



Rethinking Morgenthau in the *German* Context

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This paper is part of my Ph.D. project on the origin of Realism as a theory about power, international law, and morality in international politics (“Hans J. Morgenthau und die ‘*Twenty Years’ Crisis*’. Zur Entstehungsgeschichte des Realismus”). It was presented on the Panel “Politics, Morality and Prudence” at the 51th Annual Convention of the International Studies Association (ISA) in New Orleans, February 17-20, 2010.



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Abstract

After a lapse in interest and popularity, realist approaches to International Relations (IR) have begun to spark interest again, even in Europe. This paper elaborates the origin of Hans J. Morgenthau's realist thinking. Given his various power-oriented, legal and moral arguments against Wilson's doctrine of democracy promotion and democratic interventionism, the Vietnam War, and in favour of an Israeli state (3.), my thesis is that there is a primal and entrenched *critical* and *normative dimension* in Morgenthau's thought from the beginning. His particular understanding of international law and morality as limitations of power extends *beyond* a rationalist and conservative 'Cold War' theory about power politics (as Realism is presented in prevalent readings). The core argument of the paper is that the complex relation between power, law and morality inherent in Morgenthau's thinking, and the contradictions coming along with this (2.), are characteristic of his complete works (*Gesamtwerk*). In order to deal with his 'paradoxical' thinking, we should rethink young international lawyer Morgenthau in his *German Context* (*Erfahrungshintergrund*). Surprisingly, less work has been done on the evolution of Realism in the *inter-war period* (which E.H. Carr calls the "*Twenty Years' Crisis*") in general, and Morgenthau's life and work in Germany in the 1920s and 1930s in particular which is also neglected in the literature about Realism and the history of IR so far. But, Morgenthau's *Weltbild* can only be truly understood if and when the German years in which he was socialized intellectually and politically are considered as the roots (or the constitutive moment) of his realist theory (4.). Moreover, an understanding of Morgenthau's brand of Realism is necessary to understand both the history of Realism as a 20th-century school of thought as well as the development of our discipline IR.

Keywords: History of International Relations, Realism, Morgenthau, Germany, US Foreign Policy

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1. Introduction¹

Realist approaches to international politics, in particular Hans J. Morgenthau (1904-1980) and his theory, have begun to spark interest again.² But why should we reread Morgenthau? Three general arguments can be made in favor of this: revisiting classical texts widens our intellectual perspectives as International Relations (IR) scholars in order to understand what Realism is *actually* about as well as the history of our discipline; it enables us to read texts carefully and reveals how culture- and time-bound they respectively their authors are; and it encourages us to learn from them despite or because of their pitfalls and shortcomings, and to bring them back into the contemporary debates in IR about power, international law, justice, and Western liberal interventionism in the post Cold war world (Lebow 2007: 263/264).

Morgenthau who originally was a German lawyer working on the prospects and limitations of international law to solve conflicts among states is one of the founders of the realist school in IR. Besides, he was one of the most prominent opponents of US foreign policy. As a consequence of his public critique and his belief in intellectual integrity and responsibility, he lost his function as a policy advisor in the US State Department, and he was subsequently denounced by his colleagues as a communist. However, Morgenthau's critique is characterized by a multitude of *power-oriented, legal, and moral* arguments against Wilson's doctrine of democracy promotion, US interventionism in Central and Latin America, the Vietnam War, and the Middle East Policy. Morgenthau warned that America came to "lose much of that peculiar moral attractiveness which throughout its history set it apart from all other nations" (Morgenthau 1975a: 516).

¹ I am grateful to Heather Taylor, Lothar Brock, Chris Brown, and the participants on the Panel "Politics, Morality and Prudence" at the 51th Annual Convention of the International Studies Association (ISA), New Orleans, February 17-20, 2010 on which I present this paper (Reichwein 2010), for their helpful comments.

² See Bell (2009); Frei (2001); Lebow (2003); Jütersonke (2010); Neacsu (2009); Scheurman (2009); Williams (2007).

My thesis is that there is an entrenched and primal *critical* and *normative* dimension in Morgenthau's realist thinking about international politics, and that his particular understanding of international law and morality extends *beyond* a rationalist and conservative theory about power politics.³ Nevertheless, the relation between a conservative bias in Morgenthau's thinking on the one hand, and a critical and normative dimension on the other hand is puzzling. Yet, my core argument is that the relation between power, law and morality inherent in his thinking, and the *contradictions* coming along with this, are characteristic of Morgenthau's complete works (*Gesamtwerk*). In order to deal with his '*paradoxical*' thinking, we should *rethink* Morgenthau in *context* (*Erfahrungshintergrund*). His seesaw between normative, and to some extent 'liberal', ideas about international law, morality, democracy, and the purpose of American politics, and the 'realist' belief in power politics as an 'unremovable' law in international politics, which become simply obvious in his critique of US foreign policy, can only be truly understood if and when Morgenthau's *German Years* are considered as the *roots* (or the *constitutive moment*) of his realist theory. Morgenthau's early Weimar ideas have to date been a crucial aspect in his personal and intellectual life (which was indeed concealed by Morgenthau himself). This time period is almost neglected in the prevalent IR literature focusing on the history and evolution of Realism as a conservative 'American theory' on power politics which has occurred and evolved in the context of the Cold War so far.⁴ Given Morgenthau's career, this oversimplified and shortened understanding of Realism in IR, which is normally reduced to the "Six Principles of Political Realism" (Realist Principles) Morgenthau introduces in his classic "Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace" (PAN, published for the first time in 1948) in chapter 1 as "A Realist Theory of International Politics" (1978a: 3-15), is all the more surprising – and in need of clarification.

³ Frei (2001); Koskeniemi (2000, 2002); Neascu (2010); Pichler (1998); Söllner (1987) and Turner (2009) who are stressing the influence of Carl Schmitt (1888-1985), Max Weber (1864-1920), and Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) on Morgenthau suggest that Realism is a conservative, backward, ad pessimistic theory about power politics.

⁴ Except the authors and their work cited in this paper, in particular Frei (2001); Jütersonke (2010); Pichler (1998); Scheuerman (2007a, 2007b; 2008; 2009a, 2009b); Shilliam (2006, 2009); Söllner (1987); Williams (2005, 2007). The debate among these authors is whether Morgenthau was a conservative or liberal and progressive thinker of his time.

In my paper, I begin by working out the contradictions in Morgenthau's thinking about international politics (2.). Following this, I summarize his animadversion on Wilson's liberal internationalism, his opposition to the Vietnam War, and his position in favour of the Israeli state. The goal of this section is to advert to the varied power-oriented, legal, and moral arguments Morgenthau has given concerning these three issues, and to illustrate the contradictions in his thinking (3.). My paper concludes with some sociologically inspired ideas on *how* to read Morgenthau (as a member of a *Denkkollektiv*), and on *how far* his German context helps us to understand his complex realist thinking (4.).

2. Morgenthau's Paradox

Morgenthau's rationale against Wilson's liberal internationalism, his opposition against US involvement in Vietnam, and his arguments in favour of an Israeli state can be characterised as expressing a wide range of power-oriented as well as legal and moral concern. Altogether, his rational and strategic power-oriented arguments which highlight the *national security interest* of the United States (Morgenthau 1951b; 1952) are *in line* with what IR scholars today expect the realist theory in IR is about, and what Realism is supposed to be in popular readings.⁵

Though, Morgenthau's prevailing arguments in favour of an Israeli state and strong US military backing were nevertheless in contrast to many current Realists. Morgenthau excoriated Kissinger's balance of power-oriented diplomacy between Israel and its Arab neighbours for putting too much pressure on the Israeli side. Given prevalent neo-realist standards, Morgenthau's position also runs *counter* to a neo-realist foreign policy theory. But what makes the Israeli as well as the Vietnamese case, and its critique on Wilson really particular cases is Morgenthau's critical and normative position which becomes obvious. Coming along with this, there are at least three substantial problems in Morgenthau's argumentation.

⁵ Legro/Moravcsik (1999); Guzzini (1998).

2.1. *The Inconsistency between Theory and Practice*

The first problem is the contradiction between *theorizing* about international politics/foreign policy and *policy intervention*. On the one hand, Morgenthau claimed to perceive and formulate 'objective', 'valid', and 'universal' laws which 'rules' international politics that have their roots in human nature.⁶ In PAN, Morgenthau formulates his realist theory of international politics that reflects these laws.

The realist tradition in IR has been constructed around its main proposition, namely that politics is an immutable and insuperable struggle for power among humans/states (Morgenthau 1978a: 27-103). Morgenthau assumes that statesmen think and act in terms of interest defined in terms of power, which is unaffected by the circumstances of time and place, and which makes the theoretical understanding of international politics possible. The core assumption that humans/states struggle for power is the essence of politics, as Morgenthau emphasizes in the second and third of his "Realist Principles" (1978a: 5, 8). Morgenthau scathingly remonstrated with statesmen such as Wilson for ignoring these laws, and judged US foreign policy to be 'wrong'. However, Morgenthau's arguments stretch beyond the realm of his theoretical capacity when he criticizes US foreign policy which do not reflect but instead conflict with the alleged laws he has formulated.

