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**Disenchantment and Re-Enchantment**

**MIHAELA NEACSU**



# Hans J. Morgenthau's Theory of International Relations

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# **Hans J. Morgenthau's Theory of International Relations**

**Disenchantment and Re-Enchantment**

Mihaela Neacsu

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*To the memory of my father*

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# 1

## Introduction: Context and Assumptions

In the introductory part of one of his best-known essays the political philosopher Leo Strauss asserts, while tackling the issue of what he calls ‘the crisis of modernity’, ‘that such a crisis exists is now obvious to the meanest capacities’ (Strauss in Gildin, 1975, p. 81). At the time of putting this thought to paper, Strauss was telling the academic world nothing new: in emphasising that ‘modern western man no longer knows what he wants’, that he ‘no longer believes that he can know what is good and bad, what is right and wrong’ (Strauss in Gildin, 1975, p. 81), Strauss echoed some of the pessimistic assessments regarding central developments within modernity, which had been formulated and reflected on since the nineteenth century. Moreover, Strauss echoed many voices within his own generation, voices of witnesses to the horrors of World War II, whose life experiences had made them agree with the philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche: God is dead, and the world is in crisis.

This book argues that International Relations (IR) scholar Hans J. Morgenthau – a colleague of Strauss at the University of Chicago, and also a witness of the rise of the Nazi Party in Germany – was one of the voices who expressed the aforementioned critique of modernity and incorporated it into his works. It intends to portray Morgenthau as a scholar interested in discussing topics such as the status of truth and the legitimacy of universal values, much discussed in the aftermath of the ‘death of God’, which to Morgenthau represents the defining moment for his political theory. As will be shown in this book, the ‘death of God’ constitutes an interpretation of the times which Morgenthau adopts from Nietzsche, and which he sees as the collapse of a supranational

ethics 'composed of Christian, cosmopolitan, and humanitarian elements' (Morgenthau, 1967, p. 244).

The central goal of this book is to show that in Morgenthau's work issues such as the unpredictabilities of human life, the individual's longing for security and certainty, and his feeling of 'homesickness' (Connolly, 1988, p. 137), are constituted within an overarching theme which preoccupied Morgenthau all his life: the quest for 'meaning'. At present is there a 'God', that is a 'meaning generator', in the international realm? What events caused his 'death', and what are the implications of such an event? What do we find in God's place? How can we overcome this 'death'? In the present interpretation, these are the questions which can be fruitfully explored in relation to Morgenthau's interest in philosophy as a realm from which he expected help in his 'quest for the meaning of human existence' (Morgenthau, 1978, p. 63).

In the interpretation put forward here Morgenthau implies that the 'death of God' makes the creation of meaning central to man, and that the godless world man now inhabits grants him opportunities and stimulating conditions for the unfolding of his creative capacities in this regard, but it also encompasses traps. Furthermore, the meaning of existence and its interpretation, the credibility of its long-established values, the individuals' 'will to meaning', and their relevant creative potential – all form a scholarly concern which, as will become clear in the book, Morgenthau shares with his intellectual mentors, Friedrich Nietzsche and Max Weber. This is a positive and productive reading of Morgenthau, its innovative character stemming from the discussion of the following: the role of Nietzsche and Weber in the articulation of Morgenthau's perspective; his interpretation of his mentors' diagnosis of the 'death of God'; the centrality of the topic of meaning in Morgenthau's theory; the subsequent interpretation by Morgenthau of power as meaning imposition and as an interrelational concept; his examination of the disenchantment of human life and of politics in particular; his vision of man as the source of both destruction and transcendence; his concept of the creative, responsible and thoughtful leader, who represents the constructive force behind the re-enchantment of politics.

This book does not intend to examine Morgenthau's concept of the national interest in detail, or the interpretation of power in materialistic terms, both of which have been analysed by various scholars elsewhere. Similarly, it does not take up the issue of ideology, which in

the present interpretation is endowed by Morgenthau with a different meaning from that of power as meaning imposition. Instead, it is interested more in addressing Morgenthau's concept of power, and while doing this it points to his interpretation of power as meaning imposition as one which echoes views commonly associated with postmodern IR thinking. Without claiming that Morgenthau was a postmodern, this reading nevertheless points to the commonalities of approach between Morgenthau and postmodern IR strands of thinking, and depicts the significance of the Nietzschean and Weberian reading experiences in the articulation of Morgenthau's perspective, and in his discussion of meaning in particular. As will be shown below, postmodernism opened up the realist theory to reinterpretations, and emphasised the plurality of truths, meanings and perspectives and the historicity of human existence in a way to which Morgenthau himself was no stranger.

In addition to the detailed reading of relevant secondary literature, this reinterpretation benefits from the scrutiny of both Morgenthau's published writings and the full archive of his manuscripts and type-scripts, held by the US Library of Congress. The Morgenthau archive contains over 80,000 items, which make up almost 200 boxes. It comprises papers written by Morgenthau both in Europe and the US, and it covers unpublished lectures, drafts of published work, personal notes and diaries, newspaper clippings and an extensive intellectual correspondence. The archive is useful in illuminating further Morgenthau's arguments made in published writings and represents a valuable source of information, which helps one gain an in-depth understanding of Morgenthau's theory.

In order to better understand this discussion of Morgenthau's scholarly contribution, this chapter provides an elucidation of two terms which are crucial to the book: 'modernity' and 'postmodernity'. Following the interpretation provided by Rengger (1995), the next section portrays modernity as carrying two broad senses: 'modernity as mood' (the sense which permeates Morgenthau's thinking), and 'modernity as socio-cultural form' (Rengger, 1995, p. 39). As is shown below, the present reading understands postmodernity to be a mood within modernity, 'a reaction to or perhaps a dissolution of modern moods and intellectual categories' (Rengger, 1995, p. 200). In setting up the background for the present interpretation, the first section also draws on the work undertaken by Toulmin, Lyotard and Bauman, without however departing from Rengger's approach, which is useful

in this context because it conveys an image of postmodernity circumscribed within modernity which fits best with Morgenthau's critical attitude. While performing his critique of modernity as a mood, Morgenthau nevertheless places himself within modernity's soil of certainty, and he still longs for metaphysical foundations despite being critical of the human individual's need for security and certainty which he sees as expressions of foundationalism.

The chapter further provides an overview of previous readings of Morgenthau's account, showing their strengths and weaknesses and also their relevance to the present interpretation, and also reveals some of the central claims made in this work that are summarised in the last section. Chapter 2 examines the intellectual roots of Morgenthau's approach, pointing to certain readings or encounters, especially Friedrich Nietzsche and Max Weber, which influenced his formulations. Chapter 3 explores Morgenthau's diagnosis of the times – which according to the present interpretation mirrors similar issues addressed by Nietzsche and Weber – and shows that starting from the position of 'God's death', Morgenthau follows Nietzsche's and Weber's views regarding human beings' increased prospects for affirmation as one of the consequences of this 'death'. Here the book focuses on Morgenthau's concept of 'power' and interprets it as meaning imposition.

Chapter 4 points to a certain kind of relativism and perspectivism which in Morgenthau's view characterise the realm of politics. The chapter once again focuses on the analysis of power as meaning imposition while also introducing the concepts of the disenchantment of politics and of the responsible, superior political agent. Chapter 5 is devoted to the analysis of Morgenthau's concepts of universality, tradition and superior leadership, and shows that Morgenthau's views pave the way to a sophisticated account of leadership which retains much of the Nietzschean and Weberian ideas of the *Übermensch* and the responsible political hero respectively. This view is reinforced in Chapter 6, which restates and re-emphasises the relevance of Morgenthau's writings to the modernity/postmodernity dichotomy in IR.

### **On modernity and postmodernity in international relations**

According to Rengger (1995), modernity understood as a mood is an epoch which, he argues borrowing from Connolly, carries 'no well-defined beginning or end' (Connolly, 1988, p. 2; see also Rengger,

1995, p. 41), and which has 'more to do with the growing dominance of certain ways of thinking and certain sets of assumptions than it does with discrete historical periods' (Rengger, 1995, p. 174). As Rengger puts it, we can find this sense of modernity in many different historical periods, although 'unquestionably it has been given a particularly influential elaboration over the last couple of hundred years' (Rengger, 1995, p. 175). Rengger quotes Bernstein, who borrowing a phrase from Heidegger, calls modernity a *Stimmung*, a mood which is 'amorphous, protean and shifting but which nevertheless asserts a powerful influence on the ways in which we think, act and experience' (Bernstein quoted in Rengger, 1995, p. 41).

While these considerations point to modernity as a philosophical question, Rengger's second sense of modernity – as socio-cultural form – pictures it as raising sociological issues, and it echoes the 'institutional, social and economic nature of modernity' (Rengger, 1995, p. 41). In this latter sense, according to Rengger, modernity is 'much more obviously tied to a time and a place' (Rengger, 1995, p. 41), and it denotes '*the structure of modern life rather than a sense of it as a response within/to the structure of modern life*' (Rengger, 1995, p. 41, emphasis in the original). Rengger makes a strong case that modernity as a socio-cultural form must be seen as a complex matrix of forces, 'cultural ones such as habits, and biological or ethnographic ones as well as material ones such as economic and social structures' (Rengger, 1995, p. 175). In Rengger's view, 'the conditions of the last two hundred years (in terms of the economic and social structures that we usually identify as distinctively modern) have been both encouraged by and supportive of those elements of modernity as mood that have been most obviously criticized by the postmoderns and by the more reflective moderns in the modernity debate' (Rengger, 1995, p. 175). As noticed earlier, Rengger is quick to emphasise that these two senses of modernity, although often treated separately by scholars, should nevertheless be thought of in connection with each other, as two sides of a complex concept:

How and in what manner we understand 'modernity as mood' will in part depend on how we see the relations between the ontological, advocacy and conditional elements of modern social life, and thus the relation between modernity as mood and modernity as socio-cultural form.

(Rengger, 1995, p. 115)



Coming back to the interpretation of modernity as mood in more detail, in order to further illuminate this understanding of modernity, the present book draws on Toulmin's seminal contribution *Cosmopolis: The Hidden Agenda of Modernity* (1990). The perpetuation of grand, universal narratives, and its so-called 'religion of rationality' (Toulmin, 1990, p. 176) – embodied in a series of assumptions regarding humans' rational capacities, and the generalised application of methods derived from the natural sciences – are the features of modernity which prove to be most important to Toulmin. At the beginning of *Cosmopolis* he points to the debates which surround the issue of devising an all-encompassing definition of 'modernity' (i.e. 'modernity as mood', in Rengger's interpretation). Nevertheless, he is quick to add that throughout the current controversy, the arguments

rest on shared assumptions about rationality. All parties to the debate agree that the self-styled "new philosophers" of the 17th century were responsible for new ways of thinking about nature and society. They committed the modern world to thinking about nature in a new and "scientific way", and to use more "rational" methods to deal with the problems of human life and society. Their work was therefore a turning point in European history, and deserves to be marked off as the true starting point of Modernity. (Toulmin, 1990, pp. 9–10)

The foundation of what Toulmin calls "the framework of Modernity" (Toulmin, 1990, p. 108) is made up of a central belief in, and trusting of, man's reason, of the rational capacities which are present in all human beings, and in the positive outcomes of using them, as serving the general progress of humankind. Thinking in terms of a universal theory was as common in the seventeenth century as it is today: 'an overall framework of ideas about humanity and nature, rational mind and causal matter' (Toulmin, 1990, p. 107) were 'rarely called in question' (Toulmin, 1990, p. 108). They 'were spoken of as "allowed by all men", or "standing to reason", and they were seen as needing no further justification than that' (Toulmin, 1990, p. 108). Reason is the guide in the discovery and application of universally valid principles in sciences thought of as forming a homogeneous area of research, with similar methods being applied in all domains, no matter the disciplines' particularities and variety. Following the line of thinking

inaugurated by Descartes, modern philosophy shows an enduring concern for the ‘deciphering’ of the processes of reasoning, granting them the status of human characteristics universal in scope. Toulmin makes a convincing argument that if we contrast this attitude of modern thinkers with that of humanists like Montaigne, we notice a shift ‘from a style of philosophy that keeps equally in view issues of local, timebound practice, and universal, timeless theory, to one that accepts matters of universal, timeless theory as being entitled to an exclusive place on the agenda of “philosophy”’ (Toulmin, 1990, p. 24). In contrast to previous discussions of clearly practical issues, and to the humanists’ ‘respect for complexity and diversity’ (Toulmin, 1990, p. 28), from 1600 on most philosophers have been committed to questions of abstract, universal theory (Toulmin, 1990, p. 24). From 1630 on, the focus of philosophical inquiries ‘has ignored the particular, concrete, timely and local details of everyday human affairs: instead, it has shifted to a higher, stratospheric plane, on which nature and ethics conform to abstract, timeless, general, and universal theories’ (Toulmin, 1990, p. 35). From the Oral to the Written, from the Particular to the Universal, from the Local to the General, and from the Timely to the Timeless – these are, more precisely, the four main shifts which characterise the advent of modernity (Toulmin, 1990, pp. 30–5). A process of secularisation unfolds, one in which God comes down to earth and is interpreted under the roof of modernity’s central concern for singularity. As Bauman argues convincingly,

‘God’ stands for the idea of the ‘one and only’, for the ‘thou shalt have no other gods before me’ idea in all its countless renditions and costumes: of *Ein Volk, ein Reich, ein Fuhrer*, of one party, one verdict of history, one line of progress, one way of being human, one (scientific) ideology, one true meaning, one proper philosophy. In all such cases ‘one and only’ conveys the one and only message: the right to the monopoly of power for some, the duty of total obedience for others.

(Bauman, 1997, p. 201)

This quotation links the discussion of ‘modernity’ with that regarding ‘postmodernity’ which makes up the remainder of this section. For almost two centuries, modernity has proved not only to be a settled framework, but also one which has nurtured debates and reflections

on the fate of man and universality, on the historicity of meaning and the demise of certainty. Nietzsche's verdict – 'God is dead' – stands as one emblematic manifestation of modernity's critical self-awareness. Modernity's employment of grand narratives and their contingency, difference, insecurity, uncertainty, subjectivity, lack of credibility – from nineteenth century's Romantics to contemporary proponents of the idea that we now live in 'postmodernity', these issues have surfaced within modernity. Today, its questioning is as actual as it was years ago, for Nietzsche or Weber, for Heidegger, Adorno or Strauss. Moreover, this questioning of modernity has intensified in the last three decades, with theorists (see Lyotard, 1984; Rengger, 1995; Bauman, 1997) talking about the earlier mentioned entrance into postmodernity.

This book employs the interpretation of postmodernity mentioned above: the postmodern mood is a 'mood *within modernity*' (Rengger, 1995, p. 200, emphasis in the original), not only critical of modernity, but also constructive by virtue of its reflectivity. As Bauman puts it, postmodernity may be interpreted as 'fully developed modernity', 'modernity conscious of its true nature', taking 'a full measure of the anticipated consequences of its historical work' (Bauman quoted in Rengger, 1995, p. 203), the most conspicuous features of the 'post-modern condition' being 'institutionalized pluralism, variety, contingency and ambivalence' (Bauman quoted in Rengger, 1995, p. 203). Showing how these concepts arise in Morgenthau's work, how they are approached and what they mean in Morgenthau's theory will make up an important part of this book.

A detailed interpretation of the postmodern condition which is important in the context of this discussion is advanced by Lyotard, for whom the postmodern condition is a condition of knowledge, as it is manifested 'in the most highly developed societies' (Lyotard, 1984, p. xxiii). In Lyotard's view, a modern science is one which 'legitimizes itself with reference to a metadiscourse', making 'an explicit appeal to some grand narrative, such as the dialectics of Spirit, the hermeneutics of meaning, the emancipation of the rational or working subject, or the creation of wealth' (Lyotard, 1984, p. xxiii). From this perspective, and 'simplifying to the extreme', as acknowledged by Lyotard, postmodernism is defined as 'incredulity toward metanarratives' (Lyotard, 1984, p. xxiv), that is, toward the overarching totalities – the one and only God, in all His embodiments – which modernity has encouraged. 'Let us wage a war on totality' (Lyotard, 1984, p. 82),

we are thus told. As Lyotard argues, the metanarrative apparatus of legitimation becomes obsolete, and to this obsolescence corresponds 'the crisis of metaphysical philosophy and of the university institution which in the past relied on it', whose consequences cut deep: the narrative function 'is losing its functors, its great hero, its great dangers, its great voyages, its great goal' (Lyotard, 1984, p. xxiv). Echoing Bauman's assessment, Lyotard emphasises postmodernity's respect for contingency and heterogeneity, and contrasts it with modernity's propensity for certainty and homogeneity. In Lyotard's assessment, postmodern knowledge 'refines our sensitivity to differences and reinforces our ability to tolerate the incommensurable' (Lyotard, 1984, p. xxv).

The proponents of postmodern assumptions argue that, in the aftermath of God's death, there is no way that we can talk about an epistemological and moral unity of humankind, about universal principles that men can arrive at with the use of their reason. We are free to interpret everything, to be critical and reflective – let us remember that it was Nietzsche's Zarathustra who wanted to teach man 'no longer to bury one's head in the sand of heavenly things, but to bear it freely, an earthly head, which creates a meaning for the earth' (Nietzsche in Kaufmann, 1954, p. 144). There is no one single 'reality' but a multiplicity of interpretations, no 'truth' but oceans of perspectives. These times offer the individuals conditions for the fuller expression of their potentialities, and the multiplicity of surfacing meanings and interpretations allows for more creative developments than ever before.

However, as some scholars have pointed out, this liberation from the 'one and only' God of modernity comes at a price: the loss of certainty and security. As Bauman argues, while there is an 'ever growing number of postmodern men and women' who 'find the open-endedness of their situation attractive enough to outweigh the anguish of uncertainty', and who keep options 'open to all fixity of commitment' (Bauman, 1997, p. 13), nevertheless, many are still bewildered by 'the paucity of sense, porousness of borders, inconsistency of sequences, capriciousness of logic and frailty of authorities' (Bauman, 1997, p. 124), and who crave for security and certainty. For them, modernity's evolving into postmodernity, and the latter's gifts – increased prospects for action, for creativity – are less valuable than the modern way of life, with all its embodiments. Security and freedom 'are two equally precious and coveted values which could be better or worse balanced, but hardly ever fully reconciled and without friction'

(Bauman, 2001, pp. 4–5), and this gives birth to postmodern discontents ‘born of freedom rather than of oppression’: these are ‘the discontents, pains and anxieties typical of the postmodern world’ which come from the kind of society ‘which offers ever more individual freedom at the price of ever less security’ (Bauman, 1997, p. 124). As the following chapters show, the problematique of certainty and security is of critical importance to Morgenthau, and he returns to this topic throughout his career, pointing to man’s longing for security and certainty as to a metaphysical disposition which intensifies after the demise of universal values.

The above outline of the meaning of ‘modernity’ and ‘postmodernity’ is useful for clarifying the general context which informs the present discussion of Morgenthau’s concepts of the death of God, meaning, power as meaning imposition, disenchantment and superior leadership. In what follows, this section points to modernity and postmodernity in IR, and to the moderns and postmoderns of this field and their core assumptions.

As George argues convincingly, from its disciplinary beginnings following the end of World War I, the IR discursive tradition ‘has been framed in modernist terms’ (George, 1994, p. 77). From the liberal embracing of the concept of an international community united in its rational capacities, in its allegiance to the rule of law, and in its desire to follow the path of progress for the benefit of everyone, to the realist emphasis on a universal anarchy, and a generalised struggle for power, and also the ‘unity of science’ thesis, manifesting itself during the ‘behavioralist revolution’, the mainstream argument in IR bears the marks of modernity, and to George the modernist legacy in IR ‘is represented in the way the discipline has read and interpreted its “history” and framed its “philosophical” stances’ (George, 1994, p. 70).

Banks contends that a major characteristic of the IR historical narrative is its particular reading of a ‘*single body of thought*, incorporating both the pre-modern work of classical Greece and the middle ages, and also writings from the 1648–1914 period’ (Banks quoted in George, 1994, p. 71, emphasis in the original), interpreted within the framework of some main traditions which, despite their substantive differences, have one thing in common: a typically modern desire to concentrate their assumptions within an all-encompassing theory framed in universalist terms. In George’s assessment logocentrism is

'the dominant structural theme, as history is reduced to the incantations across the time, culture, and language of those whose eternal wisdom corresponds with that which is universally and foundationally real' (George, 1994, pp. 70–1). As argued further by George, in IR 'great texts and great men punctuate a meaning script set, unproblematically, in dualized and dichotomized terms', and textually IR 'continues to be characterized by a crude essentialism centered on a cast of caricatured historical figures' (George, 1994, p. 71). IR appears as a homogenized field of knowledge, springing from homogeneous traditions, in which certain 'great texts' of Western philosophy 'are accorded a meaning that corresponds with the real world, while others are marginalized or dismissed altogether using logocentric strategies of exclusion' (George, 1994, p. 71).

In IR modernity as a mood manifests itself in the images of the world constructed and perpetuated by various theorists, which make up the main traditions present in this field – those of realism and liberal internationalism. Taking the realist family of theories as an example, the modern way of analysing in terms of the universal, of totalities and oppositions, the attempt to discover an 'essence', an Archimedean point or a foundation, is obvious to some scholars: in George's assessment, 'a positivist-Realist approach represents an anachronistic residue of the European Enlightenment and, in general, mainstream Western philosophy, which continues the futile quest for a grand (non)theory of existence beyond specific time, space, and political purpose' (George, 1994, p. 12). This is a world with a concrete existence, comprehensible, far from perfect, yet hardly changeable: the real world that is 'immediately "there", around us and disclosed to us by sensory information' (George, 1994, p. 11). The world of international politics is constituted by states, which act in an anarchical environment, and adopt instrumental rational policies in their pursuit of power, relying on the use of force, or on the threat to use force, in order to protect their interests. Here we encounter a picture constructed around a logic of contrasts, which opposes 'war' and 'peace', 'bad' and 'good', 'anarchy' and 'hierarchy', enflamed 'struggle for power' and cold-blooded 'rationality'. For realists, this representation of the international realm is universally valid and, as noted earlier, this is how things really 'are', and how they happen. The realist metanarrative is based on a series of universal concepts, such as: human nature, carrying within it a universal lust for power, structure (in the works of structural realist

Kenneth Waltz), competition, anarchy, war proneness etc. Such a reading of realism is dismissed as overly simplistic in this book, which provides an interpretation of Morgenthau that points to the richness and uniqueness of his thought, making clear that the above reading does not do justice to Morgenthau's theory and its specificities, and overlooks its strong normative aspects.

In a time when many realists carried on with their work informed by a concern with power and balance of power, structure, anarchy etc., others started to pursue a novel task: a re-evaluation of IR. They disassembled the pieces of the old interpretation of realism and of its 'great men' and 'great texts'. In this way, writings belonging to theorists who are thought of as predecessors (Thucydides, Machiavelli, Hobbes) or more recent proponents of realism (E. H. Carr, Morgenthau, Kennan) have been given new opportunities to 'speak out' by researchers who consider themselves to be 'dissidents'. Postmodernism in IR gained its strength to speak with a strong voice in 1989–90, years which witnessed the printing of several breakthrough contributions (Der Derian and Shapiro, 1989, *International Studies Quarterly* special issue, September 1990), many of which supported a reinterpretation of central realist thinkers, and of the realist tradition more broadly. In a similar manner, this book argues that the above picture of realism built around a few concepts and a dominant interpretation is poor at capturing the subtleties and originality of realist thinkers. This reading intends to open up the thinking space by examining Morgenthau's work in greater detail, and by pointing to its sophisticated foundational normative and epistemological elements.

The hallmarks to which the IR postmoderns draw attention are the ambiguity and uncertainty of identity, and the ambivalence and plurality of meanings (see Ashley and Walker in *International Studies Quarterly*, 1990, esp. p. 263). As Ashley argues, modern discourse imposes upon history a narrative structure, namely a representation that 'arrests ambiguity and controls the proliferation of meaning by imposing a standard and standpoint of interpretation that is taken to be fixed and independent of the time it represents' (Ashley in Der Derian and Shapiro, 1989, p. 263). In contrast to the modern discourse, the IR postmoderns/'dissidents' celebrate 'difference, not identity', 'the questioning and transgression of limits, not the assertion of boundaries and frameworks', and show 'a readiness to question how meaning and order are imposed, not the search for a source of meaning and

order already in place' (Ashley and Walker in *International Studies Quarterly*, 1990, p. 265). They celebrate 'the unrelenting and meticulous analysis of the workings of power in modern global life, not the longing for a sovereign figure (be it man, God, nation, state, paradigm, or research program) that promises a deliverance from power', and 'the struggle for freedom, not a religious desire to produce some territorial domicile of self-evident being that men of innocent faith can call home' (Ashley and Walker in *International Studies Quarterly*, 1990, p. 265). They focus on human life's contingencies and enigmas, and do not take modernity's appeal to totalities for granted. In their important contribution to the discussion regarding modernity and postmodernity in IR, Ashley and Walker point to the 'dissident' works as showing a readiness

[t]o regard every historical figuration of sovereign presence – be it God, nature, dynasty, citizen, nation, history, modernity, the West, the market's impartial spectator, reason, science, paradigm, tradition, man of faith in the possibility of universal human community, common sense, or any other – as precisely a question, a problem, a contingent political effect whose production, variations, and possible undoing merit the most rigorous analysis.

(Ashley and Walker in *International Studies Quarterly*, 1990, p. 368)

Closely related to this topic, the IR postmoderns bring into discussion the issue of the 'crisis of representation': they argue that there is 'no fixed and indubitable presence of an external object to which words, as re-presentations, might be referred, because the active subjectivity that must be absent if an object is to be purely objective cannot be excluded', and as a result, 'the very possibility of truth is put in doubt' (Ashley and Walker in *International Studies Quarterly*, 1990, p. 378). The IR field is now opened up to a multiplicity of re-evaluations. No singular truth or interpretation should prevail. No singular tradition should monopolise the theorists' debates. No endeavour should be directed at making events 'fit' into old straitjackets. Within a world of dialogue, no voice should claim supremacy.

Revisionist IR scholars are interested in exploring the tensions which, they believe, exist within the supposedly unified IR traditions. Taking into account the wealth of attention devoted to the examination of



the realist theories, it is not surprising that the exploration of the inner tensions, and the provision of challenging reinterpretations of this tradition's key texts, have been of central concern. In *Post-Realism: The Rhetorical Turn in International Relations* (Beer and Hariman, 1996) for example, scholars reread classical realists such as Kissinger, Kennan, Niebuhr, Carr, Wight and Morgenthau, and introduce genealogy, semiology, and dromology into the literature, as 'new deconstructive *and* antidiplomatic strategies to reinterpret realism' (Der Derian in Beer and Hariman, 1996, p. 280, emphasis in the original). The school made up of these approaches 'interprets realism as an ongoing discursive struggle that cuts across the traditional theory-practice, idealist-realist, and other synchronic and scholastic antinomies of world politics', and 'gives notice of how realism in its universalist philosophical form and particularist state application has figuratively *and* literally helped to constitute the discordant world it purports to describe' (Der Derian in Beer and Hariman, 1996, p. 281, emphasis in the original). As Der Derian maintains further, the scholars of this school 'do not seek to repudiate realism: they seek instead to dismantle a variety of epistemic privileges by which one form of realism dominates contesting forms' (Der Derian in Beer and Hariman, 1996, p. 281).

Meanwhile, in Walker's *Inside/Outside: International Relations as Political Theory* (Walker, 1993), a much older supposed advocate of realism such as Machiavelli 'speaks' in a way which is very different from the standard interpretation of his work. Yet in a provocative article published in 1997, Bleiker focuses on the 'methodological dilemmas' that emerge at the core of these dissident approaches, and argues that alternative approaches to IR 'must operate simultaneously at various levels to be successful in melting further the ice layers of realist hegemony' (Bleiker, 1997, p. 58). The article ingeniously explores 'ways through which genealogical critique can be *supplemented* with a process of *forgetting the object of critique*, of theorizing world politics without being constrained by agendas, issues, and terminologies that are preset by orthodox debates' (Bleiker, 1997, p. 58, emphasis in the original). In Bleiker's view, 'by articulating critique in relation to arguments advanced by orthodox IR theory, the impact of critical voices remains confined within the larger discursive boundaries that were established through the initial framing of debates' (Bleiker, 1997, p. 58).

The debates about modernity and postmodernity, in IR and social sciences more broadly, have opened up the question of the power of

meaning construction. In IR, one way in which this question has been reintroduced is through re-interpretations of classical realism, within which the re-interpretation of Morgenthau in this book has to be located. This postmodern opening up of interpretations encourages new readings of realism which depart from the conventional picture of realism as an amoral or immoral theory, founded on the metaphysical unity of the struggle for power. Moreover, it problematises the concept of truth and the validity of universal morality in the aftermath of the 'death of God', which this reading is interested in depicting in Morgenthau. Without representing a postmodern attempt, this book retains this opening up for its own purposes, and challenges accounts of Morgenthau which minimise his interest in values, meaning and truth.

Having clarified the concepts of modernity and postmodernity to be used throughout the present interpretation, and having outlined the main assumptions which inform modern and postmodern readings in IR, this chapter now moves on to an overview of recent analyses of Morgenthau's theory, in order to situate the present contribution in its proper interpretative context. The next section also discusses the interpretations Morgenthau's thought was subjected to during the Cold War, which represent a reflection of the particular concerns of that period.

### **Old and new interpretations**

The recent re-evaluation of Morgenthau's theory has been driven by scholars' growing interest with his views on morality, and morality has indeed been the central issue around which modern and postmodern readings of Morgenthau have been constructed. The overview which follows starts from the same place, and it depicts Morgenthau's endorsement of a moral theory which emphasises humans' potential for both destruction and construction in the aftermath of the 'death of God' announced by Nietzsche. This section of the chapter draws on previous writings which assert the moral character of Morgenthau's theory, and on some contributions which make connections between Morgenthau and Nietzsche, and Morgenthau and Weber respectively. Unlike these writings however, this interpretation is the first to analyse the commonalities among Morgenthau's, Nietzsche's and Weber's thought extensively, and to point to Morgenthau's endorsement of a vision of power understood as meaning imposition, and of responsible

leadership which has the capacity to both construct and destroy, and which imposes meaning as a way towards peace and order.

