

Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace [3rd Edition]

By Hans J. Morgenthau

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Morgenthau seeks to develop a comprehensive theory of international politics, which he terms political realism. In contrast to idealism (which assumes the "essential goodness and infinite malleability of human nature and the ability of politics to live up to moral standards), realism assumes that the world is composed of opposing interests and conflict among them is inevitable. Realism is fundamentally concerned with power rather than morality or material interests. M. includes strong assumptions about human nature - humans are not naturally good and conflict is the natural outcome of the search for power, not of misunderstanding. Six Principles of Political Realism: (1) Politics is governed by objective laws that have their roots in human nature. This means it is possible to develop a theory that reflects these laws and to differentiate between truth and opinion. We can "put ourselves in the position of a statesman" and predict what he should rationally do. (2) Interest is defined in terms of power. This sets politics apart from other spheres of action, such as economics (interest defined in terms of wealth). Because we can assume a definition of interest, we do not have to concern ourselves with questions of "motives, preferences, and intellectual and moral qualities of successive statesmen." Nonetheless, M. later says that intellectual capability can affect a statesman's ability to comprehend the essentials of foreign policy and translate them into political action. Not all foreign policies will follow the rational course predicted by realism, due to personal weaknesses and collective irrationality - wrong ideas that have become popularly accepted, despite reality. M. makes normative claims, too - "rational foreign policy" is "good foreign policy"...

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