At first glance, Morgenthau's criticism may be surprising, and even quite contradictory in itself. *If* international politics really is condemned to be power politics, and *if* Morgenthau claimed to have uncovered the 'objective' laws and causal mechanisms which link the condition of anarchy in the international arena to observable patterns of state behaviour, it is not obvious *why* he engaged in any kind of political activism. Moreover, it is not only why he participated in political debates about foreign policy that is puzzling, but it is ambiguous as to how he expected his public statements to be of

⁶ For the Freudian roots of Morgenthau's theory of international politics see Schuett (2007; 2010). Morgenthau wrote an unpublished essay about his reading of Sigmund Freud's psychoanalysis and his ideas about human nature and the need and lust for power (cited in Schuett 2007). Peterson (1999) argues that Morgenthau believed in Nietzsche's thesis about 'human lust for power'.

any consequence in terms of actually having the capacity to transform public and elite consciousness and/or produce social pressures for alternative outcomes.⁷

Despite this however, when criticizing US foreign policy, Morgenthau was neither willing to put his theory as a whole, nor any of its fundamental assumptions under question. In recognizing this, Franke/Herborth (2007) argue that realist thinkers not only fail to establish a consistent link between theoretical arguments and policy interventions, but also lack reflexivity. Their arguments have developed out of Morgenthau's criticism of Vietnam War, Waltz's objection to the US arms control policy during the Cold War, and Mearsheimer's and Walt's most recent critique of the US war in Iraq. According to Franke/Herborth, the problem being that, instead of putting the realist theory into question and bridging the theory's gaps, Realists change the level of analysis from the systemic to the domestic level focusing on influential pressure groups (Mearsheimer/Walt 2007), or put the rationality of the actors in question (Mearsheimer/Walt 2003), or they offer 'normative' arguments against US foreign policy. In any case however, when observing the context of his policy interventions, it becomes explicitly clear that Morgenthau played the role of the rational, prudent, and moral statesman who claimed to know what is good and what is bad, and what is a good foreign policy guided by moral standards (Morgenthau 1978a: 5). As Franke/Herborth have noted, Morgenthau makes the impression to hold a validity claim and to possess rigorous knowledge.⁸

⁷ Payne argues that Realists who participate actively in public debates behave like Habermasian Constructivists and Critical Theorists, violating and rejecting their own theoretical presuppositions about the inferior role of communication action and the domestic level in shaping outcomes in international politics and taking political discourse and the force of the better argument quite seriously (2007: 503/504).

⁸ See Franke/Herborth (2007: 1-3). Furthermore, both authors hold the view that Realism, in its process of scientific professionalization (see Waltz 1990), has undergone a tragic process of increasing technocratization, claiming a stance of "speaking truth to power" as a 'moral quality' at the expense of reflexivity (2007: 30/31). For both authors, tragedy, lack of reflexivity, and technocracy are the core tenets of the realist tradition in IR. As a non-technocratic understanding of policy interventions which they aim for, Franke/Herborth ultimately recommend a Habermasian approach of giving and taking reasons and of challenging routinized patterns of interpretations and behaviour in spaces of deliberation (for example in public debates) within which the equal participation of self-reflective scholars as citizens in processes of argumentative exchange according to the principle of the 'logic of the better argument' becomes possible.

To sum up, there is a striking tension inherent in Morgenthau's realist thinking between the quest for 'law-like' generalization and causation of the theory on the one hand (epistemological level), and practical policy proposals presented as public intellectuals in public foreign policy debates on the other hand (political level).

2.2. Power, Law, and Double Moral Standards

There seems to be, however, yet another problem Morgenthau is confronted with. First of all, the relation between a theory of *power politics* and *moral arguments* against a ruthless power politics (as he judged). Most notably, Morgenthau's objection to Wilson's doctrine of democracy promotion and US interventionism abroad is characterized, among other things, by moral arguments. At first glance, this criticism may also be surprising, and even quite contradictory in itself. *If* international politics really is condemned to be *immutable* and *insuperable* struggle for power among states, it is not obvious *why* Morgenthau believed in any kind of morality in international politics. Anyway, in PAN, Morgenthau discusses morality as "Limitations of National Power" (1978a: 229-263).

Secondly, the role of morality itself is ambiguous. Morgenthau argued against Wilson's 'moral' idea "to make the world safe for democracy" in US foreign policy resulting from ideological preferences and 'political moralism', and leading to crusades and endless wars in the name of any supposed higher morality such as democracy. In doing so, Morgenthau offered *his particular* understanding of morality in international politics. It is not only *why* Morgenthau devised ideas about morality in a world of power politics that is puzzling. He also considered his understanding of morality to be *superior* and to be a guiding principle for a moral, prudent, and successful US foreign policy (Morgenthau 1951a: 31, 35). Again, Morgenthau makes the impression to hold a validity claim, and to know what is moral and what is immoral. The question is whether *Morgenthau* was the moralist claiming for universal validity of his understanding of morality he imputed Wilson to be.

Furthermore, there seems to be an inconsistency in Morgenthau's thinking with regard to his early Weimar ideas about the power of *international law* to resolve disputes and conflicts between states and to prevent war which are '*liberal*' and '*progressive*', and his *conservative* post-war 'realist' belief that international politics is an immutable and insuperable struggle for power among states, including war. *If* international politics really is condemned to be power politics, it is not obvious but rather puzzling *why* Morgenthau believed in any kind of law in international politics as limitation of power politics. Anyway, in PAN, Morgenthau discusses international law as further "Limitations of National Power" (1978a: 277-334):

In a world whose moving force is the aspiration of sovereign nations for power, peace can be maintained only by two devices. One is the self-regulatory mechanism of the social forces, which manifests itself in the struggle for power on the international scene, that is, the balance of power. The other consists of normative limitations upon that struggle, in the form of international law, international morality, and world public opinion (Morgenthau 1978a: 25)

2.3. *Realism as Ideology?*

Finally, Morgenthau's uncompromising support for an Israel state is highly moral and *ideological* by defending the right of the Israelis to preserve their existence and by stressing Israeli democracy as lighthouse in an evil world. This is why current Realists such as Mearsheimer and Walt could bring forward the argument that Morgenthau if he lived today would be part of the 'Israel Lobby'. Whereby, Morgenthau potentially would not only not object to the actions of the lobby but also postulate a special relationship between the US and Israel based on strong US military backing and protection, something which if true, would lead to a foiling of current US interests, namely a balance of power in the Middle East. It may be argued that Morgenthau, who basically *opposed* ideological preferences and motives in foreign policy in his later post-war writings (1977: 8-10; 1978a: 5-7), actually argued in an ideological manner.

Kaufman argues that Morgenthau's position towards Israel is "The Anomaly of Israel in Morgenthau's Thought" (2006: 35/36). By reducing Morgenthau's Realism to the

concept of interests defined in terms of power, Kaufman goes on to accuse Morgenthau of defending the national interest of the state as the sole 'moral' principle guiding US foreign policy as it is in line with the rules of power politics (2006: 28/29). The crucial point of Kaufman's criticism being that, Morgenthau's theory of international politics and foreign policy not only misses "transcendent moral standards to judge relative degrees of moral and geopolitical evil" (2006: 24), but it is also representative of "bleak, morally modest realism" (2006: 35) without any substantial moral and conceptual clarity, or a sense of identity. For the neoconservative Kaufman, in contrast, the luminous moral standards are universal 'American values', such as democracy and freedom, which are to be promoted around the world. Ultimately, Kaufman concludes that Morgenthau's highly ideological and moral position towards Israel is conflicting with the precept of power politics that Morgenthau himself would otherwise praise (2006: 36). Kaufman accords that ideology and morality are two unresolved problems Morgenthau became confronted with. Kaufman and Wrightson (1996) are right to point out that Morgenthau defines the national interest leading to a prudent and successful foreign policy as an absolute moral standard. But neither are they right to reduce Morgenthau's Realism to the concept of interests defined in terms of power, nor are they right to reduce his understanding of morality in international politics to the *sole* principle of the national interest, and nor are they right to accuse Morgenthau to lack in a sense of 'American identity'.

However, the problem with ideology is another one. According to Seliger, Realism, like Liberalism and Marxism, is ideological inasmuch using

[...] sets of factual or moral propositions which serve to posit, explain and justify ends and means of organized social action, especially political action, irrespective of whether such action aims to preserve, amend, destroy or rebuild any given order. According to this conception, ideology is as inseparable from politics as politics from ideology". (1977: 1)

Morgenthau's "Realist Principles" are characterised by *descriptive and prescriptive* elements. Realists, by this definition, are as much ideologues as the ideologists they condemn. The given order that they seek, a balance of power system of states

(Morgenthau 1978a: 171-228), is much based on *a-priori* abstractions about the causes of human/state behaviour as all other ideologies.

The contradictions in realist thinking which I introduced in this section can thus be deemed 'Morgenthau's Paradox'. Given this paradox, the following questions are posed: (1) What is the meaning of power, international law, and morality in Morgenthau's critique of US foreign policy which I summarize in the following section? (2) How far is his critique in line with his realist theory? (3) And how should we deal with his thinking? In the last section, I work out how far Morgenthau's German context may help us to understand his complex thinking.

3. Morgenthau's Critique of US Foreign Policy

3.1. Against Wilson's Doctrine of Democracy Promotion

Morgenthau was a prominent detractor of Wilson and his doctrine of democracy promotion.⁹ His critique focused not so much on the strategic aspects of Wilson's interventionism abroad, which was indeed power politics to balance Germany and Russia and to end the First World War, but on the ideological aspects and objectives as well as on Wilson's 'moralistic' rhetoric.