During the Cold War Morgenthau's reputation as a theorist of International Relations was predominantly that of an amoralist. Evidence of this dominant trend of interpretation comes from several sources. Rosecrance (1981) attests to the way in which in the late 1940s and early 1950s, Morgenthau's power theory 'was cited as an explanation and justification for the Cold War between East and West', and in later years his doctrines 'were often used to support rearmament at both strategic and conventional levels and to rationalize the expansion of the "struggle for power" to the new nations of Southeast Asia and Africa' (Rosecrance, 1981, p. 751). Moreover, Spegele argues that Morgenthau 'is supposed to be the quintessential moral sceptic' (Spegele, 1987, p. 206), while Gellman emphasises that Morgenthau's attitude towards power 'has been reproached for being too accepting' (Gellman, 1988, p. 256). Largely perceived as an advocate of a cold-blooded struggle for power, Morgenthau ended up being criticised exactly for what he used to condemn so forcefully: the neglect of moral considerations in the interpretation of events in the international political arena. Within this context, Krauthammer's description of Morgenthau's central plea – that 'Miss Manners for statesmen is not yet morality' – comes as no surprise (Krauthammer, 1986, p. 21). As I intend to argue in what follows, the theoretical edifice of Morgenthau's account presupposes a moral foundation which places limits on the use of power, and which supports Morgenthau's contention that 'political action can be defined as an attempt to realize moral values through the medium of politics, that is, power' (Morgenthau, 1962a, p. 110).

During the Cold War, a few scholars endorsed an approach which contradicted the dominant position, without however stimulating a debate on the issue. These attempts can be seen as no more than isolated exceptions, which do not constitute themselves into a strong interpretative trend. Good, for instance, notes the transcendental character of Morgenthau's formal ethic in an article published in 1960 (Good, 1960, p. 612), in which he analyses the concept of the national interest in Niebuhr's, Morgenthau's, and Kennan's works. Good finds it 'surprising' 'that more attention has not been given to Morgenthau's views on morality and principle' (Good, 1960, p. 612). As emphasised by Good, Morgenthau's theory is more sophisticated than usually assumed: Morgenthau asserts 'that there are moral absolutes that set

boundaries not to be trespassed under any circumstances in the pursuit of interest', and the absolute principle 'prevents acts of gross immorality while at the same time identifying every political act as in fact political and therefore inconsistent with the moral law' (Good, 1960, p. 612). In Good's assessment, 'the widely held assumption' that Morgenthau has simply updated Hobbes 'does him serious injustice' (Good, 1960, p. 612).

Meanwhile, in an article on the development of International Relations in the US published in 1977, Hoffmann points to Morgenthau's awareness of norms, and to his desire 'to root his norms in the realities of politics, not in the aspirations of politicians or in the constructs of lawyers' (Hoffmann, 1977, p. 44). In a similar vein, in an article on the 'limits' of realism published shortly after Morgenthau's death, Hoffmann notes the 'constant tension' present in Morgenthau's work 'between his awareness of the diversity of politics – he was at his best as a subtle analyst of concrete situations – and his desire to reduce politics to a single type he deemed politically prudent and ethically wise' (Hoffmann, 1981, p. 657). In Hoffmann's often-quoted assessment on the topic, it is precisely this desire which makes Morgenthau 'an idealist in disguise, a somewhat conservative liberal in revolt against other, imprudent liberals' (Hoffmann, 1981, p. 657). According to Hoffmann,

Between the need to debunk grandiose utopias (which grew out of his skepticism, his sense of history and his life experiences) and the need for a radical leap beyond politics-as-usual (which derived from his sense of logic, his awareness of the significance of the absolute weapon, and his deep concern for peace), there was a gap which he never filled.

(Hoffmann, 1981, p. 657)

In his turn, a few years after Hoffmann's assessment, Coser accurately points to Morgenthau's thinking as rooted in the German philosophical tradition, and to his moral vision 'that refused to concede to diabolic forces total dominance in the affairs of nations' (Coser, 1984, p. 223), and argues that Morgenthau 'had an acute sense of the existential limits of a science of politics', and 'throughout his writings idealism and realism continue to be engaged in a fruitful dialectical tension' (Coser, 1984, p. 223).

Despite these few isolated exceptions, Morgenthau's views of politics as a morally laden enterprise, and, more broadly, of morality's place and role in people's lives, have been largely overlooked, the dominant position being that according to which Morgenthau was an amoralist thinker. In Gellman's view, 'a pattern of misunderstanding and confusion' was then running through numerous assessments of Morgenthau's political realism (Gellman, 1988, p. 247). Several lines of argument can be advanced in order to explain this. One possible explanation is that the misunderstanding was triggered by Morgenthau's style of argumentation, more exactly by the lack of clarity prone to nourish ambiguities and paradoxes. Jervis, for instance, takes the view that 'like any subtle and supple thinker, he voiced too many contradictions to permit ready distillations' (Jervis, 1994, p. 853). As Frei puts it in his turn, on Morgenthau's part there were few explanations and even less willingness 'to put things in perspective' (Frei, 2001, p. 201): 'so convinced was he of the justice, the obviousness of his cause that he failed at times to make a convincing case for it' (Frei, 2001, pp. 201–2). In Frei's account, against what Morgenthau felt was a misleading view of the world, 'he asserted his own view as the "right", in fact, as the only "right" perspective', and he gave his views 'the semblance of indisputable, self-evident truths' (Frei, 2001, p. 201). Moreover, at times, Morgenthau displayed 'neither much tolerance nor much awareness of the relativity of his own views', and his statements 'occasionally took on the hectoring tone of dogmatic positions' (Frei, 2001, p. 201). For Frei, it is clear that Morgenthau's style of argumentation contributed to the misinterpretation of this scholar's position:

So adamant was he in his assertions against ostensible liberal attempts to bypass, if not replace, the political realm, that these assertions were frequently misunderstood as a *moral* affirmation of politics – as a positive appreciation of interest and power and hence as a depreciation of law and morality.

(Frei, 2001, p. 204, emphasis in the original)

A convincing interpretation which points to Morgenthau's response to the contextual factors is provided by Lebow. A former student of Morgenthau, Lebow argues that the latter deliberately emphasised certain facets of his theory, this representing 'a strategic as much as

an intellectual choice' (Lebow, 2003, p. 238). Lebow maintains that to Morgenthau politics was 'undeniably about power, but in the 1940s he had emphasised it to the point of excluding other features of politics as a reaction to the liberal idealist emphasis on law and morality' (Lebow, 2003, p. 238). In support of his assertion, Lebow quotes Morgenthau who in 1966 wrote that 'when the times tend to depreciate the elements of power', international relations theory 'must stress its importance' (Morgenthau quoted in Lebow, 2003, p. 238). In a similar vein, to Morgenthau,

When the times incline toward a monistic conception of power in the general scheme of things, it must show its limitations. When the times conceive of power primarily in military terms, it must call attention to the variety of factors which go into the power equation and, more particularly, to the subtle psychological relations of which the web of power is fashioned. When the reality of power is being lost sight of over its moral and legal limitations, it must point to that reality. When law and morality are judged as nothing, it must assign them their rightful place.

(Morgenthau quoted in Lebow, 2003, pp. 238–9)

Lebow's interpretation makes Morgenthau's stances meaningful by situating them within the context of the main debates of the time – between utopianism and realism at first, then the debate upon methods in IR, stirred by the so-called behavioralist revolution (this method of making Morgenthau's works meaningful is also applied in the present interpretation). While reacting to liberal internationalism, Morgenthau deliberately emphasised the power element of politics, and the need for a central concept 'which allows the observer to distinguish the field of politics from other social spheres, to orient himself in the maze of empirical phenomena which make up the field of politics, and to establish a measure of rational order within it' (Morgenthau, 1971a, p. 31). He reacted to the environment by affirming the need for a realist approach, without however dismissing idealism completely – as he noted in an address before the US Army War College in September 1959, 'when it comes to foreign policy, there is an abundance of idealism in human nature and a dearth of realism', and 'the realistic approach to foreign policy and to politics in general needs more emphasis in our society than the idealistic

approach' (Morgenthau Papers, Library of Congress, Washington DC, Box 170, p. 15). Here Morgenthau is quick to add that 'I certainly would be the last to deny that the idealistic element is an indispensable ingredient to any foreign or domestic policy which is worthy of free men to pursue' (Morgenthau Papers, Library of Congress, Washington DC, Box 170, p. 16). By taking this stance however – and with the lack of clarification and detail noticed by Frei – he inadvertently appeared to reject any attempt to ascribe moral values to politics, and the aforementioned issues concurred to paint a simplistic and misleading yet extraordinarily enduring picture of Morgenthau, which has only recently come under considerable reassessment.

Decades passed before the alleged amorality of Morgenthau's theory started to be questioned more systematically. At present, the balance appears to have been reversed: after a plethora of readings which emphasised the power struggle as the first – and even the only – principle which underpins Morgenthau's theory, recent revisionist works draw attention to its defining moral facet, and to Morgenthau's commitment to the Judaeo-Christian tradition of moral inquiry (Russell, 1990; Murray, 1996 and 1997; Frei, 2001; Mollov, 2002). Furthermore, as indicated below, many re-evaluations point to the commonalities among Morgenthau and figures as diverse as Thucydides and Clausewitz (Lebow, 2003), Augustine (Murray, 1996 and 1997), Nietzsche (Petersen, 1999; Frei, 2001), and Weber (Frei, 2001). These ongoing assertions of various positions share a common ground in pointing to Morgenthau's moral claims. Their aim is to rediscover Morgenthau's political theory, and to assert its relevance to present day developments, while also reconstructing and reassessing the principles of classical realism itself, as a relevant tradition.

One of the pioneering contributions to address Morgenthau's normative claims is Russell's *Hans J. Morgenthau and the Ethics of American Statecraft* (Russell, 1990). Russell's key project concerns the unearthing of Morgenthau's largely neglected moral commitments, and of their importance in the context of Morgenthau's political theory. Russell discusses Morgenthau's account of the international political realm and asks the all-important question: is Morgenthau's theory amoral, as most scholars proclaimed throughout the Cold War, or should we trust his expression (be it not very forceful) of commitment to moral values which are universal in scope? After a thoroughgoing reinterpretation of his writings, Russell argues that Morgenthau did not lie

to himself or to others: he espoused an ‘abiding concern for those ethical vitalities – the compelling force of judgments that give value and meaning to life – that distinguish the human condition in all its conflictual and cooperative dimensions’ (Russell, 1990, p. 148). For Morgenthau, any international political theory ‘is a reflection of certain philosophic propositions’, the intellectual horizon of the political theorist extending ‘to the identification and analysis of objective, general truths that exist regardless of time and place’ (Russell, 1990, p. 60). Russell indicates that Morgenthau’s transcendent frame of reference is ‘somewhat vague, more implicit than explicit, and without clearly defined roots in any philosophical or theological system’, and that ‘nowhere does he explicitly develop a transcendent international political ethic or a normative calculus by which to rank and evaluate alternative ethical objectives in world politics’ (Russell, 1990, p. 164). However, he also emphasises that Morgenthau’s realism ‘gained in depth by drawing on a general political philosophy, a set of general principles that shaped his analysis of concrete problems and have universal applicability’ (Russell, 1990, p. 69). In light of this interpretation, Russell concludes that ‘if Morgenthau’s position continues to raise doubts about the moral significance of political action, this is largely attributable to the relationship between his estimate of man’s nature and the use of transcendent norms in political analysis’ (Russell, 1990, p. 169).

An important, more recent interpretation which emphasises Morgenthau’s moral approach to politics is that of Benjamin Mollov (2002). Mollov’s key project is that of depicting the influence that anti-semitism and the German-Jewish heritage had on Morgenthau’s political thought, and it is within this context that he unearths the moral foundation of Morgenthau’s theory. He outlines Morgenthau’s close connection with the Jewish community, and goes on to analyse the spiritual aspects of his thought, with an emphasis on its transcendent character. In Mollov’s interpretation, the transcendent elements present in Morgenthau’s thought ‘relate to morality in politics and statecraft, the responsibility of the intellectual to speak “truth to power”, the importance of philosophy to Morgenthau’s approach to international relations, and, indeed, his recognition of the importance of spiritual forces in man and politics’ (Mollov, 2002, p. 24). For Mollov, these features support the assertion that ‘despite his image as a Realpolitik thinker, Morgenthau throughout his career



grappled with moral, philosophic, and spiritual issues' (Mollov, 2002, p. 31).

An important trend in the ongoing re-evaluation of realism concerns its reconsideration as a political tradition, and within this context several interpretations of Morgenthau's thought have been published lately. For instance, in one recent contribution (Lebow, 2003), Lebow builds upon an argument previously made by Gellman – who, writing in 1988, emphasised that Morgenthau 'comes remarkably close to Thucydides' in arguing that the struggle between nations is 'located essentially in human nature, and only then in the conditions of international affairs' (Gellman, 1988, p. 253). In his reading however, Lebow's main argument is that Morgenthau and Thucydides, and also Clausewitz, share a sophisticated tradition: what he calls 'tragic realism'. Clausewitz and Morgenthau did not write tragedy, but according to Lebow they did share Thucydides' 'tragic perspective on life and politics' (Lebow, 2003, p. 20). These three thinkers address similar problems but in different cultural settings (Lebow, 2003, pp. 61–2), and in their thinking 'there is no fundamental contradiction between ethics and interests' (Lebow, 2003, p. 61). As Lebow is keen to emphasise, they envisage 'a hybrid order that would maintain or resurrect the best features of the old system but accommodate the kind of changes that were either unavoidable or held out the prospect of benefits' (Lebow, 2003, p. 33). As this book intends to point out, Morgenthau's awareness of the tragic character of life shows up in his theory forcefully, and from this perspective, Lebow's account provides useful insights. I will come back to Morgenthau's 'tragic' notion of life in Chapter 3, where I will assess the way in which it is embedded in Morgenthau's metaphysics, relying on Nietzsche's and Weber's diagnosis in the process.

Lebow portrays Morgenthau as a German and American intellectual and émigré, and emphasises the importance of the interwar life experience in the shaping of Morgenthau's perspective: his life experiences 'bring politics, culture and scholarship together in the most pronounced way' (Lebow, 2003, p. 40). For Morgenthau, Lebow argues further, power was 'the starting point – but by no means the end point – of his analysis of international affairs' (Lebow, 2003, p. 217), and in this context he refers to Morgenthau's ethical concerns, emphasising the fact that Morgenthau 'believed that successful foreign policy depended more on the quality of diplomacy than it did on

military and other capabilities, and had to be tempered by ethical considerations' (Lebow, 2003, p. 217). Last but not least, Lebow also maintains that by 1970 Morgenthau had become 'guardedly optimistic about the prospects for a far-reaching transformation of the international system' (Lebow, 2003, p. 50). This assumption regarding Morgenthau's growing optimism, outlined by Lebow and widespread among IR scholars, will be addressed in subsequent chapters, in light of evidence which points to the complexity of the issue, and questions Lebow's claim.

Another innovative interpretation of tradition is offered by Williams (2005), who reads Morgenthau with a view to prove the existence of a tradition which he calls 'wilful Realism'. This is a tradition which demonstrates 'a continual concern with the relationship between knowledge and politics, the politics of knowledge, and a strong advocacy of the need for a politics both informed and suitably chastened by an understanding of the limits of knowledge' (Williams, 2005, pp. 5–6), and which seeks 'a politics of limits that recognizes the destructive and productive dimensions of politics, and that maximises its positive possibilities while minimising its destructive potential' (Williams, 2005, p. 7). Williams is preoccupied with the articulation of the concept of 'politics' in Morgenthau's thought, as a moral and political project placed within the confines of an epoch whose 'loss of belief in the power of the divine, and of an interest in religion, has left individuals in the anomic condition of modernity', and whose societal rationalisation 'has increased this feeling of powerlessness' (Williams, 2005, pp. 121–2). Within this context, Williams emphasises the strong affinities between classical realism – that is, between Morgenthau – and post-structuralist approaches, the idea of the existence of 'unbreachable chasms' between post-structuralism and realism being for Williams 'simply fallacious' (Williams, 2005, p. 164).

In the interpretation put forward by Williams, Morgenthau implies that uncertainty is the only thing we can be sure of in present times. The death of God, once proclaimed by Nietzsche, manifests itself forcefully in the field of politics, the outcomes of which are often emphasised: the lack of fixed understandings of the good and the true stands as 'the condition of modern politics, and the basis of its distinctiveness as a realm of freedom, creativity, and change' (Williams, 2005, p. 7). As argued by Williams, for Morgenthau, a correct understanding of the concept of politics 'was essential if a recognition of

the role of power in politics was not to be equated with a simple reduction of politics to nothing but power and violence, and Realism reduced to little more than a crude form of *realpolitik*' (Williams, 2005, p. 84). In Morgenthau's account as spelled out by Williams, politics is 'potentially a remarkably destructive dimension of human action', yet at the same time, it is also 'the protean centre of social life' (Williams, 2005, p. 116). As Williams adds further, Morgenthau endorses a creative vision of politics, and 'views the indeterminacy of politics as a potentially positive phenomenon, representing the possibility of change, and as a core principle of democracy' (Williams, 2005, p. 116).

An account different from those of Lebow and Williams, which pictures realism as a tradition of political ethics and a form of Judaeo-Christian imperfectionism, is provided by Murray (1997). Unlike Lebow's and Williams', Murray's endeavour is directed towards portraying Morgenthau, Niebuhr and Kennan as exponents of what he calls 'Christian realism'. In Murray's account, the central themes which connect these thinkers' works are represented by the emphasis upon the transcendental moral code, and by the attempt to strike a balance between power political and cosmopolitan moral components. As Murray maintains, 'an explicitly Judaeo-Christian set of values underlay the realists' entire approach, and any reinterpretation of their moral theory must seek to understand how this concern with cosmopolitan moral principles fits with their emphasis on power politics' (Murray, 1997, p. 11).

Murray points to the centrality ascribed to the critique of rationalism in the thought of Niebuhr, Kennan and Morgenthau, and argues that 'the account of realism as part of the conservative rationalist orthodoxy is fundamentally mistaken' (Murray, 1997, p. 17). To Murray it is clear that realists considered all choices to be 'constrained within the bounds of natural possibility', 'directed by the flow of historical trends', and 'conditioned by the historical context in which they exist' (Murray, 1997, p. 75): 'it is ultimately of the essence of realism that man is incapable of directing history according to some rational plan' (Murray, 1997, p. 75). Moreover, Murray maintains that the apparent contradiction produced in realism by its simultaneous affiliation to both the tradition of power politics and the tradition of Judaeo-Christian ethics simply 'cannot be resolved adequately by interpreting realism through the lens of the tradition

of pessimism centred around Thucydides, Machiavelli, and Hobbes' (Murray, 1997, p. 45):

We find ourselves in a circular process in which, once the realists are identified within this tradition, it is inevitable that confirming evidence becomes standard, and dissenting material becomes an anomalous contradiction or cynical self-justification. It is this structure which perhaps explains the extended dominance of amoral readings of realism, and the inability of revisionist writers to take the final step and provide an integrated account of the theory.

(Murray, 1997, p. 46)

Most importantly, Murray argues that at the core of classical realism stands an Augustinian 'dialectic of absolutes', in which absolute principles 'are maintained in tension with the requirements of political survival' (Murray, 1997, pp. 107, 16). In this account, 'the attempt to provide a framework in which a transcendental morality could be combined with a realistic appraisal of the conditions of life was central to Augustine' (Murray, 1997, p. 48), and it is exactly this attempt which Murray finds in Morgenthau as well. Murray points out that Morgenthau made reference to Augustine frequently – 'indeed, certain of his passages bear a striking resemblance to parts of the *City of God*' – and argues that Morgenthau 'returned to pre-rationalist modes of thought – and, especially, to Augustine's attack on classical rationalism – in order to make his own critique of modern rationalism' (Murray, 1997, p. 47).

Thus, unlike Lebow who integrates Morgenthau within a tradition of tragic realism, along with Thucydides and Clausewitz, and unlike Williams who points to wilful realism and its postmodern nuances, Murray focuses on what he calls Christian realism and its source (St Augustine) and followers (Morgenthau, Niebuhr and Kennan). All of these scholars discuss Morgenthau within different projects regarding the re-creation of a tradition. While their objectives diverge, what is significantly common is an awareness of Morgenthau's moral concerns, and of the centrality ascribed by Morgenthau to values within his theory. The present interpretation is based on the same recognition of the central place occupied by morality in Morgenthau's thought, and points to Morgenthau's scholarly interest in the imposition and stabilisation of meaning and values. This reading will

add to the interpretations summarised above by demonstrating Morgenthau's working out along a tension between assumptions regarding values typically modern and postmodern respectively, and his development of a solution to the dichotomous normative choices of modernity and postmodernity which emphasises the creative role of the superior human actor.

Coming back to Murray's assessment, this reading would like to point that St Augustine is one of the thinkers Morgenthau referred to explicitly when asked about the influences which he absorbed throughout his career: in the little known private correspondence Morgenthau maintained that in addition to Nietzsche's 'most powerful and probably decisive influence', in later years Aristotle, Saint Augustine and Niebuhr had been 'most important' (letter to Samuel H. Magill, 5 January 1962, Morgenthau Papers, Box 39). While Murray focussed on a later influence, a few other scholars have chosen to highlight Morgenthau's early intellectual encounters. In this context, as emphasised by Smith (1987), Morgenthau's relationship with Weber is of considerable importance. In Smith's outline of Weber's realism he addresses the following themes: Weber's definitions of the state and politics; his view of international relations; his nationalism; his preoccupation with leadership and his stance regarding the necessity of genuine leadership; his formulation of the moral problem in statecraft as a dichotomy between an ethic of conviction and an ethic of responsibility (Smith, 1987, pp. 23–4). In discussing Weber's impact on Morgenthau's thought, Smith emphasises that questions regarding Morgenthau's supposedly amoral approach miss the point. Just like Weber, Morgenthau was deeply concerned with morality, and to Smith this concern is all too obvious. He situates Morgenthau's contribution within the context of US political developments, and argues that Morgenthau's project was 'to turn realism from a critique of utopianism and a characteristic approach to man and politics into a comprehensive theory that would explain the underlying essence of relations among states, illuminate the moral problem in statecraft, and provide a sound basis for evaluating specific, contemporary problems of national policy' (Smith, 1987, p. 134). As argued further by Smith, in his concept of the national interest Morgenthau 'claimed to define an approach to policy that would lead to both political success and ethical moderation', but this claim failed 'on both analytical and normative grounds': in Smith's account, Morgenthau's realism 'may

provide a way to structure the political and moral dilemmas of foreign policy, but it does not prove to be an especially reliable guide to empirical success or automatic morality' (Smith, 1987, p. 135).

No overview of previous assessments of Morgenthau's theory is complete without mentioning the innovative reading provided by Petersen (1999). Petersen's article – which is critically important for the views endorsed in the present interpretation – breaks with readings such as above, and portrays Morgenthau as a political thinker influenced by Nietzsche, who struggled with issues similar to those presently dealt with by critical (international) political theory (Petersen, 1999, p. 84). Petersen provides a reinterpretation of Morgenthau's concepts of power and human nature, and argues provocatively against situating Morgenthau within the realist tradition itself. As Petersen contends, 'far from re-establishing continuity and stability within the realist narrative', his analysis shows that Morgenthau 'cannot in any meaningful sense be located within this narrative', and that Morgenthau's core concepts are 'developed in direct opposition to the philosophical and theoretical assumptions that fuel contemporary realism' (Petersen, 1999, p. 84).

Petersen questions the 'received wisdom' regarding Morgenthau, whose thought was representative of 'the richness of the tradition of political realism' (Gilpin, 1984), and analysed with the view that Morgenthau was primarily an American scholar who was comfortable with the established certainties of modernity. He pleads instead for a thorough consideration of Morgenthau's intellectually formative years in pre-World War II Germany. In Petersen's account, this was 'one of the most tumultuous, fruitful, and creative epochs of modern thought' (Petersen, 1999, p. 85). It was 'a period of political and philosophical upheaval and profound crisis in which the rubble left by the collapse of established modes of thought had not yet been cleared away by viable alternatives' (Petersen, 1999, p. 85). Petersen emphasises the importance of Nietzsche's and Weber's thinking in this environment, and points to the basic assumption which guides his reinterpretation, and his focus on metaphysical and ontological issues: in Petersen's view, Morgenthau, as a member of the above mentioned community, 'shared in the general task of trying to work out the implications of Nietzsche's re-articulation of the relationship between man and world' (Petersen, 1999, p. 86). As Petersen claims further, Morgenthau's thought, 'very far from being the instigator of

modern, scientific realism, and thus the spiritual father of neorealism and the pupil of Hobbes and Machiavelli', represents a response to the crisis of that very tradition, and marks a transition: 'rather than being in the midst of the grand narrative of modernity', Morgenthau 'is balancing on its edge' (Petersen, 1999, p. 86). Thus, rather than grounding him in a tradition constituted on the firm soil of modernity, Petersen posits Morgenthau in a territory within which he questions modernity in a way that is reminiscent of Nietzsche's critique.

In Petersen's account, Morgenthau scrutinises man and the nature of his relationship to the world. He emphasises the rift which has occurred between man and the world, between the self and its other, 'as the collapse of metaphysical certainty throws him back into the flux, uncertainty, and conflict that define his empirical existence' (Petersen, 1999, pp. 91–2). For Petersen's Morgenthau, 'the hope of identifying an Archimedean point of incontestable knowledge and pure identity is a mirage', and behind his argument 'lies the realization that radical and pure thinking as envisaged by Descartes leads not to certainty and firm foundations but to absurdity' (Petersen, 1999, p. 90). It 'does not bring man to Truth but to himself – himself not as a universal subject capable of transcendence but as one whose fate is as a finite, limited being' (Petersen, 1999, p. 90). As outlined in the present reading, there are indications in Morgenthau's work that point towards the possibility of transcendence. This interpretation will turn to the relation between man's finitude and his capacity for transcendence in the following chapters, and will show that this relation is more complex than Petersen suggests.

Petersen's depiction of the connection between Morgenthau and Nietzsche has received important evidence in its support with the publication of Frei's *Hans J. Morgenthau: An Intellectual Biography* (2001). Frei undertook an extensive research of Morgenthau's papers held by the Library of US Congress (papers which as mentioned in the introduction to this chapter comprise unpublished lectures, drafts of published work, personal notes and diaries, newspaper clippings, and an extensive intellectual correspondence), and his book reconstructs Morgenthau's 'European past', and the formative influences which shaped his intellectual trajectory as a student and young scholar in Germany and Switzerland. From Morgenthau's diary entries we find out that Nietzsche was 'the god' of Morgenthau's youth (Frei, 2001, p. 98), and that Weber exerted a similarly powerful impact on his thinking.

The young Morgenthau portrayed by Frei refers to the ongoing crisis of morality, and points that 'ours is not an age of faith' (Morgenthau quoted in Frei, 2001, p. 145). In Morgenthau's view, in such times, anyone who wants to gain understanding must be able to question the firm soil of certainty. In the spring of 1936 he writes to Hugo Sinzheimer, one of his most esteemed former professors: 'My findings lead me to the inescapable conclusion that ethics, like all the other normative realms, is in a state of total dissolution' (Morgenthau quoted in Frei, 2001, p. 143). Thus, for Morgenthau, just like for Nietzsche, God is dead: as Frei explains, 'religion and dogmatic metaphysics have abdicated, all objective ranking of values has proved illusory – such is Nietzsche's diagnosis of the time. (...) Ultimate values and ideals lose their normative strength' (Frei, 2001, p. 142). There are 'no firmly established concepts of good and evil' – 'it all depends on one's ultimate values' (Morgenthau quoted in Frei, 2001, p. 147).

Like Petersen, Frei maintains that Nietzsche is a viable starting point for understanding Morgenthau's thought, and for locating it within a tradition which questions the received wisdom of modernity. Against the overly optimistic views of life, Morgenthau posits what Frei calls 'the *tragic as an ineluctable condition* of human existence' (Frei, 2001, p. 185, emphasis in the original). He restores the tragic dimension to history 'altogether in the spirit of Nietzsche and in the best German tradition' (Frei, 2001, p. 187). Last but not least, for Morgenthau, as described by Frei, such times require the emergence of strong characters, able to counteract destruction, and to impose creatively. Frei maintains that, Morgenthau

had early on succumbed to an aristocratic radicalism, which induced him to value rank and greatness, the elite of the stronger, great deeds and great lives, and discipline and authority more highly than bourgeois notions of security and progress.

(Frei, 2001, p. 157)

Frei's contribution to the ongoing re-evaluation of Morgenthau is substantial. It points to important events which marked Morgenthau's life and intellectual development, and engages with critics who argue the case of the supposed amoralism of Morgenthau's theory, by raising awareness of a multiplicity of contexts in which Morgenthau's moral commitment shines through. Frei's work differs from those of the other authors discussed above not only by its genre (intellectual



biography) but also by its objective of interpreting Morgenthau as a scholar who read Nietzsche extensively, and who was aware of the post-Nietzschean moral uncertainty. After an examination of Morgenthau's voluminous unpublished papers, lectures, private correspondence and diaries, Frei takes the Nietzschean intellectual heritage as a central starting point for his analysis, and works out the meaning of Morgenthau's encounter with Nietzsche and its impact on Morgenthau's theory in a way which does justice to contexts and debates. These issues will be examined at length in Chapter 2.

The scholars mentioned above provide readings that are useful to the present interpretation, which intends to build on the existing literature, putting forward new insights regarding Morgenthau's commitment to topics and positions relevant to both modernity and postmodernity, as defined in the first section of this chapter. In the following section I provide a summary of the chapter-by-chapter argumentation which will be undertaken in the book, pointing out its innovative elements and its contribution to the ongoing re-evaluation of realism. As mentioned earlier, according to the view advanced here, the central issue addressed in Morgenthau's narrative is that of meaning. To talk about meaning is to talk about morality. For Morgenthau, this is the meaning of meaning, and in this context, morality is the key concept to be analysed, when discussing the fate of man following the 'death of God'. Along with the depiction of the centrality of the topic of meaning in Morgenthau's theory, of Nietzsche's and Weber's importance in the articulation of Morgenthau's perspective, and of Morgenthau's specific interpretation of his mentors' diagnosis of the 'death of God', the present reading also points to Morgenthau's interpretation of power as meaning imposition, and to his examination of the disenchantment of human life and of politics in particular. Furthermore, the book puts forward arguments to substantiate the claim regarding Morgenthau's vision of man as the source of both destruction and transcendence, and examines Morgenthau's concept of the creative, responsible and thoughtful leader, who represents the artisan of the re-enchantment of politics.

