review of International Studies*, 31:3 (2005), pp. 599–618; Christopher Hobson, 'Towards a critical theory of democratic peace', *Review of International Studies*, 37:4 (2011), pp. 1903–22; Anna Geis, Lothar Brock, and Harald Müller, 'From democratic peace to democratic war?', *Peace Review*, 19:2 (2007), pp. 157–63.

[2]Christopher Hobson, Tony Smith, John Owen, Anna Geis, and Piki-Ish Shalom, 'Between the theory and practice of democratic peace', *International Relations*, 25:2 (2011), pp. 147–84; Piki Ish-Shalom, 'Theory as a hermeneutical mechanism: The democratic-peace thesis and the politics of democratization', *European Journal of International Relations*, 12:4 (2006), pp. 565–98; Brent Steele, 'Of "witch's brews" and scholarly communities: The dangers and promises of academic parrhesia', *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, 23:1 (2010), pp. 49–68.

remains an important lacuna in this literature, however: with a notable exception,[3] critical scholars do not explain how such reflexivity can be carried to the public, particularly in times of public deception, and what practical tools theorists hold, qua public intellectuals, to advance this objective. This article contends that classical realism, and Hans Morgenthau's work in particular, can amend this lacuna.

A core premise in research that employs reflexive methodology is that 'scientific knowledge … is grounded in and warranted by the researcher's concrete implication in sets of social relations that are through and through imbued with and marked by race, class, gender and other logics of distinction'.[4] It is the responsibility of the researcher to challenge the dominant ideology in society that reinforces these distinctions. According to Morgenthau, this anti-ideological function ought to play a central part in political science if it is to remain 'faithful to its moral commitment of telling the truth about the political world'.[5] Inevitably, this political science,

> ought at the very least to be an unpopular undertaking. At its very best, 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, which is in good part a social convention, by its own. In doing so, it becomes an embarrassment to society intellectually. But it also becomes a political threat to the defenders or the opponents of the status quo or to both.[6]

Reflexivity is not simply a commitment to 'telling the truth' in theoretical terms. The scrutiny of the dominant ideology needs to translate from theory to practice, from scholarly output to the public, particularly in times when public reflexivity is necessary to guard against deception that rationalises imperial wars. When the political leadership employs moral and political abstractions that reify the political – that is to say, turn the political into Schmittian binaries ('democracy' versus 'communism' or 'democracies' versus 'autocracies') – to advance these wars, the responsibility towards public reflexivity lies with scholars. The role of scholars, qua public intellectuals, is to be the guardians of criticism and possibilities, contra the sterility of the status quo. For this, scholars require practical tools. One practical tool that Morgenthau offers is the 'signpost' of 'interest defined in terms of power'.

By signpost, this article does not mean a statement on the content of interest or power. A signpost is a practical tool or device to navigate the political realm and actions of political actors. Specifically, Morgenthau's signpost offers a practical tool to remind political actors of the contested nature of politics as the realm of a plurality of interests striving for power. It therefore challenges attempts to gloss over this plurality by ideologically rationalising power in the name of universal ideals. The dominant interpretation of this signpost is that it operates as a counter-ideological device in foreign policy.[7] A device, that is, that contributes to peace through its critique of moral crusades and advocacy of diplomacy. There is, however, an additional *domestic* function to this device: it helps critical scholars translate reflexivity from theory to practice through retaining the openness – that

[3] Piki Ish-Shalom, 'Don't look back in anger', *International Relations*, 25:2 (2011), pp. 178–84.

[4] Patrick Jackson, *The Conduct of Inquiry in International Relations: Philosophy of Science and Its Implications for the Study of World Politics* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011), p. 159.

[5] Hans Morgenthau, *Dilemmas of Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), p. 28.

[6] Morgenthau, *Dilemmas of Politics*, p. 29.

[7] Sean Molloy, 'Truth, power, theory: Hans Morgenthau's formulation of realism', *Diplomacy & Statecraft*, 15:1 (2004), pp. 1–34 (p. 26); Hartmut Behr and Amelia Heath 'Misreading in IR theory and ideology critique', *Review of International Studies*, 35:2 (2009), pp. 327–49; Hartmut Behr, 'Security, politics and public discourse: A Morgenthauian approach'; Mark Bevir, Oliver Daddow, and Ian Hall (eds), *Interpreting Global Security* (London: Routledge, 2013), pp. 160–76; Haro Karkour, 'Unipolarity's unpeacefulness and US foreign policy: Consequences of a "coherent system of irrationality"', *International Relations*, 32:1 (2018), pp. 60–79.

is, the contingency and indeterminacy – of the political as a space not reified by the dominant ideology of the powers-that-be.[8] With this domestic function, the signpost arms critical scholars with an important tool to retain the premises of Kantian democratic peace; namely, a tool to preserve an open public sphere where the public can deliberate the nation's fundamental interests and values spatio-temporally, and offer democratic control.

The article advances two sets of debates in International Relations (IR). First, it contributes to disciplinary history by showcasing the relevance of Morgenthau's work to critical literature on democratic peace. While important works by Brent Steele, Andy Hom, Sean Molloy, Felix Rösch, Michael Williams, and others have unveiled reflexive and liberal dimensions in classical realism,[9] this article puts these readings in conversation with critical literature on democratic peace to address an important lacuna in the latter literature. Second, the article contributes to critical literature on democratic peace by filling this lacuna. Specifically, critical literature on democratic peace calls for reflexivity in times of elite deception of the public. It does not explain *how* scholars can discharge this reflexivity to the public and what practical tools they require in this endeavour. Morgenthau's work helps answer this question and offer the necessary practical tool. This lacuna is important to address for two reasons that are elaborated in the article below. First, scholars who neglect the public sphere and seek to influence elites in times of deception often find themselves in what Anna Geis describes as a 'fundamental tension' between associating themselves with policies they cannot support or retaining scholarly reflexivity at the risk of irrelevance.[10] Second, in the absence of an open public sphere where social solidarity and meaning can be formed spatio-temporally, deception feeds into an environment of mistrust and alienation that renders democracy ripe for demagogues who promise to restore social solidarities and meaning in political religions.

The article proceeds in four steps. First, it highlights the gap in critical literature on democratic peace, particularly on the role of scholars in translating reflexivity from theory to practice. Second, the article addresses a common misunderstanding of Morgenthau's alleged suspicion of public opinion, showing, instead, that Morgenthau saw a well-informed public as fundamental to a rational foreign policy. Third, the article outlines Morgenthau's dissent against the US elite's deception of the public during the Cold War. Fourth, the article presents Morgenthau's tool for critical scholars to translate reflexivity from theory to practice.

Critical literature on democratic peace and its limitations

The reliance of liberal democratic peace on neo-positivist methodology, according to critical scholars, renders the theory susceptible to the ideological rationalisation of US imperial wars. To address this limitation, critical scholars call for reflexivity and the exploration of alternative forces at play that explain the 'darker side' of democratic peace. It is not clear, however, how such reflexivity can be brought about to the public and what practical tools theorists hold, qua public intellectuals, to advance this objective.

[8]Michael Williams, 'Why ideas matter in International Relations: Hans Morgenthau, classical realism, and the moral construction of power politics', *International Organization*, 58:4 (2004), pp. 633–65.

[9]Brent Steele, '"Eavesdropping on honored ghosts": From classical to reflexive realism', *Journal of International Relations and Development*, 10:3 (2007), pp. 272–300; Andy Hom and Brent Steele, 'Open horizons: The temporal visions of reflexive realism', *International Studies Review*, 12:2 (2010), pp. 271–300; Michael Williams, 'In the beginning: The International Relations enlightenment and the ends of International Relations theory', *European Journal of International Relations*, 19:3 (2013), pp. 647–65; Felix Rösch, *Power, Knowledge, and Dissent in Morgenthau's Worldview* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015); Hartmut Behr and Michael Williams, 'Interlocuting classical realism and critical theory: Negotiating "divides" in International Relations theory', *Journal of International Political Theory*, 13:1 (2016), pp. 3–17; Hartmut Behr, 'Towards a political concept of reversibility in International Relations: Bridging political philosophy and policy studies', *European Journal of International Relations*, 25:4 (2019), pp. 1212–35; Sean Molloy, 'Realism and reflexivity: Morgenthau, academic freedom and dissent', *European Journal of International Relations*, 26:2 (2020), pp. 321–43; Haro Karkour, *E. H. Carr: Imperialism, War and Lessons for Postcolonial IR* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2022).