In his article "The Moral Dilemma in Foreign Policy", Morgenthau distinguishes between two "diametrically opposed" conceptions of foreign policy: the realist and the moralist one (1951a: 12). In doing so, he obtrusively argued against Wilson's "false concept of morality" (1951a: 31). Referring to George Washington's proclamation of neutrality in the War of the First Coalition against France, the First World War and Woodrow Wilson, as well as the issue of the Bulgarian atrocities and the debate between Benjamin Disraeli and William Gladstone, Morgenthau introduces three lessons to be learned from history: (1) to keep out of other nation's wars if the US interests are not at stake; (2) to abandon the liberal dream that power politics, rivalries,

⁹ For Wilson's foreign policy ideas see Ambrosius (2002); Anthony (2008); Ikenberry (2009).

and war had disappeared from the international scene to give way to harmony of interests, peace, justice, enlightened mankind, and humanitarianism; (3) to defend the national interest of the US in terms of the maintaining a balance of power in Europe and Asia which best would serve American security and keep peace (1951a: 15-24, 27, 29). Morgenthau then derives a “*moral principle*” from these lessons: the *national interest* of all individual members in international society - which are equal and sovereign nation states independent of political culture and national morality - as a reason of state and the ultimate standard of foreign policy.

Against this background, Morgenthau denounces Wilson as a ‘moralist’ adhering to blind idealism and ideological moralization through crusading fervour, radical and bellicose nationalism, and a sense of ‘American holy mission’ which leads to religious or ‘just wars’ in the name of any supposed higher morality such as democracy (1951a: 34). According to Morgenthau, Wilson had substituted the concrete national interest for the liberal dream “to make the world safe for democracy”¹⁰, which in fact means no war to end all wars (as Wilson argued) but an endless state of war. Instead of making war on Germany to defeat German hegemony and to restore the balance of power in Europe, and to withdraw from Europe after the end of the war, Wilson’s aim was a new age of democracy in Europe.

On the one hand, Wilson’s approach in US foreign policy was characterized by the principle of self-determination of the peoples and nations, which was an important aspect in his “Fourteen Points”. But, in order to prevent the dynamic that also non-democracies such as Germany and Russia could refer to the universal principles of self-determination, Wilson conditioned these principles by democratic standards. In other words, this means that ultimately, Wilson’s foreign policy aimed at a world order based on Western liberal democracies which defend the right of *democratic self-determination*. Wilson was a liberal advocate of ‘American Exceptionalism’, which means that he believed in the moral superiority, infallibility, and universality of ‘American values’ to be spread around the world (Knock 2009). According to

¹⁰ President Woodrow Wilson’s Fourteen Points, Speech to US Congress, Washington, January 8, 1918.

Morgenthau, Wilson's idealism was characterized by his faith in American democracy and his rhetoric about a new world where the interests of the US, as that of all other nations, would disappear in a community of interests comprising mankind (Morgenthau 1951a: 27/28). As a result, Morgenthau concluded that Wilson's foreign policy of democracy promotion actually foiled the national interests of America, namely a balance of power in Europe and Asia which best would serve American security and keep peace.

A Realist Understanding of 'American Exceptionalism'

In his book "The Purpose of American Politics" (1960), which is almost neglected in the literature on Realism, Morgenthau continues to denounce Wilson's crusade for democracy as it transformed the American purpose of being a distinct moral, social, and political entity, and as it was a radical departure from the tradition of *non-interventionism* and an abdication of expansionism abroad as elaborated on in the Monroe-Doctrine (1823).¹¹ Furthermore, Morgenthau saw American involvement in Europe after World War I as contradicting the American purpose insofar as it resulted in US not only offering its own political culture and society as a model to be emulated by other nations voluntarily, wherein voluntarily was in reality negated by Wilson by the use force and coercion to enable or push the world, i.e. the nations and states constitute the world, to emulate the America model (1960: 104-110):

The very plausibility of the American purpose and the possibility of its achievement were from the beginning dependent upon the objective conditions of American existence [...]. American principles [...] could plausibly be held up as a model for others to emulate only if conditions elsewhere were not totally different from those prevailing in the United States. Even in conditions not completely dissimilar, American principles could apply only as ideal guideposts, not as blueprints to be imitated to the letter. America was not a paradise to be duplicated elsewhere, it was a paradise open to all who wanted to enter it. It was a light to attract strangers, not as a flame to be spread throughout the world, that America fulfilled its purpose. The Statue of Liberty is indeed its proper symbol. (Morgenthau 1960: 109)

¹¹ For the Monroe-Doctrine see McDougall (1997).

Morgenthau, who also believed in 'American Exceptionalism', was convinced that the America was a model, or an *example* to be emulated by other nations voluntarily, or rather be seen as something like a beacon. But in contrast to Wilson (and 'Liberal Internationalists' today who refer on Wilson), he refused to promote democracy abroad through coercion, use of force, or warfare against the will of other nations.

The National Interest, Equality, Sovereignty as 'Moral Principles'

To sum up, Morgenthau offers *his* particular understanding of morality in international politics by means of three principles: the national interest of the individual members in international society as a reason of state and the ultimate standard of foreign policy in concrete circumstances of time and place; self-preservation for individuals (within a state) and states (at the international sphere); and a modicum of order in international society based on the existence of equal and sovereign nation states (regardless of their political culture, domestic constitution, and national morality which is a matter of national self-determination), which are responsible of preserving order, peace, and stability in international politics. Morgenthau considered these principles to be *universal* and to be an appropriate guiding principle for a moral, prudent, and successful US foreign policy (1951a: 31, 35):

A foreign policy derived from the national interest is in fact morally superior to a foreign policy inspired by universal principles. It is not only a political necessity but also a moral duty for the nation to follow in its dealings with other nations, but one guiding star, one standard of thought, one rule for action: The National Interest. (Morgenthau 1951b: 38/39).

The Perils of 'Universal Moral Principles' in Foreign Policy

In "The Moral Dilemma in Foreign Policy", Morgenthau produces some reasons that ground why he cautions against most universal and abstract 'moral principles' (1951a: 31-35). First of all, he states that ideas such as justice or democracy, are capable of guiding political action only in so far as the extent to which they have been given concrete content and have been related to political situations within society. Within society, there exists consensus between individuals about what justice means under

concrete conditions, but no such consensus about national values and interests exists in the relations between states. Morgenthau concludes that the moral preconceptions of a particular nation will be unable to gain universal recognition, because the functions of the international society are not identical with those of the national society in which a hierarchical order and a monopoly of organized force exist. In this regard, the influence of Max Weber and his reflections about the nation state, its society, and the “Monopol legitimer physischer Gewaltsamkeit” on Morgenthau becomes quite obvious.¹²

Secondly, according to Morgenthau, universal ‘moral principles’ such as democracy and human rights can serve crusading moralists only as a mere pretext for the pursuit of national policies, fulfilling the functions of ideological rationalizations and justifications for radical nationalism, power politics, interventionism, and war. Morgenthau deduces that universal principles are ideological by their very nature. The crusader believing in something which Weber named ‘*ethic of attitude*’ (Gesinnungsethik) claims to provide the national moral standards and values which are seen to be good and superior as universal values for all mankind. According to Morgenthau, Wilson had given ‘American values’ universal applicability, just like Napoleon and Hitler did. The national and the universal moral standard become one and the same thing then. Morgenthau hints at Wilson’s ‘degeneration of international moralism’ and his crusade to make the world safe for democracy as well as willingness to use fire and sword to convert people and states which refuse to accept ‘American values’ (1951a: 34). Morgenthau reasoned that the age of ‘democratic nationalism’ and of ‘Western political moralism’ would issue a series of ‘just wars’, but also contain political and religious fanaticism and opposition against the Western values and states. In this regard, it becomes very clear how far Morgenthau can make a contribution to current debates in IR about Western interventionism in the Muslim world.

¹² The influence of sociologist Max Weber and his ideas about power as a social relationship between actors, about the nation-state and its society which is characterized through a hierarchy and a ‘Monopol legitimer physischer Gewaltsamkeit’, and his ideas about leadership and the ethics of responsibility on young Morgenthau, who had studied Weber’s work ripely, is a commonplace in the literature about Realism and Morgenthau (Bain 2000; Llanque 2007; Smith 1986; Pichler 1998; Turner 2009; Turner/Mazur 2009; Williams 2005a,b). Morgenthau assumed power as a social relationship between states, and he assumed the international society of states as an anarchical society lacking such a monopoly. See Max Weber (1922), *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*, Tübingen: Mohr.

Finally, Morgenthau warns that a 'moralist' approach in foreign policy in which adherents refuse to consider and to weigh in the political consequences of policy which Weber named '*ethic of responsibility*' (Verantwortungsethik), may guide political action to failure leading to national suicide, like war and self-destruction.

The Problem of Double Moral Standards

The paradox in Morgenthau's thinking about morality in politics becomes quite obvious. While on the one hand, he argues that ideology and morality are too subjective as standards by which to judge politics. He also objected to concrete 'moral principles' or ideological driven foreign policy such as democracy promotion, purporting that he himself suspend his own value judgments with regard to his thinking about international politics. In the second of his "Realist Principles", he clarified:

A realist theory of international politics then will guard against two popular fallacies: the concern with motives and the concern with ideological preferences [...] A realist theory of international politics will also avoid the other popular fallacy of equating the foreign policies of a statesman with his philosophic or political sympathies, and of deducing the former from the latter. (Morgenthau 1978a: 5/6, 7)

On the other hand, however, Morgenthau asserted that his theory was the most moral approach because it promoted stability and peace among states (1978a: 16-25). Morgenthau's objection against a Wilsonian 'political moralism' exemplifies these two conflicting, if not contradictory positions (1951a: 35).¹³

But, as Morgenthau has expressed it, there are different types of morality which in accordance than must be distinguished:

¹³ See Wrightson (1996: 357-364) who points out the problem of morality in Morgenthau's thought.