### **Power as meaning imposition; between destruction and construction**

The present reading is built on the assumption that there is one key concept in Morgenthau's account – meaning – which is addressed

throughout the book. After a discussion of the historical context which is very important for the development of Morgenthau's views in native Germany, Chapter 2 introduces his fundamental intellectual encounters with Nietzsche and Weber. It is shown that Morgenthau read Nietzsche and Weber around the same time, and he developed an interest in the diagnosis of the death of universal values, and in values per se, which would remain a central concern to him throughout his life. Chapter 2 points to other intellectual encounters, both positive and negative, and refers to Morgenthau's experience of the American academia and the latter's impact on him, and also to Morgenthau's role in the development of post-war US realism.

Chapter 3 explores Morgenthau's diagnosis of the times, which according to the present interpretation mirrors the issues addressed by Nietzsche and Weber. Morgenthau is fascinated with the issue of man's fate in present times, which to him are plagued by an 'unprecedented increase in physical danger, social disintegration, and metaphysical doubt' (Morgenthau, 1971b, p. 621). Within this picture of the present, Morgenthau maintains, society is not the only entity which could fulfil man's need for security and certainty: the realms of morality and religion, closely connected, should also perform this function. As Morgenthau reveals, however, these realms have lost their powers recently: Morgenthau emphasises that in the nineteenth century, man's sense of insecurity started to increase, nourishing an acute social instability, and that in the twentieth century this instability became permanent 'as a result of the emancipation of the individual from the ties of tradition, especially in the form of religion, of the increased rationalization of life and work, and of cyclical economic crises' (Morgenthau, 1967, p. 102). Morgenthau is aware of the 'twilight of international morality' (Morgenthau, 1948), of the collapse of the 'common roof of shared values and universal standards of action' (Morgenthau, 1967, p. 331) – namely of a moral realm 'composed of Christian, cosmopolitan, and humanitarian elements' (Morgenthau, 1967, p. 244).

This book argues that Morgenthau's interpretation of the times, and of man's life within them, is a narrative about modernity's enlightened potential, but also about its gloomy consequences, brought together in a dynamic relationship. A world 'stripped' of its wonders, subjected to universalised calculation, whose art, religion and metaphysics are discredited, and whose nationalistic masses 'meet under an empty sky from which the gods have departed' (Morgenthau, 1948, p. 99, and

1967, p. 249) – this is our disenchanting world, in Morgenthau's view. Equally important in this context is Morgenthau's assumption that in such times humans can change the world through creating religious, moral and social worlds of their own, and he argues that this is an era that grants man's imagination its rightful place. Thus, starting with 'God's death', Morgenthau goes on to reaffirm Nietzsche's and Weber's view regarding human beings' increased prospects for agency manifestation, for individuals' affirmation, as one of the consequences of this 'death'.

The present interpretation maintains that there is no better way to understand Morgenthau's vision of contesting individuals/meanings than to focus on his concept of 'power', which here is interpreted as meaning imposition. In Chapters 3 and 4 it is shown that for Morgenthau, the process of creating and imposing power is not about gaining material power, but power of a different, non-corporeal nature, obtained after a struggle of minds and wills. The book argues that Morgenthau shares Nietzsche's passion for grasping man's nature, and also his emphasis upon humans' creative potential, interpreting the well-known concept of the 'will to power' as 'the power to create meaning' (Habermas, 1987, p. 95), and regarding it as a cradle of both destruction and construction. Nietzsche's 'will to power' manifests itself in offering reinterpretations of the world, and, for the German philosopher, 'to impose upon becoming the character of being' stands as 'the supreme will to power' (Nietzsche, 1968, p. 330). This latter assertion is interpreted here as representing one's striving to make her/his own created meaning – which has the 'character of being', namely it is well crystallised – prevail upon the others' indefinite 'becoming'. Morgenthau's narrative reveals its author's view on the centrality of meaning creation, his Nietzschean concern with 'the possibility of human agency in a historical world' (Warren, 1985b, p. 183) and the importance of individual interpretations, and discusses the unfolding of phenomena whose consequences are critical for current times: nihilism and disenchantment.

While Chapter 3 addresses Morgenthau's metaphysics, Chapter 4 analyses the transposition of Morgenthau's metaphysical assumptions on to the political theory domain. Chapter 4 points to a certain kind of relativism and perspectivism which in Morgenthau's view characterise the realm of politics, and analyses power as meaning imposition – an interpretation which differs from that of power as influence (already

discussed in the literature) by means of its emphasis on the creative value of the act of imposing meaning. Moreover, it introduces the concept of the disenchantment of politics, and outlines Morgenthau's critique of this development, which in his view renders politics meaningless. Morgenthau maintains that in the political realm one notices a disenchantment stimulated by technological fervour and bureaucratic development, which have rendered the old, traditional values meaningless, and have exposed the political act to the temptation of action for action's sake. Chapter 4 also focusses on the creative facet of human nature, as represented by the responsible individual who acts within the confines of a disenchanted political world. On the political scene, this individual is the thoughtful statesman/diplomat,<sup>1</sup> who imposes a particular interpretation through a creative reworking of tradition.

The analysis of Morgenthau's concepts of universality, tradition and superior leadership forms the main part of Chapter 5. In the article 'Epistle to the Columbians on the Meaning of Morality' (Morgenthau, 1962a, pp. 368–74), Morgenthau argues that 'if the disparate historic systems of morality were not erected upon a common foundation of moral understanding and valuation, impervious to the changing conditions of time and place, we could not understand any other moral system but our own, nor could any other moral system but our own have any moral relevance for us' (Morgenthau, 1962a, p. 372). The commands of the moral law, Morgenthau maintains in the same article, are 'absolute and must be obeyed for their own sake' (Morgenthau, 1962a, p. 370). The 'Epistle' is representative of the other facet of Morgenthau's discussion of morality: Morgenthau refers to 'the sanctity of the moral law' (Morgenthau, 1962a, p. 372) on numerous occasions throughout his career, and he argues that morality is 'not just another branch of human activity, co-ordinate to the substantive branches, such as politics or economics' (Morgenthau, 1962a, p. 325). On the contrary, in Morgenthau's assessment morality is 'superimposed' upon these branches, 'limiting the choice of ends and means and delineating the legitimate sphere of a particular branch of action altogether' (Morgenthau, 1962a, p. 325).

In Morgenthau's view political science is 'of necessity based upon, and permeated by, a total world view – religious, poetic as well as philosophic in nature – the validity of which it must take for granted' (Morgenthau, 1955, p. 449). Moreover, in defining political action,

Morgenthau argues that 'to say that a political action has no moral purpose is absurd; for political action can be defined as an attempt to realize moral values through the medium of politics, that is, power' (Morgenthau, 1962a, p. 110), and in discussing power he points to 'those transcendent concepts by which power must be tamed, restrained, and transformed' (Morgenthau, 1962a, p. 317). In *The Decline of Democratic Politics* (1962), Morgenthau states that his book assumes 'not only the continuing value of the tradition of political thought for the contemporary world but also the need for the restoration of its timeless elements': it is especially concerned 'with the restoration of politics as an autonomous sphere of thought and action' (Morgenthau, 1962a, p. 3). Most significant for the present discussion, in the 'Epistle' (which is included in *The Decline of Democratic Politics*), Morgenthau points to 'the vital connection with the moral law from which life receives its meaning' (Morgenthau, 1962a, p. 374), and putting it most clearly, he argues that human existence 'cannot find its meaning within itself but *must* receive it from a transcendent source' (Morgenthau, 1962a, p. 373, emphasis added). Creation, and man's possibilities in this regard following the 'death of God', now look like being of secondary importance to Morgenthau. Instead, what is more important to him is that humans' own created meanings be in harmony with the transcendent moral law.

This is the moment when the apparent tension which informs Morgenthau's vision of the present times – the tension between nihilism and morality in a disenchanting world – becomes clear. A careful reading of Morgenthau's works leads to the conclusion that, while praising the opportunities opened up by the death of God, Morgenthau also emphasises the importance of a universal moral realm with which humans' own created meanings should be harmonious. This is the complex issue the present interpretation intends to explore. Chapter 5 will show that Morgenthau's stances are not contradictory, as argued by some observers. In fact they pave the way to a sophisticated account of leadership which retains much of the Nietzschean and Weberian ideas of the *Übermensch* and the responsible political actor respectively, and represents a viable model of politics which avoids action for action's sake in the aftermath of the demise of universal values. This is a view that is reinforced in the conclusion, which reiterates the relevance of Morgenthau's writings to the discussions regarding modernity and postmodernity in International Relations.

Coming back to the issue of context, I would like to emphasise the importance of placing Morgenthau's endeavours in context, and of reconstructing the questions to which Morgenthau's texts are the answers. To accomplish these tasks, this book will use two approaches. First, when reflecting upon matters of context and intentions, the analysis will be guided by the method of studying political thinkers founded by Cambridge historian Quentin Skinner. Second, since it shares the view that the text 'must be understood as an answer to a real question' (Gadamer, 1975, p. 367), in attempting to reconstruct the questions and the answers which live in Morgenthau's written contributions, this book will follow Skinner (who addresses this issue as well), but also considerations on the issue of textual interpretation that have been put forward by German theorist Hans-Georg Gadamer. The present reading will draw on pertinent aspects of Skinner's and Gadamer's approaches, while avoiding purism in favour of any one author.

As pointed out earlier in the chapter, this interpretation differs from others, which revisit Morgenthau, in two ways: first, in its assessment of the centrality of the issue of meaning in Morgenthau's theory, and second, in the importance ascribed in this regard to Morgenthau's encounter with Nietzsche and Weber early in his career. This encounter led him to subscribe to his mentors' diagnosis of the 'death of God', albeit interpreting it in light of concrete historical events, and to read power as meaning imposition. He perceives man as the source of both destruction and construction and his vision of creative and responsible leadership stands as an interpretation of hope and order, and represents a valid solution to the problems caused by the death of God and the disenchantment of politics.

# 2

## Life Experience and Intellectual Encounters

In 1976, Hans Morgenthau was asked by a journal to make a list of the ten books that were the most important to him, for an article called 'Books that Shape Lives' (see Frei, 2001, p. 113). In an impressive list of authors and titles, among Carr, Arendt and Plato, along with Aristotle's *Politics* and Niebuhr's *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, we find *The Collected Works of Friedrich Nietzsche* and *The Political Writings of Max Weber* (Frei, 2001, p. 113). This list constitutes one of the very few public acknowledgements of the authors whom Morgenthau considered of utmost importance to him, authors whose insights he deemed relevant to his theory, and employed for his own purposes. The present chapter intends to focus on the Nietzschean-Weberian section of Morgenthau's list, and to emphasise these thinkers' special role in the articulation of Morgenthau's scholarly perspective, and of his concern with meaning and disenchantment in particular.

There are two factors which shaped Morgenthau's thinking in a profound and lasting way, and they both belong to that period between the two world wars which Morgenthau spent in his native Germany. The first factor is the political context which shaped Morgenthau's passage to maturity. He faced the World War I and the subsequent years, marked by political instability, economic hardship and moral decay: as Morgenthau put it in his interview with Bernard Johnson, 'this was a very bad period of history and it led to social, moral, and economic devastation, which was of great benefit to the Nazis and really opened the door for them' (Morgenthau in Thompson and Myers, 1984, p. 337). These early confrontations with

a polarised and hostile environment left an enduring mark on Morgenthau.

Secondly, and more importantly, attention should be paid to the intellectual context in the midst of which Morgenthau grew up as an academic, and to the ideas by reference to which he positioned himself. After outlining the characteristics of the German interwar intellectual environment, the chapter will focus on those key influences which were assimilated by Morgenthau at an early stage of his academic training, and which shaped his perspective in his main areas of academic concern: the forces at work in international politics, man's life and nature, and morality in a post-metaphysical age.

The present assumptions regarding the importance of Morgenthau's 'German years' in the development of his thinking are, to be sure, nothing new: the unearthing of Morgenthau's life and work in Germany and Europe was the focus of several scholars' investigation (Amstrup, 1978; Thompson, 1980; Sollner, 1987; Honig, 1996; Pichler, 1998; Frei, 2001; Mollov, 2002). With help from Morgenthau himself, who approached these issues in an interview with Bernard Johnson (Thompson and Myers, 1984, pp. 333–86) and also in an article first published in 1978 (Morgenthau, 1978, reprinted in Thompson and Myers, 1984, pp. 1–17), scholars have reconstructed Morgenthau's personal and intellectual itinerary in his native Germany and in Europe more broadly, with a view to disclosing the major experiences which marked the evolution of his thought. Some of them (see Amstrup, 1978) have looked mainly at Morgenthau's early writings published in Europe, which dealt with issues pertaining to the domain of international law and the relations between law and politics (Amstrup, 1978, p. 163). Starting from the biographical data available, others (see Mollov, 2002) have examined the impact of the Jewish experience on Morgenthau's thought, depicting several transcendent elements which speak volumes about Morgenthau's moral commitments. Last but not least, the intellectual biography published by Frei has brought to light many interesting comments made by Morgenthau regarding the years spent in Germany, and his intellectual companions in those times. Frei's study focuses on Morgenthau's thoughts as expressed in his diaries, letters and texts written as a student and incipient academic in Europe, and contributes to the ongoing rereading of Morgenthau as a normative thinker.



Why is it worth coming back to Morgenthau now? What is important and specific about his work? The answers to these questions are spelt out in this chapter. Both Nietzsche and Weber are central to current discussions on 'modernity' and 'postmodernity', and Morgenthau's relevance for present day International Relations stems from the Nietzschean–Weberian core of his ideas (while putting Nietzsche and Weber together, this interpretation also acknowledges the existence of an 'intellectual debt' that Weber himself owed to Nietzsche, a debt which has been thoroughly documented elsewhere – see Hennis, 1988, esp. pp. 146–62; Owen, 1991, 1994; Warren, 1992; Szakolczai, 1998). Morgenthau takes the diagnosis of 'modernity' as a theme of philosophical and political reflection from Nietzsche and Weber, and he makes it his own, dealing with the issues of the loss of meaning and the disenchantment of politics extensively. He mirrors Nietzsche's and Weber's concern for the fate of values in modernity, and his views are populated with the dynamic Nietzschean–Weberian picture of a battle among opposed value standards (within this context, it comes as no surprise that scholars' recent interest in the 'European' Morgenthau has coincided with the rediscovery of the normative core of Morgenthau's ideas). Moreover, while raising awareness of the dangers of nihilism and disenchantment, Nietzsche's and Weber's account also sheds light on man's potential for creation through responsible action. This dualistic vision is replicated by Morgenthau.

This interpretation acknowledges that there are other intellectual companions that can be highlighted when writing about Morgenthau, and the list provided by Morgenthau in 1976 is all but exhaustive. It also attempts to bring to light the importance of the 'American context', in the midst of which Morgenthau wrote his main academic texts. Most importantly however, this reading shares with those of other scholars one crucial assumption, according to which Morgenthau developed some essential concepts on the nature of politics before his departure to the US, and remained faithful to them (Amstrup, 1978, p. 173). It also suggests that Morgenthau did not find US philosophy potentially useful to his approach, and that he therefore did not attempt to draw on it when devising his theory as he had previously tried with psychoanalysis, for example. In light of the assumptions made above, the 'German context' is the one which deserves to be approached first and foremost when discussing the particularities of Morgenthau's theory.

Let us start with some biographical data and brief comments on the political context which moulded Morgenthau's development in native Germany. As argued by Nobel in his overview of Morgenthau's life, 'these experiences may well have instilled in Morgenthau both a respect for power and a craving for transcending power as the ultimate reality of politics. Nor was power restricted to politics: it was an existential necessity' (Nobel, 1995, p. 63). In Rosenthal's assessment, 'it is difficult to judge just how prejudice might have affected the young Morgenthau and to what extent it shaped his views, but there can be little doubt that the effect was traumatic and long-lasting' (Rosenthal, 1991, p. 13). In the present interpretation, such experiences – sources of motivation and toughness of spirit – exerted an impact on young Morgenthau's assumptions regarding life's meaning, dynamics and complexity. After a summary of the biographical data relevant for the purpose of this book, the chapter will move on to an outline of the mentors and negative influences during Morgenthau's academic beginnings, and will then develop into a detailed account of the impact of Nietzsche, Weber and the American academic environment on Morgenthau.

### **A motivating life experience**

Hans Morgenthau was born in 1904 in the German city of Coburg. Currently a part of north-east Bavaria, Coburg is granted by some historians the reputation of being 'the first Nazi town' (Hayward and Morris, 1988), where the National Socialist Party was popular, and won the majority of seats in the town council elections in June 1929, 'for the first time anywhere in Germany' (see Hayward and Morris, 1988, p. 113). It was an environment characterised by anti-Semitism, discrimination and exclusion, to which Morgenthau would refer negatively in later years.

Morgenthau's adolescence was marked by a series of political developments which succeeded at a high pace, in less than a decade, leading to a highly polarised interwar environment in Germany, and to multiple level crises – to a 'a disintegrating society', as Morgenthau would later put it (Morgenthau, 1978, p. 66). The majority of Germans believed that World War I was 'fresh and joyous' (Morgenthau in Thompson and Myers, 1984, p. 334), and like them, in 1918, young Morgenthau felt 'fully confident that the justice of the German cause

will eventually lead to victory' (Frei, 2001, p. 15). Soon, however, a plethora of events succeeded quickly: the armistice, the November 1918 revolution, the Weimar constitution, and inflation. The latter brought an 'enormous moral, economic, and social devastation' upon Germany (Morgenthau in Thompson and Myers, 1984, p. 335) – as Morgenthau described it in an unpublished lecture, inflation was 'an event of really catastrophic importance, especially for the German middle classes, and for the predominant values of the middle classes', with important strata of the population being rendered 'absolutely and completely pauperized' by it (Lecture 9, 1 May 1962, Morgenthau Papers, Box 171, p. 4). All these developments made up a very bad period, which in Morgenthau's account 'was of great benefit to the Nazis and really opened the door for them' (Morgenthau in Thompson and Myers, 1984, p. 337). Last but not least, from an early age, Morgenthau faced the consequences of the propagation of what he would later call 'the stab in the back legend', according to which the German armies had never lost the war, but had been 'stabbed in the back by traitors from within: the trade unions, socialists, Jews, Catholics, liberals, Free Masons, and so forth' (Morgenthau in Thompson and Myers, 1984, p. 335).

Around that time, Morgenthau lived as trapped between two poles: a 'cruel and utterly devastating' anti-Semitism (Morgenthau in Thompson and Myers, 1984, p. 339), and the domestic reality of a household under the command of his 'rather neurotic and oppressive' father Ludwig (Morgenthau in Thompson and Myers, 1984, p. 337). In Morgenthau's acknowledgment expressed in the interview with Bernard Johnson, the latter 'certainly had a destructive influence' on him – as Morgenthau added in the aforementioned interview, 'I really owe it to my constitution and to my mother that I survived relatively intact' (Morgenthau in Thompson and Myers, 1984, p. 339). In the process of facing his father's authoritarianism, Morgenthau felt the need to be away from companionship: his life experience led to his withdrawal 'from the outside world' (Frei, 2001, p. 23), and made him shy and fearful of being rejected (see Morgenthau in Thompson and Myers, 1984, p. 339).

Within school walls moreover, life was far from easy for him. As the only Jew, and also the best pupil in his class, Morgenthau often had to go through 'terrible experiences' (Morgenthau in Thompson and Myers, 1984, p. 339), such as that of being shouted insults

upon his delivering of a speech at the celebration of the Duke of Coburg (see Thompson and Myers, 1984, pp. 340–1). It was a horrible day, in Morgenthau's assessment 'probably the worst day' of his life (Morgenthau in Thompson and Myers, 1984, p. 341). Adding to the 'traumatic experiences' he had at home, those Morgenthau went through as the only Jew in his class led to 'a kind of retrenchment': Morgenthau retreated into his own shell 'in fear of disappointing human contacts' (Morgenthau in Thompson and Myers, 1984, p. 339), and this went on to become an enduring feature of his personality.

Unsurprisingly, the ideas expressed in Morgenthau's school compositions were often a mirror of his own experiences. As Morgenthau stated in an essay written in 1922, during those early years spent in Coburg he became more and more aware that his relationship to the social environment was determined by three factors: he was a German, a Jew, and a boy whose passage to maturity had taken place in the period following the World War I (see Morgenthau in Thompson and Myers, 1984, p. 1). He also made it clear that he regarded negatively the blaming of the Jews for the difficulties experienced by the German people in the interwar years. Moreover, he was eager to point out that the accusations directed against him as a Jew were unjustified, and considered the hostile actions evoked by those accusations 'a crying injustice and a dishonoring humiliation' (Morgenthau in Thompson and Myers, 1984, p. 2).

Around that time, young Morgenthau admitted that he had two hopes: he hoped 'for the lifting of the pressure' to which he was exposed by the social environment, and also to find 'a direction and a purpose' for his future activities (Morgenthau, 1978, p. 63). He also concluded that 'the latter cannot be realized before the former is fulfilled' (Morgenthau, 1978, p. 63). Shortly afterwards, in a development which helped him escape the social pressures of his hometown, Morgenthau left Coburg in 1923 to pursue undergraduate studies at the University of Frankfurt.

### **Studies, mentors, negative influences**

The intellectual context in which Morgenthau's academic development took place was affected by the political and economic background that animated post-war Germany. World War I had a

tremendous impact all around Europe, yet it was in Germany that its most radical consequences unfolded: in *The Nietzsche Legacy in Germany 1890–1990*, Aschheim talks about 'a certain brutalization that spilled over from the war and became an inbuilt part of postwar attitudes' (Aschheim, 1992, p. 155). As Aschheim argues further,

The subsequent cheapening of life, the infusion of greater linguistic and physical violence into the public realm, and the depersonalization may have been a generally European phenomenon, but in Germany it was exacerbated by defeat, revolution, and the persistent socioeconomic crisis.

(Aschheim, 1992, p. 155)

It was a period of 'radical dislocation and polarization', which 'increasingly provided the space for politically extremist alternatives' (Aschheim, 1992, pp. 154–5). Struggles on the political scene – often taking the form of open street confrontations between proponents of different ideologies – were replicated onto the intellectual one, where discussions regarding the struggle among values in modernity, and the emergence of strong, responsible leadership, blended with the critique of liberalism, and with discourses which emphasised the perils of technological thinking and practice. Morgenthau's development took place in this heterogeneous space of intellectual concerns, in which he immersed and later also sought to make his own criticism heard, while engaging with some of the major strands of thought of the time. Moreover, Morgenthau positioned himself through the thinkers he deemed relevant to his academic concerns, especially Nietzsche and Weber, whose ideas were central to interwar German intellectual debates (see Aschheim, 1992). Morgenthau was an avid reader of both Nietzsche and Weber, and he agreed with many of their assumptions, using them to develop his political theory, and exploring the topic of the 'death of God' at length in his works, with the loss of meaning and the disenchantment entailed by it.

As a teenager, Morgenthau was eager to perfect his writing style (a concern which would preoccupy him all his life), and he developed an interest in philosophy and literature (see Morgenthau, 1978, p. 63). Upon leaving high school, he wanted to embark on the undergraduate study of literature, but after several discussions with his

father, who was against this choice, he realised this would not happen. Subsequently, in 1923, Morgenthau went to the University of Frankfurt with the aim of studying philosophy – in his own words, ‘philosophy, so I thought, would answer my quest for the meaning of human existence and unravel the riddles of the universe’ (Morgenthau, 1978, p. 63). Morgenthau was however very disappointed by the manner in which philosophy was taught in Frankfurt at the time, especially by the introductory course, which dealt with ‘nothing but epistemology’, and was ‘quite boring’ (Morgenthau in Thompson and Myers, 1984, p. 342). He moved to Munich to study law after only one semester: as Morgenthau explained this, ‘once the fields in which I was really interested were eliminated – academic philosophy in view of its lack of emotional appeal, and literature because of the paternal veto – law appeared to make the least demands on special skills and emotional commitment’ (Morgenthau, 1978, p. 63).

Not feeling attracted to law, while in Munich, Morgenthau limited his attendance to law lectures ‘to the bare minimum’; instead, he took various other courses whose subject matter and professors interested him (Morgenthau, 1978, p. 63). He thus enrolled for the course held by Heinrich Wölfflin, a famous art historian who was the founder of a school of aesthetics ‘that revolutionized the understanding and criticism of art’, accounting for changes in style ‘in terms of the transformation of fundamental forms rather than of mere chronological sequence’ (Morgenthau, 1978, p. 64). Moreover, from the autumn of 1923 up to the spring of 1924, Morgenthau attended the classes taught by Hermann Oncken, an expert on nineteenth-century German history, a scholar ‘of unusual sensitivity’, who ‘entered into an historic period or personality and reconstructed it, laying bare the hidden connections of motivations, actions, and consequences’ (Morgenthau, 1978, p. 64). Morgenthau attended Oncken’s lectures on Bismarck’s foreign policy, and also those which focused on the principles of foreign and military policy, and the relationship between them. The latter area of study, in particular, made a profound impression on Morgenthau – as he explained in his ‘Intellectual Autobiography’, ‘for the first time, I felt the impact of a coherent system of thought, primarily a distillation of Bismarck’s *realpolitik*, that appeared to support my isolated and impressionistic judgments on contemporary issues of foreign policy’ (Morgenthau, 1978, p. 64).

Another professor dear to the young student Morgenthau was Karl Rothenbucher, a former friend of Weber who held a seminar on Weber's political and social philosophy, which focused on Weber's political writings. Years later, Morgenthau would emphasise that 'it was a most fortunate coincidence for me that the intellectual and moral stature of Rothenbucher was commensurate with the subject matter of the seminar', and that this was 'a great experience, on account of the subject matter as well as the teacher' (Morgenthau, 1978, p. 64). In Morgenthau's account in his interview with Bernard Johnson, Rothenbucher was 'a great man, very intelligent, of great character and civic courage' (Morgenthau in Thompson and Myers, 1984, p. 348).

Morgenthau went through another formative experience, 'both intellectual and personal' (Morgenthau, 1978, p. 64), when he attended a seminar on international law organised by Professor Karl Neumeyer. It is to Neumeyer that Morgenthau owed a education in international law which over the years did him 'an enormous amount of good' (Morgenthau quoted in Thompson and Myers, 1984, p. 348). Following the encounter with Neumeyer's rigorous, line by line analysis of core international law texts, Morgenthau learnt 'to take nothing for granted in the so-called scholarly literature' – as he put it in his intellectual autobiography, 'whenever later on I came across outrageous statements that I hesitated to expose for what they were, I remembered Neumeyer's seminar and took heart' (Morgenthau, 1978, p. 65). Years later, in writing Neumeyer's obituary for the *American Journal of International Law*, Morgenthau would use touching words to praise his former teacher, portraying Neumeyer as a scholar with a 'pious and noble soul', who was endowed with intellectual honesty and with 'a genuinely ethical aspiration toward truth for truth's sake' (Morgenthau, 1941, p. 672). As Morgenthau wrote in the obituary, 'whoever went through his school was immune against the misconceptions of the post-World War science of international law' (Morgenthau, 1941, p. 672).

Another very important intellectual encounter was that between Morgenthau and Hugo Sinzheimer, a specialist in labour and criminal law who ran his own firm, and who also acted as a professor at the University of Frankfurt. Morgenthau met Sinzheimer in 1928, when he began a legal internship under the latter's supervision, and stayed on until 1931. During the internship, he provided Sinzheimer

with general research assistance and worked at the drafting of briefs for the Supreme Court, but he also had teaching assistant duties at the university, and often accompanied and represented his boss in criminal cases (see Frei, 2001, p. 36). As one of the drafters of the 1919 Weimar Constitution, Sinzheimer had an outstanding reputation, being, in Morgenthau's assessment, 'one of the two or three foremost labor lawyers in Germany' and 'one of the greatest criminal lawyers' (Morgenthau in Thompson and Myers, 1984, p. 348). In Morgenthau's account, Sinzheimer was 'passionately and eloquently devoted to the legally defined interests of the underdog' (Morgenthau, 1978, p. 65), and he had to fight 'within a political system that had stacked the legal cards against him and his cause' (Morgenthau, 1978, p. 66), and what was decisive 'was not the merits of different legal interpretations but the distribution of political power' (Morgenthau, 1978, p. 65).

Sinzheimer's importance in Morgenthau's scholarly achievements went beyond the boundaries of the legal internship. Thanks to his association with Sinzheimer, Morgenthau met scholars such as Franz Neumann, Ernst Fraenkel, Otto Kahn-Freund (all of them acting as Sinzheimer's interns), Paul Tillich, Martin Buber, Carl Mennicke, Hendrik de Man and Friedrich Giese (see Frei, 2001, p. 38). Moreover, Morgenthau also came in contact with the Frankfurt Institute for Social Research, and there he met a wide range of thinkers like Max Horkheimer, Franz Oppenheimer, Karl Mannheim, Theodor Adorno, Herbert Marcuse, Friedrich Pollock, Karl Landauer and Erich Fromm (Frei, 2001, p. 39). This was an exciting time for Morgenthau who took advantage of the opportunities Sinzheimer offered him. In a letter sent in January 1934 to his supervisor and friend, Morgenthau wrote that he was grateful for having breathed 'the intellectual and moral air' that Sinzheimer emanated, and concluded: 'Giving up the ties that such an influence creates would mean giving up my own personality' (Morgenthau quoted in Frei, 2001, p. 168).

Equally important, around that time, Morgenthau also began to affirm his critical voice, and he articulated a series of critical positions whose outline would help to get a complete picture of his intellectual encounters back in Germany, and also to understand Morgenthau's main theoretical commitments better. The targets of Morgenthau's criticism are outlined below.



As mentioned above, through his association with Sinzheimer, Morgenthau came into contact with many of the scholars associated with the Frankfurt Institute for Social Research, taking part in some of the work of the Institute 'as an outsider' (Morgenthau, 1978, p. 67). In an important assessment, in his short intellectual autobiography published in 1978, Morgenthau refers to Marxism as a 'diffuse and largely negative' intellectual influence on him, along with psychoanalysis (Morgenthau, 1978, p. 66).

While acknowledging that he learnt 'a great deal' from Marx, Morgenthau added that he 'could not abide that particular type of Marxist who considers Marxism to be a closed intellectual system, containing ready-made answers to all possible questions, to be elicited by correct interpretations' (Morgenthau, 1978, p. 67). Soon after familiarising himself with the scholars at the Frankfurt Institute for Social Research, Morgenthau was 'struck and repelled' by the contrast between the political situation in Germany, and the 'futile hair-splitting' in which the ordinary members of the Institute were engaged. According to Morgenthau, 'the Nazi enemy was standing at the gate, aided and abetted from within, and these intelligent and learned people, the natural enemies and designated victims of nazism, found nothing better to do than search for the true meaning of one statement by Marx as against another' (Morgenthau, 1978, p. 67). As Morgenthau stated in his 1978 article, 'the aversion to a dogmatism that sacrifices pragmatic effectiveness for logical or ideological consistency has remained a persistent element of my intellectual attitude' (Morgenthau, 1978, p. 67).