[10]Anna Geis, 'Of bright sides and dark sides: Democratic peace beyond triumphalism', *International Relations*, 25:2 (2011), pp. 164–70 (p. 169).

'The academic study of democratic peace', writes Patrick Jackson in *The Conduct of Inquiry in International Relations*, 'has been almost completely dominated by a neo-positivist methodology.'[11] Neo-positivist methodology is premised on two ontological assumptions that sustain liberal theory of democratic peace. First, mind–world dualism: liberal democratic states exist 'out there', independently from the theorists studying them. Second, 'phenomenalism': the 'liberal zone of peace'[12] can be observed empirically in the historical record, lending itself to generalisable statistical analysis and causal explanation. Critical scholars highlight the problem with this observer–observed dichotomy that lends itself to claims of value neutrality apropos concepts such as 'liberal democracy' and 'war'.[13] Early on, Ido Oren observed that

> the values embodied in the current definition of democracy were historically shaped by the need to distance America from its adversaries. They are products, more than determinants, of America's past foreign political relations. The reason we do not fight 'our kind' is not that 'likeness' has a great effect on war propensity, but rather that we from time to time subtly redefine our kind to keep our self-image consistent with our friends' attributes and inconsistent with those of our adversaries.[14]

'Liberal democracy', that is, is a political construct to describe America's 'friends' – namely, it is an effect of peaceful relations with America, not a 'causal variable' in an empirically observable reality. As a neo-positivist theory, liberal democratic peace furthermore needs to assume the mind-independent reality of war. Yet critical scholars problematise the theory's state-centric understanding of war.[15] In this view, covert actions, along with the imperial wars that preceded them, are outside the purview of the 'liberal peace'.[16] This is because they do not constitute 'interstate wars' in the traditional sense defined by the Correlates of War.

Critical literature on democratic peace thus rejects the theory's claims of value-neutrality and political disinterestedness. Such claims omit what Geis and Wagner refer to as the 'darker side' of democratic peace, namely the theory's ideological employment to justify US imperial wars.[17] Instead, liberal democratic peace offers ideological justification for what critical scholars refer to as the 'master narrative of empire'.[18] This is the narrative of Bush Jr's 'war on civilisation',[19] the 'failed state',[20] the Afghan 'tribe',[21] and the 'failure' of the 2011 Arab uprisings.[22] In all these instances, the narrative of empire is premised on liberal eschatology and a linear view of history that reduces 'others' to temporal backwardness.

[11] Jackson, *Conduct of Inquiry*, p. 41.

[12] Michael Doyle, 'Kant, liberal legacies, and foreign affairs', *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, 12:3 (1983), pp. 205–235 (p.213).

[13] Brent Steele, 'Liberal-idealism: A constructivist critique', *International Studies Review*, 9:1 (2007), pp. 23–52 (p.39); Hobson, 'Towards a critical theory of democratic peace', p. 1907.

[14] Ido Oren, 'The subjectivity of the "democratic" peace: Changing U.S. perceptions of imperial Germany', *International Security*, 20:2 (1995), pp. 147–84 (p. 147).

[15] Barkawi and Laffey, 'The imperial peace'.

[16] Christopher Layne, 'Kant or cant: The myth of the democratic peace', *International Security*, 19:2 (1994), pp. 5–49 (p. 40); David Spiro, 'The insignificance of the liberal peace', *International Security*, 19:2 (1994), pp. 50–86 (p. 55).

[17] Geis and Wagner, 'How far is it from Königsberg to Kandahar?', p. 1574; Tony Smith, *A Pact with the Devil* (New York: Routledge, 2007); Tony Smith, 'Democratic peace theory: From promising theory to dangerous practice', *International Relations*, 25:2 (2011), pp. 151–57.

[18] Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), p. 43.

[19] Philip Darby, 'Pursuing the political: A postcolonial rethinking of relations international', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, 33:1 (2004), pp. 1–32.

[20] Branwen Gruffydd Jones, '"Good governance", and "state failure": Genealogies of imperial discourse', *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, 26:1 (2013), pp. 49–70.

[21] Nivi Manchanda, 'The imperial sociology of the "tribe", in Afghanistan', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, 46:2 (2018), pp. 165–89.

[22] Jasmine K. Gani, 'From discourse to practice: Orientalism, Western policy and the Arab uprisings', *International Affairs*, 98:1 (2022), pp. 45–65.

To address these limitations, critical scholars call for reflexivity and the exploration of alternative forces at play that explain the 'darker side' of democratic peace. Christopher Hobson calls for the exploration of global capitalism and its role in the 'prevent[ion] [of] wider democratic peace'.[23] Similarly, Beate Jahn challenges the role of private interests in propagating past imperialism and contemporary 'liberal wars'.[24] But if private interests in the political economy of empire play a crucial role in 'liberal wars', what role do scholars play against the usurpation of the foreign policy apparatus by these interests? Furthermore, how are citizens, who consume the news media that are also governed by private interests, to be empowered to counter the narrative propagated by these interests? These questions are important because, as Geis and Wagner acknowledge, it is only a short road from Konigsberg to Kandahar.[25] The asphalt from which this road is made is filled with public deception and glued together with nationalism.[26] As Brent Steele recounts,

> During the lead-up to the Iraq War, we recall a democratic electorate's inability to skeptically challenge its Executive, the inability of the American 'free' press or its national legislature to challenge the information being disseminated by that same Executive, and, therefore, the willingness of the American media, its Congress, and its electorate to overwhelmingly support a preventive invasion.[27]

In this context, the critical literature's plea 'for introducing more self-criticism and self-reflexion' needs to explain how such reflexivity can be brought about to the public in the midst of widespread deception to justify 'democratic wars'.[28]

A notable exception is Piki Ish-Shalom's work. Ish-Shalom argues that liberal democratic peace theory was 'trivialised' – that is to say, abused by power to justify ends beyond the intentions of its authors.[29] As these authors did not intend their theories to justify the 2003 Iraq War, Ish-Shalom argues, they could not be held morally responsible for it. As scholars, however, they bear 'social responsibility' to act as 'theoretician citizens', namely as 'contributors of theoretical insights [to] enrich policy shaping, endowing it with rational qualities that would result in reasonable policies equipped to cope with the complexities of reality'.[30] These 'theoretical insights', Ish-Shalom writes, should aim to foster 'public deliberation', helping citizens to 'doubt' and 'ask questions'.[31] But how can theorists ensure their theories help citizens raise 'doubts' and 'ask questions', rather than reinforcing the dominant ideology in society? How can theory retain its reflexivity vis-à-vis the dominant ideology in a society that reifies the political into us/democracies vs them/autocracies binaries? Furthermore, how can it translate this reflexivity into an open public sphere where citizens can deliberate the nation's interests and values spatio-temporally?

To the latter questions, critical scholars offer no satisfactory answers. Instead, critical scholars engage with the question of why liberal democratic peace theory became 'trivialised' and offer

[23] Hobson, 'Towards a critical theory of democratic peace', p. 1915.

[24] Beate Jahn, 'Kant, Mill, and illiberal legacies in international affairs', *International Organization*, 59:1 (2005), pp. 177–207 (p.193–4).

[25] Geis and Wagner, 'How far is it from Königsberg to Kandahar?'.

[26] This has been the long-standing neo-realist critique of democratic peace. 'The democratic process may act as a constraint on leaders' ability to go to war', John Schuessler writes, 'but deception provides a way around that constraint.' See John Schuessler, *Deceit on the Road to War: Presidents, Politics and American Democracy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2015), p. 3.

[27] Steele, 'Liberal-idealism', p. 46.

[28] Geis and Wagner, 'How far is it from Königsberg to Kandahar?', p. 1576. Geis and Wagner's definition of 'democratic wars' is in line with Jahn's definition of liberal wars. These are wars conducted by liberal democracies in defence of liberal democratic ideals, or 'liberal universalism' broadly defined. See also Geis, Brock, and Müller, 'From democratic peace to democratic war?', *Peace Review*, 19:2 (2007), pp. 157–63.

[29] Piki Ish-Shalom, 'Theorization, harm and the democratic imperative: Lessons from the politicization of the democratic-peace thesis', *International Studies Review*, 10:4 (2008), pp. 680–92 (p. 691).