The contest is rather between one type of political morality and another type of political morality, one taking as its standard universal moral principles abstractly formulated, the other weighing these principles against the moral requirements of concrete political action, their relative merits to be decided by a prudent evaluation of the political consequences to which they are likely to lead. (Morgenthau 1962: 111)

Morgenthau solves the problem of contradiction by connecting his understanding of morality with Machiavelli's 'necessity of the case'. Morgenthau defines his '*relative morality*' (Wrightson 1996) case by case, abstaining from any abiding universal moral standards such as democracy, but deducing from discrete political events and given cultural, economic, social and political circumstances in the international sphere which define the national interest of a state. In this sense, moral acts are all acts in the name of the national interest which best serve state power and nation's survival in a concrete political situation, included the possibility that a statesman can or is required to choose between different political decisions. But, as the cases of Vietnam and Israel show, it is neither right to reduce Morgenthau's realist world view (Weltbild) to the concept of interests defined in terms of power, nor is it right to reduce his understanding of morality in international politics to the sole 'moral principle' of the national interest (as Kaufman and Wrightson did). Morgenthau's ideas and his thinking about morality in international politics stretch *beyond* the national interest.

3.2. Opposing the Vietnam War

Morgenthau was one of the most prominent critics of US involvement in Vietnam, calling for US withdrawal and the end of war.¹⁴ After full-scale military intervention through US combat troops in 1965, he had become a *public critic*, attracting attention through public appearances on radio and television programs. He travelled the country giving speeches at universities, military war colleges, foreign policy clubs, and civic organizations. Morgenthau enjoyed his rising prominent role as an *intellectual dissenter* 'speaking truth to power' (Morgenthau 1966) and arguing against the advocates of war (Morgenthau 1969). According to Kadushin (1974: 56), after Noam Chomsky,

¹⁴ For Morgenthau's opposition against Vietnam War and its consequences see Rafshoon (2001); See (2001); Zambarnardi (2010).

Morgenthau was the second most influential actor in discussing on the Vietnam War within the American intellectual community. More importantly though, Morgenthau was also truly convinced by the role he held as an insurgent. In an unpublished lecture delivered at Columbia University in October 1967, Morgenthau said that it was “impossible for a man dealing in a theoretical and academic manner with politics to remain silent when those great issues are before the public and before the government”¹⁵.

As a consequence of his public action, the Johnson administration monitored his antiwar activities and explicitly tried to discredit him. The success of the administration’s campaign is demonstrated by the fact that Morgenthau lost his function as a policy advisor in the US State Department, and was subsequently denounced by his colleagues and those advocating the war, such as Henry Kissinger, McGeorge Bundy, and Zbigniew Brzezinski, as a communist playing down the Chinese and Soviet threat. Morgenthau’s rationale of consistent opposition against the war is characterized by a range of power-oriented and moral concern.

The Balance of Power-Argument

Two of his main geopolitical arguments in the late 1950s and early 1960s against Kissinger and Bundy were that the security of the US was not threatened by Vietnam or China, and that the vital interest of the US was to foster stability in South East Asia by a *balance of power*-strategy. Whereby, he argued this should be accomplished on the one hand by backing Vietnam politically and militarily, and on the other hand by containing China’s expansionism in the region and Chinese power in Asia, something which would further be made possible through accomplishing the latter. Against the background of his policy advice, Morgenthau was amazed about the imprudent and irrational US foreign policy which only served to weaken the ‘real’ ally and strengthen the ‘real’ rival (Morgenthau 1968a).

¹⁵ Cited according to Rafshoon (2001: 55).

Beyond the balance of power-argument, his general claim against an ideological driven approach in US foreign policy, motivated by a dogmatic anti-communism, and his pragmatic concern regarding the war objectives in Vietnam as a result become clearly obvious.

Moral Concern against Warfare

Nevertheless, we can discern a clear evolution in Morgenthau's writings concerning the war in the late 1960s and early 1970s, which started with an early power-oriented reasoning to a subsequently shifting greater emphasis to the *moral foundations* of American power. Over the course of time, his reflections began to focus on the moral shortcomings of US foreign policy. In his numerous writings concerning the Vietnam War, Morgenthau lodged a moral protest against US involvement. In his volume "Vietnam: Shadow and Substances of Power" (1965a), one of Morgenthau's moral arguments is that the US moral self-image is at stake because of the ruthless warfare of air bombing campaigns of towns and civil institutions, destroying villages and land, and torturing and killing combatants and non-combatants such as prisoners of war and the civil population without discrimination, and because of violating the principles of *Humanitarian International Law* (Morgenthau 1965a: 19/20).

Throughout the course of war, Morgenthau blatantly condemned the escalation of violence. This condemnation stood in direct contradiction with the Johnson administration and, above all, the Nixon administration. Both administrations were ready to escalate the use of force and military involvement in South East Asia. 'Operation Rolling Thunder' after 1965 and the area-wide air bombing of Laos and Cambodia between 1970 and 1973 resulted in millions of Vietnamese, Laotian, and Cambodian victims, wherein most of them being civilians. Between full-scale US military involvement in Vietnam in 1955 and the end of war in 1975, there were roughly three million victims. Having received information about massacres by US combat troops against Vietnamese civil population and prisoners of war, Morgenthau then worried about genocide (Morgenthau 1965b). In his article "We Are Deluding Ourselves

in Vietnam” (1965b), he concludes that the most severe consequence of this kind of warfare would not be political or military but moral:

The brutalization of our armed forces would be a serious matter for any nations, as the example of France has shown. It is intolerable for the United States. For this nation, along among the nations of the world, was created for a notable purpose: to achieve equality in freedom at home, and thereby set an example for the world to emulate. (Morgenthau 1965b)

But this brutalization was contrary to his *normative belief* in the liberal, pluralistic, and democratic American society in which conflicts should be solved quietly and equality and freedom of the people should be guaranteed (Morgenthau 1965a: 19/20). This normative belief was further expressed in his article “The Impotence of American Power” (1963), wherein he argues that the national interests at stake in Vietnam were not of the magnitude to justify the “moral reprobation the United States was incurring throughout the world” by its use of military power (1963: 384). Morgenthau saw America’s conduct in Vietnam as a “betrayal of the nation’s legacy which linked power and moral purpose” (1965a: 20).

The Moral Attractiveness of the United States

Morgenthau’s concern in his articles “U.S. Misadventure in Vietnam” (1968a), “The Intellectual, Political, and Moral Roots of U.S. Failure in Vietnam” (1968b), and “The Decline of the West” (1975) is about the *peculiar moral attractiveness* and the moral traditions of the US in which he believed. As principles concerning the moral attractiveness and integrity of the American society, its economic system and political culture, and its identity and self-image achieved through the centuries since the American Revolution, Morgenthau explicitly refers to equality, freedom, human and minority rights, self-determination, political participation, non-violent political or economic competition, and pluralism on which all citizens can rely. These principles and rights have to be secured and guaranteed by the political, judicial, and public institutions (1960: 3-37, 311-323).

In the case of Vietnam, Morgenthau postulated US withdrawal and placing a civilian government in power in South Vietnam which would negotiate a settlement with North Vietnam and organize free elections without any US participation. Arguing in this way, it is clear that Morgenthau held the idea of national self-determination of the Vietnamese people (1968c). Given the warfare in Vietnam, he warned that America came to “lose much of that peculiar moral attractiveness which throughout its history set it apart from all other nations” (Morgenthau 1968b; 1975a: 516):

No civilized nation can wage such a war without suffering incalculable moral damage. [...] And it is particularly painful for a nation like the United States - founded as a novel experiment in government, morally superior to those that preceded it - which has throughout its history thought itself as performing a uniquely beneficial mission not only for itself but for all mankind. (Morgenthau 1968a: 33/34)

Coinciding with his concern about moral attractiveness and integrity, Morgenthau warned about US foreign policy makers would put the credibility, legitimacy, and prestige of the US in the world at stake (1968a: 29, 34; 1975). In addition, Morgenthau was enraged about the conscious deception of US public by the Johnson and the Nixon administration. Both administrations portrayed the Diem regime as a democratic ally. After a meeting with Diem in Vietnam in 1956, Morgenthau concluded that Diem was not the democratic hero his American supporters claimed, but a petty tyrant (1956; 1965b). Moreover, Morgenthau observed an obvious contradiction between the war objective of establishing an independent and democratic Vietnam versus the massive use of force and support of the authoritarian, and in some lights totalitarian, Diem regime, making the US position implausible and morally untenable (1963: 386; 1965b). As he puts it in a tongue-in-cheek manner, “the champion of the ‘free world’ is protecting the people of South Vietnam from communism by destroying them” (Morgenthau 1968a: 34).

The Purpose of American Politics

In this context, Morgenthau at the same time points out another fundamental problem which substantially puts this moral attractiveness and integrity of the US at stake. He

put the exceptional role of the US into question, because he was convinced that the American society itself was in a *deep crisis*, lacking the realization of moral standards such as equality and freedom. He foresaw the decline of the public realm, denounced the fact that a minority of elites govern the majority of people, and warned *authoritarian and illiberal tendencies* within the government and society in times of racial discrimination, ideological anti-communism (which is called 'McCarthyism'), and economic crises leading to poverty and social inequality (Morgenthau 1960: 43-89, 143-157, 197-292).