Morgenthau's criticism of Marxism is very detailed and deserves special attention in its own right (the unpublished lectures provide an impressive array of materials for scholars interested in the topic). For the purposes of this interpretation I want to focus on Morgenthau's critique briefly, and to point out that in his lectures Morgenthau criticised Marxism for its misunderstanding of human nature and society, and for what he considered to be Marxism's economic reductionism. Regarding the first issue, Morgenthau argued in one of his lectures that 'Marx was wrong in first of all assuming the perfect goodness of man by nature, and secondly, assuming that whatever evil there is in the world is the result of a particular type of society' (Lecture 7, 24 April 1962, Morgenthau Papers, Box 171, p. 10). In a significant statement which spoke volumes about

Morgenthau's position regarding the human individual as the main unit of analysis, he maintained that 'it is the nature of man, in whatever type of society he lives, which creates power relations and which makes the complete achievement of freedom impossible. So it is the primacy of the society over the individual which is really the fundamental mistake of Marx' (Lecture 7, 24 April 1962, Morgenthau Papers, Box 171, p. 3). Morgenthau argued further that it was the 'unpredictable sphere of human freedom, human creativeness, which Marx did not see' (Lecture 7, 24 April 1962, Morgenthau Papers, Box 171, p. 10). Regarding Marx's reductionism as noted by Morgenthau, he was quick to tell his students that 'whereas there are of course economic elements determining foreign policies, I think it is one of the greatest mistakes, and a very primitive explanation of foreign policy, to try to reduce foreign policy to a mere reflection of economic conflicts and economic interests' (Sixth lecture, 14 January 1946, Morgenthau Papers, Box 169, p. 12).

Morgenthau's encounter with psychoanalysis did not fare any better. In 1929, soon after finishing the preparations for the publication of his doctoral thesis, he started to think about developing a political theory that would provide 'a general foundation for the specific relationships between politics and law', which he had written about in his doctoral thesis (Morgenthau, 1978, p. 67). Psychoanalysis was much discussed in Germany at that time, and Morgenthau hoped that Freud's insights might be able to provide him with such a foundation for his theory. After searching for this foundation in anthropology and psychology, for about a year, Morgenthau experimented with Freudian concepts and ideas, 'in an attempt to construct a theoretical system of politics' (Morgenthau, 1978, p. 67). However, he then realised that his experiment had been unsuccessful, and he did not even try to publish the manuscript he had prepared during that period – in Morgenthau's words, 'so certain have I been of the failure of this undertaking' (for an argument which highlights Freud's importance for Morgenthau's perspective, see Schuett, 2007). Years later, he would criticise both psychoanalysis and Marxism for their reductionism – as Morgenthau would state in his 1978 article, 'what defeats a psychoanalytical theory of politics is what has defeated a Marxist theory of politics: the impossibility for accounting for the complexities and varieties of political experience with the simplicities

of a reductionist theory, economic or psychological' (Morgenthau, 1978, p. 67).

Moreover, the conservative revolutionaries' ideas were received by Morgenthau with mixed feelings (see Frei, 2001, esp. pp. 164–6). He was in accord with their assumptions regarding the consequences of technology, and the need for strong leadership in Germany; yet, unlike them, the emphasis on war and on conflict for conflict's sake looked horrific to Morgenthau. Relevant to the present interpretation is the fact that, in contrast to Junger in particular, Morgenthau emphasised in an unpublished manuscript the idea of 'morally relevant values' (Morgenthau quoted in Frei, 2001, p. 164), and maintained that man has 'a higher, spiritual vocation, to which instinctual drives must be subordinated', that man keeps striving 'to direct instincts toward objective, morally relevant goals' (Morgenthau quoted in Frei, 2001, p. 165). In this unpublished piece written in Germany, Morgenthau criticised Junger for his view on war as 'a goal in itself', for glorifying war as a 'splendid emotional release' which turned men into 'magnificent beasts of prey' (Morgenthau quoted in Frei, 2001, p. 164). This, Morgenthau argued, was an attitude which viewed 'the unleashing of instincts as the ultimate goal and the enjoyment of emotional outbursts as the ultimate value', and which demonstrated Junger's 'lack of restraint, his barbarism, his egotistic hedonism, his hostility toward culture and society' (Morgenthau quoted in Frei, 2001, p. 164). In that manuscript, according to Frei, Morgenthau acknowledged the existence of human drives which sought release. War however, he concluded, was only one possible consequence of these drives, and by no means a necessary one (see Frei, 2001, p. 165).

In interwar Germany, Morgenthau rejected not only Marxism, psychoanalysis and some of the conservative revolutionaries' ideas, but also Carl Schmitt. Morgenthau met Schmitt once, in Berlin, and this meeting was an immense disappointment to him: as he would later put it, the encounter lacked 'anything even approaching spontaneity', it was 'staged in every detail, a charade – cold, contrived, dishonest, and worthwhile only in revealing in capsule form the character of that brilliant, inventive scholar' (Morgenthau, 1978, p. 68). According to Morgenthau, after their meeting, Schmitt apparently incorporated some of Morgenthau's ideas (to be found in his doctoral dissertation) into the second edition of *The Concept of the*

*Political* without consulting him and without mentioning their source (Morgenthau, 1978, p. 68).

The motives behind Morgenthau's critique were not only theoretical, but also moral. While praising Schmitt for his immense and intellectually well-deserved prestige (Morgenthau, 1978, p. 68), Morgenthau attacked him for his lack of theoretical constancy, for his passing from neo-Kantianism to Catholic political philosophy, and then to liberal democracy, authoritarianism and Nazism (Morgenthau, 1978, p. 67). Morgenthau also disliked Schmitt for what he considered the latter's unprincipled scholarly behaviour. He criticised Schmitt for his argumentation in favour of Hitler's blood purge of 1934, and for his article on the founder of the Prussian Conservative Party, Friedrich Julius Stahl, who had been endowed by Schmitt 'with a Jewish-sounding name of his own invention', in an article in which his Jewish antecedents had been used 'in terms so dishonest, mean, and vulgar as to qualify Schmitt as the Streicher of the legal profession' (Morgenthau, 1978, p. 68). In Morgenthau's view, 'no German political thinker of the interwar period was more amply endowed with intellectual ability, but it is doubtful whether any surpassed him in lack of principle and servility to his Nazi masters' (Morgenthau, 1978, p. 67).

Last but not least, between 1932 and 1934, Morgenthau developed a critique of another major strand of thought in interwar Germany: Neo-Kantianism. To Kelsen's 'pure' theory of law and its adherents grouped around the Vienna School, Morgenthau opposed what he called 'the reality of norms' (the title of his *Habilitation* thesis, published in 1934). Morgenthau criticised the neo-Kantians for placing the normative realms 'between heaven and earth ... in these Elysian fields', and he argued in favour of bringing the norms back to 'earthly' reality, in an attempt to construct 'an empirical theory of a ideal phenomenon' (Morgenthau quoted in Frei, 2001, p. 135). For Morgenthau, the reality of norms was 'either psychic or physical', the 'psychic reality' of a norm being founded on its 'capacity to influence the will of the person it addresses' in the direction desired by the norm' (Morgenthau quoted in Frei, 2001, p. 135).

Morgenthau criticised Kelsen and the Vienna School for their withdrawal from 'reality' and for their refusal to acknowledge the existence of 'burning political problems' (Frei, 2001, p. 135). Moreover, he sought to weaken the distinction between the *ought to be* and

the *is*, central to (neo-) Kantian philosophy (Frei, 2001, pp. 134–5). As Frei explains, in Morgenthau's interpretation, the *ought to be* was 'no longer envisaged as a purely aprioristic category independent of experience, but one in relation to an empirically ascertainable reality' (Frei, 2001, p. 135). Morgenthau suggested that it was 'mistaken, dangerous, and ultimately impossible to banish value judgments completely from the social sciences in order to keep them "pure"' (Frei, 2001, p. 151). Thus, to Morgenthau, norms had to be grounded in the reality of life and politics. As we will see in the subsequent chapters, this was a position which he maintained throughout his life.

To sum up, while in Germany, Morgenthau met and admired teachers such as Oncken, Rothenbucher, Neumeyer and Sinzheimer. Moreover, he was not only a passive receiver of knowledge. On the contrary, he was an interpreter and a critic, and his criticism helps one to grasp Morgenthau's positions on some of the major topics of discussion in those times. Most importantly, the present interpretation argues that there were two thinkers with whose views Morgenthau was in accord: Friedrich Nietzsche and Max Weber. Their ideas encompassed valuable assumptions, many of which were in harmony with Morgenthau's views regarding the death of universal values, the loss of meaning and the disenchantment of the world.

How did Morgenthau go about acknowledging Nietzsche's and Weber's importance in the articulation of his thought, and which of Nietzsche's and Weber's ideas did he share and incorporate into his theory, and which ones did he reject? The following section intends to answer these questions.

## **Morgenthau's reading of Nietzsche and Weber**

### **Friedrich Nietzsche**

Hans Morgenthau hardly ever talked or wrote about Friedrich Nietzsche openly. Taking into account the generally hostile attitude developed against the Germans around World War II, and Nazis' misuse of Nietzsche in particular, the acknowledgement of such a relationship may not have looked like a good thing to do to Morgenthau, even years after 1945. According to Frei, these must have been Morgenthau's calculations upon entering the United States in 1937: by the time he arrived in his adoptive country, many of his

contemporaries 'made no distinction between Nazis and Germans', and it would have been 'very imprudent, if not outright self-defeating for Morgenthau to have presented his views as a "German" theory of politics, or to have stressed the "German" origins of his ideas' (Frei, 2001, p. 110). After all, as a German Jewish immigrant, Morgenthau was 'hardly alone during those years in trying to conceal German influences in his academic work' (Frei, 2001, p. 112).

According to Frei, Morgenthau first read Nietzsche in high school, but Nietzsche did not make an impact on him at that time. His second, decisive encounter with Nietzsche occurred in early 1926 when Morgenthau passed through *The Untimely Meditations*, as a law student in Munich (see Frei, 2001, pp. 98–9). It took him more than three years to work through the complete writings, and the systematic reading was followed by a written confession: Nietzsche, 'the harbinger of a new Renaissance, much like the Quattrocento: strong, clear, without morality', became the 'god' of Morgenthau's youth (Morgenthau quoted in Frei, 2001, p. 98). Morgenthau's relationship with Nietzsche's thought witnessed both ups and downs, Morgenthau praised, but at times also distanced himself from his mentor (see Frei, 2001, pp. 105–6). Yet, Nietzsche was never abandoned, and he remained 'an important source of confirmation up until the final years – for the *realist* in Morgenthau' (Frei, 2001, p. 94, emphasis in the original).

According to the information Frei extracted from Morgenthau's diaries and private correspondence, especially from those parts which were written in Germany, Morgenthau considered Nietzsche no less than the 'god' of his youth (Frei, 2001, p. 98). Moreover, once, in private correspondence, he put it plainly: 'A most powerful and probably decisive influence has certainly been Nietzsche' (letter to Samuel H. Magill, 5 January 1962, Morgenthau Papers, Box 39). In light of the evidence available to him, Frei concluded that, in Morgenthau's case, the reading of Nietzsche represented a crucial formative experience, which '*touched upon the very roots*' of Morgenthau's thinking (Frei, 2001, p. 108, emphasis in the original). Nietzsche 'confirmed and articulated Morgenthau's own experiences' (Frei, 2001, p. 100), the convergence of the latter's personal experiences with the former's perspective and diagnostic method of inquiry leading to the creation of an 'affinity of outlook' between the two (Frei, 2001, pp. 107–8). In Frei's interpretation, the fact that to Morgenthau, Nietzsche stood

above all the other authors he read throughout his academic studies (for Morgenthau's 'reading list' around that time see Frei, 2001, p. 108) should not be underestimated, but given its proper place, and its significance recognised. The findings arrived at in the present interpretation are in their turn based on an in depth reading of Morgenthau's manuscripts held by the US Library of Congress, as well as of all his published works and an extensive secondary literature, and they highlight the Nietzschean aspects of Morgenthau's thought. However, as the following chapters will demonstrate, the account provided here differs from Frei's in its more detailed analysis of the Nietzschean and Weberian aspects of Morgenthau's theory – especially of his concern with meaning, power as meaning imposition and disenchantment – and in the emphasis on Morgenthau's originality and relevance to the discussion of modernity and post-modernity in *International Relations*. The study of Nietzsche's and Weber's impact on Morgenthau will help us to understand why it is important to return to Morgenthau at present, with a view to the discussions of the topics of modernity and postmodernity, of the concepts of meaning and values, and the legitimacy of truth. The points of convergence between Nietzsche's, Weber's and Morgenthau's thinking will be hinted at below, and explored at length in the next chapters.

One of the outcomes of Morgenthau's reading of Nietzsche is his engagement with the Nietzschean diagnosis regarding modernity after the 'death of God' – interpreted by Morgenthau as the 'death' (disintegration) of an international moral realm 'composed of Christian, cosmopolitan, and humanitarian elements' (Morgenthau, 1967, p. 244). As Nietzsche once put it, 'one interpretation has collapsed; but because it was considered *the* interpretation it now seems as if there were no meaning at all in existence, as if everything were in vain' (Nietzsche, 1968, p. 35, emphasis in the original). Nietzsche outlines the meaning of nihilism in a nutshell by stating that nihilism means '*that the highest values devalue themselves*. The aim is lacking; "why?" finds no answer' (Nietzsche, 1968, p. 9, emphasis in the original). The issue of meaning and what its loss entails preoccupies Morgenthau, who agrees with the 'death of God' diagnosis, and is aware of the exceptional character of the situation. For Morgenthau, a strong, singular meaning of the world is absent and at first, like everybody else, he strives for security and certainty

(Frei, 2001, p. 102). However, he then realises that, in a present stigmatised by the death of God, one 'must learn to live without either' (Frei, 2001, p. 102). As Morgenthau puts it in *Scientific Man vs Power Politics*, man – 'and here we have to exclude the rationalist' – discovers 'many little answers but no answer to the great questions of his life, no meaning, no direction' (Morgenthau, 1947, p. 176). Like the nationalistic masses which Morgenthau criticises for their destructive actions, men 'meet under an empty sky from which the gods have departed' (Morgenthau, 1967, p. 249). An extended analysis of Morgenthau's views on this issue will be made in Chapter 3).

Nevertheless, like Nietzsche, Morgenthau is not only aware of the dangers, but also of the possibilities opened up by the death of God. Thus, after emphasising that men live in the aftermath of 'God's death', in a world lacking a 'guiding light', a source of universally accepted principles, Morgenthau argues that those who value certainty have to face a challenging situation which embodies uncertainty and insecurity. As we will see in future chapters in detail, Morgenthau starts from the Nietzschean position of 'God's death', and he also agrees with Nietzsche on one of the consequences of this 'death': human beings now have increased scope for the creative manifestation of their agency. The act of meaning imposition points to the creative potentialities embedded in the power struggle, and constitutes a positive interpretation of human capabilities.

A remark deserves special emphasis at this point: as Morgenthau's critique of Junger and Schmitt demonstrates, his endorsement of Nietzsche's diagnosis of the 'death of God' does not mean that he succumbs to a relativism which denies the existence of any transcendental source of values whatsoever. On the contrary, the dangers implied by the continuous erosion of morality will preoccupy Morgenthau throughout his life. According to the present interpretation, Morgenthau gains from Nietzsche an awareness of a certain kind of relativism, one which takes into account historical and cultural variations (see Morgenthau, 1979, p. 4). Nevertheless, Morgenthau still rates Judaeo-Christian and Kantian moral values highly, and he also regards the consolidation of a universal realm of values favourably (the implications of this very important position will be analysed later on).

According to the present interpretation, another theme in whose articulation Morgenthau is in accord with Nietzsche is that of life as



a struggle, perpetuated by a human individual caught between the opposing forces which constitute his nature. As Morgenthau acknowledges in an interview from 1964, his basic motivation has always been 'to get at the truth about human nature and human action': as Morgenthau adds further, 'that I addressed myself to the truth about politics was in a sense an accident' ('The Sum and Substance' interview, Morgenthau Papers, Box 172, p. 1). Sharing with Nietzsche this interest in 'man', Morgenthau seems to ask, at his turn: 'What can we know about the human?'

While rejecting the unidimensional, 'reason-based', portrait of human nature, Morgenthau wonders 'whether reason could possibly prevail over the other "forces" in human beings' (Morgenthau quoted in Frei, 2001, p. 103). Along these forces, he singles out the lust for power, whose outstanding dominance over man makes life a perpetual struggle. Thus, in Morgenthau's interpretation, similar to Nietzsche's, life is not 'only' struggle – it is struggle for power, and individuals' awareness of this fact intensifies their appetite for such a form of domination. In Morgenthau's account, which echoes Nietzsche's views, there is no social action 'which would not contain at least a trace of this desire to make one's own person prevail against others' (Morgenthau, 1947, p. 166). Morgenthau points to the 'elemental bio-psychological drives' by which society is created, to 'the drives to live, to propagate, and to dominate', common to all men (Morgenthau, 1967, p. 31). Taking all these into account, Morgenthau writes in *Scientific Man vs Power Politics* that 'there can be no actual denial of the lust for power without denying the very condition of human existence in this world' (Morgenthau, 1947, p. 172).

Morgenthau's view on the meaning of power is Nietzschean too. For Morgenthau, 'power' represents 'man's control over the minds and actions of other men' (Morgenthau, 1967, p. 26). We notice that one's power needs others' presence and recognition, that 'power' is clearly linked to the issue of social interactions. More important, in order for someone to have power and therefore 'to make one's own person prevail against others' (Morgenthau, 1947, p. 166), (s)he must exert control over the minds. Such a form of control, manifesting itself as one's 'rule' over others' interpretations of events, points to man's creative potential. Moreover, the above-mentioned control refers to one's act of imposing a certain 'version', a certain interpretation, upon the others – as a meaning imposition. The issue of meaning is

central to Morgenthau, and in his view, man's power resides in the successful imposition of interpretations. The human creative capacities are thus channelled into a continuous effort, performed by each human being, for imposing 'his' meaning, his particular positions, not by virtue of physical force, but of 'the force of the mind'. This assumption regarding the centrality of a Nietzschean approach to power in Morgenthau's theory, which focuses on creation as interpretation, and on struggling for meaning imposition, will be substantiated in the next chapters.

'Who of you will renounce power, knowing and experiencing that power is evil?', Nietzsche once rhetorically asked his readers (Nietzsche quoted in Kaufmann, 1974, p. 180). Resembling Nietzsche's 'repudiation of power as an evil principle' noted by Kaufmann (Kaufmann, 1974, p. 197), Morgenthau tackles the issue of what power makes men do, and how they gain this power. Time and again, Morgenthau points to the limitless character of humans' lust for/will to power: while man's vital needs 'are capable of satisfaction', the lust for power 'would be satisfied only if the last man became an object of his domination, there being nobody above or beside him, that is, if he became like God' (Morgenthau, 1947, p. 165). As Morgenthau maintains, 'the selfishness of man has limits; his will to power has none' (Morgenthau, 1947, p. 165). It is in this context that Morgenthau points to the omnipresence of 'the tragic'. What he calls the 'tragic meaning of the irrationality of life' (Morgenthau, 1947, p. 174) stems from man's nature itself, from its characteristics – more precisely, from the limitations demonstrated in dealing with a lust for power which all so easily generates destruction.

However, here it is worth emphasising that in Nietzsche's and Morgenthau's interpretation, man's nature is viewed dichotomously, and in man we find both 'creature' and 'creator'. In Morgenthau's account, humans' desire for power carries within it, on the one hand, a highly destructive potential. On the other hand however, like in Nietzsche – for whom the *Übermensch* turns into a creator, his act of destruction being, in the end, positively assessed – in Morgenthau's portrait of human nature we can perceive a second, positive facet. It is a facet symbolised by the possibility of overcoming through mastering and creation. Man, perceived as a creature governed by antagonistic forces, is also a source of creation, causing positive changes by means of his longing for transcendence. As it will become obvious in Chapters 4

and 5, for Morgenthau, man's essence comprises a dynamic relation destruction – construction. Morgenthau suggests that, in order to succeed in 'taming' his destructive capabilities, men living in the aftermath of the 'death of God' should engage in an exercise in self-knowledge, in obtaining insights about their human condition, in understanding it as well as possible. Here, what is interesting is that this stance seems to mirror some of Nietzsche's own assertions. As Abbey reveals, during Nietzsche's 'middle period', a conception of self-knowledge 'as a continuous quest to understand a protean, multiple, mysterious self is not repudiated; on the contrary, it is essential for the sort of aesthetic self-refashioning he advocates' (Abbey, 2000, p. 22). As Abbey adds further, for Nietzsche 'in order to refigure themselves, individuals must know their faults and weaknesses, strengths and virtues, whence these originate and whether they can be modified', and 'those who do not engage in careful self-observation misunderstand their passions and are unable to master them' (Abbey, 2000, p. 22).

To overcome, to go beyond the limits of the 'customary', of ordinary experiences, to strive for fulfilling constructive endeavours, to aspire to better and greater – these are the other insights gained by young Morgenthau during his Nietzschean reading experience. As Chapter 5 will show at length, Morgenthau's superior hero grapples with ethical issues, animated by a desire to know more about his nature, and to be able to 'tame' it. The present interpretation argues that Morgenthau's best characters are thought of by him in a way similar to that in which Nietzsche regarded his superior heroes, yet they have also undergone a political recasting. Re-shaping Morgenthau's Nietzschean outlook, this process of political recasting was performed with the help of a scholar whose works young Morgenthau read around the same time as Nietzsche's. His name is Max Weber.

### **Max Weber**

Morgenthau's systematic encounter with Weber's thought took place in 1926, during his attendance at the University of Munich of a series of seminars organised by Karl Rothenbucher, a professor of constitutional law. We find occasional references to Rothenbucher and Weber in Morgenthau's letters (see Frei, 2001, p. 130, n. 65), in a discussion he had with three other scholars at the Rockefeller Foundation in 1972, and in two 'official accounts': his interview with Bernard

Johnson (Thompson and Myers, 1984, pp. 333–86), and the ‘intellectual autobiography’ published in 1978 (Morgenthau, 1978, reprinted in Thompson and Myers, 1984, pp. 1–17). Professor Rothenbucher had a major contribution in generating, and then cultivating, Morgenthau’s admiration for Weber: ‘a great man, very intelligent, of great character and civic courage’ (Morgenthau in Thompson and Myers, 1984, p. 348), Rothenbucher ‘understood Weber’s mind and made it understood’ (Morgenthau, 1978, p. 64). Consequently, the encounter with Weber’s political thought, as mediated by Rothenbucher, was rated highly by Morgenthau: it stood as ‘one of the formative experiences’ (Morgenthau in Thompson and Myers, 1984, p. 347), and Rothenbucher’s Weber had ‘a reassuring influence’ on him (Morgenthau, 1978, p. 64). As Morgenthau stated during the ‘Values and Humanities: The Formulation of a New Programme by the Rockefeller Foundation’ discussion in 1972, he was ‘impressed and deeply influenced’ by Rothenbucher’s seminars on the political writings of Max Weber, this being ‘one of the lasting experiences’ of his intellectual life (Morgenthau, 1972a, Morgenthau Papers, Box 174, p. 41). According to Morgenthau’s detailed account of the reasons behind his admiration, Weber’s political thought ‘possessed all the intellectual and moral qualities I had looked for in vain in the contemporary literature inside and outside the universities’ (Morgenthau, 1978, p. 64). As a scholar, Weber was dear to Morgenthau because he was ‘everything most of his colleagues pretended to be but were not’ – he was thus true to himself, and to the others. According to Morgenthau, while, as a citizen, Weber was ‘a passionate observer of the political scene and a frustrated participant in it’, as a scholar he ‘looked at politics without passion and pursued no political purpose beyond the intellectual one of understanding’ (Morgenthau, 1978, p. 64).

As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, various works which document Nietzsche’s influence on Weber, and the subsequent similarities between Nietzsche’s and Weber’s positions, have been published already (see Hennis, 1988, esp. pp. 146–62; Owen, 1991, 1994; Warren, 1992; Szakolczai, 1998). This book contends that in Weber’s works, young Morgenthau encountered some themes which must have looked very familiar to him, since he had already found them in Nietzsche. Most importantly, the present interpretation maintains that it is by means of recasting Nietzschean insights in institutional terms, ‘thus lending them a public and political import

that is found wanting in Nietzsche himself' (Horowitz and Maley, 1994, p. 9), that Weber gained particular importance to Morgenthau. What Nietzsche expressed in philosophical terms, Weber 'translated' to political terms, and made it relevant to politics. In the interpretation put forward here, this 'politicised Nietzschean' facet of Weber was the most appealing to Morgenthau, in support of this assumption standing the fact that when asked to assemble a list of the ten books which shaped his life, Morgenthau mentioned *The Political Writings of Max Weber* (see Frei, 2001, p. 113). This represents an indication that to Morgenthau, Weber was important precisely for his political insights, with all their Nietzschean overtones. Moreover, this interpretation argues that to Morgenthau, Weber's economic writings were of secondary importance, and consequently it does not see Weber the economist in Morgenthau.

The idea that the "rule (*Herrschaft*) of man over man" is an inescapable fact of human existence' represents 'a central theme' of Weber's social and political thought (Lassman, 2000, p. 83). Life as a generalised struggle, and politics as a struggle for power par excellence – these are the main images of Weber's dynamic account on the topic. For Weber, the idea of a world free from the rule of man over man is simply utopian. Moreover, politics means, above all, struggle for power – in Weber's words, 'anyone who goes in for worldly politics must, above all, be free of illusions and acknowledge one fundamental fact: to be resigned to the inevitable and eternal struggle of man with man on this earth' (Weber quoted in Lassman, 2000, p. 84). The meaning of 'power' in this context Weber interprets as 'every chance of imposing one's own will within a social relation, even against resistance, regardless of what this chance is based upon' (Weber quoted in Lassman, 2000, p. 89). In a well-known formulation, Weber asserts that 'anyone engaged in politics is striving for power, either power as a means to attain other goals (which may be ideal or selfish), or power "for its own sake", which is to say, in order to enjoy the feeling of prestige given by power' (Weber quoted in Lassman, 2000, p. 85). According to Frei, almost identical formulations can also be found in Nietzsche. See Frei, 2001, p. 130).

For Morgenthau then, life is a struggle, and politics is a struggle for power par excellence. Moreover, he argues that both domestic and international politics encompass a struggle for power, 'modified only by the different conditions under which this struggle

takes place in the domestic and in the international spheres' (Morgenthau, 1967, p. 32). Thus, in both cases, we encounter a generalised struggle for power of tremendous dynamics and proportions. In Morgenthau's definition, political power consists in 'a psychological relation between those who exercise it and those over whom it is exercised', giving the former control over certain actions of the latter 'through the influence which the former exert over the latter's minds' (Morgenthau, 1967, p. 27). This definition echoes Weber's definition, and, as suggested above, also Nietzsche's account. Moreover, Morgenthau also borrows from Weber the well-known classification according to which political phenomena can be reduced to one of three basic types: 'to keep power, to increase power, or to demonstrate power', with their typical international policies of the status quo, imperialism, and prestige (see Morgenthau, 1967, pp. 36–7). Here it is important to point that, when asked about the origins of this typology, Morgenthau did mention Weber's name. He wrote: 'I would hazard the guess that I was most strongly influenced by Max Weber' (Morgenthau quoted in Frei, 2001, p. 130).

This interpretation argues that the disenchantment of the modern world constitutes another important topic in Morgenthau's account. He adopts the Nietzschean–Weberian diagnosis of the times – comprising the 'death of God' and the advent of nihilism and disenchantment – and applies it to his particular area of interest, trying to raise his contemporaries' awareness on these developments. As the first scholar who drew 'the most radical scientific conclusions from Nietzsche's diagnosis of nihilism' (Hennis, 1988, p. 158), Weber points to the phenomenon of disenchantment as to one among several which make up 'the fate of our times' (Weber in Gerth and Wright Mills, 1948, p. 155). Men live now in an era when 'the ultimate and most sublime values have retreated from public life either into the transcendental realm of mystic life or into the brotherliness of direct and personal human relations' (Weber in Gerth and Wright Mills, 1948, p. 155). For Weber, we live in a world in which as Lassman puts it, 'the reality of rule and the struggle for power, the effects of which will be heightened by the permanent existence of relative scarcity of resources, will be given direction and substance by the inevitable struggle of irreconcilable values' (Lassman, 2000, p. 86). The characteristics of the modern world, as spelt out by Weber, echo Morgenthau's own assumptions, and amplify his eagerness to

understand the inner mechanisms of a struggle over meaning imposition, which takes place within a disenchanted life. In the following chapters it will be shown that Morgenthau is particularly concerned with the topic of what this interpretation has called 'the disenchantment of politics', as exacerbated by scientific enterprises. According to Morgenthau, the attempt to reform by means of rationalisation, to simplify an extremely complex reality, has made the burden of life 'harder to bear' (Morgenthau, 1947, p. 110).

However, nowhere is Weber's impact more powerful than in Morgenthau's emphasis on the moral facet of the political act, and this brings us back to the concept of 'man', focused upon by all three thinkers analysed here. As seen above, an important part of Morgenthau's reading of Nietzsche regards man's creative, interpretative potential. Weber also places a considerable emphasis on the creative, self-affirming opportunities provided by modernity, and on the role of great personalities in particular. Being mainly interested in the political embodiment of such great personalities, Morgenthau borrows from Weber a particularly political perspective on the Nietzschean-Weberian leadership problematic: the individual statesman who embraces politics as a vocation, and who is the prototype of responsibility in the field of international politics. In the interpretation put forward here, Morgenthau picks up and continues his mentors' project in this regard, especially within its Weberian political formulation. Morgenthau engages with the issue of responsibility, and his superior political actor impresses by means of his wisdom, moral strength, calmness and 'pathos of distance'.

To Morgenthau, the statesman, caught between his inner poles of lust for power and morality, stands as 'the common lot of all mankind', and in his 'unsolvable contrast between what he needs and wants and what he is able to obtain', he represents 'the prototype of social man himself' (Morgenthau, 1947, p. 188). Because he grasps and then overcomes his nature's evils, and due to his awareness of the moral facet of the political act, he nevertheless is a symbol of humanity's superior embodiment. The statesman represents a living proof of human nature's constructive force, and he has the gift of recognising 'in the contingencies of the social world the concretizations of eternal laws' (Morgenthau, 1947, p. 187) – the already mentioned laws which animate the human nature. The responsible statesman has a crucial role in 'domesticating' the all-encompassing fight over power,

and political ethics must reconcile itself to 'the enduring presence of evil in all political action' (Morgenthau, 1947, p. 172). The 'evil of power' cannot be avoided, Morgenthau asserts, therefore what remains to be done is to 'model' it – as Morgenthau quotes from Goethe, 'to accept the evils, as it were, as raw materials and then seek to counterbalance them' (Morgenthau, 1947, p. 185).