[30] Ish-Shalom, 'Don't look back in anger', p. 181.

[31] Ish-Shalom, 'Don't look back in anger', pp. 181–2.

answers in its 'objectivity' claims[32] and parsimony.[33] It is true that liberal democratic theorists' claims of 'objectivity' made their theories attractive to power, and parsimony gave their theories rhetorical power to manipulate the public. The issue at hand, however, is the relationship between theory and the dominant ideology, and it cannot be resolved by adding more complexity to theory, by clarifying explanatory premises,[34] or by transparency about the theorist's ideological commitments.[35] For, important as these steps are, the problem remains that liberal democratic peace theory, as John Owen notes, is rooted in the same liberal ideology that has rationalised US wars since 1776.[36] The theory was thus *not* first formulated apolitically before it was 'trivialised' or 'abused' by power. As Steele notes, liberal democratic peace theorists were 'quite comfortable' that their theories 'should be part of the political discourse'.[37] In relation to the dominant ideology, liberal democratic peace scholars had two tasks where they failed: first, to distance their theory from the dominant ideology in society; and second, to challenge this dominant ideology and help retain the openness of the public sphere.

To accomplish these tasks, theory, including critical theory, requires a tool that puts limits on the dominant ideology's rationalisation of power and its closure of the political as the spatio-temporal realm of the plurality of interests.[38] Ideologies, ultimately, attempt to conceal the 'essentially, and not just superficially, contested nature of the political realm'.[39] To formulate knowledge that is appropriate for the 'contested nature of the political realm', therefore, 'nonideological knowledge' as Jahn writes, 'requires an explicit engagement with, and exploration of, its limitations'.[40] Or, as Morgenthau puts it, 'a theory of politics, to be theoretically valid, must build into its theoretical structure, as it were, those very qualifications which limit its theoretical validity and practical usefulness'.[41] Without a practical tool that offers these qualifications, the 'practical usefulness' of theory encloses the new possibilities that criticality allows and, rather than retaining the openness of the political in the public sphere, it turns itself into an ideology.

IR theorists thus require practical tools, built into theories, that can be employed to retain scholarly and public reflexivity. Before unpacking Morgenthau's conceptualisation of this tool, the article will justify the proposition that Morgenthau sought public reflexivity in the first place. This is because it is commonplace to juxtapose 'rationality' and 'public opinion' in a realist foreign policy.[42] The following section demonstrates that this juxtaposition is based on a misunderstanding of Morgenthau's argument on the role of public opinion in a realist foreign policy.

[32]Piki Ish-Shalom, 'Theorizing politics, politicizing theory, and the responsibility that runs between', *Perspectives on Politics*, 7:2 (2009), pp. 303–16 (pp. 309–11).

[33]Steele, 'Of "witch's brews" and scholarly communities', p. 62.

[34]Ish-Shalom, 'Theorizing politics', pp .309–11.

[35]Ish-Shalom, 'Theorizing politics', pp. 311–12; Piki Ish-Shalom, 'Theoreticians' obligation of transparency: When parsimony, reflexivity, transparency and reciprocity meet', *Review of International Studies*, 37:3 (2011), pp. 973–96 (p. 993).

[36]John Owen, 'Liberal tradition, not social science', *International Relations*, 52:2 (2011), pp. 158–63 (pp. 160–1).

[37]Steele, 'Of "witch's brews" and scholarly communities', p. 61.

[38]Haro Karkour and Dominik Giese, 'Bringing Morgenthau's ethics in: Pluralism, incommensurability and the turn from fragmentation to dialogue in IR', *European Journal of International Relations*, 26:4 (2020), pp. 1106–28.

[39]Beate Jahn, 'Liberal internationalism: From ideology to empirical theory – and back again', *International Theory*, 1:3 (2009), pp. 409–38 (p. 433).

[40]Jahn, 'Liberal internationalism', p. 435. The problem of ideology thus cannot be resolved through methodological rigour, for example, by falling back on 'rigorous research' or a 'sound logic of inference' as suggested in Ish-Shalom, 'Theorizing politics', pp. 311–12.

[41]Hans Morgenthau, 'The nature and limits of a theory of international relations', in W. T. R. Fox (ed.), *Theoretical Aspects of International Relations* (Notre Dame, IL: University of Notre Dame Press, 1959), pp. 15–28(p. 20).

[42]Most recently, Joseph McKay, 'Making democracy safe for the world: Kenneth Waltz on Realism, democracy, and war', *International Studies Quarterly*, 68:3 (2024), pp. 1–11.

Public opinion and realist foreign policy: Common misconceptions

This section refutes the common assumption in the discipline that a classical realist foreign policy is suspicious of public opinion. In anticipation of the criticism that there may be 'several Morgenthaus' in different writings and contradicting each other on this question, the section draws on the same texts cited by critics.[43] Upon closer reading and contextualisation of these texts, it argues that this false assumption is perpetuated in the discipline due to a conflation of Morgenthau's concept of the political with Carl Schmitt's and a misunderstanding of what Morgenthau meant by public opinion.

The conventional wisdom in IR is that classical realists in general, and Morgenthau in particular, saw public opinion as anathema to a foreign policy that follows the rational dictates of the national interest. 'Realists', Dan Reiter writes, 'have long been sceptical that political institutions or public opinion affect foreign policy behaviour.'[44] The most elaborate and sustained critique of Morgenthau on this subject is presented by Daniel Bessner and Nicholas Guilhot. Bessner and Guilhot argue, correctly, that *Politics among Nations* is a book for policymakers.[45] Public opinion, Bessner and Guilhot add, represented a problem for Morgenthau; a nuisance for diplomatic and policy elites.[46] Not only Morgenthau but 'émigré classical realists' in general, Bessner and Guilhot write, 'asserted that decisionmakers must be unconstrained by useless laws or ignorant publics incapable of understanding international relations'.[47] 'Morgenthau', therefore, 'criticised public opinion for its naïveté, stupidity, and destructiveness.'[48]

Bessner and Guilhot attribute Morgenthau's rejection of democratic norms to the influence of Schmittian decisionism on his thought.[49] Morgenthau however was a critic of Schmitt, ever since his postdoctoral dissertation.[50] 'Morgenthau', Hartmut Behr and Felix Rösch write, 'deplored Schmitt's understanding of the political on moral and conceptual grounds.'[51] 'No German political thinker of the interwar period was more aptly endowed with intellectual ability', Morgenthau described Schmitt in his autobiography, adding 'but it is doubtful whether any surpassed him in lack of principle and servility to his Nazi masters'.[52] In Morgenthau's view, the problem with Schmitt's concept of the political, centred on a priori friend/enemy categories, is that it reifies these categories, thus limiting 'humankind's potentialities to act socially and politically in the world'.[53] Schmitt's dualistic conception of the political, in effect, 'restricts humankind's spectrum of action towards the problems of war and peace, the regulation of conflicts and disputes, as well as action in diplomacy, in humankind's engagement in the public sphere and the creation of order, and in foreign policy'.[54]

Morgenthau's concept of the political, unlike Schmitt's, 'does not have a fixed content which can be determined once and for all'.[55] To Morgenthau, any activity, inside or outside the state, can take political value depending on its 'intensity'.[56] Morgenthau, in other words, is committed to

[43] I thank Simon Pratt for raising this point.

[44] Dan Reiter, 'Democracy, deception, and entry into war', *Security Studies*, 21:4 (2012), pp. 594–623 (p. 595).

[45] Daniel Bessner and Nicholas Guilhot, 'How realism Waltzed off: Liberalism and decisionmaking in Kenneth Waltz's neorealism', *International Security*, 40:2 (2015), pp. 87–118 (p. 92).

[46] Bessner and Guilhot, 'How realism Waltzed off', p. 93.

[47] Bessner and Guilhot, 'How realism Waltzed off', p. 96.

[48] Bessner and Guilhot, 'How realism Waltzed off', pp. 93–4.

[49] Bessner and Guilhot, 'How realism Waltzed off', pp. 96–7.

[50] Hartmut Behr and Felix Rösch, 'Introduction', in Harmut Behr and Felix Rösch (eds), *The Concept of the Political* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), pp. 3–79(p. 7).

[51] Behr and Rösch, 'Introduction', p. 19. See also Christoph Frei, *Hans Morgenthau: An Intellectual Biography* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2001), p. 161.