Morgenthau was really worried, as he expressed in a letter to Hannah Arendt, of the prevailing political culture and the ruling elites trying to prevent any debate and critical voices from the left about US involvement in Vietnam (Rafshoon 2001). Finally, Morgenthau claimed for demanded a critical reflection about the contemporary domestic crisis. He argued that America's purpose was to recover and to uphold its *exceptional moral stature* as a model of integrity for the rest of the world (1965b: 85; 1968b). He mentioned three tasks the US has to cope with, namely to guarantee equality and freedom for the American people, to restore a meaningful economic and social order, and to face the 'real' challenges in foreign policy, like to cooperate with communist states and the Soviet Union, to establish a free market order, and to deal with questions of foreign aid and justice vis-à-vis the underdeveloped countries in Africa and Asia (Morgenthau 1960: 158-196, 311-323; 1977a). In other words: Morgenthau's postulation was for improving democracy at home, not for promoting democracy abroad.

Morality in Realist Theory

Given prevalent readings in IR literature about Realism as a theory of power politics, Morgenthau's critique of US involvement in Vietnam is amazing. While initially presenting strategic power-oriented and pragmatic arguments against US involvement, and highlighting the national interest which is reduced to American security and maintaining a balance of power in Europe and Asia, Morgenthau was also convinced that the Vietnam War and US military strategy were *immoral*. His moral concerns about

US involvement in Vietnam poses an important question in order to understand his thinking: Does the Vietnam War caused him to *revise* his notion of how national interests should be determined in making foreign policy from a calculation based on purely strategic factors to one that also takes moral factors into account? Or is the “moral attractiveness” of a Western liberal democracy part of his realist thinking from the beginning?

In any case, it might be argued that the moral attractiveness serve the power of a state. Thus, this normative dimension is *in line* with Morgenthau’s realist theory. But in his critique of the Vietnam War, as well as in his request for an Israeli state, there are further legal and moral principles which cannot be linked to pure power considerations.

3.3. Advocating the Israeli State

Morgenthau was one of the most prominent advocates of the Israeli state, and *unlike* with the Vietnam case, he was an intercessor of US involvement in the Middle East. Again he became a visible public persona, attracting attention and calling for advertency in US public opinion through public appearances in the media, and joining academic lobbying groups supporting the Israeli cause. After recognizing a shift in US policy in the Middle East in the 1960s, Morgenthau had criticized US policy and US elites as being anti-Israel and against the Jewish collective, and he also began to offer his counsel to Israeli foreign policy administrators. Again, Morgenthau’s rationale concerning US and Israeli foreign policy in the Middle East in his articles such as “The Threat on Israel’s Security” (1977b) is characterized by a range of geopolitical and power-oriented arguments as well as moral concern.¹⁶

Security Arguments

¹⁶ For a summary of Morgenthau’s criticism of US Middle East Policy see also Friedler (1975).

The starting point of Morgenthau's rationale was his assessment that Israel and its existence were in great danger. Although Israel had won both the Six-Day War and the Yom Kippur War in 1967 and 1973, a fact Mearsheimer and Walt advert to in their views on Israeli defence capabilities, Morgenthau demonstrated intense concern for Israel's *security* and its existence (Morgenthau 1967b; 1973b; 1977b). After the Six-Day War, Morgenthau began to see Israel's position as increasingly bleak and precarious in the face of Soviet support for the Arab neighbour states.

Morgenthau's concern for Israel's security was also influenced by a deep mistrust of Israel's neighbouring Arab governments and leaders, who using oil as a political weapon, put the existence of an Israeli state into question, and aspired to achieve a settlement against Israel and in favour of a Palestinian state (Morgenthau 1971; 1978b; 1978c). Because of this deep mistrust and his threat perception, Morgenthau called for a permanent US naval presence in Haifa. Being convinced that US policy, in the aftermath of both wars, was no longer on the Israeli side because it had set the immediate goal of retreating Israel to its 1967 borders and announced a Palestinian state within Israel, Morgenthau began to counsel the Israeli government to take more independent action from American policy in the Middle East. His accusation against the US administrations under Nixon and Carter, was that both endangered the survival of Israel.

Morgenthau was deeply critical about US Secretary of State Kissinger's shuttle diplomacy between Israel and the Arab states, and he emphatically argued against a Palestinian state (Morgenthau 1975b; 1977c). In an interview with the American Examiner Jewish Week in March 1974, he labelled the peace agreement between Israel and the Arab states, which Kissinger tried to negotiate, a "Munich-style sell out of Israel" and a "policy of appeasement" for the hostile Arab states.¹⁷

Morgenthau's opposition against the establishment of an autonomous Palestinian state in the West Bank was centred around the opinion that the Palestinian issue was analogous to the demands of the Sudeten Germans in the 1930s, and that US

¹⁷ Cited according to Mollov (2002b: 186, 190).

government's aim to act as mediator was analogous to the behaviour of France and Great-Britain face to face with Hitler in 1938 when the 'Munich agreement' had been negotiated. Furthermore, he specifically cautioned against the creation of an 'irredentist Palestinian state' whose goal would in essence be to achieve the destruction of Israel (Morgenthau 1978b). In an interview with Robert Hirschfield in the *City Scope* (a television program in New York City) in February 1979, Morgenthau articulated his pessimistic assessment of the Camp David Agreement for peace between Israel and Egypt, which was reached in the same year as a result of Kissinger's Middle East diplomacy.¹⁸ Morgenthau excoriated Kissinger's balance of power-oriented diplomacy between Israel and its Arab antagonists (a balance of power strategy he *otherwise* evaluated to be prudent and rational, e.g. in the Vietnamese-Chinese case) for putting too much pressure on the Israeli side.

Although he was aware of the justifiable interests and goals of both sides, Morgenthau remained convinced that Arab interests (the return of the Arab refugees to what was formerly Palestine and is now Israel) were fundamentally in opposition to the existence and survival of Israel, and therefore not negotiable. He sided with Israel unequivocally and denounced the notion that Israel was the more responsible side in terms of causing the violent conflict (Morgenthau 1971: 9).

Ideological and Moral Arguments

But Morgenthau's pro-Israeli position was not confined to containing purely strategic power-oriented arguments. One of his ideological arguments concerned the Israeli state and its nature. In a TV discussion in January 1974 with Daniel Berrigan, a Jesuit priest and prominent activist against the Vietnam War, Morgenthau hailed *Israeli democracy* for realizing at least a modicum of justice in a world which by its very nature was evil, whereby for Realists the claim that we exist in an 'evil world', is still valid today.¹⁹

¹⁸ Cited according to Mollov (2002b: 189).

¹⁹ Cited according to Mollov (2002b: 191-193).

Furthermore, in the very same debate Morgenthau went on to also defend the *moral right* of the Israelis to preserve their existence. In doing so, he explicitly emphasized the importance for Israel to win the struggle for the hearts and minds of people in all over the world. It was in this context that Morgenthau then went on to underline in an interview with the Jerusalem post in 1974, the undeniable significance that international, and moreover specifically the US, public opinion would have in terms of the ability of public opinion to shape US foreign policy in a manner to impact the capacity of Israel to survive.²⁰

In interviews in 1971 and 1975, Morgenthau then went on to connect the Jewish struggle for survival with the threats facing all small and weak nations, specifically referring to the Kurds and to Czechoslovakia which had fallen apart after the Munich agreement in September 1938, whereby in this connection he blatantly used a *'life and death' rhetoric* (Morgenthau 1978b).²¹ Against advocates of a Palestinian state in Israel, like for instance Berrigan, Morgenthau reminded his audience of the evils committed against Israel, and more importantly of *Jewish history* and of Jewish struggle for survival throughout the last two millennia. Beyond these arguments, Morgenthau went on to then producing a *legal argument* in the TV discussion with Berrigan which grounded in the right of Israel to use force against its enemies for self-defence according to Article 51 in the UN charter. Finally, Morgenthau supported the Jackson Vanik Amendment to the US Trade Act with the Soviet Union in 1974. This amendment aimed for a human rights initiative to protect the Soviet Jews from repression and persecution. The amendment conditioned the granting of most-favoured nation status to the Soviet Union on the right of emigration for the Soviet Jews.²²

Morgenthau's reasoning concerning Israel, at first glance, seems as if it is terribly against his theoretical background. Given prevalent neo-realist standards advocated by Mearsheimer and Walt (2003), Morgenthau's demand for a special relationship

²⁰ Cited according to Mollov (2002b: 184).

²¹ See also Cooper (1971) and Friedler (1975).

²² Cited according to Kaufman (2006: 35).

between the US and Israel based on strong US military backing and protection for Israel and a strategy of containment and roll-back against the Arab states, also runs *counter* to a neorealist foreign policy theory in the name of clearly defined American security interests defined in terms of a balance of power in the Middle East. Though, what makes the Israeli as well as the Vietnamese case, and his critique on Wilson really particular cases is Morgenthau's critical claim, and his normative belief which ultimately raises the question of the *origin(s)* of his realist thinking.