According to Morgenthau, all action affecting others – including here political action – is subject to the ethics of responsibility. In Morgenthau's view, before the adoption of a decision, the statesman should first and foremost ask himself consequence-related questions, and the importance and the subtlety of matters belonging to statecraft clearly make it depart from all bureaucratic, vocation-less, 'rationalised' professions. In determining the goals of his country, in assessing those of others, in employing the adequate means suited to the pursuit of certain objectives, the statesman turns into an artisan, and his decisions are crucial not only for his country, but for humanity at large. In this interpretation, Morgenthau's statesman represents the goal humanity must long for, and he redeems the world, by giving it its meaning. Morgenthau's vision of leadership will be developed in Chapter 5, which will examine these Weberian aspects of Morgenthau's thinking in more detail.

This chapter has so far pointed to Morgenthau's Nietzschean and Weberian reading experiences, which he went through as a student in native Germany. In what follows, it will provide an overview of Morgenthau's encounter with the American tradition, and of his contribution to post World War II IR debates. Morgenthau's *Politics among Nations*, first published in 1948, enjoyed an extraordinary reception and exerted a great impact on IR, consolidating Morgenthau's place in US academia and the dominance of realism in the field. While a proponent of Nietzschean and Weberian assumptions (mentioned earlier), Morgenthau also immersed himself in the US academic environment, and his thinking was marked by certain intellectual encounters and concrete historical events in the US, to which the next section will point in greater detail.

## **The American experience**

Hans Morgenthau arrived in the United States in 1937, after it had become clear to him that his situation was hopeless. In a Europe



shadowed by the prospect of a new war, he was an unemployed academic and a Jew threatened by the Nazis, leaving Frankfurt for Paris, then Geneva for Madrid. By contrast, the US looked more peaceful and also like a genuine land of opportunity – as Morgenthau would later put it, ‘the complete hopelessness of a man in my position in Europe as opposed to opportunities in the United States is very impressive’ (Morgenthau in Thompson and Myers, 1984, p. 364). As he would gratefully admit, ‘there is no doubt in my mind that I would never have been able to establish myself as a scholar were it not for the opportunities offered me by the United States’ (Morgenthau in Thompson and Myers, 1984, p. 385). In the US, he had the chance to prove his academic potential, to show what he could do, and by doing this he was able to advance (see Morgenthau in Thompson and Myers, 1984, p. 385).

In his admission, from an intellectual perspective, Morgenthau was ‘quite unprepared’ for the United States (Morgenthau in Thompson and Myers, 1984, p. 378). He had read some of the works of the American pragmatist William James in a German translation, but had found him ‘rather flat, common-sensical, and not particularly interesting’ (Morgenthau in Thompson and Myers, 1984, p. 378). Having been brought up ‘in a tradition entirely different’, as soon as he familiarised himself with the US academic environment, Morgenthau was ‘quite taken aback by the optimism and pragmatism characteristic of the American intellectual tradition’ (Morgenthau in Thompson and Myers, 1984, p. 378, 379). To this optimism, as manifested in the field of International Politics, Morgenthau opposed a ‘realist’ approach, which emphasised the pervasive nature of the struggle for power, the primacy of the national interest, and the demanding tasks faced by responsible statecraft. Unsurprisingly then, upon arriving at the University of Chicago in 1943, Morgenthau attracted a negative reception on the part of colleagues such as Charles E. Merriam (chairman of the Political Science department), Harold Lasswell, David Easton, Leonard White and Gabriel Almond, who were supporters of the behaviourist movement, incipient during that period (see Frei, 2001, p. 190).

As Morgenthau points out in his interview with Bernard Johnson, ‘very quickly there developed a certain tension between myself and the Merriam faction’ (Morgenthau in Thompson and Myers, 1984, p. 370), and this tension did not go away with the publication

of *Scientific Man vs Power Politics*, his first book published in the US. By Morgenthau's admission, *Scientific Man vs Power Politics* came 'probably ten years too early' (Morgenthau in Thompson and Myers, 1984, p. 371). As Morgenthau adds in the interview, the moment of its publication was a good one from a professional perspective: 'I was fortunate that I had already received tenure a couple of weeks before that book came out, because I am certain that if the book had come out first, either I would not have received it at all, or else it would have been a very difficult task to obtain it' (Morgenthau in Thompson and Myers, 1984, p. 371). Despite the bad reviews and the cold reception on the part of his behaviouralist colleagues, Morgenthau persevered with his approach. In the words of his former student and close collaborator Kenneth W. Thompson, Morgenthau 'was less defiant than determined in his mission or reordering thinking on international politics', and he 'undertook to bring order and meaning to a body of information that would otherwise have remained a collection of disparate and unrelated information' (Thompson, 1999, pp. 21, 22).

While *Scientific Man vs Power Politics* provided 'a blueprint for the building of a systematic theory of world politics', *Politics among Nations* gave readers 'the completed edifice', sought 'to propound, especially as elaborated in 1954 in the second edition, a realist theory of international politics', and 'attempted to give the political scientist a focal point that would distinguish his inquiries from those of the economist, the lawyer, or the moral philosopher' (Thompson, 1960, pp. 34, 35). Morgenthau's first two books published in the United States consolidated his scholarly reputation and prominence in IR theory, and stirred debates within the discipline. As two of Morgenthau's re-evaluators put it, Morgenthau's confrontation with scholars in his adopted country 'certainly' had 'some elements of a "cultural clash"' (Amstrup, 1978, p. 173), and *Scientific Man vs Power Politics* in particular marked 'the beginning of the conflict between a European social scientist and the new country he had come to know' (Sollner, 1987, p. 164). In contrast to the American 'idealists', who optimistically pointed to the prospects for cooperation, Morgenthau emphasised the reality of international political competition over power. He continuously confronted what he called 'the American tradition' imbued with faith in reason and progress, which assumes 'that all problems are susceptible of a rational solution', and 'that if

they seem to resist such a solution, if you only spend more energy, more time, more manpower, and more money on them, they are bound to be solved' (Morgenthau in Thompson and Myers, 1984, p. 379). For his part, as indicated in his interview with Bernard Johnson, Morgenthau tried to make his American colleagues aware of the tragic character of political and social problems, which 'escape a clear-cut solution, but which must be lived with and manipulated', and which 'cannot be exorcised by some technological, social, or political contrivance' (Morgenthau in Thompson and Myers, 1984, p. 379). In Hoffmann's characterisation, Morgenthau was 'a refugee from suicidal Europe, with a missionary impulse to teach the new world power all the lessons it had been able to ignore until then but could no longer afford to reject' (Hoffmann, 1977, p. 44). He 'wanted to be normative, but to root his norms in the realities of politics, not in the aspirations of politicians or in the constructs of lawyers' (Hoffmann, 1977, p. 44) – realities which to Morgenthau were synonymous to competition, power struggle and fight for political survival.

Equally important however is the fact that once in the US, Morgenthau's thought evolved during its exposure to the academic world of his adopted country. This is a contention the present interpretation shares with Lebow, who in *The Tragic Vision of Politics: Ethics, Interests and Orders* points out that Morgenthau's intellectual growth 'did not stop with his early postwar books, but continued throughout his career' (Lebow, 2003, p. 254). Lebow argues that by the time of the Vietnam War Morgenthau 'had become disillusioned with American-style realism', and had come to adopt 'much of the agenda of his former idealist opponents' (Lebow, 2003, pp. 26–7). In Lebow's account, by 1970 Morgenthau had become 'guardedly optimistic about the prospects for a far-reaching transformation of the international system', and his commitment to some form of supra-national authority 'deepened in the 1970s' (Lebow, 2003, pp. 50, 245). Lebow concludes that Morgenthau's optimism was 'based on his renewed belief in the power of experience and reason to serve as engines for progress', and was also 'the result of his experiences in his adopted homeland' (Lebow, 2003, pp. 254, 255). The present interpretation acknowledges this evolution depicted by Lebow, which manifests itself in many of Morgenthau's reflections on topics such as democracy, political leadership and greatness. Nevertheless this

reading intends to prove that certain themes – such as the death of God, the disenchantment of politics, and power as meaning imposition – are foundational and enduring in Morgenthau's theory, and subsequently it will explore these central elements and demonstrate their continuity in Morgenthau's account.

Last but not least, in the context of this discussion of the impact of the US environment on Morgenthau, I would like to emphasise that by focusing on Nietzsche and Weber, this interpretation does not imply that other sources – for instance those within the American academic environment, such as Reinhold Niebuhr – were not important to Morgenthau. The present reading is far from underestimating the significance of Morgenthau's encounter with Niebuhr, and it would like to point to Morgenthau's own acknowledgement made in private correspondence, according to which in addition to Nietzsche's 'most powerful and probably decisive influence', in later years Aristotle, Saint Augustine and Niebuhr had been 'most important' (letter to Samuel H. Magill, 5 January 1962, Morgenthau Papers, Box 39). Nevertheless, the present interpretation argues in favour of considering the Nietzschean and Weberian reading experiences as formative experiences for Morgenthau, and therefore carrying an impact and importance which far outweigh the significance of Morgenthau's later encounter with Niebuhr. As Morgenthau mentioned once, in a private discussion and correspondence, 'Reinie and I come out about the same on politics', and Niebuhr's writings 'have confirmed certain conclusions at which I arrived independently and have contributed to deepening and stimulating my thinking' (Morgenthau quoted in Frei, 2001, pp. 110, 112). Thus, in Morgenthau's acknowledgement, his encounter with Niebuhr had more of a reconfirming character than a formative one.

After outlining the intellectual encounters of greatest importance for the shaping of Morgenthau's account, we will proceed now to unpack the latter. Chapter 3 will explore the metaphysical foundation of Morgenthau's theory only hinted at so far, and will point to Morgenthau's interpretation of Nietzsche's and Weber's 'death of God' diagnosis, and to his scholarly interest in the status of 'truth', as a value of pivotal concern to debates on modernity and postmodernity.

Furthermore, the chapter will reveal that, by arguing against the generalised application of scientific methods, and by emphasising

the consequences stirred by rationalist endeavours, Morgenthau mirrors Weber's insights. While doing this, he points to a dramatic phenomenon which will be analysed in Chapter 4 at length, and which constitutes one of the original contributions brought by this reading to the re-evaluation of Morgenthau: the disenchantment of politics.

# 3

## The 'Death of God' and the Crisis of Philosophy

This chapter addresses the core of Morgenthau's theory by examining the metaphysical assumptions which underpin it, with an emphasis on Morgenthau's concern with the concept of 'truth'. The analysis which follows is important because it unravels the significance of meaning in Morgenthau's theory, and implicitly argues for reconsidering strict materialistic readings of Morgenthau, and for focusing on the normative aspects of his thought, with all their value and sophistication. At the same time, this analysis points to the opposite, typically modern and postmodern, visions of 'truth' which both permeate Morgenthau's account, and shows that the issue of 'truth' is central to unlocking significant aspects of Morgenthau's metaphysics.

In contrast to other interpretations, this reading focuses on Morgenthau's concern with metaphysics explicitly, and it will analyse his arguments against the truth arrived at through rationalist methods, explaining them with an eye to his embracing of Nietzschean and Weberian assumptions. This chapter argues that Morgenthau adopts from Nietzsche the diagnosis of the 'death of God', and that the diagnosis exerts a fundamental influence on his thought: this grand theme pervades his vision of truth and power, of man and morality. Moreover the problem of the status and legitimacy of truth is closely related to Morgenthau's concern with the disintegration of morality: he is aware that following the death of God, 'truth' as a value is called into question.

Despite the centrality assigned by Morgenthau to the concept of truth and its relationship with power (see for example his essays which make up a book-length discussion in *Truth and Power*, 1970),

few scholars have attempted to analyse his account of truth explicitly and systematically. A recent exception is an article written by Molloy, in which the author argues convincingly that 'truth' is a core concept, which dominates and conditions Morgenthau's thought on the nature of politics (Molloy, 2004, p. 1). According to Molloy, Morgenthau's career 'revolved around a commitment to discovering the "truth" of international politics and an assertion of the primacy of power' in this realm (Molloy, 2004, p. 1). In Molloy's interpretation, for Morgenthau, the truth about international politics is 'intrinsically bound to power', the primacy of power standing as 'the ultimate reality and truth of international politics as it permeates the social and political fabrics of human existence' (Molloy, 2004, pp. 1–2).

The analysis undertaken here highlights Morgenthau's commitment to the analysis of the meaning of 'truth', and his interpretation of the 'truth' of the international realm, as captured by the dynamic picture of the struggle for power, understood as a struggle for the imposition of 'the truth' among various competing truths. Moreover this chapter will show that Morgenthau's interest in establishing the 'truth' of international politics parallels his similarly pivotal concern regarding the fragmentation of a universal realm of values, which in his view can hardly place any moral restrictions upon the fight for power, and over truth, anymore. For Morgenthau, truth, power and morality are closely connected, and his analysis stands as a critique of those assumptions which emphasise the universality and unity of moral and epistemological interpretations.

Belief in a harmonious ontology, endorsement of a universal concept of the self, uninhibited by specific location in time and space, and the subsequent denial of man's historicity and finitude, are in Petersen's view the main characteristics of what he terms 'modern thought' (Petersen, 1999, p. 87). As Petersen reminds us, the death of God 'denies modern thought access to the metaphysical resource it has relied upon, consciously or unconsciously, to successfully negotiate the dilemmas and uncertainties of man's empirical existence', and it 'throws into doubt the very possibility of truth, identity, and meaning by uprooting them from their foundation' (Petersen, 1999, p. 89). Nietzsche's announcement – 'God is dead' – 'bears directly and devastatingly upon the structure of modern thought', because the notion of God embodies 'a silent assumption guaranteeing that human efforts to secure certainty in the realms of knowledge, meaning, morality, and

political principles would not be in vain' (Petersen, 1999, pp. 88–9). Petersen argues that Morgenthau is one of the scholars who try to work out 'the implications of Nietzsche's rearticulation of the relationship between man and world' (Petersen, 1999, p. 86), and by doing this, he positions himself in an unusual way along the IR spectrum: 'rather than being in the midst of the grand narrative of modernity', Morgenthau 'is balancing on its edge' (Petersen, 1999, p. 86).

Morgenthau endorses the Nietzschean diagnosis regarding the disintegration of universal values and truth, and adopts a certain kind of relativism, which in this book is interpreted as a philosophical orientation according to which, as Nardin describes it, 'we must acknowledge the existence of many truths, each determined by whatever standards are used to define and measure truth' (Nardin, 1989, p. 150). Relativism signifies that 'what counts as true in a given context depends upon the conventions of particular societies, traditions, scientific paradigms, or modes of discourse' (see Nardin, 1989, pp. 150–1). As Morgenthau argues in a famous 1979 lecture on the topic of human rights, 'you cannot say that this statement or that action is immoral per se. You have to put it into context and adapt your judgment to particular circumstances' (Morgenthau, 1979, p. 10). The 'truth' of morality is plural to Morgenthau, and what he takes to be the ongoing crisis of morality and truth represents a situation he is keen to examine extensively. Morgenthau's interest in metaphysics and his advocacy of a certain kind of relativism must have been challenging within the US academic environment, dominated by pragmatism, behaviourism, and by an overall optimism regarding the possibility of peace, progress and living universal values. As this interpretation demonstrates with examples from both published and unpublished works, despite some aversion to his ideas, Morgenthau did not change them, and he continued to hold them until the end of his career.

By focusing on humans' desire for meaning, certainty and security, Morgenthau exhibits a concern with the fate of human agency in a post-metaphysical world. Moreover, as we will see, Morgenthau holds an understanding of the 'power phenomena' which emphasises creation through interpretation and meaning imposition, and he regards these phenomena as forming a unity in multiplicity, with each unit in the whole – each man – containing the forces of destruction and construction, which actually symbolise the dangers and the possibilities opened up by 'the death of God'. Last but not least, Morgenthau's



account also reflects the well-known Nietzschean theme of overcoming. He suggests that, through mastering the lust for power – by, at first, acknowledging its existence and understanding its inner dynamics, and then by employing power responsibly – man's actions may account not only for destruction, but also for construction. Here, and especially in the portrayal of the genuine statesman, as a responsible, constructive force acting within the confines of a disenchanting political scene, we can perceive Weber's contribution to the shaping of Morgenthau's perspective. A detailed analysis of several key concepts in Morgenthau's theory, according to the present interpretation, including disenchantment/re-enchantment of politics, and responsible and wise leadership, is undertaken in Chapter 4.

The present chapter begins with an examination of Morgenthau's interpretation of the 'death of God', and of man's fate in such times, characterised by relativism and perspectivism, and by a rationalisation which Morgenthau is keen to criticise. The chapter proceeds to an analysis of the dark, destructive side of human nature in Morgenthau's account, which fights over power, and then employs it to bring about disastrous outcomes. The chapter concludes with an outline of Morgenthau's vision of the superior human agent, whose act of meaning imposition is portrayed positively. While this chapter focuses on Morgenthau's metaphysics, Chapter 4 will concentrate on the translation of his metaphysics into an understanding of politics, with an emphasis on his account of political leadership.

### **The experience of nihilism and disenchantment**

Hans Morgenthau's interpretation of modernity following the 'death of God' forms the foundation on which he posits his theory of the political, and as such it makes up a sophisticated background which remained remarkably unchanged throughout his career. This approach helped him to develop a complex view on the topic, which he refined and enriched throughout the years, adding more to his discussion of meaning and disenchantment. To his disadvantage, he was vulnerable to accusations of rigidity and un-openness, and appeared uneasy with accommodating change. The present reading interprets this as a self-imposed strategy on Morgenthau's part, who continuously attempted to raise his contemporaries' awareness on the topics of the death of God and the disenchantment and loss of meaning in politics,

following his assumption changes had yet to take place. Judging from the pessimism present in his works, it can be argued that Morgenthau did not perceive any change taking place with regard to the death of the universal God of values and the disenchantment of the political space. As such, he did not see reasons to alter his assumptions, and he maintained his views by virtue of their ongoing relevance to the topic of his enquiry, and in accord with his strategic aim of raising others' awareness.

The analysis of the demise of universalism forms a major guiding thread in Morgenthau's account, and he restates his assumptions at various points in his career. In one of the early unpublished IR lectures, Morgenthau points to the breakdown of universal religion and universal humanism, arguing that the 'universal ties' which bind men together have become 'weaker and weaker', and that while looking at the moral principles which shape human conduct, one can notice that 'the strength of non- or anti-universal allegiance is greater today than it was at any time in the history of Western civilization' (Sixteenth lecture, 6 February 1946, Morgenthau Papers, Box 169, pp. 7, 8). To Morgenthau, men now clearly live in a revolutionary age, which 'has broken with the political, moral, and technological traditions of the Western world' (Second lecture at the Oriental Institute, 31 March 1950, Morgenthau Papers, Box 169, p. 2). Meanwhile, in *Scientific Man vs Power Politics*, his first book published in the United States, Morgenthau asserts that man is a creature who has 'lost its animal innocence and security' (Morgenthau, 1947, p. 9), and he is aware of the role played by the disintegration of the value systems of a religious nature. Years later, in *The Decline of Democratic Politics*, we find Morgenthau pointing to the attacks 'upon the very foundations of Western civilization', which have left 'the received systems of thought empty of content and, in any event, without conviction' (Morgenthau, 1962a, p. 3). Furthermore, in an article published in 1971 and a book from 1972, Morgenthau focuses his attention on the same theme, and advances similar conclusions. He argues that a secular age, which has lost 'faith in individual immortality in another world and is aware of the impending doom of the world through which it tries to perpetuate itself here and now', is left 'without a remedy', and that 'once it has become aware of its condition, it must despair' (see Morgenthau, 1972, p. 151). In this age, men live in a threatening world, plagued by an 'unprecedented increase in physical danger,

social disintegration, and metaphysical doubt' (Morgenthau, 1971b, p. 621), a world in which they experience the 'existential dread', and get to taste 'the transitoriness and absurdity of all life and hence of all suffering' (Morgenthau, 1971b, pp. 626, 629).

Morgenthau maintains in *Scientific Man vs Power Politics* that the intellectual and moral history of mankind is 'the story of inner insecurity, of the anticipation of impending doom, of metaphysical anxieties', the novelty of the present situation being 'not the existence of these anxieties in popular feeling but their strength and confusion, on the one hand, and their absence in the main currents of philosophy and political thought, on the other' (Morgenthau, 1947, p. 9). Morgenthau emphasises that in the nineteenth century, man's sense of insecurity started to increase, nourishing an acute social instability, and that in the twentieth century this instability became permanent 'as a result of the emancipation of the individual from the ties of tradition, especially in the form of religion, of the increased rationalization of life and work, and of cyclical economic crises' (Morgenthau, 1967, p. 102). Time and again, Morgenthau mentions that humans live in an age in which religion can no longer assure salvation. In an early work he makes reference to the 'hopeless impotence of universal ethics' (Morgenthau, 1948, p. 96), while in later ones he points to the 'empty transcendent space' pessimistically (Morgenthau, 1972, p. 14), and to 'a decline in the adherence to moral values in general' (Morgenthau, 1979, p. 3). In one of Morgenthau's most famous metaphoric formulations expressed at the end of the article 'The Twilight of International Morality', and in the seminal work *Politics among Nations*, at present the nationalistic masses 'meet under an empty sky from which the gods have departed' (Morgenthau, 1948, p. 99, and 1967, p. 249).

As seen above, the decline of metaphysics with all its certain meanings and values supposedly fixed once and for all represents a continuous concern for Morgenthau, which springs from his personal experiences which were detailed in Chapter 2. Morgenthau reacts to environmental factors and questions the optimism of the American academia, with a view to raising awareness of the collapse of tradition and its constituting values, and of the perils of meaninglessness (his treatment of these topics will make Forst de Battaglia to start his review of *Scientific Man vs Power Politics* published in 1947 with the comment that despite the word 'existentialism' not appearing at all in Morgenthau's book, the problematique pertaining to

existentialism is 'very much present in each page of this clear and bright exposé'. Forst De Battaglia, 1947, Morgenthau Papers, Box 149, p. 1). As the present interpretation maintains, it is here that one can notice Morgenthau's taking up of the Nietzschean problematic of the 'death of God', which according to Ansell-Pearson points to the fact that 'we have lost the traditional metaphysical-moral structure which enabled us to make sense of existence, to give it a meaning and a purpose' (Ansell-Pearson, 1994, p. 7). As Nietzsche once put it, 'one interpretation has collapsed; but because it was considered *the* interpretation, it now seems as if there were no meaning at all in existence, as if everything were in vain' (Nietzsche, 1968, p. 35, emphasis in the original). Moreover, in Nietzsche's words, nihilism means that 'our existence (action, suffering, willing, feeling) has no meaning: 'the pathos of "in vain" is the nihilists' pathos – at the same time, as pathos, an inconsistency on the part of the nihilists' (Nietzsche, 1968, p. 318). As Ansell-Pearson explains, nihilism is 'a condition which affects the metaphysical and moral languages through which we fabricate an understanding of the world and on which we base our acting in the world' (Ansell-Pearson, 1994, p. 7). It encompasses a situation of moral void and meaninglessness which both Nietzsche and Morgenthau are eager to portray, and which constitutes a fundamental focus of their philosophical and theoretical enquiries.

Pangle argues convincingly that Nietzsche is aware of man's striving for meaning – a position and a concern which we find in Morgenthau as well, as emphasised throughout the present interpretation – and of the fact that the death of God brings forward the issues of meaning and historicity: 'God's existence, like every other meaningful existence, is temporal or historical' (Pangle, 1983, p. 46). In Pangle's analysis, the cause of God's death is

a historically acquired disposition of the soul which renders untenable *all* beliefs in *any* objective and trans-historical spiritual values; and the world that remains before man in the wake of this destruction of permanence is not a value-neutral flux of data and subjective ideals.

(Pangle, 1983, p. 65, emphasis in the original)

In Pangle's assessment of the Nietzschean position, people must experience meaningful existence, their physical being 'must be understood

as dedicated to, and in some circumstances to be sacrificed for, some way of life that makes demands far beyond what is required for security and creature comforts' (Pangle, 1983, p. 47, emphasis in the original). Pangle identifies that for Nietzsche, it is this need that defines the human, 'setting man apart from all other existence' (Pangle, 1983, p. 47). Following the death of a universal realm of values likely to provide guidance, man's subjective will stands as the only source of meaning and order, and his 'gloomy awareness of the historicity and subjectivity of all meaning' (Pangle, 1983, p. 66) triggers the discontent with life. As Pangle states further, in the aftermath of the collapse of values, the source of all meaning is 'the mutable inventiveness or creativity of man' (Pangle, 1983, p. 49).

Similarly to Nietzsche, Morgenthau maintains that 'man basically strives for security and certainty' (Morgenthau quoted in Frei, 2001, p. 102), valuing both of these highly. He is aware of man's need to find a meaning in existence, and incorporates this human need into his metaphysics and epistemology, focusing on the need for meaning in his discussion of the disintegration of moral and epistemological universality. Morgenthau notes that following the 'death of God', instead of feeling certain in his beliefs and secure within the boundaries of his existence, the human individual experiences the opposite: he is lost in uncertainty, feels insecure and lonely. This position is expressed most clearly in two of Morgenthau's books which outline similar perspectives on similar topics, despite being written 25 years apart, *Scientific Man vs Power Politics* (1946) and *Science: Servant or Master?* (1972). In the first book, Morgenthau argues that man 'meets in his intellectual experience the unceasing struggle between his understanding, on the one hand, and the riddles of the world and of his existence in this world, on the other' (Morgenthau, 1947, p. 176). In a moving paragraph, he points to man's disappointment with his existence by stating that this is a struggle

which offers with each answer new questions, with each victory a new disappointment, and thus seems to lead nowhere. In this labyrinth of unconnected causal connections, man discovers many little answers but no answers to the great questions of his life, no meaning, no direction.

(Morgenthau, 1947, p. 176)

Meanwhile, in *Science: Servant or Master?*, Morgenthau argues that man 'encounters the mysterious and unfathomable on two levels: the philosophic and the empirical' (Morgenthau, 1972, p. 25). Most importantly, he adds, man's quest for causes, laws, and meaning is answered 'incompletely or not at all', and all that man can be sure of are 'the illusion of knowledge and the certainty of ignorance' (Morgenthau, 1972, pp. 25–6). In Morgenthau's diagnosis, in the sphere of science it is at best 'still possible' to distinguish between true and false. Meanwhile, in the field of action, 'one can still distinguish between useful and useless, but no longer between good and bad, valuable and worthless' (Morgenthau, 1972, pp. 28–9). Lost in uncertainty, man as described by Morgenthau 'experiences the vanity of his own existence', and feels a 'painful disquiet' 'in the face of the inexplicable' (Morgenthau, 1972, p. 26).

As the aforementioned quotations demonstrate, Morgenthau is keen to draw his readers' awareness on man's desire to find meaning, and on the ongoing frustration with an increasingly meaningless existence. Closely linked to this topic we find Morgenthau's concern with the status and appeal of truth and knowledge, following the collapse of universal values. For Morgenthau, in such times when certainty and security are difficult to be achieved, truth as a universal standard with a settled meaning is called into question. As seen from the introduction to the chapter, by adopting a position which acknowledges the plurality of truths which comes after the 'death of God', Morgenthau agrees with a certain degree of relativism, which can be understood as a philosophical orientation which implies that there are many kinds of truth, and that what counts as true in a given context 'depends upon the conventions of particular societies, traditions, scientific paradigms, or modes of discourse. To claim that a proposition is true is therefore to claim that it is true "for" or "relative to" a given community or conceptual scheme' (Nardin, 1989, pp. 150–1). In line with the Nietzschean diagnosis, Morgenthau emphasises the relativity of moral judgment, and moreover he sees it as both a loss and an opportunity. As he states in his 'Human Rights & Foreign Policy' lecture, truth is plural, and 'you cannot say that this statement or that action is immoral per se', but 'you have to put it into context and adapt your judgment to particular circumstances' (Morgenthau, 1979, p. 10). Morgenthau's sophisticated position is outlined by Lang, who correctly identifies in his discussion of Morgenthau's lectures on Aristotle that on the one

hand Morgenthau refuses to accept the relativist accounts of the political realm, 'pointing out that our daily discourse is imbued with moral principles' (Lang, 2004, p. 8). On the other hand however, he 'does argue for a larger form of moral relativism, one based on a historical time frame and national context' (Lang, 2004, p. 8). As Morgenthau puts it in the context of his discussion of the supposedly universal character of human rights, there exists a 'twofold' relativism in the relation between moral principles and foreign policy:

It is a relativism in time [...] when certain principles are applicable in one period of history and not applicable in another period of history, and it is a relativism in terms of culture – of contemporaneous culture – in that certain principles are obeyed by certain nations, by certain political civilizations, and are not obeyed by others.

(Morgenthau, 1979, p. 4)

Moreover, Morgenthau's diagnosis emphasises perspectivism, the latter being interpreted here in a Nietzschean fashion, as an attempt to replace epistemology with, as Strong remarks, 'an understanding of the self and of knowledge that does not posit any particular position (or self) as final' (Strong, 1985, p. 165). By submitting to this perspectivist vision Morgenthau implies, in a Nietzschean-like fashion, that the 'real world' has become 'a myth': humans cannot grasp 'one' reality, instead they encounter a flow of various interpretations, and a diversity of meanings of 'the truth'. Perspectivism frames the problem as one of the relation between the individual and the external world, and following from this, Morgenthau always maintains that norms, truth and meaning are constituted at the level of autonomous individuals. As he emphasises in an unpublished lecture, 'the influence of the personal equation of the observer upon the truth' (Second lecture, 4 January 1946, Morgenthau Papers, Box 169, p. 10) should not be overlooked: 'if you ask what is the truth with regard to a particular problem of foreign affairs and you consult five books written respectively by an American, an Englishman, a Russian, a Frenchman, and a Chinese, you will find you have, if not five different truths, then five different formulations of truth stressing different points of view' (Second lecture, 4 January 1946, Morgenthau Papers, Box 169, p. 9).