[52] Hans Morgenthau, 'Fragment of an intellectual autobiography: 1904–1932', in Kenneth Thompson (ed.), *Truth and Tragedy: A Tribute to Hans J. Morgenthau* (Piscataway, NJ: Transaction Books, 1984), pp. 1–17(p. 15).

[53] Behr and Rösch, 'Introduction', pp. 21–2.

[54] Behr and Rösch, 'Introduction', p. 22.

[55] Hans Morgenthau, *The Concept of the Political*, trans. Maeva Vidal (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012 [1933]), p. 101.

[56] Morgenthau, *The Concept of the Political*, p. 102.

the openness of the political in the public sphere. This commitment, as Behr and Rösch argue, 'was deeply seeded in his European experience'.[57] This experience, which culminated in the rise of the Nazis and the Holocaust, 'reinforced Morgenthau's conviction that the political is the central aspect of society and that therefore active civic engagement is required to prevent the violation of a political and public sphere of free and discursive contestation'.[58] To Morgenthau, neither the state has a monopoly over political matters, nor is the public incapable of engaging in the political in the public sphere. Indeed, Morgenthau criticised US policymakers who engaged in a campaign of public manipulation based on 'a profound misunderstanding of the nature of public opinion and of the intelligence and moral character of the American people'.[59] It was the media that gave US policymakers a false perception of public opinion. 'While the media may roughly indicate the American mind's lack of information', Morgenthau wrote, 'they give only a dim inkling of its native intelligence and moral reserves.'[60]

In defence of the intelligence of the average citizen, Morgenthau for instance castigated those who attempted to justify the abdication of the 'politically conscious public' in the face of scientific expertise.[61] 'This juxtaposition between the knowledgeable and objective scientist and the ignorant and subjective layman', Morgenthau wrote, 'greatly oversimplifies and distorts reality.'[62] Neither the former is 'as objective and knowledgeable as he appears to the public' nor the latter is 'as ignorant and subjective as he appears to himself'.[63] Morgenthau drew a distinction between the knowledge that the scientist has monopoly over – 'the reasoning behind the creation and operation of technological devices' – and the 'mental processes that go into the making of a decision on the construction and political-military effects of a new technological device'.[64] The latter involves speculation about the future and is 'political in nature'. Crucially, 'the expert does not know more about the likely political and military effects of the great technological decisions of our age than the man in the street'.[65] These 'decisions' concern questions such as 'the need for on-site inspections to police a test-ban treaty or the feasibility of the H-bomb or of an antimissile system, [wherein] the scientist, like everyone else, must rely on his hunches'.[66] The average citizen is no less capable than the 'scientific expert' of making informed political decisions about these matters of scientific complexity involving nuclear technology. In fact, the average citizen's decision may in some instances be even superior to the 'expert scientist': 'The politically aware scientist, then, has no advantage over the scientifically informed layman, and if the former is not politically aware he is even inferior to the latter.'[67]

The target in Morgenthau's critique of 'public opinion' was thus not the public's intelligence or inability to understand politics, including in matters of technological complexity, but the private interests of the press, minorities (lobby groups) in Congress, and the radio that transmitted a false picture of public opinion that reflected their interests. As these private interests took hold, Morgenthau castigated US foreign policy for its democratic deficit. 'A vociferous, passionate, well-financed, and well-organised minority', Morgenthau protested, 'was able first to impose its will upon a minority of Congress and then to frighten the Administration into pursuing, against its better judgment, policies that failed.'[68] Morgenthau's argument vis-à-vis the role of public opinion

[57] Behr and Rösch, 'Introduction', p. 12.
[58] Behr and Rösch, 'Introduction', p. 12.
[59] Hans Morgenthau, *In Defence of the National Interest* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1951), p. 231.
[60] Morgenthau, *In Defence of the National Interest*, p. 231.
[61] Hans Morgenthau, *Science: Servant or Master?* (New York: New American Library, 1972), p. 108.
[62] Morgenthau, *Science: Servant or Master*?, p. 108.
[63] Morgenthau, *Science: Servant or Master*?, p. 108.
[64] Morgenthau, *Science: Servant or Master*?, p. 109.
[65] Morgenthau, *Science: Servant or Master*?, pp. 109–10.
[66] Morgenthau, *Science: Servant or Master*?, p. 110.
[67] Morgenthau, *Science: Servant or Master*?, p. 114.
[68] Morgenthau, *In Defence of the National Interest*, p. 234.

in foreign policy was thus not that the latter required shielding form the former. Rather, foreign policy requires a public sphere that is mobilised and capable of offering a democratic mandate to the government in matters of foreign policy. As Tjalve and Williams write, to Morgenthau, 'the absence of a mobilised public sphere within which to negotiate a collective sense of purpose often reduced liberal political leadership to the vacillating pursuit or placation of whatever interests were able to present themselves as expressing public opinion or the national will at a given moment'.[69] This 'sense of purpose', according to Morgenthau, is 'equality in freedom'.[70] Each generation of American citizens ought to give equality in freedom a spatio-temporal meaning in a concrete sense. This meaning, in turn, forms the basis of the national interest. For the 'kind of interest', which comprises the national interest, does not have a fixed meaning but depends on the 'particular period of history' and 'the political and cultural context within which foreign policy is formulated'.[71] In the absence of a public sphere, the national interest becomes usurped by private interests and powerful lobby groups. The public, on the other hand, turns to apathy and disinterestedness in matters of foreign policy. 'There is apathy all around', Morgenthau protested in *The Purpose of American Politics*; 'this lack of interest in public issues result[ed] in the cessation of genuine political activity by the citizen'.[72]

The misconception in the discipline that Morgenthau was cynical about public opinion in foreign policy is thus based partly on the conflation of his concept of the political with Schmitt's and partly on the misunderstanding of what Morgenthau meant by public opinion. While Morgenthau was critical of public opinion as a reflection of the views of the media or private interests, he supported democratic control over foreign policy, namely a public that is offered real policy choices, informed about their trade-offs, and able to meaningfully engage in a process of deliberation.[73] Morgenthau was not driven by a 'conservative ideology' that stipulated 'minimal democracy' and 'only expected [the public] to participate in elections'.[74] Not only did Morgenthau castigate such a 'minimal' view of democracy, but he also saw 'the decline of the public realm' as a threat to American civilisation, as the stillness of the status quo meant that American society was losing its vitality and ability to negotiate urgent political matters.[75] 'The citizen becomes so engrossed with cultivating his private garden', Morgenthau wrote, 'that he remains a citizen only in the formal sense of enjoying political rights that he sporadically and lackadaisically makes use of. In the full sense in which citizenship means making the public business one's own, he ceases to be a citizen.'[76] Ceases, that is, to engage in the contest of diverse interests from which power is generated in the public sphere. The public sphere, in turn, becomes infiltrated 'by the competition of political professionals, representing parochial interest groups, for the control of the administrative apparatus'.[77]

In sum, this section demonstrated that the assumption that public opinion is anathema to Morgenthau's realist foreign policy is problematic. To Morgenthau, the problem was not public opinion but those who, in its name, conflated the national interest with their private interests. The following section outlines the historical context where Morgenthau presented his critique of these interests and the elite deception of the public to advance the cause of imperial wars.

[69]Vibeke Tjalve and Michael Williams, 'Reviving the rhetoric of realism: Politics and responsibility in grand strategy', *Security Studies*, 24:1 (2015), pp. 37–60 (p. 46).

[70]Hans Morgenthau, *The Purpose of American Politics* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1960), p. 201.

[71]Hans Morgenthau, *Politics among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*, 5th ed. (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1978), p. 9.

[72]Morgenthau, *The Purpose of American Politics*, p. 203; also Morgenthau, *Science: Servant or Master*?, pp. 104–5.

[73]Hans Morgenthau, *Politics in the Twentieth Century: Vol. 1 The Decline of Democratic Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962), pp. 380–9.

[74]Piki Ish-Shalom, 'The triptych of realism, elitism, and conservatism', *International Studies Review*, 8:3 (2006), pp. 441–68 (pp. 444–5).

[75]Such as racial justice and the prospect of nuclear war.

[76]Morgenthau, *The Purpose of American Politics*, pp. 203–4.

[77]Morgenthau, *The Purpose of American Politics*, p. 201.