4. Morgenthau in the German Context

Morgenthau was born in 1904 in Coburg. During and after his studies of law and philosophy in Frankfurt, Munich and Berlin (1923-1928), young Jewish scholar had spent a long time in Frankfurt as Research Associate at University and Rechtsreferendar at the Frankfurter Arbeitsgericht (1929-1932) before he left Germany for Switzerland (1932-1935) and Spain (1935-1937). Not until 1937, he emigrated into the US, where he lived and taught in Kansas City, New York at New School, at Chicago University, and finally in New York again, and became one of the most famous and influential IR scholars.²³ In his German Years, Morgenthau experienced World War I and the failure of Weimar Republic, and he participated in the debates about the role of international law, the reasons for the failure of Weimar democracy, and the prospect of peace within Europe after World War I. Moreover, he was influenced by left-liberal as well as far-right conservative intellectuals such as Hugo Sinzheimer and Carl Schmitt who represented the German *Zeitgeist* of the interwar period, and he was witness of the rise of fascism in Europe.

4.1. How to Read Morgenthau: Context, Denkstile, Denkkollektive

The theoretical argument to read classical texts/authors in the *context* in which they were embedded can be made with reference to German sociologist Karl Mannheim's "Ideology and Utopia" and Ludwik Fleck's "Entstehung und Entwicklung einer wissenschaftlichen Tatsache: Einführung in die Lehre vom Denkstil und Denkkollektiv". Fleck and Mannheim both elaborate on the historical and social *situation* out of which

²³ For the biography of Morgenthau see Frei (2001, 2005).

individually style of thought (*Denkstil*), or thinking of individuals within social groups as a thought collective (*Denkkollektiv*), emerge.

Fleck's and Mannheim's propositions are threefold: first of all, ideas and beliefs of individuals concerning social phenomena cannot be seen as given, or as occurring isolated, and therefore cannot be understood without reference to the political and social context in which individuals are *socialized*. Secondly, academic individuals are speaking the language of their particular in-group such as a scientific community of a particular field (*Diskursumfeld*), e.g. German international lawyers and their discourse about international law, in which they are socialized intellectually. Here, inter-collective communication, and inter-subjective meaning of central categories such as power, law, morality, etc. occur. Spoken with Habermas, individuals share a social and an academic environment (*Lebenswelt*), and they act and think in a communicative way. Thirdly, thinking and communication never occurs without *transformation*. Either the members of a scientific community change their style of thought and discourse because of external influence such as political change. Or an individual switches from one thought collective to another (and sometimes very different) one, as Morgenthau did in 1937 when German international lawyer who was socialized in the European interwar-period emigrated to US and 'became' an American Political Scientist who was socialized in the Cold War from now on. From this sociological point of view, it follows that thought is *always* context-dependent.²⁴

Given Morgenthau's biography and his intellectual career, the thesis of a '*break*' in his thinking from international law to power politics is widely spread in the readings of those IR scholars cited below in the following section who are actually aware of Morgenthau's German context. Though, this reading lacks an accurate portrayal. My thesis in the following section is that there is *continuity* in Morgenthau's thinking about power, law *and* morality.

²⁴ Karl Mannheim (1936), *Ideology and Utopia: An Introduction to the Sociology of Knowledge*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, p.3; Ludwik Fleck (1935), *Entstehung und Entwicklung einer wissenschaftlichen Tatsache. Einführung in die Lehre vom Denkstil und Denkkollektiv*, Basel: Benno Schwabe & Co, xiii-xix, 111 (published as *Genesis and Development of a Scientific Fact*, Chicago: University Press, 1979). For the reference to Mannheim and Fleck, see also Jütersonke (2010: 32/33).

4.2. *The Roots of Realism*

International Law and the Interwar Period in Europe

In Morgenthau's early Weimar ideas, *international law* played a crucial role.²⁵ Young Morgenthau, who was a representative of a liberal, progressive, and to some extent idealistic thinking in Germany of that time, believed devoutly in the *peaceful transformation* of international politics through international law and its power to solve the ongoing disputes and conflicts between states. These disputes and conflicts had occurred after the end of the era of European imperialism and World War I. In other words, Morgenthau believed in international law as a source of peace, or at least as a limitation of crude and ruthless power politics and warfare.

Therefore, Morgenthau was one of the fervid advocates of German Foreign Minister Gustav Stresemann's foreign policy (1923-1929). His first article "Stresemann als Schöpfer der deutschen Völkerrechtspolitik" (published in 1929) isn't cited in the literature on Morgenthau and Realism so far, even though it is Morgenthau's tribute to law. Given the surrounding conditions of the Treaty of Versailles, Stresemann's policy aimed at German-French reconciliation and multilateral cooperation between European powers to secure and to ensure stability and peace within Europe after World War I. But at the same time, Stresemann's policy tended to an end of Germany's isolation and its reputation and accession into the League of Nations as an equal and emancipated European power which overcomes the restrictions of the Treaty of Versailles. In other words, this means that Stresemann's *Völkerrechtspolitik* was characterized by 'liberal', and to some extent 'idealistic', elements of European integration as well as by 'realist' elements of power politics in the name of German national interest, such as preventing a conflict or a possible two-front-war with Poland and France, and achieving a balance of power within Europe. It is exactly that incorporation of agreement and integration by law on the one hand, and 'Realpolitik' on the other hand, which is in accordance with Morgenthau's understanding of a moral and prudent foreign policy he advocated in his "Realist Principles" of his later post-war version of Realism in PAN, or in "In Defense of the National Interest" (1951).

²⁵ Morgenthau (1929a, 1929b, 1933, 1940).

In his doctoral thesis "Die internationale Rechtspflege, ihr Wesen und ihre Grenzen" (also published in 1929) as well as in his Stresemann-article, Morgenthau not only argued in terms of the power of legal norms, but also in terms of an existing normative (as he judged) international order based on equal and sovereign nation states and the logic of a *balance of power system*. According to Morgenthau, against the background of a struggle for power among European states, a balance of power is the precondition of a working peace system based on legal norms. International law, in a sense, is not superior but a *function of politics* used by states should reflect power relations among states in order to work. In other words, the balance of power-idea is something like an absolute term (but by no means the sole) in Morgenthau's thinking *from the beginning* (and by no means an idea which has evolved in the context of World War II or the Cold War), even though older Morgenthau was sceptical whether a balance of power alone was sufficient to maintain peace (1978a: 171-228). Morgenthau's balance of power-idea may have different sources; it may be argued that his idea has evolved in opposition to his teacher Heinrich Triepel and his idea of hegemony.²⁶

Initially, Stresemann's policy was successful. Based on the Treaty of Locarno, which became effective in September 1926, Germany had become member of the League of Nations. Germany and the former wartime enemies Belgium, France, Great-Britain, Italy (both as guarantor powers), Poland, and Czechoslovakia had achieved an agreement about borders in the West and in the East, the demilitarization of the Rhineland, the abdication of Alsace-Lorraine and French occupation, reparations, the principles of non-interventionism and non-violence in European affairs, and about the principle to solve conflicts and disputes within the institutions of the League of Nations, or any other international arbitration. Later, in 1928, Stresemann was one of the mediators who were responsible for the Briand-Kellogg-Pakt (*Kriegsächtungspakt*). But in the long run, the radical conservatives and revisionists in Germany who opposed the treaties of Versailles and Locarno, and who denounced and condemned both treaties as 'Diktatfrieden' (an enforced peace treaty) against Germany's 'real' (as they judged) national interest of rearmament and territorial expansion, had prevailed at the end of the 1920s. *Revisionism* had become a key factor in German foreign policy.

²⁶ Morgenthau was one of Triepel's (1868-1946) students in Berlin. For the idea about hegemony, see Heinrich Triepel (1938), *Die Hegemonie: ein Buch von führenden Staaten*, Stuttgart: Kohlhammer.

Ultimately, Stresemann's Völkerrechtspolitik had failed, leaving a *disenchanted* Morgenthau behind.²⁷

Hugo Sinzheimer, Weimar, and the Failure of a Liberal Project

Morgenthau's understanding of international law was mainly influenced by his Doktorvater, the prominent social democratic left and liberal Frankfurt lawyer Hugo Sinzheimer (1875-1945), who was professor of labour law at Frankfurt University. Sinzheimer was an adherent of a critical and progressive sociology of law. He was an advocate of a transition in Germany which aimed for democratic socialism to overcome the gap between the bourgeoisie and the working class peacefully, and to guarantee *equality, freedom and the right of self-determination and participation* for all citizens within the political, legal and economic system.²⁸ My thesis is that Morgenthau transferred Sinzheimer's ideas about law from the national to the international level. Morgenthau again and again stressed the equality, sovereignty, and the right for self-determination of all nations/states within the international system as moral principles.

After the *failure* of the Weimar Republic, disappointed Morgenthau gave up on his strong belief in international law and Western democracy in his post-war writings²⁹, but *without* abdicating this belief entirely. Morgenthau's later version of Realism is neither without a legal dimension nor anti-liberal. Quite the contrary, Morgenthau *continued* to believe in democratic standards. In "Scientific Man Versus Power Politics" (1946), "The Purpose of American Politics" (1960), and in "The Decline of Democratic Politics" (1962), he works out the political, economic, and social problems liberal western democracies were confronted with (as he judged), and US citizen Morgenthau asked for reforms within American society in which he was socialized since 1937 after his emigration in order to guarantee equality, freedom, and civil rights for all American

²⁷ For Stresemann's foreign policy, the Treaty of Locarno and the Briand-Kellogg-Pakt, and the development within Europe between World War I and II see Cohrs (2007); Wright (2002).