As seen above, for Morgenthau modernity symbolises a time of opportunity, but also one of loss: the 'death of God' and the subsequent awareness of relativism and perspectivism allow for the unfolding of man's creative powers (the positive outcome), while refusing him certainty and security (the negative outcome). Morgenthau often points to the decline in the adherence to moral values, and to what he takes to be 'a general decay of respect for human life, probably stimulated by technology' (Morgenthau, 1979, p. 14). His theory is an ethical theory, and it exhibits its author's concern with morality, in an age in which the transcendent space is empty, religion can no longer assure salvation, and various interpretations and perspectives stand in conflictual positions with each other. Morgenthau argues that men live consciously, that is they live 'in the presence of death' (Morgenthau, 1972, p. 56), in empirical and metaphysical danger. As he points out in *Science: Servant or Master?*, in an ingenious reinterpretation of a well-known Kantian dictum, 'to live in consciousness of danger means to live in fear, and to live like that is a risky adventure. That is what *sapere aude* (dare to know) means' (Morgenthau, 1972, p. 55). As Morgenthau explains further,

Consciousness that is aware of its own transitoriness must be tempted to regard the reflective life as a quixotic undertaking that assumes meaning and duration for that which is in truth meaningless and transitory. Meaning and duration, then, appear as mere phantoms of the transitory mind, with which the will to live cheats the mind of the awareness of its transitory nature.

(Morgenthau, 1972, p. 56)

What strikes as particularly important in Morgenthau's account of modernity in the aftermath of the 'death of God', is that his diagnosis is always accompanied by the forceful expression of his discontent with humanity's response to the crisis. Morgenthau states that men now live in an era characterised by a devastating 'crisis of philosophy', an age 'first, of uneasy confusion, then, of cynical despair' (Morgenthau, 1947, p. 10). Equally important for Morgenthau, the situation is aggravated by humans' inability to address the ongoing decline properly: man's response is inadequate and weak to Morgenthau, and it perpetuates the crisis. As he puts it, what we see as novelty in the current situation is human anxieties' 'strength and confusion', but also 'their



absence in the main currents of philosophy and political thought' (Morgenthau, 1947, p. 9).

Which is the philosophy whose inadequacy is emphasised by Morgenthau in the quotations above? His answer to the question develops into a thoroughgoing critique of this mode of thought, characterised by a glorification of the force of reason: it represents what Morgenthau calls 'the philosophy of rationalism', or 'scientism'. To eliminate doubts over his employment of the terms, Morgenthau states in a footnote from a manuscript that, in his interpretation, 'rationalism' and 'rationalistic' refer to 'the philosophical movement which is identified with the Age of Reason, and whose tenets, especially in the form of positivism and scientism, have since become an intrinsic element of our culture' (n. 1, p. 1, undated manuscript, Morgenthau Papers).

One of the first significant published expositions of Morgenthau's critique is contained in *Scientific Man vs Power Politics*, which was written against the background of the behaviourist revolution, then emerging in US universities. Morgenthau tells his readers that the main characteristic of this trend of thought is 'the reliance on reason to find through a series of logical deductions from either postulated or empirical premises the truths of philosophy, ethics, and politics alike and through its own inner force to re-create reality in the image of these truths' (Morgenthau, 1947, p. 10). The analysis is brought further to reveal two important features:

The conception of the social and the physical world as being intelligible through the same rational processes, however these processes are to be defined, and the conviction that understanding in terms of these rational processes is all that is needed for the rational control of the social and the physical world.

(Morgenthau, 1947, p. 11)

For Morgenthau this mode of thought, which 'gives the appearance of eternal verities to certain anthropological, social, and political assumptions which are true, if at all, only under the conditions of a particular historic experience' (Morgenthau, 1947, p. 12), praises a concept of the physical world 'erected into an idol and emulated as a model', pervaded by rational laws, and therefore 'capable of complete rational determination' (Morgenthau, 1947, p. 115). Like Nietzsche

who, in Habermas's words, wanted 'to explode the framework of Occidental rationalism' (Habermas, 1987, p. 74) with its never ending trust in reason, Morgenthau at his turn is eager to prove the flawed nature of this trend of thought which sees the achievement of certainty as its supreme goal, irrespective of field of enquiry, local particularities or historic circumstances. He argues that the present age lives under the signs of both confidence and despair, and points out that this state of affairs works against rationalism: while confidence is manifested 'in the power of reason, as represented by modern science, to solve the social problems of our age', its twin feeling – despair – is stirred by 'the ever renewed failure of scientific reason to solve them' (Morgenthau, 1947, p. 9). Last but not least, Morgenthau asks us to approach rationalism critically. We will then see that it 'misunderstands the nature of man, the nature of the world, and the nature of reason itself' (Morgenthau, 1947, p. 174). What rationalism's proponents want is 'simple, rational, mechanical', while what they have to deal with is 'complicated, irrational, incalculable' (Morgenthau, 1947, p. 86).

It is important to emphasise at this point that, despite his aversion to rationalism and to what he perceives to be its proponents' efforts to impose a unilateral meaning which is alien to the social realm, characterised by unpredictable changes, Morgenthau nevertheless hangs on to a sense of the rational, and he is against irrationality. This view advanced by the present interpretation is also endorsed by Molloy, who indicates that Morgenthau's main complaint with rationalism is 'its misunderstanding of the nature of social knowledge', and that Morgenthau constructs his theoretical stance in opposition 'to the excessive empiricism of the American foreign policy elite', and with an awareness that facts 'do not exist outside their social context' – and here the importance of the contextual factors is emphasised (Molloy, 2004, pp. 3–4). This does not mean, however, that Morgenthau dispenses with the category of the rational in its entirety (see Molloy, 2004, p. 3). As emphasised by Molloy, there is a clear distinction in Morgenthau's works between rationalism and rationality: 'where rationalism provides merely an illusion of control over knowledge derived from a traditionalist interpretation of science, rationality is an effective approach to knowledge, it is what makes knowledge possible in international relations' (Molloy, 2004, p. 3). Molloy contends further that the argument of

rationality giving meaning to the social world represents 'the foundation of Morgenthau's approach to the formulation of the six principles of political realism' (Molloy, 2004, pp. 3–4). Morgenthau's approach to knowledge and his endorsement of rationality will be explored further in the next chapter.

As with his later works, in *Scientific Man vs Power Politics* Morgenthau is categorical: he claims that the rationalist philosophy 'cannot give meaning to the experiences of the mid-twentieth century' (Morgenthau, 1947, p. 10). Moreover, he points to the most dangerous consequence of employing the same rationalist processes when addressing social issues: the tendencies of the modern mind 'to look in social affairs for a certainty in planning and prediction that is as unattainable here as elsewhere' (Morgenthau, 1947, p. 120) have been encouraged by scientism which has left man 'enriched in his technical mastery of inanimate nature', yet 'impoverished in his quest for an answer to the riddle of the universe and of his existence in it' (Morgenthau, 1947, p. 111). In Morgenthau's picture, the individual subjected to such enterprises is 'poorer':

By destroying the confidence of the human mind in the answers that art, religion, and metaphysics could give and by holding out the hope, bound to be disappointed, that it had all answers to all questions, rationalism has left man the poorer and has made the burden of life harder to bear.

(Morgenthau, 1947, p. 110)

In Morgenthau's account outlined earlier, in the aftermath of the death of God, rationalization has stripped the world of its wonders, and has de-magified humans' existence. The mysteries of the world have ceased to amaze with their secrecy, and have become instead victims of a ruthless drive to impose a rationalist interpretation of them all. At this point we can start to see our 'Weberian Morgenthau', who links Nietzsche's diagnosis of the 'death of God' and the awareness of nihilism to the topic of disenchantment, thoroughly analysed by Weber.

Weber points to 'the fate of our times' as being 'characterized by rationalization and intellectualization and, above all, by the "disenchantment of the world"' (Weber in Gerth and Wright Mills, 1948, p. 155) – and as we have seen in Chapter 2, Hennis takes Weber to

be the first to have drawn 'the most radical scientific conclusions from Nietzsche's diagnosis of nihilism' (Hennis, 1988, p. 158). At present, Weber argues, one can in principle master all things by calculation, and 'there are no mysterious incalculable forces that come into play' (Weber in Gerth and Wright Mills, 1948, p. 139). In one of his most famous quotations, Weber maintains that modern life is comprised of an unceasing struggle among various gods, who, since they are disenchanted, take the form of impersonal forces. Weber warns his readers that our civilisation 'destines us to realize more clearly these struggles again, after our eyes have been blinded for a thousand years – blinded by the allegedly or presumably exclusive orientation towards the grandiose moral fervor of Christian ethics' (Weber in Gerth and Wright Mills, 1948, p. 149). As Weber maintains, 'the ultimately possible attitudes toward life are irreconcilable, and hence their struggle can never be brought to a final conclusion. Thus it is necessary to make a decisive choice' (Weber in Gerth and Wright Mills, 1948, p. 152).

In the ongoing battle over values, science can only prove its weaknesses and inabilities. Scientific knowledge is unable to provide meaning when applied to the social sciences domain because here it cannot provide clear-cut answers. Moreover, it also brings about negative outcomes, by disenchanting the field of enquiry within which its methods are applied. After all, Weber asks rhetorically, who else, aside from certain 'big children' to be found in the field of the natural sciences, still believes 'that the findings of astronomy, biology, physics, or chemistry could teach us anything about the *meaning* of the world?' In Weber's categorical conclusion,

If these natural sciences lead to anything in this way, they are apt to make the belief that there is such a thing as the 'meaning' of the universe die out at its very roots.

(Weber in Gerth and Wright Mills, 1948, p. 142)

Weber's concerns are echoed by Morgenthau, and the blind, unreflective endorsement of reason's scientific embodiment is regarded with horror by both scholars. In contrast to those who assert the positive contribution of rationalism and technology to the construction of society, Morgenthau emphasises the overwhelming growth of technology by approaching it critically. As Morgenthau mentions in

a paragraph featured in one of his unpublished lectures, the process of automation, more particularly, of the assembly line, leads 'to a degeneration of the meaningfulness of work' (Lecture 10, 10 May 1962, Morgenthau Papers, Box 171, p. 11). The individual 'is no longer capable of understanding what he is working for, and he no longer derives any satisfaction from it' (Lecture 10, 10 May 1962, Morgenthau Papers, Box 171, p. 11). Moreover, Morgenthau contends in *Truth and Power* that the central positions science and technology occupy in the affairs of modern government have led to the ascendancy of a new kind of ruler, 'the scientific elite' (Morgenthau, 1970, p. 221), whose members possess knowledge which has a 'monopolistic and esoteric character' (Morgenthau, 1970, p. 228). Furthermore, in *Science: Servant or Master?*, Morgenthau decries the fact that the human individual is 'the hapless object of these technological developments and political possibilities', and portrays man as reduced to 'shaking his fists in impotent rage at those anonymous forces which control a goodly fraction of his life but which he cannot control' (Morgenthau, 1972, p. 4). Morgenthau emphasises the contrast which, in his view, exists between 'the achievements and promises of science', on the one hand, and 'a malaise that, for the first time in recorded human history, is not limited to a particular civilization but has become a universal phenomenon encompassing humanity' (Morgenthau, 1972, p. 4). In Morgenthau's assessment,

While science thus elates man with the promise to transform *homo faber*, the maker of tools, into *homo deus*, the maker of worlds, it also depresses him. By the same token that it promises him the creation of new worlds, it threatens to destroy the only world he has known, and has already destroyed a significant part of it.

(Morgenthau, 1972, p. 2)

As seen above, Morgenthau's attack against rationalism and technology shows up in many of his writings, and technological advancement is presented as inherently bad. In the context of a bipolar world made of two superpowers eager to increase their weapons arsenal, and with a view to Morgenthau's witnessing of the horrors of the Second World War made worse by technological developments, his critique is hardly surprising. Nevertheless, in the view advanced here

it is also unidimensional, it does not place enough emphasis on the benefits brought about by technological advancement, and this represents a weakness in Morgenthau's account.

A detailed interpretation of what I refer to as 'the disenchantment of politics', caused by the actions undertaken by the proponents of rationalism on the political scene, will be performed in Chapter 4. In what follows, I will return to the original point of departure – the diagnosis of 'the death of God' – in order to lead the reader to Morgenthau's interpretation of the human individual, who occupies a central place in this diagnosis, and who can both intensify and alleviate the above disenchantment, in his ruthless fight over meaning imposition. As mentioned earlier, in a stance which mirrors Nietzsche's, Morgenthau is aware of man's need to find meaning in his life, and of his metaphysical disposition towards security and certainty. In both Morgenthau's and Nietzsche's accounts, the death of God makes the creation of meaning an issue of utmost concern to individuals, and moreover the process of meaning creation takes centre stage in a time in which the desire for self-affirmation clashes with the need to find refuge in the certainty provided by universal standards and a universal interpretation. It is a complex situation, which both Morgenthau and Nietzsche are eager to examine.

Equally important, for Morgenthau like for Nietzsche, these times offer men conditions for the fuller expression of their potentialities, these times are here to grant them what has been long denied – as Nietzsche's Zarathustra asked rhetorically, 'what would there be to create, after all, if there were gods?' (Nietzsche, 2006, p. 67). Moreover, Morgenthau argues that now suffering is a main feeling experienced by humans, yet he also highlights the relevance and value of creation in this context – let us not forget that for Nietzsche, creation was 'the great redemption from suffering and life's growing light' (Nietzsche quoted in Kaufmann, 1954, p. 199). Echoing the Nietzschean dictum, Morgenthau pleads for a new beginning, and asks his fellow men to put to rest conformism, certainty and security, and to wake up to their creative capabilities, letting their imagination accomplish relevant creative tasks. In Morgenthau's view, the death of God should be regarded as an excellent opportunity for man to reinvent himself, and such an opportunity should not be missed. The death of God is definitely a time of taking up challenges, and now it's time for the individual alone to decide his fate: as Morgenthau maintains

in *Science: Servant or Master?*, 'man's future depends ultimately upon himself' (Morgenthau, 1972, p. 71).

Aware of the fact that 'whatever man does or intends to do emanates from himself and refers again to himself' (Morgenthau, 1947, p. 163), Morgenthau argues that the human individual's dynamic, multi layered nature, should be a main theoretical area of concern. As the present analysis shows, Morgenthau taken on a vision of the human which echoes Nietzsche's: the human self stands as a realm of struggles, populated by powerful antagonistic forces. Most importantly, Morgenthau maintains that man's essence comprises a dynamic relation between destruction and construction. As Nietzsche once put it, 'in humans there is material, fragments, abundance, clay, dirt, nonsense, chaos; but in humans there is also creator, maker, hammer-hardness, spectator-divinity and seventh day' (Nietzsche, 2001, p. 117). According to one of Nietzsche's finest interpreters, for Nietzsche in man there is 'the human and the all-too-human, the superhuman and the animalic' (Kaufmann, 1974, p. 310). For Morgenthau as well, in human beings '*creature* and *creator* are combined' (Nietzsche, 2001, p. 117, emphasis in the original), and he formulates this in a nutshell in a published work in which he discusses the status of man as the object of study of the social sciences: for Morgenthau man should be regarded as 'both the creature and the creator of history in and through which his individuality and freedom of choice manifest themselves' (Morgenthau, 1955, p. 441).

In Morgenthau's account in *Science: Servant or Master?*, man once 'beheld in shocked wonderment the sun and sea, the beasts and the elements, birth and death'; by contrast, he now searches 'in questioning disquiet for the understanding and mastery of the incomprehensible yet familiar threats emanating from himself' (Morgenthau, 1972, p. 29). According to Morgenthau, philosophical disquiet and fear of physical danger 'are inescapable when the mysteries, which we have understood and mastered to such an unprecedented extent in inanimate nature, make us helpless in the face of human nature, that is, our own' (Morgenthau, 1972, p. 30). The source of the threat is to be found in the destructive potential which man carries within him. Thus, in Morgenthau's interpretation in man there can be no construction without destruction. As we will see in the next section and in Chapters 4 and 5 in more detail, Morgenthau is aware of the dangers implied by the death of a universal realm of values and

meaning, and he is far from pleading in favour of purposeless destruction, advocating instead actions carried out responsibly, and directed towards re-enchantment.

The next section will turn to the 'creature' facet of man's nature and to Morgenthau's interpretation of power as meaning imposition, with an emphasis on the connection between Morgenthau's concepts of 'man' and 'power', and on the negative assessment which forms an important part of Morgenthau's account of man in a post-metaphysical age. The final section will examine the 'creator' facet of man's nature, and it will also pave the way to the analysis of Morgenthau's political theory to be undertaken in Chapter 4.

### **Man as creature: Power as meaning imposition, and the fight over power**

Power represents a central concept in Morgenthau's metaphysics, and informs his dynamic interpretation of human existence. Morgenthau's writings put forward a sophisticated account of power, informed by an awareness of man's need to find meaning in existence, an account which encompasses both pessimistic and optimistic assumptions, and is not as clear-cut or amoral as some observers assume. On many occasions, while discussing power as meaning imposition, Morgenthau emphasises the negative potential of the struggle for power understood as action for action's sake, and he refers to the latter in negative terms. Moreover, on other occasions, Morgenthau is keen to point out the positive resources contained in the struggle for power, and he examines its creative possibilities with an optimistic conviction in the positive change brought about by the responsible use of power. The present section will examine the negative facet of the struggle for power as discussed by Morgenthau, while the next section will provide a preliminary outline of Morgenthau's vision of the positive use of power, which will pave the way to a more elaborate discussion in Chapters 4 and 5.

In Morgenthau's interpretation, the human being is a creature which has 'lost its animal innocence and security', and is now 'forever striving to recapture this innocence and security in religious, moral, and social worlds *of its own*' (Morgenthau, 1947, p. 9, emphasis added). In the present reading these words spell out Morgenthau's view regarding our times' creative opportunities. Morgenthau implies that



this is, indeed, an era that grants man's imagination – which 'creates new worlds of religion, art, and reason that live after their creator' (Morgenthau, 1962c, p. 20) – its rightful place. For Morgenthau, the social world captures man in his overwhelming dynamism, in all his gestures and capacities, as endowed with the gift of creating his own interpretation of the world, that is, his own 'version' of the meaning of existence, his own tablet of values – let us remember that it was Nietzsche's Zarathustra who wanted to teach men 'no longer to bury one's head in the sand of heavenly things, but to bear it freely, an earthly head, which creates a meaning for the earth' (Nietzsche in Kaufmann, 1954, p. 144).

One of the innovative features of the argument here, which departs from materialistic readings of Morgenthau in order to demonstrate the importance of meaning for his discussion of man and politics, is the focus on Morgenthau's interpretation of creation as the creation of values. Consequently, the argument that follows will focus on this particular understanding. This book argues that there is no better way to grasp Morgenthau's views on the topic of creation than to analyse the concept of 'power', which Morgenthau interprets as meaning imposition. The present interpretation maintains that the triad creation – power – meaning imposition works best in spelling out Morgenthau's vision of politics, and it illuminates an understanding of power which points to its creative essence. To Morgenthau 'power' is not synonymous with a mere act of one influencing the other without further reflection on the complex phenomena behind it, but to a creative endeavour par excellence – to a creative and open-ended struggle for imposing particular values and interpretations, which cuts in different ways and which can lead to either destruction or construction, and to a variety of outcomes.

The centrality of the concept of power in Morgenthau's account transpires in both his published and unpublished writings, and all of Morgenthau's important writings tackle this concept to various degrees and from various angles. In an unpublished lecture given at the beginning of his academic career in the US, Morgenthau maintains that the struggle for power represents 'a general phenomenon of human life in society and must be regarded as such': our whole social life 'is interspersed with the element of power' (Morgenthau, Seventh lecture, 16 January 1946, Morgenthau Papers, Box 169, p. 5). Moreover, in the article 'The Evil of Power' published in 1950,

Morgenthau maintains that power is an intrinsic element of life, which manifests itself in various forms, and has a protean nature, changeable and contingent – as he argues, 'the metaphysics of Power distorts, if it does not blot out, the reality of power' (Morgenthau, 1950, p. 515). Moreover, in Morgenthau's view expressed at length in his centrepiece *Politics among Nations*, 'power' stands as 'man's control over the minds and actions of other men' (Morgenthau, 1967, p. 26), and this concept constitutes the foundation of his theory of international relations. Last but not least, in an important and much quoted essay, Morgenthau compares love and power – an unusual comparison by his own account – and concludes that both of them 'try to overcome loneliness, and the sense of man's insufficiency stemming from this loneliness, through duplication of his individuality' (Morgenthau, 1962c, p. 8). Morgenthau emphasises that 'what man cannot achieve for any length of time through love he tries to achieve through power: to fulfil himself, to make himself whole by overcoming his loneliness, his isolation' (Morgenthau, 1962c, p. 10). Through love, man seeks another human being like himself 'to form a union which will make him whole' (Morgenthau, 1962c, p. 8). Through power, Morgenthau maintains, man 'seeks to impose his will upon another man, so that the will of the object of his power mirrors his own' (Morgenthau, 1962c, p. 8). Moreover, while love is 'reunion through spontaneous mutuality', power 'seeks to create a union through unilateral imposition' (Morgenthau, 1962c, p. 8). Drawing on interesting similarities which he notices between the two concepts, Morgenthau argues that the common quality of love and power is 'that each contains an element of the other' (Morgenthau, 1962c, pp. 8–9):

Power points toward love as its fulfilment, as love starts from power and is always threatened with corruption by it. Power, in its ultimate consummation, is the same as love, albeit love is corrupted by an irreducible residue of power. Love, in its ultimate corruption, is the same as power, albeit power is redeemed by an irreducible residue of love.

(Morgenthau, 1962c, p. 9)

The central place assigned by Morgenthau to the concept of power has been noted by several observers. In his analysis of Morgenthau's

concepts of power and human nature Petersen emphasises that Morgenthau is preoccupied with searching for 'a new metaphysical principle' (Petersen, 1999, p. 93), and that his thinking – rather than being epistemological or methodological in character – is 'first and foremost metaphysical and ontological' (Petersen, 1999, p. 93). Petersen argues that Morgenthau's concept of power 'represents the next stage in his fundamental *Auseinandersetzung*, or critical encounter, with the modern tradition' (Petersen, 1999, p. 96), and that 'power, or more precisely the lust for power, seems to be an alternative metaphysical principle through which to make intelligible the existence of order' (Petersen, 1999, p. 99). As Petersen argues further, the Nietzschean will to power 'makes unity and totality intelligible without grounding them in a higher unity' (Petersen, 1999, p. 95), and Morgenthau's concept of power seems to Petersen 'to have such an all-encompassing quality, that it gives the lie to the idea that it is simply, as is commonly assumed, to be equated with material capabilities' (Petersen, 1999, pp. 95–6).

Petersen's account is persuasive and important in its findings regarding the metaphysical character of Morgenthau's writings, and his views of power in particular. This vision of power is forcefully displayed in Morgenthau's discussions on the topic, especially in his assumptions according to which in order for someone to have power, (s)he must exert control over the minds. Such a form of control, manifesting itself as one's 'rule' over others' opinions, decisions and subsequent actions, points to intra-human relations as the *locus classicus* in the shaping of power. Moreover, it is clear that it also points towards Morgenthau's concern with man's creative, interpretative potential. The above-mentioned control refers – and this is an important contribution brought to the ongoing discussion of Morgenthau's theory by the present reading – to one's act of imposing a certain 'version', a certain interpretation of reality, upon the others: a meaning imposition. The present reinterpretation, while starting from assumptions similar to those popularised by Petersen, intends to bring to light an unexplored facet of Morgenthau's theory: that of power as meaning creation and imposition, which exhibits Morgenthau's concern with the idea of meaning in a post-metaphysical world, and demonstrates the relevance of this scholar's theory to current discussions on the status of meaning and truth in modernity and postmodernity.

Morgenthau subscribes to an individualist ontology in which meaning imposition is less a matter of institutional relations, and more one of individual relations. In Morgenthau's account, power is a relational concept, and one's power needs others' presence and recognition. Moreover, like Nietzsche, power for Morgenthau is 'the expression of the self'.<sup>1</sup> This does not mean that he overlooks institutionally created meaning impositions; on the contrary, his writings comprise numerous references to the meaning impositions exercised by various political institutions. Nevertheless, as argued throughout this book, his main concern regards the human individuals' created meaning impositions, which shape and transform an ever-changing and dynamic social world.

What is peculiar to humans, according to Morgenthau, is that, by virtue of one of their nature's features, they continuously engage in attempts not only to create their own interpretations, but also to impose them upon their fellow men. For Morgenthau, power is not primarily materialistic but ideational, and the specific nature of Morgenthau's conceptualisation of power stems from this very commitment to an ideational vision of power, in which the fight for meaning imposition constitutes a fascinating phenomenon, which surfaces vigorously after the weakening of universal values. Man's power resides in the success of imposing his interpretation, and the human creative capacities are thus channelled into a continuous effort, performed by each man, for imposing 'his' meaning, his particular position, not through physical force, but through 'the force of the mind'.

Morgenthau is careful to maintain a well-known Nietzschean distinction. Just as for his intellectual companion, for whom in his 'last period' stances self-preservation was 'only one of the indirect and most frequent *consequences*' of the living thing's desire 'to discharge its strength' (Nietzsche, 2001, p. 15, emphasis in the original), for Morgenthau humans' desire for power 'concerns itself not with the individual's survival but with his position among his fellows once his survival has been secured' (Morgenthau, 1947, p. 165). Furthermore, Morgenthau mirrors the Nietzschean account of the greed for power's area of manifestation: in Morgenthau's view the desire for power is centred 'upon the person of the actor in relation to others', and 'there is no social action which would not contain at least a trace of this desire to make one's own person prevail against others' (Morgenthau, 1947, pp. 165–6). As emphasised earlier, here it is obvious that the

view according to which Morgenthau's concept of 'power' narrowly applies to the field of politics is mistaken. As Petersen notes, it 'applies to the very constitution of our being, that underlies and seeks to make intelligible realms of knowledge, meaning, and morals – good an evil, truth and falseness' (Petersen, 1999, pp. 100–1). Nietzsche's 'will to power' manifests itself in offering reinterpretations, 'the greatest means for change, for establishing new conditions and creating new values' (Nehamas, 1985, pp. 97–8) – and throughout them, new meanings. For Nietzsche, 'to impose upon becoming the character of being' stands as 'the supreme will to power' (Nietzsche, 1968, p. 330) – and the latter assertion is interpreted by Morgenthau as representing one's striving to make his/her own created meaning prevail. According to this reading, it is this Nietzschean approach to power, which focuses upon the issue of human agency after the death of God, upon creation as interpretation, and upon struggle over meaning imposition, that forms the core of Morgenthau's theory. In Morgenthau's world, just like in Nietzsche's, 'what determines your rank is the quantum of power you are: the rest is cowardice' (Nietzsche, 1968, p. 457), and the individuals' awareness of this fact intensifies their appetite for such a form of domination. By virtue of one of his nature's features, Morgenthau's human being is pictured as continuously engaged in a quest for acquiring more and more power, interpreted as man's engagement in a fight to impose the meaning/values that he has created, upon the others.

In Morgenthau's view, humans' lust for power is universal in scope, and is endowed with a limitless character: humans always want more and more power. In *Scientific Man vs. Power Politics*, he writes that 'while man's vital needs are capable of satisfaction, his lust for power would be satisfied only if the last man became an object of his domination, there being nobody above or beside him, that is, if he became like God' (Morgenthau, 1947, p. 165). As Morgenthau asserts in the same writing, when comparing man's lust for power with his selfishness,

There is in selfishness an element of rationality presented by the natural limitation of the end, which is lacking in the will to power. It is for this reason that mere selfishness can be appeased by concessions while satisfaction of one demand will stimulate the will to power to ever expanding claims.

(Morgenthau, 1947, p. 166)

Equally important to Morgenthau is the fact that this limitless desire is very likely to trigger catastrophic outcomes. Mirroring Nietzsche's interpretation, Morgenthau argues that the human affirmation of power carries within it a highly destructive potential – see Nietzsche's early views, for whom power was 'always evil' (quoted in Kaufmann, 1974, p. 180), and whose 'demon' (quoted in Kaufmann, 1974, p. 197) humans could not escape. Within this context, the ideas of action for action's sake and of the evil of power are introduced and discussed by Morgenthau.

A detailed exposition of Morgenthau's critical views on the issue of action for action's sake is undertaken in the book *Science: Servant or Master?* Here Morgenthau emphasises that in a time with no values universally endorsed, man is disappointed with the interpretation and solutions to the crisis which are advanced by science, and he returns to an 'obscurantist' and 'unconditional' activism (Morgenthau, 1972, p. 47). In Morgenthau's view, man seeks in activism 'salvation from empirical misery and metaphysical doubt': he 'despairs of the possibility of transforming reality by understanding it in a systematic, theoretical manner and sets out to transform it through the vital force of his individuality' (Morgenthau, 1972, p. 47). In Morgenthau's interpretation, man 'finds in action as such the highest source of meaning', and 'the febrile activity that clings to the empirical world like a drowning man to a plank is an antidote to the perplexity of the soul' (Morgenthau, 1972, pp. 47–8). Morgenthau draws our attention to the fact that the refuge into action is common to man and beast. Despite this similarity, the beast 'does not need a further refuge because it is not reflectively conscious of the insufficiency of action' (Morgenthau, 1972, p. 53). Unlike the animals however, man experiences in action his 'impotence' as well: in an interesting formulation which echoes Nietzsche's, Morgenthau tells us that man alone 'has the gift of reflective consciousness, of thinking of the past and the future' (Morgenthau, 1972, p. 53).

Morgenthau argues that man 'tries to forget the question posed by the metaphysical shock' in this 'intoxication of incessant activity' (Morgenthau, 1972, p. 49), and he is keen to emphasise that action for action's sake does not provide man with answers to the metaphysical shock, it carries no creative force within it, and hardly reconciles the disenchanted human soul with the external world. Morgenthau argues against filling in the aftermath of the death of God with a philosophical

attitude which celebrates creativity for its own sake, against succumbing under an empty activism. Morgenthau's criticism of action for action's sake makes up an important step in his theory, and constitutes a clear indication of his theoretical and ethical commitments. What Morgenthau emphasises – and this is a very important distinction to draw attention to – is the assumption that man now has the possibility to engage in genuinely creative deeds, which are not imbued with the glorification of action for action's sake, and of power per se (Morgenthau's solution advanced against action for action's sake and meaningless creation will be discussed at length in Chapter 5).

In Morgenthau's account, the fight over power/meaning imposition can easily generate destruction and tragedy. Power and tragedy are interrelated, and the exercise of the former leads to the latter when power escapes humans' control, thus testifying to the human limitations in dealing with the lust for power. Tragedy is a characteristic of human life to which Morgenthau devotes significant attention, and of whose importance he is well aware. As he emphasises in a letter to Michael Oakeshott dated 22 May 1948, 'I would not for a moment admit that tragedy is a category of art and not of life [...]. Man is tragic because he cannot do what he ought to do. That contrast between duty and ability is a quality of existence, not a creation of art' (Morgenthau, 22 May 1948, Morgenthau Papers, Box 44, p. 1). At this point, the positive, creation-affirming potentialities provided by 'the death of God', seem to be called into question by an evil coming from within the human individuals, nourished by their inherent limitations.