Morgenthau and the problem of deception in US foreign policy

This section contextualises Morgenthau's dissent against the US government's deception of the public during the Cold War. To Morgenthau, Vietnam was a symptom of a broader decline in US democratic politics, epitomised in a government that chose to govern through deception to advance the cause of imperial wars. This deception did not only deviate US foreign policy from its rational course but also posed a threat to democracy and race relations in the US.

In a letter to a friend from 11 December 1941, right after Pearl Harbour, Morgenthau wrote,

> The events of this week have made me feel more intensely than ever before, on the one hand, the futility of my present occupation [at the University of Kansas City–CF], and, on the other, the duty to put whatever faculties I may have at the disposal of the community … I should be glad to do research which would contribute something worthwhile to the solution of the problems with which this country is at present confronted.[78]

Morgenthau's contribution took the form of not only advising the US government, but also of dissenting against a political leadership that engaged in a campaign of public deception and took upon itself the moral crusade against communism. From the early days of the Cold War, Morgenthau argued that US elites resorted to grandiose declarations and elevation of 'modest occasions' into crises. The Truman Doctrine is one such example where

> The President had been advised, probably wrongly, that he had no chance of obtaining from Congress the appropriation for aid to Greece and Turkey … Thus a crisis had to be created … and the American people had to be cajoled into believing that they had the mission and the ability to contain Communism all over the world by sending money, goods, and soldiers to all the danger spots.[79]

The manufacturing of a 'crisis' propagated what Douglas Klusmeyer refers to as the 'ideology of the national security state', which 'subordinated all other aspects of foreign policy to the struggle against [the] communist threat'.[80] This led to a policy that was 'unsound in conception and unworkable in practice'.[81] For it meant that US elites were required to act on their words to contain communism 'all over the world', whether or not US vital interests were at stake. Deception of the public, through the manufacturing of crises and exaggeration of threats abroad, turned elites into prisoners of their own lies. Lacking the ability and will to contain their exaggerated threats, elites 'must then resort to ever stronger doses of deception; and the people inevitably react with ever deeper doubt, bewilderment and cynicism'.[82] To return to the example of the Truman Doctrine,

> The Administration has succeeded in making illusory hope, fear, and hysteria the prime movers of popular support. In consequence, it has in large measure deprived itself of the ability to educate public opinion, to guide it toward an understanding of the new conditions of American existence, to endanger the spontaneous support of policies that are approved because they are understood. Instead, the Administration must resort to ever grosser misrepresentations in order to be able to stimulate ever more exaggerated hopes and fears, and it must also pursue policies that seem to justify the hopes and fears it has itself created.[83]

[78] Cited in Christopher Frei, '*Politics among Nations*: A book for America', in Cornelia Navari (ed.), *Hans Morgenthau and the American Experience* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2018), pp. 55–74 (p. 55).

[79] Morgenthau, *In Defence of the National Interest*, p. 235.

[80] Douglas Klusmeyer, 'The American republic, executive power and the national security state: Hannah Arendt's and Hans Morgenthau's critiques of the Vietnam war', *Journal of International Political Theory*, 7:1 (2011), pp. 63–94 (p. 63).

[81] Morgenthau, *In Defence of the National Interest*, p. 235.

[82] Morgenthau, *In Defence of the National Interest*, p. 237.

[83] Morgenthau, *In Defence of the National Interest*, p. 237.

These words were written in 1951, well before Morgenthau's critique of the Johnson administration's campaign of deception in Vietnam. It shows that deception was ubiquitous in US foreign policy and did not occur 'rarely' in times of crises or to justify a specific war.[84] Furthermore, it shows that Morgenthau was not only opposed to US elites deceiving the public but also viewed such deception as a threat to democracy. Each time the lies were uncovered, it led the public to 'inevitably react with ever deeper doubt, bewilderment and cynicism'.[85]

US elites' declaration that the nation had embarked on a universal crusade to contain communism 'all over the world', in effect, abstracted the threat of communism from concrete reality. This led to deception on two levels. First, it led to the exaggeration of the threat, making the public falsely believe that US vital interests were at stake even when the concrete situation did not dictate so. For instance, Morgenthau argued that the concrete situation in Vietnam did not involve US vital interests because the success of the communist regime had no ultimate bearing on the global balance of power between the US and the USSR.[86] The misapplication of containment in Vietnam masked this reality. Rather than engage in a careful assessment of US vital interests in the concrete situation in Vietnam, Morgenthau argued, US policymakers instead sought 'to put the principle of the Truman Doctrine into practice by identifying revolution with Communism and trying to stop Communism everywhere'.[87] Second, the universal crusade against communism was deceptive in its ideological role: it rationalised power and concealed the contested nature of politics as the realm of the plurality of interests. Embarked on this moral crusade, US elites came to 'portray to themselves that an act of power is in fact an act of morality'.[88] They 'proceed[ed] with a good conscience, being assured of [their] moral superiority and the moral inferiority of the object of [their] power'.[89] This, in turn, limited the spatio-temporal negotiation of America's interests not only in diplomacy, but also in an open public sphere domestically. The universal crusade against Communism, abstracted from concrete reality, became the universal moral end that annulled all other ends; the overarching interest defined in the abstract that annulled the spatio-temporal negotiation of other interests. In short, it did not only threaten peace in Vietnam but also enclosed the public sphere in America.

Vietnam, in this context, was a symptom of a larger problem in US *domestic* politics. The scholarship on Morgenthau's critique of US foreign policy in Vietnam refers to his critique of US policy failure to advance the national interest.[90] Morgenthau's critique of US foreign policy in Vietnam however transcends the policy failure. The critique challenges the state-centric view of the war altogether. This view fails to account for the 'global social relations' that critical scholars identified as central to constituting both democracy and war.[91] There are two ways in which Morgenthau challenges the state centric view of the war. First, the state is not a 'black box' for Morgenthau; there is a relationship between the closure of the public sphere at home, what Morgenthau refers to as the 'decline of the public realm',[92] and the excessive use of force abroad. This decline encloses the 'spheres of elasticity', that is, the 'public sphere in which differences can be expressed and the resulting agonism can evolve peacefully, which is why it facilitates finding compromises rather than

[84]Dan Reiter, 'Response to Trachtenberg, Schuessler and Kaiser', *H-Diplo*, 5:4 (2013), available at: {https://issforum.org/roundtables/5-4-democracy-deception-war}, p.63.

[85]Morgenthau, *In Defence of the National Interest*, p. 237.

[86]Hans Morgenthau, *A New Foreign Policy for the United States* (London: Pall Mall, 1969).

[87]Morgenthau, *A New Foreign Policy*, p. 10.

[88]Karkour and Giese, 'Bringing Morgenthau's ethics in', p. 1113.

[89]Morgenthau, *Politics in the Twentieth Century: Vol. 1*, p. 13.

[90]Jennifer See, 'A prophet without honor: Hans Morgenthau and the war in Vietnam, 1955–1965', *Pacific Historical Review*, 70:3 (2001), pp. 419–48; Lorenzo Zambernardi, 'The impotence of power: Morgenthau's critique of American intervention in Vietnam', *Review of International Studies*, 37:3 (2011), pp. 1335–56; Alex Reichwein, *Hans J. Morgenthau und die Twenty Years' Crisis: Das realistische Denken eines Emigranten im Lichte seines deutschen Erfahrungshintergrundes* (Wiesbaden: Springer, 2021).

[91]Barkawi and Laffey, 'The imperial peace'.

[92]Morgenthau, *The Purpose of American Politics*, p. 197.

imposing consensus'.[93] The closure of the public sphere enables private interests to gloss over the political as the realm of deliberation and adjustment of interests; namely, to manipulate the public through the media, or, failing this, to employ 'law enforcement' against dissenters to advance the cause of wars that do not serve the interest of the nation. Secondly, Morgenthau challenges the state-centric view of the war by highlighting the interlink between America's wars abroad on one hand and democracy and race relations at home on the other.[94] The state does not stand in the demarcation line between the 'outside', defined by anarchy, and the 'inside', defined by liberal democracy.[95] Rather, the failure to address the question of racial inequality at home also turns America into 'soulless giant', an imperial power against which anti-colonial forces unite. In Morgenthau's words, 'the racial minorities of America are in the process of merging into that vast movement of non-white peoples, comprising four fifths of mankind who demand equality'.[96] The denial of their rights and the denial of the rights of the Vietnamese to self-determination are part of the same story of global race relations transcending the state.