²⁸ For the influence of Hugo Sinzheimer on Morgenthau see Scheuerman (2008; 2009a, b).

²⁹ For this interpretation see also Scheuerman (2008); Williams (2005a, b: 172-192).

people. Furthermore, in the context of the McCarthy-Era and his public opposition against Vietnam War, Morgenthau warned against authoritarian tendencies within American political system and society. The Johnson- and the Nixon-Administration had tried to muzzle Morgenthau and other critical intellectuals who opposed the war and censorship of war reporting in the media.

Morgenthau also expounded the problems of an idealistic and illusive understanding of science, politics, and law as well as the naïve and blind thrust of politicians, academics, and intellectuals in Western democracy which hadn't managed to 'appease' Hitler, and which started to wage war in the name of another ideology. Morgenthau's 'realist' reflections about idealism/liberalism referred to Wilson's foreign policy of democracy promotion as well as to Western believe in progress and human rationality. He put the assumption that modern liberal democracies with the help of technological revolutions are able to solve problems like war and poverty, and to build a peaceful world, into question. Here, the seesaw between Morgenthau's 'liberal' and 'realist' ideas becomes very obvious.³⁰

The "Hidden Dialogue" with Carl Schmitt³¹

Morgenthau was also influenced by far-right conservative lawyer Carl Schmitt who was a representative of a revisionist, authoritarian *Zeitgeist* which had emerged in Germany in the 1920s and 1930s.³² Morgenthau was one of Schmitt's students in

³⁰ For an excellent analyses of „Scientific Man versus Power Politics“ see Scheurman (2007b) who asks whether Morgenthau was actually a Realist? For Morgenthau and the liberal tradition, see Williams (2005a: 93-104). There is another aspect worth to be mentioned here. In the literature about the history of IR discipline, there is a controversial discussion whether there was a “First Debate” among Realists and Idealists in inter-war period (Ashworth 2002, 2011), as suggested by Mearsheimer (2005), or not. My argument is that, even if there was no debate (because “idealism” as a scientific paradigm had not exist) as suggested by Crawford (2006), Schmidt (2002) and Wilson (1998) who speaks about a “realist myth”, Morgenthau himself was engaged in a personal quarrel based on 'realistic' and 'liberal' ideas in politics.

³¹ For the „hidden dialogue“ (Scheurman 1999) with Carl Schmitt, and very different readings and interpretations among these authors about to what extent Schmitt has influenced Morgenthau leading to a controversial debate see Brown (2007); Jütersonke (2006, 2007, 2010); Koskenniemi (2000, 2002); Pichler (1998); Scheurman (1999, 2007a); Williams (2004).

³² For that time period see Amstrup (1978); Honig (1996).

Berlin. It is a commonplace in IR literature about Realism that 'conservative' Morgenthau, like Schmitt, assumed the struggle for power as the essence of politics among human beings and nation states.³³ But in his time in Frankfurt, Morgenthau was *also* engaged in a controversial debate with Franz L. Neumann, who also was Sinzheimer's research assistant and who had received Schmitt's work, and other German lawyers about Schmitt's Staatsrechts- and Verfassungslehre.³⁴

Moreover, and this is much more interesting, even though Jew Morgenthau possessed a commitment to democratic politics and pluralism that Schmitt, who was an opponent of Weimar democracy and an adherent of Nazi ideology, lacked, and, as a consequence, represented a forward-looking political realism rather than Schmitt's reactionary conservatism and later totalitarianism, both shared a particular understanding of morality: the *Jus Publicum Europaeum*.³⁵ Comparing Schmitt's "Der Nomos der Erde im Völkerrecht des Jus Publicum Europaeum" and Morgenthau's "The Twilight of International Morality" (1948b) as Chris Brown did, it becomes obvious that both shared *nostalgia* for the absolutist state system within Europe which had been established by the Westphalian order after 1648. According to Morgenthau and Schmitt, the Jus Publicum Europaeum based on an order of equal and sovereign nation-states. The Monroe Doctrine (1823) served as an interdiction for both the European colonial powers to intervene in the American hemisphere, and the US to intervene in Europe (which Schmitt depicted as "Großraum").

Finally, Morgenthau and Schmitt, who both embraced the new era of secular, modern international law which has displaced the medieval and parochial order within Europe, cautioned against democratic interventionism. Their argument was that the consequences would have been the end of the newly established European order, and

³³ See Frei (2001); Koskenniemi (2000, 2002); Pichler (1998); Scheuerman (1999); Söllner (1987). For the Schmittian understanding of politics see Carl Schmitt (1932), *Der Begriff des Politischen*, München: Duncker & Humblot.

³⁴ See Scheuerman (1994, 1999) who is the only scholar interested in the history of Realism who work out Morgenthau's *Frankfurt Years* systematically so far.

³⁵ See Brown (2007); Scheuerman (2007a). For the Jus Publicum Europaeum see Carl Schmitt (1950), *Der Nomos der Erde im Völkerrecht des Jus Publicum Europaeum*, Köln: Greven.

the beginning of a new era of modern nationalism leading again to a never ending state of 'holy crusades' and 'just wars' against "immoral and just enemy" in the name of democracy. As a further consequence, these wars, which are comparable to the *Kreuzzüge*, are no longer in line with the principles of the Humanitarian International Law ("*Humanitäres Kriegsvölkerrecht*"), which treats states as equal and sovereign subjects of international law all having the right to wage war (*jus ad bellum*) at one's disposal, but which at the same time have to observe the rules of warfare (*jus in bello*).

But again, Morgenthau and Schmitt are to be *distinguished* carefully: whereas the former argues against *any* interventionism and imperialism, the latter asks 'oppressed Germany' to learn a lesson from US imperialism (which according to Schmitt is successful because it is based on international law, and the US can define what is international law), and to accomplish German imperialism *in line with* international law in order to achieve hegemony and to rule Europe.³⁶

4.3. A Lesson Learned? From International Law to Power...

Because of the conclusions Morgenthau had drawn from the failure of Weimar, the rise of the Nazi Regime, the end of the League of Nations and both World Wars, a *transformation* (or turn), but no radical change in his thinking from international law to power politics (as Frei and Koskeniemi suggest³⁷) occurred between the 1930s and 1940s after his emigration into the United States. A *new emphasis* on power becomes obvious, because in Morgenthau's later American ideas which he has developed in the context of the Cold War, the insuperable struggle for power among states and its limitations by a *balance of power*-strategy became the decisive point in his thinking

³⁶ For Schmittian critique on US imperialism see Carl Schmitt (1932/33), 'USA und die völkerrechtlichen Formen des modernen Imperialismus', in *Frieden oder Pazifismus? Arbeiten zum Völkerrecht und zur internationalen Politik* (edited by Günter Maschke 2005), Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, pp. 349-367. For a critical reflection of how to read Schmitt see Koskeniemi (2004).

³⁷ Frei (2001); Koskeniemi (2000, 2002). Both elaborate Morgenthau's "turn" from International Law to International Relations as power politics.

about international politics.³⁸ But, what are the origin(s) of this idea about the centrality of power?

The balance of power-idea which Morgenthau already developed in his Weimar writings as a precondition of international law and a working peace system should be considered against the historical background of the fact that Western allies had favoured a - ultimately abortive - policy of 'appeasement' face to face Hitler *instead* of a balance of power-strategy to contain Nazi Germany. Anyway, the balance of power-idea is an important aspect in Morgenthau's criticism of Wilson's interventionism who, according to Morgenthau, should restore a balance of power within Europe after World War I and withdraw the US from Europe, and Vietnam War. Morgenthau postulated a balance of power-strategy to contain China's rise in South East Asia. Finally, he condemned Kissinger's policy of 'appeasement' face to face with the Arab states putting Israel's existence into question.

But, Morgenthau's later version of Realism cannot be *reduced* to a theory about power politics which can *only* be limited by a balance of power among states (as most of IR literature about Realism want to make us believe). Quite the contrary, Morgenthau also *continued* to believe in international law and morality as limitations of power politics.

4.4. ...and Back to the Roots

Morgenthau's legal and moral arguments which appear in his critique of US foreign policy are part of a *primal* normative dimension in his thinking he never entirely abdicated in his later work. Also in this regard, the German context as the constitutive moment of his thinking becomes quite obvious.

Against Ideology in Foreign Policy

³⁸ See Little (2007).

In his critique of Wilson's democratic interventionism, Morgenthau denounced the belief in American values as superior and therefore universal moral principles for mankind, and he cautioned about any ideology and nationalism leading to war in consequence. According to Morgenthau, universal moral principles such as democracy can serve crusading moralists as a mere pretext for the pursuit of national interests, fulfilling the functions of ideological rationalizations and justifications for bellicose nationalism, use of force, crusades, and war. This is one of numerous reasons why we should rethink Morgenthau today, particularly in view of radical liberal and neoconservative ideas about America's 'national greatness' and 'moral mission' leading to US foreign policy of democracy promotion. Morgenthau's fundamental opposition against ideology as a guiding principle of a state's foreign policy should be reconsidered in the context of *revisionism* and radical *Nazi ideology*. Nazi foreign policy was, among other things, aimed at spreading 'German values' within Europe, and it was legitimized by an ideology of "*Lebensraum im Osten*", anticommunism, and anti-Semitism.