Nietzsche once warned his readers that 'whoever still wants to gain the consciousness of power will use any means' (Nietzsche quoted in Kaufmann, 1974, p. 193). Mirroring his intellectual companion's view, Morgenthau passionately discusses the issue of the power's 'demon' and 'evil'. He therefore locates himself within a Nietzschean milieu, in which the perils and possibilities stirred by the death of God are problematised, in search for a viable solution likely to foster man's creativity, while also imposing certain boundaries to it. The notion of tragedy in relation to man's nature raises awareness on the destructive potential embedded in the power struggle, and points to the historicity and shortcomings of human nature in a way which questions the received wisdom of the American tradition, with its never-ending belief in progress and positive human input.

In the first volume of his collection of essays published in 1962, Morgenthau re-emphasises these ideas, and argues that man 'cannot help sinning when he acts in relation to his fellow men: he may be able to minimise that sinfulness of social action, but he cannot escape it. For no social action can be completely free of the taint of egotism which, as selfishness, pride, or self-deception, seeks for the actor more than is his due' (Morgenthau, 1962a, p. 319). Within his discussion of the evils of power, Morgenthau also emphasises that man's aspiration for power over men denies what is 'the very core of Judeo-Christian morality', namely respect for man as an end in himself: the power relation 'is the very denial of that respect; for it seeks to use man as means to the end of another man' (Morgenthau, 1962a, p. 319). In Morgenthau's account, 'it is the very function of Christian ethics to call upon man to comply with a code of moral conduct with which, by virtue of his nature, he cannot comply', which is 'both unattainable and approachable' (Morgenthau, 1962a, p. 375). Morgenthau concludes by arguing that man 'cannot attain moral perfection in this world', and that the best he is capable of 'is to conceive its meaning, to achieve through an isolated act of goodness a tiny fragment of it, and make aspiration toward it the guiding principle of a whole life' (Morgenthau, 1962a, p. 375).

Meanwhile, in *Science: Servant or Master?*, Morgenthau continues to argue along this line of thinking, and he maintains that humans' will to power 'interposes itself between the will to live and the means to that end' (Morgenthau, 1972, pp. 31–2), and that it orients action toward the achievement of its own end – that is, 'the accumulation, preservation, and demonstration of power' (Morgenthau, 1972, p. 32). As Morgenthau tells us further, 'that will to power not only takes the destruction of human life in its stride as a means to that end, but it is predicated upon it' (Morgenthau, 1972, p. 32).

In Morgenthau's view, the lust for power's 'evil' is both intentional and unintentional, it is nourished by humans' employment of malefic means, but also by their inability to envisage the consequences of their actions, directed towards meaning imposition. In *Scientific Man vs. Power Politics* Morgenthau writes that because of its natural limitations, the human intellect 'is unable to calculate and to control completely the results of human action' (Morgenthau, 1947, p. 162). Men cannot master their innermost evil accordingly, they cannot 'domesticate' its ever-expanding claims, and, despite their initial



intentions – ‘generally good’ (Morgenthau, 1947, p. 161) – they are often responsible for the unfolding of events which bring about tragic, destructive consequences. Man’s fate seems to be sealed:

Suspended between his spiritual destiny which he cannot fulfil and his animal nature in which he cannot remain, he is forever condemned to experience the contrast between the longings of his mind and his actual condition as his personal, eminently human tragedy.

(Morgenthau, 1947, p. 188)

Moreover, in *Science: Servant or Master?*, Morgenthau argues that the tragic stands as the essence of humans’ suffering, while to suffer is interpreted as ‘to be conscious of the insufficiency of one’s existence, both in experience and as a possibility’ (Morgenthau, 1972, p. 67) – that is, of the limitations outlined above. According to Morgenthau, the awareness of the limitations demonstrated in dealing with the lust for power intensifies man’s suffering: ‘because man is conscious of himself he must suffer, and because he suffers he longs for more consciousness, and the more consciousness he has the more he must suffer’ (Morgenthau, 1972, p. 67). In Morgenthau’s pessimistic conclusion, ‘the ultimate knowledge is beyond human possibility. Thus man must suffer because he is man’ (Morgenthau, 1972, p. 67). Humans suffer because of their natural limitations, and the awareness of these limitations intensifies the suffering, and leads to existential anxieties and frustrations which are amplified by the death of God.

As mentioned earlier, in opposition to many assessments of Morgenthau’s portrait of human nature, a strong case can be made that it actually contains two facets, which ‘help’ it to never turn black completely. In Morgenthau’s portrait of human nature we can perceive a second facet, of overcoming through creation and mastering. This reading suggests that, in Morgenthau’s interpretation of man’s condition, one can also see the Nietzschean theme of overcoming. This is attained by humans who have the awareness of the destruction likely to be brought by their lust for power, and who also succeed in mastering it. From the same struggle for power can, therefore, also spring hope and re-enchantment, and the ‘rejuvenation’ of the age – also ‘a task of destruction’ (Morgenthau, 1947, p. 15) – is therefore finalised by constructive means.

As Morgenthau implies, through mastering the lust for power, through employing power responsibly, man's actions may account not only for mere destruction, but for a destruction which builds the path towards construction and transcendence. Thus, in his account, power can cut in different ways, and this very ambivalence of power makes its analysis replete with difficulties.

### **Man as creator, and the issue of responsibility**

According to a recent assessment performed by Mollov, the transcendent elements present in Morgenthau's thought relate to morality in politics and statecraft, the responsibility of the intellectual to speak 'truth to power', the importance of philosophy to Morgenthau's approach to international relations, and his recognition of the importance of spiritual forces in man and politics (Mollov, 2002, p. 24). For Mollov, these features support an assertion which only recently has started to gain ground: 'despite his image as a Realpolitik thinker, Morgenthau throughout his career grappled with moral, philosophic, and spiritual issues' (Mollov, 2002, p. 31). The present work agrees with these assumptions but also attempts to go beyond them, and to portray Morgenthau as the proponent of an individualist ethical theory which addresses the break up of universal values in order to provide a solution likely to support order and re-enchantment. The meaning of the latter concept is revealed in Morgenthau's portrayal of the superior character, who constructs a moral order responsibly and out of his knowledge of man's nature. This section investigates some of the transcendent elements which make up the constructive part of Morgenthau's theory.

The analysis of man's constructive potential makes up an important section in Morgenthau's works, and Morgenthau points to it at various moments in his career. In his first book published in the US Morgenthau mentions man's *aristeia*, his 'heroic struggle to be and to be more than he is and to know that he is and can be more than he is' (Morgenthau, 1947, p. 189). As Morgenthau adds further, man – 'a giant Prometheus among the forces of the universe' – is 'but a straw on the waves of that ocean which is the social world' (Morgenthau, 1947, p. 189), and he never stops longing for transcendence. In a remarkable paragraph, Morgenthau pictures a battlefield where the human being fights 'with the forces of nature, his fellow-men's lust

for power, and the corruption of his own soul' (Morgenthau, 1947, p. 189). In Morgenthau's vision, the individual partakes in this confrontation as an authentic hero, his hopes nourished by a symbolic light that is 'never extinguished' (Morgenthau, 1947, p. 190). He is a man by virtue of his creative, constructive capabilities and last but not least, his reason. Here it is important to point out that Morgenthau's stance regarding reason, as revealed in this paragraph, does not represent a departure from his criticism of the 'glorification' of reason and rationalism, outlined in the previous section (in the paragraph below, Morgenthau perceives human reason as placed in the service of creation, and he consequently endows the concept with a positive connotation, whereas in the case discussed in a previous section, he refers to a specific application of reason, namely to that embodied by modern science):

Above this struggle, never ended and never decided in the perpetual change of victory and defeat, of life and death, a flame burns and a light shines, flickering in the vast expanses of human freedom but never extinguished: the reason of man, creating and through this creation illumining in the triumph and the failure of scientific man the symbol of man himself, of what he is and of what he wants to be, of his weakness and of his strength, of his freedom and of his subjection, of his misery and of his grandeur.  
(Morgenthau, 1947, p. 190)

Moreover, in an article published in 1950, while witnessing the Cold War unfold, and also the behaviourist revolution (which some of his colleagues at the University of Chicago were key proponents of), Morgenthau sought to raise awareness about the phenomenon of power in international relations, and he expressed his fears regarding the 'evil of power'. An important distinction spelled out by Morgenthau was that between what he called 'general evils', which 'flow from the ubiquity of the lust for power and, hence, are beyond remedy by human effort', and 'specific evils' (Morgenthau, 1950, p. 516). The latter are those 'which result from concrete historic circumstances' and which can therefore be rectified, according to Morgenthau: they are 'subject to correction by the processes of history, supported by conscious human effort' (Morgenthau, 1950, p. 516). In Morgenthau's account, what is needed in this corrective

endeavour is the grasping of the 'eternal laws', of the 'universal laws of human nature' by which man acts in the social world (Morgenthau, 1947, p. 187) – and here it is not Morgenthau's intention to refer to laws which have been determined by scientific means. By 'eternal laws', Morgenthau implies that there are some human characteristics – such as the lust for power, and the evil generated by it – that a superior character must be aware of, in order to address them straight away, and to be able to master them properly. Such wisdom belongs to an exceptional individual who correctly assesses the incoming dangers, and who in Morgenthau's assessment is 'the true realist' by virtue of his knowledge, who 'does justice to the true nature of things' (Morgenthau, 1947, p. 187). Overcoming his nature's evils throughout a considerable effort and, in the end, his overall condition, he represents humanity in its superior embodiment: as Morgenthau puts this, 'the achievement of the wisdom by which insecurity is understood and sometimes mastered is the fulfilment of human possibilities' (Morgenthau, 1947, p. 189).

Morgenthau is particularly interested to analyse this superior character as he appears on the international political stage, and not as a prototype of human beings in general. Consequently, the remaining part of this section will tackle the concept of the superior human character briefly, the detailed analysis of his political embodiment being intended to develop in Chapters 4 and 5, which will analyse Morgenthau's vision of thoughtful political leadership.

In the international political realm, the collapse of the 'common roof of shared values and universal standards of action' (Morgenthau, 1967, p. 331) – namely, of a moral realm 'composed of Christian, cosmopolitan, and humanitarian elements' (Morgenthau, 1967, p. 244) – has led to a relativism which Morgenthau is aware of, and which he often points to throughout his career, as we have already seen. The mission to be accomplished by Morgenthau's superior individuals in a realm which is so difficult to master, proves not to be an easy one, and Morgenthau emphasises this at various points in his career. As Morgenthau asserts in *Politics among Nations*, the struggle for power's amplitude is outstanding – it is a struggle 'universal in time and space' and 'an undeniable fact of experience' (Morgenthau, 1967, p. 31). The subtle and complex struggle for the minds of men exhibits uncertainty and diversity, and the individuals' actions directed towards imposing their particular interpretations may generate an

outstanding destructiveness. Because of this threat, the superior character's task appears to Morgenthau to be more important than ever. He argues that in order to be deemed superior, an actor must possess wisdom – which is 'the gift of intuition' and 'the rarest of gifts' – and adds that 'the recognition of wisdom as a distinct quality of the mind has well-nigh disappeared from our culture', and that 'its absence is sorely felt' at present (Morgenthau, 1972, p. 45). Endowed with a crucial role in 'domesticating' the all-encompassing fight over power and annihilating its many possible negative outcomes, Morgenthau's superior character impresses with his knowledge, calmness and responsible ethics. Morgenthau's concept of wisdom as it applies to the field of politics will be analysed in Chapters 4 and 5. As will be shown there, while partaking of the Nietzschean symbol of the *Übermensch*, Morgenthau's superior actor also echoes Weber's politicised hero, who tackles 'the destructiveness of power politics' successfully (Morgenthau, 1947, p. 16), acting with an eye to consequences.

Nietzsche addressed the concept of responsibility in his *On the Genealogy of Morals*, and argued that 'in order to dispose of the future in advance in this way', man 'must first have learnt to distinguish necessity from accident', 'to think in terms of causality, to see and anticipate from afar, to posit ends and means with certainty, to be able above all to reckon and calculate' (Nietzsche, 1996, p. 40). At his turn, in his seminal 'Politics as a Vocation' lecture, Weber states that by following the ethic of responsibility, 'one has to give an account of the foreseeable results of one's action' (Weber in Gerth and Wright Mills, 1948, p. 120). As we will see in the following chapters, Morgenthau picks up his mentors' views on the superior human individual, especially within the Weberian, political formulation.

Only '*the philosophers, artists, and saints*' are 'truly human beings and *no-longer-animals*', Nietzsche once asserted (quoted in Kaufmann, 1974, p. 312, emphasis in the original). In projecting his superior hero, Morgenthau appears to follow this other assumption from Nietzsche. Morgenthau's political actor must have a good knowledge of human nature's essence. Furthermore, he has 'a special moral responsibility to act wisely, that is, in accordance with the rules of the political art' (Morgenthau, 1947, p. 159). The artistic, creative skills exhibited by this superior character can succeed in an ocean of evil power, and therefore, their importance should never be underestimated: as argued

by Morgenthau, the social world 'yields only to that intricate combination of moral and material pressures which the art of the statesman creates and maintains' (Morgenthau, 1947, p. 16). Throughout his never-ending battle with the conflicting forces of the social field, throughout the struggle with his own limitations, with gaining self-knowledge, in order to master his inherent evil, and the others', the statesman becomes the symbol of man fulfilling his destiny:

To act successfully, that is, according to the rules of the political art, is political wisdom. To know with despair that the political act is inevitably evil, and to act nevertheless, is moral courage. To choose among several expedient actions the least evil one is moral judgment. In the combination of political wisdom, moral courage, and moral judgment, man reconciles his political nature with his moral destiny.

(Morgenthau, 1947, p. 173)

'Know thyself; you will then know the others' inner essence, "tame" your common inclination towards evil, and construct' – this seems to be Morgenthau's message. He tries to raise awareness that, instead of just passively waiting for a prophet to redeem the world, in such an era, humans can engage in a thoroughgoing act of self-reflection, and, become aware of their nature and its limitations – more precisely, of their lust for power's evil essence – they can begin their own accomplished overcoming. It is here that we can see most clearly that Morgenthau's superior hero resembles the Nietzschean symbol of the *Übermensch* – 'the meaning of the earth' according to Zarathustra (Nietzsche quoted in Kaufmann, 1954, p. 125), and an expression of 'what man will become when he conquers himself' (Jaspers, 1965a, p. 128), namely his nature's passionate longing for power.

This chapter has focused on Morgenthau's metaphysics, with an emphasis on the significance of the 'death of God' diagnosis for his metaphysics, and for the development of his concern with the issues of meaning and disenchantment. The interpretation has thus moved away from materialistic readings of Morgenthau in order to point to the foundational assumptions in Morgenthau's account, and to his views regarding the multi-perspectival character of truth and the multiplicity of meanings and value interpretations. It has argued that Morgenthau employs a nuanced and rich understanding of the

power phenomena, which points to power as less as a mere influence and more as a creative act, in a league of its own. Morgenthau is fascinated with power as a creative value in itself, as interpretation and meaning imposition, and he sees the power related phenomena as forming a unity in multiplicity. This reading maintains that following a well-known Nietzschean dictum, Morgenthau's superior characters do destroy, but in the end their actions, which spring from an outstanding effort to overcome the malefic inevitabilities contained within men's nature, are clearly perceived as positive, and they account for what we can call – without creating a contradiction in terms – 'positive destruction'. The difference between 'good' and 'bad' destruction stems from the actor's pondering over the consequences, and therefore from his acting responsibly: 'good' destruction is that performed with an awareness of the consequences likely to follow from that particular action. Throughout the change of values which they perform, it is from these superior heroes that men's long awaited meaning springs, since 'what is good and evil *no one knows yet*, unless it be he who creates. He, however, creates man's goal and gives the earth its meaning and its future. That anything at all is good and evil – that is his creation' (Nietzsche quoted in Kaufmann, 1954, p. 308).

The next chapter will consider the broadening out of the scope of Morgenthau's metaphysical assumptions, by examining the translation of his metaphysics into an interpretation of the political. It will show that Morgenthau's vision focuses on developments such as the disenchantment of politics, which in his view is imperative to address after the death of universal values. Morgenthau perceives politics to be a realm characterised by intrinsic plurality, dynamic reinterpretations and conflictual meanings, and he criticises disenchantment, pointing to the meaninglessness of politics triggered by rationalisation. The chapter will also shed light on Morgenthau's account of the political embodiment of a constructive force. The second part of the chapter will show that Morgenthau's superior hero is aware of the evil of political action, and instead of becoming the victim of a rationalisation which reduces his creative potentialities, he responsibly affirms his individuality on the political stage, and counteracts disenchantment.

# 4

## The Disenchantment of Politics, and Morgenthau's Leadership Theory

By 1964, Hans Morgenthau regarded the opportunities offered by the social and political order more optimistically. When asked about the disillusionments expressed earlier, he replied: 'I'm through with being disillusioned, as it were. I try now to come to terms with the positive values which human nature and human life, social and political life, contain and more particularly potentialities which human life and the social and the political order contain' ('The Sum and Substance' interview, Morgenthau Papers, Box 172, p. 5). At that time, Morgenthau was trying to raise his contemporaries' awareness of the 'death of God', and the perils of meaninglessness and technological advancement. At the same time however, his earlier criticism of the perceived disenchantment of the world, including here the disenchantment of the political world, was tempered by the belief that mankind could use 'the new potentialities' provided by modern technology to its advantage, instead of its destruction (see Fifth Lecture at the Oriental Institute, 7 April 1950, Morgenthau Papers, Box 169, p. 23). The present interpretation maintains that despite the aforementioned coming-to-terms with life's positive values, the foundational assumptions embedded in Morgenthau's theory – the 'death of God', the subsequent advent of nihilism and disenchantment, and the fight over power interpreted as meaning imposition – will endure in his account until the very end. In a significant exposition a few years after 'The Sum and Substance' interview, in *Science: Servant or Master?*, Morgenthau reinforces his critical account of modernity, and here we recognise familiar themes. He exposes modern man's anxieties and disappointment with his existence, and argues that many dangers are still to be



counteracted. In a familiar stance, he criticises science's disenchantment of human life, and its propensity for duplicity: 'the same technologies produce medicines and poison gas, machines and weapons, nuclear energy and nuclear bombs' (Morgenthau, 1972, p. 28).

The previous chapter explored Morgenthau's metaphysics. Now it is time to examine the way in which Morgenthau's diagnosis translates into an understanding of politics, and to focus on this in more detail through revealing the specifics of Morgenthau's account of politics. This chapter shows that the Nietzschean and Weberian dimensions of Morgenthau's philosophical outlook translate into a theory which emphasises politics' inner dynamics and uniqueness, its perils, the propensity for political creation – understood as meaning imposition – and also the actor's responsibilities in this regard. It is a theory built on an acknowledgement of the value and importance of moral considerations for politics, which points to the fundamental role played by the human agent in shaping the outcome of the numerous and continuous perpetual struggles within a disenchanted realm of social and political experience.

Morgenthau's analysis proceeds along two axes: one is constituted by the triad truth – meaning – the death of God, the other by the triad power – politics – the disenchantment of politics. This chapter will show that these triads permeate Morgenthau's account, and his discussion of power politics never loses sight of ethical considerations – as Lang puts it, Morgenthau is 'intensely interested in the intersection of ethics in politics' (Lang, 2004, p. 5). Moreover, as this book asserts, just like his metaphysics, Morgenthau's political theory starts from the foundational assumption of the 'death of God' – of an external moral reference point, which could guarantee meaning – which has affected the political space, and of the consequences of this 'death' upon this space. In modernity, as interpreted by Morgenthau, humans live and act politically through values, they propagate values which are the end results of laborious interpretative processes. At the same time, a consensus upon values such as truth, justice and equality seems impossible to be attained. As Morgenthau puts it in an article published in 1949, no one could give answers to questions regarding these values 'which would be more than reflections of his own national preconceptions, for there are no standards at once concrete and universal enough to provide more than *ex parte* answers to such questions' (Morgenthau, 1949, p. 211). As Morgenthau restates this and

maintains years later in another writing which indicates his continuing interest with the topic, 'the substance of the answers derives not from the abstract pronouncements but from the concrete interests at stake', which 'fill the gap between abstract statements and concrete cases', and 'give concreteness to the abstractions' (Morgenthau, 1970, p. 64).

A central feature of Morgenthau's account is his analysis of what I will call the 'disenchantment of politics', as caused by scientific rationalisation. Mirroring Weber's methodological assumptions, Morgenthau argues against 'importing' methods which belong to natural sciences into the field of the social sciences, which deal with human agents whose actions are impossible to predict due to all the unknowns and uncertainties involved. Moreover, he maintains that in recent times, the status of politics has diminished, and it has been rendered meaningless by attempts to simplify its complex, contingent internal processes. In Morgenthau's account, a significant number of political scientists do not grasp their field of enquiry properly, they engage in meaningless empirical investigation, and avoid values. They contribute to the phenomenon of disenchantment by trying to reduce political processes to rationalist schemes which don't convey their genuine meanings, and which leave us with more questions and disappointments than with answers. Moreover, on the political scene, a new type of leader has emerged in the aftermath of rationalism, a leader who in Morgenthau's view fails to understand political reality properly – that is, the reality of power and of meaning imposition.

The first section of this chapter examines the issues of perspectivism and a larger form of relativism in the political realm, and the consequences of these positions, as articulated by Morgenthau. In his account, Morgenthau distinguishes between domestic and international politics; however, the distinction will not be problematised in this section. The next section then focuses on Morgenthau's theory of politics, with a special emphasis on the disenchantment which has occurred in this sphere. The examination of the specific characteristics of the autonomous sphere of thought and action called 'politics' will indicate that for Morgenthau politics after the death of God stands as a dangerous realm, disenchanting by rationalist approaches, plagued by ideological battles and threatened with technological destruction. As this interpretation is keen to emphasise, Morgenthau returns to the critique of rationalism throughout his life with views

unchanged, and the optimism referred to at the beginning of this chapter does not lead to the abandonment of his foundational assumptions regarding the negative potentialities contained in the 'death of God'. On the contrary, these assumptions continue to permeate Morgenthau's account up until the end of his career. Following the fracture of moral universality and the advent of rationalism, human existence and within it the sphere of politics itself have been disenchanting, and therefore reduced to calculations which tell us nothing about their intrinsic meaning. This is the meaning assigned in this book to the concept of 'the disenchantment of politics'.

In Morgenthau's interpretation of the political, man is the propagator and also the victim of the lust for power – what St Augustine called *animus dominandi*, as Morgenthau reminds us (Morgenthau, 1972, p. 31). This is a force which 'from time to time shakes the social order to its foundations', and administers to our consciousness 'that shock of wonderment that is the beginning of a meaningful science of politics' (Morgenthau, 1972, p. 31). As Morgenthau maintains, 'when he can no longer be sure of himself, incomprehensible even in his familiar appearance', in an age 'in which religion can no longer assure salvation', man 'can be saved from despair only by an understanding that portends mastery' (Morgenthau, 1972, p. 30). The third section argues that in Morgenthau's vision, salvation from metaphysical dread and re-enchantment of the (political) world can only come through knowledge. Morgenthau is eager to emphasise that, in the political realm, 'true' knowledge is achieved by 'genuine' political actors, who employ power responsibly and are characterised by detachment and prudence.

The chapter ends by drawing attention to what at first glance may look like a contradiction in Morgenthau's theory: while pointing to the perspectivism and relativism which characterise the political realm in the aftermath of the death of God and to the opportunities offered by these developments, Morgenthau also asserts that in international politics, universal moral values which transcend national values must continue to exist. There are sound reasons to argue that this sophisticated position does not constitute a contradiction, but stems from the way in which Morgenthau interprets the meaning of politics, and from his strong stance against politics as action for action's sake. This topic will be developed in Chapter 5 at length.

## A vision of plurality and perspectivism in the political realm

The previous chapter has provided an analysis of Morgenthau's metaphysics, with an emphasis, among others, on its particular interpretation of the concept of 'truth'. This section shows that for Morgenthau, the meaning of 'truth' in modernity represents a scholarly concern which permeates both his metaphysics and his political theory, and it proceeds to provide an interpretation of the latter. Morgenthau is aware of the importance of truth in the shaping of power, and consequently, in his theory of the political these two concepts hold a central, equally important place. This vision is expressed clearly in the collection of essays *Truth and Power*, in which Morgenthau points to his faith 'in the power of truth to move men – and, more importantly, statesmen – to action' (Morgenthau, 1970, p. 5), and maintains that power 'needs truth to be wise and great' (Morgenthau, 1970, p. 28). Moreover, in the same book Morgenthau argues that the distinction between the intellectual and the politician lies in their orientation toward different ultimate values: 'the intellectual seeks truth; the politician, power' (Morgenthau, 1970, p. 14). Despite this difference, Morgenthau insists, the two worlds are also potentially intertwined, 'for truth has a message that is relevant to power, and the very existence of power has a bearing both upon the expression and the recognition of truth' (Morgenthau, 1970, p. 14).

Morgenthau's 'commitment' (Molloy, 2004, p. 1) to the discovery of the truth of politics, and to the disentangling of the relationship between truth and power, is exacerbated by the awareness of the difficulty of these tasks: in the aftermath of the death of God, the place of truth as a universally valid principle is occupied by a multiplicity of different truths, and taking into account these circumstances the meaning and success of these tasks are thrown into question. The previous chapter showed that by adopting the aforementioned position regarding the multiplicity of truths, Morgenthau agrees to a certain degree with relativism, as a philosophical orientation which as outlined by Nardin implies that 'there are many kinds of truth', and that

What counts as true in a given context depends upon the conventions of particular societies, traditions, scientific paradigms, or modes of discourse. To claim that a proposition is true is therefore

to claim that it is true 'for' or 'relative to' a given community or conceptual scheme.

(Nardin, 1988, pp. 150–1)

Moreover, Morgenthau's position on the concept of 'truth' is defined further by his endorsement of the Nietzschean diagnosis of perspectivism, the latter representing according to Strong 'Nietzsche's attempt at replacing epistemology with an understanding of self and of knowledge that does not posit any particular position (or self) as final' (Strong, 1985, p. 165). For Morgenthau as well, in every truth there is a perspective, and the position from which someone conducts their examination leads to a particular interpretation, therefore holding an important place in its shaping. No particular position is final however as per Strong's interpretation of the Nietzschean diagnosis, and everyone is engaged in a perpetual, never ending battle over power understood as truth imposition/meaning fixation.

Morgenthau's sophisticated endorsement of perspectivism and of a certain degree of relativism shows up at various points in his career, and in his discussion of several issues and concepts, making up central assumptions for the development of his arguments. His unpublished lectures given at the University of Chicago provide solid proof of the early appearance and remarkable enduring character of these ideas in his theory. The lectures contain useful information which helps us to get an in depth understanding of Morgenthau's position on relativism and perspectivism, and on the importance in his view of both the external (socially related) and internal (human nature related) dimensions which take part in the shaping of truth. As argued by Morgenthau in his second lecture at the University of Chicago in January 1946, the objectivity of the observer 'is qualified by the particular position which he occupies within the framework of the society whose problems he tries to analyze and solve', and the social scientist 'is not a detached observer'. On the contrary, he is 'an integral part of the very phenomena which he tries to analyze, and therefore a scientific point of view is colored by the particular social constellation in which he finds himself' (Second lecture, 4 January 1946, Morgenthau Papers, Box 169, p. 11). As argued by Morgenthau in the same lecture,

If you ask what is the truth with regard to a particular problem of foreign affairs and you consult five books written respectively by

an American, an Englishman, a Russian, a Frenchman, and a Chinese, you will find you have, if not five different truths, then five different formulations of truth stressing different points of view.

(Second lecture, 4 January 1946, Morgenthau Papers, Box 169, p. 9)

Moreover, Morgenthau's stance on perspectivism is revealed in depth, albeit in a somewhat informal manner, in one of his talks which helps us gain a better understanding of what he has in mind in this regard. He argues that it is possible to say, 'if one resorts to a metaphor', that

Various historians belonging to different cultures, different civilization, and different political affiliations who examine one and the same landscape from different spots see it in different lights. One observer may stand at one end of the valley, another at the opposite end of it, still another is on the summit of a mountain, and, finally, someone stands at its foot, and each one of them sees entirely different things.

(undated talk, circa 1965, Morgenthau Papers, Box 172, p. 1)

Morgenthau's positions on these topics appear in a substantial argumentation in the article 'Reflections on the State of Political Science' published in 1955. Here Morgenthau maintains that the political scientist's mind is 'molded' by the society which he observes, and from this it follows that the observer's mind is by its very nature 'unable to see more than part of the truth' (Morgenthau, 1955, pp. 445–6). Morgenthau argues that the political scientist is 'a product of the society which it is his mission to understand' (Morgenthau, 1955, p. 445), and that the influence of the observer's personal perspective upon the 'truth' must always be taken into account. There are two influences in Morgenthau's account – one external, the other internal – and the political theorist has to overcome two limitations: the limitation of origin, 'which determines the perspective from which he looks at society', and the limitation of purpose, which 'makes him wish to remain a member in good standing of that society or even to play a leading role in it' (Morgenthau 1955, p. 445). The truth 'which a mind thus socially conditioned is able to grasp is likewise socially conditioned' (Morgenthau, 1955, p. 446), and taking into account these observations, Morgenthau concludes that 'the truth of political

science is of necessity a partial truth' (Morgenthau, 1955, p. 446). Here it is also important to mention, however, that in the article 'The Dilemmas of Freedom' Morgenthau points to the pluralism of the 'genuine type of democracy', and contrasts it with the 'relativism' of its 'corrupted types', indicating that the philosophy of the former rests on an 'absolute and transcendent foundation', on an 'immutable framework' (Morgenthau, 1957, p. 720). More on Morgenthau's interpretation of this transcendent foundation will be said in Chapter 5, which will show that Morgenthau's endorsement of this vision does not constitute a contradictory position, but stems from his moral understanding of the meaning of politics.