Morgenthau's theorisation of deception and its role in irrational policies thus stands in contrast to later neo-realists who argue that deception should not be perceived solely in a negative light as it may or may not advance the national interest. This line is pursued in John Mearsheimer's *Why Leaders Lie* and Schuessler's *Deceit on the Road to War*.[97] Schuessler distinguishes between 'deception that advances the national interest and deception that harms the national interest' and argues that 'deception cannot be ruled out a priori as contrary to the national interest'.[98] But as deception, in the form of exaggerated foreign threats, is not rejected in principle, its negative impact on democracy and race relations at home is left untheorised. As David Blagden and Patrick Porter note in the context of the War on Terror, over two decades of national security discourse centred 'around dangerous fanatical foreigners … inadvertently heightened xenophobia … increased toxic and potentially violent identity politics and racial divides'.[99] Furthermore, deception plays a role in the 'academic-industrial complex', comprising of the 'blob' that perpetuates contemporary US wars.[100] Neo-realists treat the latter as merely deluded by liberal ideals or a 'hell of good intentions'.[101] The problem with this 'well-meaning' narrative, as Campbell Craig puts it, is that it elides accountability for deception, as elites advance disastrous policies and face no career consequences. For instance, 'Hillary Clinton and Joe Biden, two of the most influential Democratic supporters of the war, were their party's nominees for president in 2016 and 2020'.[102]

In contrast to neo-realists, deception in Vietnam, for Morgenthau, had 'emerging properties' for US democracy.[103] It revealed the failure of American democracy and undermined democracy even further. This is because Vietnam (as with Iraq later) constituted what Robert Shapiro refers to as 'damned lies', a category of lies that cannot be challenged because information is not available, at

[93] Felix Rösch, '"Hooray! Hooray! The end of the world has been postponed!" Politics of peace in the adventures of Tintin?', *Politics*, 34:3 (2014), pp. 225–36 (p. 228).

[94] Haro Karkour and Felix Rösch, 'Towards IR's "fifth debate": Racial justice and the national interest in classical realism', *International Studies Review*, 26:2 (2024), pp. 1–20.

[95] Enrol Henderson, 'Hidden in plain sight: Racism in International Relations theory', *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, 26:1 (2013), pp. 71–92.

[96] Morgenthau, *The Purpose of American Politics*, p. 307.

[97] John Mearsheimer, *Why Leaders Lie: The Truth about Lying in International Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); Schuessler, *Deceit on the Road to War.*

[98] Schuessler, *Deceit on the Road to War*, p. 7.

[99] David Blagden and Patrick Porter, 'Desert Shield of the Republic? A realist case for abandoning the Middle East', *Security Studies*, 30:1 (2021), pp. 5–48 (p. 39).

[100] Patrick Porter, 'Why America's grand strategy has not changed: Power, habit, and the U.S. foreign policy establishment', *International Security*, 42:4 (2018), pp. 9–46.

[101] John Mearsheimer, *The Great Delusion: Liberal Dreams and International Realities* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2018); Stephen Walt, *The Hell of Good Intentions* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2018), ch. 3.

[102] Campbell Craig, 'Did the Bush administration mean well?', *Journal of Strategic Studies 47:2* (2024), pp. 316–24 (p. 323).

[103] Tarak Barkawi, 'Decolonising war', *European Journal of International Security*, 1:2 (2016), pp. 119–214 (p. 212).

least not in the immediate term.[104] This category of lies was a concern for Morgenthau because it creates a sense of mistrust in government.[105] Morgenthau went as far to argue that this dynamic – of popular frustration and mistrust – puts US democracy in danger of succumbing to totalitarian rule, akin to what was seen in Soviet Russia and Nazi Germany:

> In the eighth decade of the twentieth century, intensified individual frustrations and anxieties have called forth a more intensive identification, on the part of the individual, with the power and foreign policies of the nation. If, therefore, the present trend toward ever increasing domestic frustration and international instability is not reversed, the United States is likely to partake to a growing extent in those tendencies in modern culture which have found their most extreme manifestations in Soviet Russia and National Socialist Germany.[106]

This explains why, when deception is ubiquitous, scholars should not abandon the public sphere. The empowerment of the individual to engage in the public sphere plays a vital role in bestowing a sense of trust and community that acts as a bulwark against the descent of democracy to demagoguery.[107] Deception, through heightening the individual's sense of mistrust, frustration, and existential alienation, renders the individual prey to demagogues. 'Morgenthau certainly has good reasons to be suspicious of nationalism', Williams writes, 'but his rejection of its affective power leaves him with the fundamental problem of sustaining or reviving a virtuous and self-limiting political order when the increasingly bureaucratized and anomic conditions that he sees characterizing modern politics militate against such developments.'[108] The Iraq War and rise of neo-conservatism, the context of Williams's critique of Morgenthau, along with the resurgence of populist nationalism, show that history bears out this critique. Still, Morgenthau does not dismiss the affective power of nationalism. The restoration of a public sphere in Morgenthau's thinking plays a role in the creation of what Robert Putnam refers to as 'social capital', the feeling of trust and community that reduces anomie in society.[109] It is precisely the *absence* of this public sphere where the individual can be empowered, and social solidarity can be spontaneously formed, that gives rise to demagogues who restore social solidarities in political religions.

In sum, as the historical analysis in this section demonstrates, throughout the Cold War Morgenthau was grappling with the same issues that later critical scholars of democratic peace grappled with in Iraq: the problem of deception and the national security state, usurped by private interests, driving imperial wars that do not only contradict the national interest but also undermine democracy and race relations at home. What, then, is the role of scholars in addressing this problem? How can scholars not only retain scholarly reflexivity vis-à-vis the status quo but also translate this reflexivity to the public?

Scholarly reflexivity: From theory to practice

The practical tool that Morgenthau offers to translate reflexivity to the public is the signpost of 'interest defined in terms of power'. This signpost reminds political actors of the contested nature of politics as the realm of a plurality of interests striving for power. It challenges attempts to gloss over this plurality by ideologically rationalising power in the name of universal ideals. This helps restore the political as an open – contingent and indeterminate – space that is not reified by the

[104]Robert Shapiro, '"Lies, damned lies, and American democracy"', in David Barker and Elizabeth Suhay (eds), *The Politics of Truth in Polarized America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), pp. 38–62 (p. 38–39).

[105]Klusmeyer, 'The American republic, executive power and the national security state', p. 79.

[106]Morgenthau, *Politics among Nations*, p. 115.

[107]This argument is more developed in Haro Karkour, 'Liberal modernity and the classical realist critique of the (present) international order', *International Affairs*, 98:2 (2022), pp. 569–86.

[108]Michael Williams, 'Morgenthau now: Neoconservatism, national greatness, and realism', in Michael C. Williams (ed.), *Realism Reconsidered: The Legacy of Hans J. Morgenthau in International Relations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 216–240 (p. 233).

[109]Robert Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2001).

dominant ideology of the powers-that-be. The signpost is thus an important tool for scholars to retain an open public sphere where the public can deliberate the nation's fundamental interests and values spatio-temporally, and offer democratic control.

'Interest defined in terms of power' does not mean that there is only power that states pursue. Rather, power, as Rösch argues, is a normative concept to Morgenthau that 'enables people to constantly construct their life-worlds by forming societies as temporal manifestations of the common good … through the alignment of their antagonism of interests'.[110] In domestic politics, totalitarian regimes abolish this normative concept of power through eliminating the political as a plurality of interests. In foreign policy, the elimination of this concept of power is through policies that fail to acknowledge the plurality of interests internationally. To Morgenthau, depoliticisation in one realm feeds into the other: moral and political abstractions abroad, the fight against 'communism everywhere', echo the narrowing of the public sphere where a plurality of interests can challenge such abstractions.[111]

Morgenthau's signpost restores the plurality of interests through recognising the limits of attempts to rationalise power in the name of universal ideals. The recognition of limits, as Steele argues, 'creates the possibility of freedom'.[112] This is because universal ideals that are abstracted from concrete reality surrender the political actors' free will to define these ideals spatio-temporally. They thus operate as 'bases for discipline and control'.[113] By inhibiting the dominant ideology from rationalising power through invoking universals, Morgenthau's signpost guards against the 'discipline and control' imposed by their closure of the political as a spatio-temporal space where a plurality of interests and new possibilities can emerge. Armed with this signpost, the theorist becomes the guardian of the plurality of interests in the political – that is to say, of criticism and possibilities in an open public sphere. An 'important philosophical foundation' for Morgenthauian reflexivity, therefore, as Hom and Steele argue, is 'an open, indeterminate vision of time'.[114] In this vision, 'each present holds the possibility of novelty, and novelty itself constitutes reality by contravening past reconstructions and by enabling new novelties and subsequent new realities'.[115] The key question for public reflexivity is how to retain this open time – that is to say, to protect the public sphere from predetermined abstractions that subordinate the ends of politics to universals. Morgenthau's signpost performs this role contra the reifying power of universals. It thus opens a space for what Hom and Steele refer to as 'temporal creativity', which 'holds that every moment, is indeterminate and therefore an opportunity to begin, to adapt, to revise – to reflect'.[116] As a result, it not only is a tool for diplomacy between nations but also gives scholars a role in translating reflexivity to an open public sphere where the public can deliberate, adapt, revise, and reflect on their interests.