Another aspect in Morgenthau's criticism of Wilson's democratic interventionism is his understanding of *morality* he (despite all differences between both thinkers) shared with Carl Schmitt. This specific understanding of morality as *anti-interventionism* in a sense of the Monroe-Doctrine in order to establish an 'just' and peaceful order of sovereign and equal states who can refer to the right of national *self-determination* in the American and the European hemisphere also becomes obvious in Morgenthau's later critique of US interventionism in Guatemala 1954 and other countries in Central and Latin America (Morgenthau 1967a).

Vietnam War and the Moral Attractiveness of Western Liberal Democracy

In Morgenthau's critique of the Vietnam War, his normative belief in American democracy and pluralism and the *moral attractiveness* of the US, the purpose of America to uphold its exceptional stature as a model of integrity and legitimacy for the rest of the world to emulate, and his warnings concerning authoritarian and even totalitarian tendencies within American society became clear. Morgenthau warned the advocates of war that America came to lose much of his exceptional role because of the justifications of war, warfare, and the way to treat opponents of war. Morgenthau's

very serious concern about *American democracy* can only be understood in light of the experiences he has made in the *Weimar Republic*, and in light of the rise of Nazi Germany. Morgenthau's Realism results from his reflections about the *crisis* and the *failure* of the liberal project in Weimar, and his *Weltbild* can be interpreted as the legacy of a disappointed liberal left intellectual. But, nevertheless, disenchanted Morgenthau who had believed in the reformist power of law to secure equality, welfare, peace and stability in a Western liberal state and in international politics *continued* pertinaciously and impassioned to warn political leaders to put democracy and its liberal values of equality and freedom at stake, or to muzzle political dissenters and critical voices from the left against power politics or war.

Another aspect very worth to be highlighted is Morgenthau's legal critique of ruthless and illegal US warfare against civilian population. In this context, his primal ideas about Humanitarian International Law based on the *jus in bello*-principles codified in the *Haager Landkriegsordnung* Morgenthau mentioned in his early works as well as in his chapter on international law in PAN become very clear.

Israel and the Lessons from the Past

In Morgenthau's rationale in favour of Israel, there are some explicit references to Germany in the 1930s. Mollov attributes Morgenthau's highly moral position towards Israel to his *Jewish identity* (2002b: 173). However, Morgenthau's Jewish identity is only one aspect characterizing his thought.³⁹

Another aspect is Morgenthau's lesson he learned from German history. Morgenthau's rationale against an Israeli-Arab agreement (the Camp David Agreement arranged by US shuttle diplomacy between Israel and the Arab states), and against a Palestinian 'irredentist' state which could endanger the existence of Israel can be traced back to the conclusions he draw from the '*Sudetenkrise*' in the 1930s. Morgenthau's opposition against an autonomous Palestinian state in the West Bank was centred round his opinion that the Palestinian issue was *analogous* to the demands of the

³⁹ Morgenthau himself reflects about „The Tragedy of German-Jewish Liberalism“ (1961). For the role of his Jewish origin and culture see Frei (2001; 2005); Mollov (1996, 2000, 2002a); Söllner (1987).

Sudeten Germans, and the Camp David Agreement was analogous to the “*Münchener Abkommen*”, and Israel’s destiny could become that of Czechoslovakia.

The Sudeten Germans who had lived in Czechoslovakia aimed at to be integrated into the Deutsches Reich, and they legitimized their demand with the principle of national self-determination. The Nazi regime exploited the ethnic as well as national movement of the Sudeten Germans and their demand to legitimate the affiliation of the Sudetenland into the Deutsches Reich in October 1938, and the Nazis claimed this annexation by propaganda and military enforcement. In the context of the *Münchener Abkommen* in September 1938, the Western allies who had been led by the democratic powers France and Great-Britain complied with Hitler’s request (as the US, according to Morgenthau, could do with Arab demands in favour of a Palestinian state, and a right of return for all Palestinian refugees). The Czech delegation had not been invited to the negotiations. As consequence of Western policy of ‘*appeasement*’, which had entailed that Hitler was more and more convinced to be in a very strong and safe position (as the Arab states could conclude from US Middle East Policy which, according to Morgenthau, was obviously pro-Palestinian), Hitler invalidated step by step the Versailles treaty as well as the principles of Stresemann’s policy and the peaceful status quo within Europe (as Arab states as the advocates of the new Palestinian state could do by putting Israeli borders from 1948 and 1967 into question). First of all, Czechoslovakia fell apart as a sovereign nation-state (as Israel, according to Morgenthau, was also in danger), and German troops violated the principle of territorial integrity by marching in into its capital Prague. Later on, the ‘*Hitler-Stalin-Pakt*’ based on German hegemony within Central Europe was negotiated in August 1939, and Hitler started his war of conquest in Europe in September 1939 by German invasion in Poland.

E.H. Carr and Morgenthau both judged Western policy of ‘*appeasement*’ as failure and a political capitulation. The opposition to ‘*appeasement policy*’, besides the balance of power-idea, international law, and a specific understanding of morality, and the warning to pursue an ideologically driven and totalitarian Western policy of democracy promotion leading to interventionism and war, are something like absolute terms in Morgenthau’s realist thinking:

When this book was written in 1947, it summarized an intellectual experience of twenty years. It was an experience of lonely and seemingly ineffectual reflection on the nature of international politics and on the ways by which a false conception of foreign policy, put into practice by the western democracies, led inevitably to the threat and the actuality of totalitarianism and war. When this book was originally written, the false and pernicious conception of foreign policy was still in the ascendancy. This book was indeed, and could be nothing else but, a frontal attack against that conception. (Morgenthau 1954: vii)

This *lesson of the past* shaped Morgenthau's thinking in a very strong and specific way, and he was aware of a contradiction in his rationale. In the case of the Palestinian people, Morgenthau denied the right of national self-determination, a right he otherwise (e.g. in the Vietnam case) claimed for.

The Critical and Normative Dimension in Morgenthau's Weltbild

Against the background of Morgenthau's Germany Years and the experiences he had made in the Weimar Republic, the inter-war period, and the conclusions he draw from Nazi Germany, it becomes clear why power, law and morality all play a crucial role in this thinking about international politics. Also the contradiction between his theory and his policy action is not an 'unresolvable' problem, as suggested by Franke and Herboth. Two arguments can be made to argue why Realists engage in any kind of political activism. First of all, it was Morgenthau's claim to criticize the foreign policies of liberal Western democracies, in particular US foreign policy, and to *caution against war*.

To reflect on international politics in the United States, as we approach the mid-twentieth century, then, is to reflect on the problems which confront American foreign policy in our time. While at all times the promotion of the national interests of the United States as a power among powers has been the main concern of American foreign policy, in the age of two worlds and a total war the preservation of peace has become the prime concern of all nations. (Morgenthau 1948a: 8)

Secondly, Morgenthau was convinced about the *political function of a theory* to deal with dangerous developments in international politics and the foreign policies of states (as he judged), i.e. ideologies and political moralism leading to bellicose nationalism and warfare (1962: 60/61). And he was also convinced to call a spade by spade if authoritarian or even totalitarian tendencies occurred within American democracy (as he judged), like during the McCarthy area in the 1950s and 1960s. Against this background, the role Morgenthau played as an intellectual dissenter, especially during the Vietnam War, becomes quite plausible.⁴⁰

5. Conclusion

The main argument of this paper is twofold: Morgenthau's complex realist thinking about power, international law, morality, and the purpose of Western liberal democracies is characterized by a conservative and rationalist bias as well as liberal and progressive (to some extent idealistic) ideas. In either case, there is an entrenched and primal critical and normative dimension in his thinking which he developed in his early Weimar writings during the 1920s, and which he *never entirely abdicated* in his later 'American' version of post-war Realism. Thus, '*Morgenthau's Paradox*' follows from the *interplay* between his early Weimar and his later American ideas. In other words, this means that the contradictions in his thought are an *inherent part* of his political philosophy. Morgenthau's realist thinking is a kind of morally informed understanding of *prudence (tugendhafte Klugheitslehre)*, and his complete works (*Gesamtwerk*) is characterized by *continuity* rather than a 'break' after World War II (as suggested in prevalent readings about Morgenthau).

In order to deal with Morgenthau's 'paradoxical' and complex thinking it is required to establish the *roots* which spawned the thoughts in his work. Morgenthau was socialized in a specific historical and political context, and by a liberal as well as a conservative *Zeitgeist* in Germany of that time which was represented by various intellectuals such as Sinzheimer and Schmitt who influenced and shaped Morgenthau's style of thought

⁴⁰ For the political function of theory see also Morgenthau (1995). Bain (2000) also argues that Morgenthau believed in theory as practice, and that Morgenthau's Realism is an authentic moral voice in the discourse of US foreign policy which emphasizes the importance of political judgement.

(*Denkstil*). Furthermore, Morgenthau has drawn his conclusions from the failure of the Weimar Republic, inter-war period (which Carr has called the “Twenty Years’ Crisis”), totalitarianism, and the rise of fascism and the Nazi regime. *Hence*, Morgenthau’s world view (*Weltbild*) can *only* be truly understood if these time period, and his personal experiences (*Erfahrungshintergrund*), are put into the analysis. If we truly want to understand the genesis and trajectory of Morgenthau’s thought, it becomes of most necessity to incorporate and to explore this time period of his life. Therefore, further research should focus on Morgenthau’s *German Years*. As Ole Waever (1997) reminds us, *introducing persons* and their *ideas* instead of paradigms, and tracing their ideas back to the context in which they first were spelled out, is what we should do if we want to *understand* what Realism is *actually* about, and the history of our discipline IR.

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