To Morgenthau, public opinion is primarily an empirical concept, in the sense that it is a political force that the government is required to heed, inform about the policy choices, and gain its consent. However, when the government fails to play this role and engages in deception to ideologically rationalise imperial wars, the scholars' role becomes key to translate reflexivity to an open public sphere.[117] In failing to play this reflexive role, scholars become part of an 'academic-political complex'; that is to say, their interests become indistinguishable from the powers-that-be.[118] In contrast,

[110]Felix Rösch, 'Pouvoir, puissance, and politics: Hans Morgenthau's dualistic concept of power?', *Review of International Studies*, 40:2 (2014), pp. 349–65 (p. 363).

[111]Morgenthau was thus, as Vibeke Tjalve writes, 'painfully aware of the links between foreign policy prudence and pluralistic vitality'. Vibeke Tjalve, *Realist Strategies of Republican Peace* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), p. 146.

[112]Steele, '"Eavesdropping on honored ghosts"', p. 281.

[113]Hom and Steele, 'Open horizons', p. 287. Hom and Steele refer to abstractions as 'aesthetic markers'.

[114]Hom and Steele, 'Open horizons', p. 271.

[115]Hom and Steele, 'Open horizons', p. 279.

[116]Hom and Steele, 'Open horizons', p. 294.

[117]In these circumstances, the politically reflexive citizen becomes a normative ideal.

[118]Alan Gilbert, *Must Global Politics Constrain Democracy? Great-Power Realism, Democratic Peace and Democratic Institutionalism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), p. 6.

'realism', as Muriel Cozette writes, is 'best described as a permanent critique of the powers-that-be that constantly challenges the *status quo* and the ideological apparatus upon which it rests'.[119] Morgenthau's dissent against the ideological application of containment in Vietnam did not only unveil 'a dangerously insulated policymaking apparatus' comprised of elites who 'had lost the capacity for prudent judgment or critical thinking'.[120] Importantly, Morgenthau's dissent stood as a guard against the dominant ideology of the powers-that-be and its depoliticisation of the public sphere, through ensuring that it remained open for the public to deliberate the nation's fundamental interests and values spatio-temporally, and offer democratic control.

Morgenthau recognised that the scholar's dissenting voice – particularly in instances when 'public opinion' is weaponised by powerful interest groups – may contradict both the government *and* the majority for the sake of peace abroad and democracy at home. It is in this sense that Morgenthau writes that 'by upholding the rational principles of sound foreign policy' scholars qua public intellectuals in dissent offer 'an alternative to the foreign policy pursued by the government with the support of the majority'.[121] This alternative, as was the case in Vietnam, would guide the public to raise doubts and ask questions: whose interests does this policy or war serve? How are these interests compatible with the collective interest and fundamental values of the nation? The objective, ultimately, is to restore 'to the people the ability to control', by which Morgenthau means to provide democratic control.[122] Meanwhile, the dissent of the scholars, 'performs a vital function for the political and moral welfare of the Republic'.[123] For 'if the government should pursue a foreign policy that is … repugnant to the very principles upon which American democracy is based, the dissenting minority, by its very existence, would remind the government and its majority of the continuing vitality of those principles'.[124]

The scholar's role in translating reflexivity to the public is crucial in times when deception is ubiquitous and public opinion is weaponised to publicise moral crusades. For it is in these times that the scholar's attempt to influence elites is frustrated by power. Reflecting on his experience as consultant to the Johnson administration (until his dismissal in 1965), Morgenthau recounts his naivety in believing that 'one only needs to call the President's attention to the probable consequences of certain policies and show him the alternatives and their probable consequences, and he will choose a policy most likely to serve the national interest'.[125] 'By 1970', writes William Scheuermann, 'Morgenthau would openly declare that he no longer shared the implicit assumption that the most important function of the public intellectual was to provide sound advice to political leaders.'[126] The problem, which Morgenthau already explained 10 years earlier, was that the leadership abdicated its role of informing the public about the policy choices and gaining democratic consent.[127] Public opinion thus became 'at best disposition, mood, or taste', instrumentalised in the hands of private interests 'who possess a near monopoly of the most effective technologies of communication'.[128] The transfer of power from elected elites to private interests distorted the scholars' relationship to those elites. The scholar's role in offering a sound advice was dismissed not due to its lack of merit in relation to the facts, but because it ran contrary to private interests that held real power. Thus, Morgenthau concluded, 'it has become obvious that the great issues of our day – the militarisation of American life, the Vietnam war, race conflicts, poverty, the decay of the cities,

[119]Muriel Cozette, 'Reclaiming the critical dimension of realism: Hans J. Morgenthau on the ethics of scholarship', *Review of International Studies*, 34:1 (2008), pp. 5–27 (p. 14).

[120]Douglas Klusmeyer, 'Death of the statesman as tragic hero: Hans Morgenthau on the Vietnam War', *Ethics & International Affairs*, 30:1 (2016), pp. 63–71 (p. 66).

[121]Hans Morgenthau, *Truth and Power: Essays of Decade, 1960–1970* (New York: Praeger, 1970), p. 44.

[122]Morgenthau, *The Purpose of American Politics*, p. 311.

[123]Morgenthau, *Truth and Power*, p. 44.

[124]Morgenthau, *Truth and Power*, p. 44.

[125]Morgenthau, *Truth and Power*, p. 5.

[126]William Scheuermann, *Hans Morgenthau: Realism and Beyond* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2009), p. 175.

[127]Morgenthau, *The Purpose of American Politics*, p. 263.

[128]Morgenthau, *The Purpose of American Politics*, pp. 264–6; Morgenthau, *Truth and Power*, p. 7.

the destruction of the natural environment – are not susceptible to rational solutions within the existing system of power relations'.[129] It is only by challenging these 'power relations' that the status quo can change, and, for this, the scholar cannot rely on advising elites alone but needs to challenge the dominant ideology through translating reflexivity to the public sphere.

Morgenthau's reflections on the broader 'system of power relations' in which public scholarship is embedded showcases his move beyond what Jahn refers to as a 'reductionist conception of reflexivity' that embodies contemporary critical theories in IR. This is a conception that fails to reflect on, and succumbs to, the 'political and social pressures' of the status quo.[130] In this context, Morgenthau's signpost offers a tool to re-politicise the dominant ideology that inhibits a 'systematic' reflexivity that engages with the broader social and political struggles in which theory and the theorist are embedded. Armed with this signpost, scholars engage in what Molloy terms as 'political reflexivity',[131] namely dissent against the dominant ideology of the powers-that-be, distance their scholarship from it, and create 'alternative thinking spaces' for deliberations in the public sphere.[132]

An objection here is that public deliberations require a moment of decision. In this moment, particularly if a government is involved in diplomatic negotiations, secrecy is key for success.[133] 'Secrecy in negotiation', Morgenthau would have agreed, 'grows from the objective nature of negotiations. No negotiation of any kind … can be carried out in public without defeating their very purpose: the transformation of conflicting and inchoate interests into a common purpose of the contracting parties.'[134] How is Morgenthau's emphasis on secrecy reconciled with the requirement of democratic control? The answer is that diplomacy does not absolve policymakers from the task of informing the public about the policy choices and attaining their consent. Morgenthau clarifies this as follows:

> Much of the confusion attending discussion of the problem of secret diplomacy results from the failure to distinguish between two separate aspects of the problem … Disclosure of the results of diplomatic negotiations is required by the principles of democracy, for without it there can be no democratic control of foreign policy. Yet publicity for the negotiations themselves is not required by democracy and runs counter to the requirements of common sense.[135]

In other words, the requirement of secrecy in diplomacy is not a free ticket to engage in deception; the leadership is still required to disclose the issues and gain public consent even in situations, such as during diplomatic negotiations, that require secrecy. When the leadership fails to disclose the issues, and chooses to govern by deception, it is the scholar's responsibility to dissent in the defence of peace *and* democracy.

It is crucial to note that to Morgenthau the scholar's reflexive role is an ideal type, due to 'the limitation of origin, which determines the perspective from which [the scholar] looks at society, and the limitation of purpose, which makes [the scholar] wish to remain a member in good standing of that society or even to play a leading role in it'.[136] As Steele notes, Morgenthau's experience in Vietnam highlights the 'incredible difficulties of speaking out into the public sphere'.[137] Not only did Morgenthau lose the presidency of the American Political Science Association,[138] but

[129] Morgenthau, *Truth and Power*, p. 6.

[130] Beate Jahn, 'Neoliberal takeover? The dangers of post-critique', *International Politics Reviews*, 10:2 (2022), pp. 76–82 (p. 76).

[131] Molloy, 'Realism and reflexivity', p.325.

[132] Beate Jahn, 'Critical theory in crisis? A reconsideration', *European Journal of International Relations*, 27:4 (2021), pp. 1274–99 (p. 1289).

[133] I thank my anonymous reviewer for raising this point.

[134] Morgenthau, *Dilemmas of Politics*, p. 271.

[135] Morgenthau, *Politics among Nations*, p. 543.

[136] Morgenthau, 'The nature and limits of a theory of international relations', p. 21.

[137] Steele, 'Of "witch's brews" and scholarly communities', p. 58.

[138] Ned Lebow *The Tragic Vision of Politics: Ethics, Interests and Orders* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

the administration also mobilised 'project Morgenthau, which had sent staffers culling through the scholar's writings in search of errors … to undermine Morgenthau's reputation as an expert'.[139] Scholars, thus, 'must be aware' of these limitations and 'the awareness of [their] moral commitment to the truth must mitigate the limitations of origin as well as the compromises between the moral commitment and social convenience and ambition'.[140]

But can this 'awareness' render scholars less susceptible to deception than the public or the government?[141] Scholars, as all citizens, are susceptible to deception, but they are also able to mitigate it by two means. First, by not pretending to know the ultimate moral and political ends of society, but facilitating a critical citizenry that deliberates them. It is in this sense that Morgenthau refers to the scholar's 'commitment to the truth'. 'Being committed to truth', Rösch writes, 'did not imply that scholars possessed absolute knowledge that only had to be passed on to other people.'[142] Rather, 'scholars … act as facilitators of the political by asking people questions about themselves, their life-worlds, and their relations with(in) these life-worlds. Through reflecting on these questions people gain awareness about their interests, helping them to become critical citizens.'[143] The goal is 'helping people to formulate their interests and to develop empathy toward other potentially diverging viewpoints in public discourse'.[144] The scholar's reflexive role, therefore, lies *not* in telling the public what their interests are. Instead, it is to act as facilitators of a critical, empathic, and engaged citizenry.

Still, how can the scholar facilitate deliberations without themselves falling into the deceptive power of ideology? A second means by which deception is to be mitigated is by recognising the imposition of power in theory qua practice and setting limits on the theory's ideological rationalisation of power. This means embracing the tendency in power to mask itself and operate under ideological veils in both theory and practice – veils that mask the reality of power not only from society, but also from the scholars themselves. From this premise power emerges not as domination but as a self-limiting tool in the process of theorisation itself, offering no crystal ball to the universal moral and political ends of society but guarding precisely against the deceptive power of such ends.

Conclusion

This article argued that Morgenthau's work fills an important gap in critical literature on democratic peace. While it shares the critical literature's reflexive approach and concerns regarding the inapplicability of the Kantian premises in practice, it offers something lacking in this scholarship: the practical tool required for public reflexivity, particularly in times of public deception. To advance this argument, the article, on the one hand, presented an historical analysis that showed that during the Cold War Morgenthau dealt with the same issues that critical scholars later dealt with in Iraq: elite deception and a national security state driving imperial wars that contradict the national interest and undermine democracy and race relations at home. On the other hand, Morgenthau's signpost of interest defined in terms of power offers a practical tool for public reflexivity. This signpost operates as a counter-ideological device against the moral and political abstractions that reify the political into Schmittian binaries. The signpost arms critical scholars with an important tool to retain the premises of Kantian democratic peace; that is, it helps preserve an open public sphere where the public can deliberate the nation's fundamental interests and values spatio-temporally, and offer democratic control.

[139] See, 'A prophet without honor', p. 440.

[140] Morgenthau, 'The nature and limits of a theory of international relations', p. 21.

[141] I thank my anonymous reviewer for raising this question.

[142] Felix Rösch, 'Morgenthau in Europe: Searching for the political' in Cornelia Navari (ed.), *Hans Morgenthau and the American Experience* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2018), pp. 1–26 (p. 11).

[143] Rösch, 'Morgenthau in Europe', p. 12.

[144] Rösch, 'Morgenthau in Europe', p. 15.

This argument offers two conclusions on the legacy of Kantianism in IR. First, the argument is in line with 'chiliastic' readings of Kant. In these readings, 'Kant's projection of democratic peace is not subject to the historical-empirical tests proposed by either the supporters or the opponents of DPT [democratic peace theory]'.[145] This is because democratic peace is an ideal in the future and fraught with problems due to a less than ideal reality. 'Kant', as Williams argues, 'never claims that his vision is the way history unfolds, only that we may *believe* it is doing so in order to support our efforts in the present.'[146] Our 'efforts in the present' require us, as critical scholars, to ask *how* to bring about the ideals of democracy and peace in a world full of deception and war. This article's answer is for scholars to accept responsibility to translate reflexivity to the public. This answer does not offer an end point for democratic peace but a constant guard against the deceptive role of abstractions that ideologically rationalise war in the name of democracy while simultaneously enclosing it. The second conclusion is related: the very need for the role of the scholar entails a rejection of deterministic readings of Kant. Deterministic readings of Kant, as Jahn argues, are 'ahistorical' and turn Kant against himself to justify liberal imperialism.[147] To guard against determinism requires more than theoretical reflexivity, however, and an acceptance of responsibility to retain an open public sphere. This is because 'ahistorical' readings that overdetermine history in the name of democratic peace also enclose the public realm of democracy.

The closure of the public realm where citizens are empowered to deliberate and form what Morgenthau refers to as 'spontaneous consensus' around the nation's interests, values, and ultimately meaning poses a danger to democracy even in times of peace.[148] It creates social conditions ripe for demagogues to restore meaning and social solidarity in political religions. The experience of neo-conservatism and more recently Trumpism are reminders that this dynamic is not a story of the past. The goal of demagogues is not to empower citizens but to shrink the public sphere even further, through attacks on the media and institutions of free enquiry and quelling dissent. The problem was familiar to Morgenthau: the status quo offers a thin platform for national consensus over the meaning of society after the death of God. It is this thinness that offers an opportunity for demagogues and political religions to rise, but also for society to renew its meaning in an open public sphere with forward-looking alternatives.

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Haro L. Karkour is Senior Lecturer in International Relations at Cardiff University.

[145] Sean Molloy, *Kant's International Relations: The Political Theory of Perpetual Peace* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2017), p. 9.

[146] Michael Williams, 'Reason and Realpolitik: Kant's 'Critique of International Politics', *Canadian Journal of Political Science*, 25:1 (1992), pp. 99–119 (p. 117), emphasis in original; see also Andrew Hurrell, 'Kant and the Kantian paradigm in International Relations', *Review of International Studies*, 16:3 (1990), pp. 183–205 (p. 199).

[147] Jahn, 'Kant, Mill, and illiberal legacies', pp. 193–4; see also William Scheuermann, 'Realism and the Kantian tradition: A revisionist account', *International Relations*, 26:4 (2012), pp. 453–77 (pp. 463–4).

[148] Morgenthau, *Truth and Power*, p. 8.

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