A topic discussed at length by Morgenthau in his published works, which demonstrates his endorsement of perspectivism and of a certain degree of relativism, is the meaning of the political scientist's membership of a pluralistic society, such as the one in the United States. Morgenthau finds this issue complex, interesting and open to debates, and in his assessment which indirectly speaks against the rationalists' reductionist views of the social and political realms, these latter realms appear in all their complexity and sophistication. In an essay from *The Decline of Democratic Politics* Morgenthau argues that for the political scientist to be a member of such a pluralistic society means actually 'to be a member of a multiplicity of sectional societies of a religious, political, social, and economic character, all exerting parallel or contradictory pressures upon him' (Morgenthau, 1962a, p. 38). As Morgenthau points out, all these groups are 'committed to a particular social "truth"', and the political scientist 'cannot help deviating from one or the other of these "truths", if he does not want to forego his moral commitment to discovering *the* truth of society altogether' (Morgenthau, 1962a, p. 38, emphasis in the original).

Another good example of Morgenthau's provocative approach, which is built on the foundational assumption of the demise of universality and on a special blend of relativism and perspectivism, is represented by Morgenthau's interpretation of the means-ends relation, which to him is open to debates and has an 'artificial and partial character' (Morgenthau, 1945, p. 8). In the article 'The Evil of Politics and the Ethics of Evil' Morgenthau maintains that one may argue from the point of view of a particular political philosophy, but one 'cannot prove from the point of view of universal and objective

ethical standards that the good of the end ought to prevail over the evil of the means' (Morgenthau, 1945, p. 8). In Morgenthau's interpretation, 'what is the end for one group of persons is used as means by another, and vice versa'. The means-end relation has 'no objectivity', and 'is relative to the social vantage point of the observer' (Morgenthau, 1945, p. 8). Moreover, Morgenthau argues that the end-means relation is ambiguous and relative also in that 'whatever we call means in view of the end of a chain of actions is itself an end if we consider it as the final point of a chain of actions' (Morgenthau, 1945, p. 9). This relativism therefore manifests itself at multiple levels and can be approached and observed from a variety of perspectives, and Morgenthau raises his readers' awareness of this important concrete proof of the demise of universality.

Relevant for the present discussion is also Morgenthau's interpretation of some of the political processes which characterise the democratic systems. In a lecture given in 1962 in which he discusses the distinctions between totalitarian and democratic regimes, Morgenthau states that while a totalitarian government 'creates consent through the monopolistic use of violence and of the mass media of communication, both supporting the claim to a monopoly of political truth', in a liberal democracy you have, of necessity, 'a relativistic approach to political truth and to the creation of consent' (Lecture 11, 15 May 1962, Morgenthau Papers, Box 171, p. 1). Morgenthau explains further that a liberal democratic government assumes 'that nobody has a monopoly of political truth', and that 'the best a group within the context of a liberal democracy can hope for is a close approximation of the truth, to be supplanted by another similarly temporary approximation to the truth' (Lecture 11, 15 May 1962, Morgenthau Papers, Box 171, p. 1). While pointing to the relativistic approach characteristic to liberal democracy and examining the latter extensively, Morgenthau emphasises the 'continuous fluidity' which exists in a liberal democracy in the relations between the different groupings 'to the political truth, and through it, to political power' (Lecture 11, 15 May 1962, Morgenthau Papers, Box 171, p. 2), and indicates that a democratic government justifies and legitimises its power 'by pointing to the temporary, precarious, and doubtful relationship which it holds to political truth', this relationship being 'continuously subject to revision by periodical elections' (Lecture 11, 15 May 1962, Morgenthau Papers, Box 171, p. 2). As showed in Morgenthau's



unpublished lectures, to him the aforementioned relativism and pluralism stand at the very core and meaning of democracy:

If there is no chance for the present majority, supporting the present government and the present policies, to be supplanted by another majority, supporting a different government, pursuing different policies, – without this relativism and pluralism, there cannot be democracy.

(Lecture 12, 17 May 1962, Morgenthau Papers, Box 171, p. 5)

Similar ideas are to be found in Morgenthau's lectures given years later, and this testifies to their enduring presence in Morgenthau's thinking. In a paragraph from one of his published lectures on Aristotle's *The Politics*, Morgenthau states that in a democracy 'you start with a relativistic conception of truth and virtue', and while believing in your own truth 'you don't deny the possibility that the other side might also have a parcel of truth' (Morgenthau quoted in Lang, 2004, p. 86). From Morgenthau's perspective, democratic elections are just one example of the fight over truth, which he is interested in depicting: through the process of democratic elections 'you give the other side a chance to make its claim prevail' (Morgenthau quoted in Lang, 2004, p. 86).

The supposedly universal and static meaning of the concept of equality is questioned by Morgenthau in a similar manner: in a paragraph taken from his lectures on Aristotle's *The Politics*, Morgenthau states that 'our conception of equality is determined by certain ethical and cultural preconceptions that are subject to change in time', and that equality 'receives its concrete, substantive meaning from the particular cultural environment within which it is applied' (Morgenthau in Lang, 2004, p. 44). He substantiates this argument by pointing to the changes which have taken place throughout the years with regard to women's political equality with men.

In a similar fashion, to Morgenthau the idea of universal and absolute freedom represents 'a contradiction in terms', since in any given society 'not everyone can be as free as everyone else' (Morgenthau, 1957, p. 715), there being differences in the degree of freedom enjoyed. Morgenthau adopts a provocative stance on the concept, and in his article 'The Dilemmas of Freedom' he raises awareness of the fact that in the political realm 'the freedom of one is always paid for by the

lack of freedom of somebody else' (Morgenthau, 1957, p. 715) – and here the assumption that freedom can hold multiple meanings is highlighted by Morgenthau. In his view, freedom has two different and incompatible meanings, which derive from two different positions and perspectives: freedom for the holder of political power signifies 'the opportunity to exercise political domination', while freedom for the subject means 'the absence of such domination' (Morgenthau, 1957, p. 714). The concept of freedom appears ambivalent to Morgenthau since most men 'play multiple roles with regard to political power, subjecting some to it and being subjected to it by others' (Morgenthau, 1957, p. 714). As he argues in 'The Dilemmas of Freedom', the majority of the members of society experience the two forms of freedom mentioned earlier at the same time, and 'the freedom of the many to compete in the market place for acceptance of their different truths requires the abrogation of the freedom of the one to impose his conception of truth upon all' (Morgenthau, 1957, p. 715).

Closely related to Morgenthau's concept of freedom is that of justice, which also bears the marks of his commitment to a vision that emphasises the multiplicity of interpretations. Justice, immortality, freedom, power and love are the poles which in Morgenthau's view 'attract and thereby shape the thoughts and actions of men' (Morgenthau, 1970, p. 61). Man can have the latter three; what he cannot have, says Morgenthau in his essay 'On Trying to Be Just' from the volume *Truth and Power*, is 'the kind and quantity of freedom, power, and love he would like to have' (Morgenthau, 1970, p. 62). With justice, as with immortality, it is different, says Morgenthau: 'the question here is whether he can have it at all' (Morgenthau, 1970, p. 62). Even if assuming the reality of justice, man cannot achieve it 'for reasons that are inherent in his nature: 'man is too ignorant, man is too selfish, and man is too poor' (Morgenthau, 1970, p. 63).

A central assumption in Morgenthau's account concerns the non-existence of a concept of justice with a universal meaning, but of a multiplicity of interpretations shaped by particular perspectives. Instead of justice one finds interests: 'powerful and weak alike tend to equate their interests with justice', and man 'cannot know what justice requires, but since he knows for sure what he wants, he equates with a vengeance his vantage point and justice' (Morgenthau, 1970, pp. 62, 65). Turning Kant's categorical imperative upside down, says Morgenthau, men take for granted that the standards of judgment

and action produced by the peculiarities of their perspective 'can serve as universal laws for all mankind' (Morgenthau, 1970, p. 64) – and here the spectre of the struggle over meaning imposition, which will be discussed in the next section of this chapter, enters the picture.

In Morgenthau's account, interests are the decisive factors which assign meanings to the concept of justice: all of us 'look at the world and judge it from the vantage point of our interests. We judge and act as though we were at the center of the universe, as though what we see everybody must see, and as though what we want is legitimate in the eyes of justice' (Morgenthau, 1970, p. 64). In Morgenthau's assessment, from an empirical perspective we find 'as many conceptions of justice as there are vantage points, and the absolute majesty of justice dissolves into the relativity of so many interests and points of view' (Morgenthau, 1970, p. 65). As he adds further, even third parties, not directly involved in the conflict of interests, 'cannot escape that relativity of justice':

At worst, they will satisfy their interests vicariously by favoring the interests similar to their own. At best, they will bring their particular view of world and man to bear on the case; yet the justice they do is justice only within the limits of the perspective from which they view the world.

(Morgenthau, 1970, p. 65)

Morgenthau's interpretation of human rights, as a concept endowed by some with universal acceptance, is another case in point which proves this scholar's incorporation of a certain degree of relativism and of perspectivism into his approach. The understanding of human rights mentioned above is criticised by Morgenthau on the basis of perspectivist and relativist principles, and he responds to the US proponents of this meaning of human rights by advancing his interpretation of the concept, which came at a time when human rights and their application were hot topics of debate among US theoreticians and politicians. As Morgenthau contends in his famous 1979 Carnegie Council for Ethics in International Affairs lecture, human rights 'are filtered through the intermediary of historic and social circumstances, which will lead to different results in different times and under different circumstances' (Morgenthau, 1979, p. 4). Morgenthau objects to the concept of rights, and uses instead the formulation 'basic interests',

‘which are common to all men’, and whose expression ‘may vary at different times and in different climes, but essentially they are what the Declaration of Independence says them to be’ (Morgenthau, 1979, p. 15). As he states in this lecture, the attempt to impose upon the rest of the world the respect for human rights is a daring endeavour, through which an abstract principle ‘we happen to hold dear’ is presented to the rest of mankind ‘not for imitation but for acceptance’ (Morgenthau, 1979, p. 5). In contrast to these tendencies, according to Morgenthau, the awareness of, and respect for, contingency and for the existing diversity of positions and interpretations must be emphasised and encouraged.

Morgenthau’s complex normative and epistemological positions also permeate his account of international politics, which makes up his main area of enquiry and reflection. Morgenthau begins his assessment by maintaining that in the international sphere the appeal to moral principles ‘has no concrete universal meaning’, it is ‘either so vague as to have no concrete meaning that could provide rational guide for political action, or it will be nothing but the reflection of the moral preconceptions of a particular nation and will by that same token be unable to gain the universal recognition it pretends to deserve’ (Morgenthau, 1982, p. 35) – and at this point the diagnosis of the ‘death of God’ enters the arena. To act in the international political realm means to act in a sphere whose features are very different from the past, and here Morgenthau points to ‘the unprecedented novelty and magnitude of the new political world’ (Morgenthau, 1982, p. 39), emphasising the moral and epistemological break with the past.

Morgenthau refers to the magnitude of the transformations within the international political scene at various points in his career, and his analysis is contextually bounded, albeit always propounding similar arguments and conclusions. As he puts it in an early lecture given at the University of Chicago, on the international scene ‘no particular interpretation of moral principles is able to prevail, and so you arrive not only at a political and social, but also at a moral anarchy’ (Twenty-eighth lecture, 18 March 1946, Morgenthau Papers, Box 169, p. 4). Here Morgenthau adds further – in a formulation which points to the contextual factors surrounding his predicament – that ‘one half of humanity believes in one interpretation of the general moral principles which everybody accepts, whereas the other half of humanity

believes in another interpretation, and so a condition of moral anarchy exists' (Twenty-eighth lecture, 18 March 1946, Morgenthau Papers, Box 169, p. 4). Moreover, as Morgenthau explains in the book *In Defense of the National Interest*, in his view the political world has been transformed by three revolutions: the political revolution, which signified 'the end of the state system which has existed since the sixteenth century in the Western world' (Morgenthau, 1982, p. 41); the technological revolution, with a technological progress achieved during the first half of the twentieth century which 'surpasses that of all previous history' (Morgenthau, 1982, p. 52); last but not least, the moral revolution due to which 'little is left today' of the political and moral system of the past (Morgenthau, 1982, p. 61). When he talks about the latter, Morgenthau points to 'a community of moral principles and of moral conduct, a community of fundamental religious beliefs, a common way of life – in one word, a common civilization' (Morgenthau, 1982, p. 60) which used to exist in the Western world. As Morgenthau adds in a formulation which once again points to the contextual factors he addressed at the time, 'throughout most of its history, the Western world was indeed one world. The moral evolution of our age has split it into two' (Morgenthau, 1982, p. 61).

As argued in this book, in Morgenthau's theory the most important and most focused upon transformation is represented by the collapse of universal norms. As he states in one of his unpublished lectures given in 1946, at present the national ethics 'have by far the stronger binding force upon the individual than any moral rule of international conduct', and 'the fact that wherever a conflict arises between national and international ethics, the conflict is almost always resolved in favor of national ethics at the sacrifice of the principle of international morality shows the extreme weakness, the extreme inefficiency, of international ethics in regulating, limiting, and civilizing the struggle for power on the international scene' (Sixteenth lecture, 6 February 1946, Morgenthau Papers, Box 169, pp. 2, 4). In another lecture from the same year Morgenthau similarly states that 'there is no working system of ethics, mores or law on the international scene which by an intricate interplay of rewards and threat of punishments would limit and make innocent, you might say, the selfishness of nations, as there exists a similar system and similar effects with regard to individuals' (Twenty-fifth lecture, 11 March 1946, Morgenthau Papers, Box 169, p. 10). Meanwhile, in a text presented at the NATO Defense College

under the title 'World Diplomatic History since 1945', Morgenthau points once again to 'the general situation of flux which the present world situation presents', and claims that 'the simplicity of approaches and of responses which was perfectly adequate eighteen or fifteen years ago is no longer adequate today' ('NATO unclassified', undated, Morgenthau Papers, Box 42, p. 21). In Morgenthau's account, 'the objective developments in the present world situation require us to adapt our modes of thought and action accordingly and this will require very hard intellectual work on the part of all of us' ('NATO unclassified', undated, Morgenthau Papers, Box 42, p. 21). Morgenthau restates his interpretation in *Politics among Nations*, and here he spells out the meaning which he assigns to the notion of the 'death of God' most clearly: the 'death of God' is interpreted by Morgenthau as the collapse of a supranational ethics 'composed of Christian, cosmopolitan, and humanitarian elements' (Morgenthau, 1967, p. 244). Morgenthau does not hide his nostalgic yearning for the way in which, in his view, international relations used to be conducted in the past: where there used to be consensus, now there is moral dissolution. As he states passionately at the end of *In Defense of the National Interest*, 'the golden age of isolated normalcy is gone forever' and 'no effort, however great, and no action, however radical, will bring it back' (Morgenthau, 1982, p. 241). Nobel aptly remarks in his article 'Morgenthau's Struggle with Power: The Theory of Power Politics and the Cold War' that here 'Morgenthau was arguing 'not *from* the practice of power politics of his times, but *against* it. He was holding up the politics of the past, of the golden age of European diplomacy, as an example to the present' (Nobel, 1995, p. 66, emphasis in the original).

In Morgenthau's account, the rise of nationalism represents one of the decisive phenomena which have brought about the collapse of the international society within which the international morality had operated. As he explains in one of his early lectures given at the University of Chicago, 'the moral principles which are invoked in international affairs are completely distorted in practical application by the national egotisms of the individual nations', and they become mere ideologies 'by which the interests and actions of one country are justified as over against the actions and interests of another country, or by which the interests and actions of another one are condemned in the light of those moral principles' (Twenty-eighth lecture, 18 March 1946, Morgenthau Papers, Box 169, pp. 2–3).

The 'mechanics' behind nationalism's manifestation in the international realm is simple to Morgenthau: as he puts it in *Politics among Nations*, since, within the national community, 'only a relatively small group permanently wields power over great numbers of people without being subject to extensive limitations by others' (Morgenthau, 1967, p. 98), the great mass of the population – 'not being able to find full satisfaction of their desire for power within the national boundaries' – 'project those unsatisfied aspirations onto the international scene' (Morgenthau, 1967, p. 98). The identification with the nation's struggle for power on the international scene is not condemned, but regarded highly by modern society, which 'encourages and glorifies' the population's tendencies to identify itself with the aforementioned struggle (Morgenthau, 1967, p. 99). As mentioned earlier, in Morgenthau's assessment the moral principles which are invoked in international affairs are 'completely distorted in practical application by the national egotisms of the individual nations', and they turn into ideologies, whereas on the domestic scene the conflict between distorted or differently interpreted moral principles generally does not lead to the demise of the nation 'because the coherence of the national community is strong enough to make one interpretation of moral principles prevail over the others' (Twenty-eighth lecture, 18 March 1946, Morgenthau Papers, Box 169, p. 3). On the international scene, the multiplicity of nations maintains the competition for meaning imposition alive, and the disintegration of the international morality mentioned above is thus continued, until one side wins and imposes a certain morality for a while. This confrontation is infinitely subtle, and it is driven by the passionate desire to attain the goal of meaning imposition.

For Nietzsche, nationalism – 'this *nevrose nationale*' (Nietzsche, 2004, p. 91) – provides 'an artificial and "overly modest" meaning for life' (Nietzsche quoted in Strong, 2000, p. 210). Meanwhile, to Morgenthau the nation is 'an abstraction from a number of individuals who have certain characteristics in common, and it is these characteristics that make them members of the same nation' (Morgenthau, 1967, p. 97). What is dangerous is that, while looking for the international success of a particular nation's interpretation of reality, people embrace what Morgenthau calls 'the spirit of nationalism', which has proved to be 'not universalistic and humanitarian, but particularistic and exclusive' (Morgenthau, 1967, p. 243). The individuals' outstanding feelings of insecurity and frustration have given rise 'to an increased desire for

compensatory identification with the collective national aspirations for power' (Morgenthau, 1967, p. 100), and to what Morgenthau calls 'nationalistic universalism', for whom the nation is 'but the starting-point of a universal mission whose ultimate goal reaches to the confines of the political world' (Morgenthau, 1967, p. 323). At present, Morgenthau asserts in *Politics among Nations*, national aspirations for power 'clash with each other, supported by virtually total populations with an unqualified dedication and intensity of feeling which in former periods of history only the issues of religion could command' (Morgenthau, 1967, p. 105). These manifestations endow the struggle for power with a 'ferociousness and intensity not known to other ages' (Morgenthau, 1967, p. 249):

Carrying their idols before them, the nationalistic masses of our time meet in the international arena, each group convinced that it executes the mandate of history, that it does for humanity what it seems to do for itself, and that it fulfils a sacred mission ordained by Providence, however defined.

Little do they know that they meet under an empty sky from which the gods have departed.

(Morgenthau, 1967, p. 249)

Morgenthau's assessment of the modern state is equally critical, and it echoes the Nietzschean Zarathustra's words: 'everything about it is false; it bites with stolen teeth, this biting dog' (Nietzsche, 2006, p. 35). 'The New Idol', 'the coldest of all cold monsters' invented 'for the superfluous', 'the ordaining finger of God', the place 'where the slow suicide of everyone is called – "life"' (Nietzsche, 2006, pp. 34–5) – this is the way in which Nietzsche describes the state, by means of his prophet's voice. In his turn, Morgenthau perceives it as a 'legal fiction' and a 'mortal God', and by employing this latter formulation, Morgenthau emphasises the state's importance in the modern age: 'for an age that believes no longer in an immortal God, the state becomes the only God there is' (Morgenthau, 1947, p. 169). In Morgenthau's account, the modern nation state has become 'in the secular sphere the most exalted object of loyalty on the part of the individual and at the same time the most effective organization for the exercise of power over the individual' (Morgenthau, 1947, p. 168). Morgenthau notes that 'while society puts liabilities upon aspirations for individual



power, it places contributions to the collective power of the state at the top of the hierarchy of values' (Morgenthau, 1947, p. 169). It is clear that for both Nietzsche and Morgenthau therefore, the modern state turns into a structure which suppresses agency's manifestation, draining 'the potential sources from which creation of new values could come' (Strong, 2000, pp. 205–6), and humans become prisoners within its cage. In this way, the state is the human community which claims not only the well-known '*monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force* within a given territory' (Weber, 1948, p. 78, emphasis in the original), but it also exercises a monopoly of meaning which Morgenthau is keen to criticise (this does not mean, however, that Morgenthau is anti-statist and agrees with the withering away of the state, or that he encourages unbound, unregulated action/creation. This point will be addressed in the book later on). Furthermore the state exhibits a false, pseudo-encouragement of individuals' affirmation, throughout a process empty of substance, of authenticity: as one of Nietzsche's interpreters puts it, in reality, 'there is no creating will behind it, no public arena except the shadow of a dead God; no value framework can be provided' (Strong, 2000, p. 205).

This section has outlined Morgenthau's foundational commitments to perspectivism and to a larger form of relativism (which are pivotal for the development of his political theory), and also his position on concepts such as truth, justice and equality which are built upon the aforementioned commitments. It has shown that Morgenthau's vision is permeated by an affirmation of multiplicity which succeeds the demise of moral universality encompassed by the 'death of God', and that his stance calls for a questioning of those approaches which overlook the diverse interpretative reality of the social and political world. We turn now to the articulation of Morgenthau's vision of politics and political power. The next section will provide an analysis of the specific characteristics of politics as stated by Morgenthau, with an emphasis on its dynamic, protean and creative nature. While praising politics as the manifestation of creative individual forces, Morgenthau is also aware of the individual's fight for meaning imposition, with both its negative and positive likely outcomes. Morgenthau holds to a universal core of values in order to avoid the likely destructive outcomes of the struggle for power, and this makes up a sophisticated normative position which is analysed in the final section of this chapter, and then in Chapter 5 in more detail.

## **On politics as a fight for power, and the perils of disenchantment and technological advancement**

A comprehensive outline of Morgenthau's vision of politics can be found in a discussion dated 1964, in which Morgenthau states that politics 'has really not the aim to make people better, or to alleviate their pain or their misery' ('The Sum and Substance' interview, Morgenthau Papers, Box 172, p. 3). On the contrary, politics has 'the aim of maintaining or increasing or destroying, as the case may be, the power of one man or one group of men as over the power of another man or a group of men' ('The Sum and Substance' interview, Morgenthau Papers, Box 172, p. 3). This is Morgenthau's account made public in the same interview in which he expressed his optimism regarding the potentialities offered by modernity's political realm. Morgenthau adds in the discussion referred to above that the problem and 'secret' of politics consists in finding a balance between freedom and order. Taking into account the diversity of contexts and the unpredictability of developments within the political sphere, the solution to this problem is 'bound to be always dynamic and at the same time precarious'. It follows, then, that the task of politics is 'never ended' ('The Sum and Substance', Morgenthau Papers, Box 172, p. 5).

In 'Power as a Political Concept' Morgenthau restates his arguments regarding the centrality of power to politics, and argues in its favour from an epistemological perspective, emphasising the theoretical need to establish such a conceptual point of reference. He states that by making power its central concept, a theory of politics 'does not presume that none but power relations control political action' (Morgenthau, 1971a, p. 31). Instead, what it must presume, according to Morgenthau, is the need for a central concept 'which allows the observer to distinguish the field of politics from other social spheres, to orient himself in the maze of empirical phenomena which make up the field of politics, and to establish a measure of rational order within it' (Morgenthau, 1971a, p. 31). A central concept such as power provides 'a map of the political scene' in Morgenthau's interpretation. However, this map does not contain 'a complete description of the political landscape as it is in a particular period of history', but 'the timeless features of its geography distinct from their everchanging historic setting' (Morgenthau, 1971a, p. 31).

As seen from the two aforementioned statements, one in typescript form, the other in the form of an article, for Morgenthau politics is about power, a central concept which aptly encompasses the meaning of a political order that by its very nature is uncertain in its inner developments and outcomes, and can't be summed up in natural science formulae. Moreover as argued throughout this book, for Morgenthau politics is about power understood as a fierce contest for the imposition of interpretations among creative and dynamic actors.

Following the Nietzschean vision of the will to power, Morgenthau emphasises the unpredictability, fluctuating and pervasive quality of the concept. In one of his early, unpublished lectures, he maintains that power 'is never anything stable, anything which is defined once and for all, but is in constant flux and it must always be conceived in relative terms' (Seventh lecture, 16 January 1946, Morgenthau Papers, Box 169, p. 8). Meanwhile, in the article 'Reflections on the State of Political Science' published in 1955, Morgenthau emphasises that the struggle for power – 'elemental, undisguised, and all-pervading' – stands as the 'distinctive, unifying element of politics' (Morgenthau, 1955, p. 454). Last but not least, in Morgenthau's view, expressed in *The Decline of Democratic Politics*, the phenomenon of power and the social configurations to which it gives rise play 'an important, yet largely neglected, part in all social life' (Morgenthau, 1962a, p. 50). Power and the struggle for power are everywhere in the social realm, and in politics in particular: according to Morgenthau this is the meaning of politics, be it domestic or international. With regard to the international realm per se, Morgenthau states in an unpublished lecture that here 'one particular aspiration plays an important role, and that is the will for power' (Third lecture, 7 January 1946, Morgenthau papers, Box 169, p. 6), and goes on to argue that 'it seems to me that history shows conclusively that the struggle for power and the desire for power as the dominating motive force in the minds of statesmen and nations has been present everywhere and at all times, regardless of economic system, form of government, etc.' (Fourth lecture, 9 January 1946, Morgenthau Papers, Box 169, p. 1). In Morgenthau's conclusion, 'from a realistic point of view the struggle for power is the very essence of international affairs' (Fourth lecture, 9 January 1946, Morgenthau Papers, Box 169, p. 1).

Petersen argues that, as it was the case with Nietzsche, for Morgenthau 'the hope of identifying an Archimedean point of incontestable knowledge and pure identity is a mirage', and Morgenthau's concept of power 'appears to be rooted in an attempt to frame the totality of relations that make up a world at any one time without reducing them to a single principle' (Petersen, 1999, p. 100). This view is similar to the one advanced in the present interpretation. As it will be shown below, the vision of power which transpires in Morgenthau's account is that of an always changing field of action, whose agents are engaged in unpredictable endeavours, with uncertain outcomes. For Morgenthau, politics is an open question, dynamic and with a life of its own, and it can endow human existence with significance. Morgenthau maintains that following the death of God men must seek to actively participate in politics, to make decisive choices, their involvement and actions being likely to save them from the pitfalls of rationalisation. Morgenthau is keen to criticise the scientific embodiment of reason for its conception of politics and for its attempts directed towards meaning imposition, which lead to the disenchantment of politics in his view.

As noted previously, the human individual is always center staged by Morgenthau. In his account, not all action is political but only that which involves human agents who strive to gain power by imposing their particular interpretations upon the others. There are strong grounds indeed for arguing that Morgenthau's is a politics mainly made up by individuals. As Morgenthau states in a relevant article published early in his career, on the political scene 'it is always the individual who acts, either with reference to his own ends alone or with reference to the ends of others' (Morgenthau, 1945, p. 10). Morgenthau argues further that 'the action of society, of the nation, or of any other collectivity, political or otherwise, as such has no empirical existence at all'. What empirically exists are always the actions of individuals 'who perform identical or different actions with reference to a common end' (Morgenthau, 1945, p. 10). Unsurprisingly then, Morgenthau's definition of political power expressed in *Politics among Nations* points to the human being and his/her nature, as the reference point. Power stands as 'man's control over the minds and actions of other men' (Morgenthau, 1967, p. 26), and political power consists in 'the mutual relations of control among the holders of public authority and between the latter and the people at large', and

in 'a psychological relation between those who exercise it and those over whom it is exercised' (Morgenthau, 1967, pp. 26–7). Furthermore, as Morgenthau explains in his article 'The Evil of Power', power can be conceived as 'a quality of a certain individual in his relations with another individual': 'in this sense we can say that A has power over B or that B fears the power of A' (Morgenthau, 1950, p. 514). Certain people have enormous power drives, while others have moderate power drives, and others have very little, if any.

Morgenthau's emphasis on the individual as the reference point in the struggle for power shows up at various points in his career from the beginning up until the end, and makes up an enduring, foundational assumption. As he states in an early unpublished manuscript, 'the nature of politics is linked to the nature of man in its origin, in its substance, and in its immediate goal. We envisage the political [das Politische] as *a force inherent in each individual* and directed toward other individuals' (Morgenthau quoted in Frei 2001, p. 198, emphasis in the original). Power is always the power of man over man, and the striving and struggle for power is not a phenomenon characteristic of international politics alone, but 'an inherent element of social relations as such', it is 'a general phenomenon of human life in society and must be regarded as such' (Seventh lecture, 16 January 1946, Morgenthau Papers, Box 169, p. 5). As Morgenthau adds further, 'our whole social life is interspersed with the element of power, with the attempt by one man or one group of men to dominate others' (Seventh lecture, 16 January 1946, Morgenthau Papers, Box 169, p. 5). Politics is therefore not so much a separate sphere of practice defined by a particular principle, but one which concerns the intensification of a particular manifestation which exists in all forms of interaction.

In Morgenthau's first two books published in the US, what Morgenthau calls the 'elemental bio-psychological drives' – 'the drives to live, to propagate, and to dominate' – are 'common to all men' (Morgenthau, 1967, p. 31), and power politics is rooted in this lust for power 'which is common to all men' (Morgenthau, 1947, p. 16). As Morgenthau often emphasises, 'there can be no actual denial of the lust for power without denying the very conditions of human existence in this world' (Morgenthau, 1947, p. 172), since 'there is no social action which would not contain at least a trace of this desire to make one's own person prevail against others' (Morgenthau, 1947, p. 172).

Man's aspiration for power is not an accident of history, but a universal experience of humanity:

It finds in politics its most extreme and most violent and brutal manifestation, but it is everywhere, hidden behind ideologies, disguised by the conventions of the good society. It is to be found wherever men live together in social groups, and that is everywhere.

(Fourth lecture, 9 January 1946,  
Morgenthau Papers, Box 169, p. 9)

What does it mean for Morgenthau to state that politics is about human individuals and their manifestations, and what are the implications for his theory? This interpretation would like to point to the fact that by focusing on the human, Morgenthau gives way to critics to question his apparent overlooking of the importance of the contextual factors, and to accuse him of a methodologically individualist oversimplification of politics. Morgenthau attempts a stabilisation and imposition of meaning which may be perceived by some as arbitrary and simplistic. This book will show that the above accusation is unfounded, and that Morgenthau's reflective awareness of relativism and perspectivism helps him devise a theory which does not suffer from the lack of depth perceived by some of its critics. On the contrary, this interpretation maintains that Morgenthau's incorporation of certain relativist and perspectivist assumptions, along with the focus on the unpredictable human, lead to a viable, contextually aware and sophisticated analysis of the phenomenon of politics with all its individual manifestations, and also of the concept of power itself and of its human reference points, both as destructors and constructors.

For Morgenthau, the political world encompasses the fight over power, diverse in its manifestations and unpredictable in its outcomes: politics is 'a universal force inherent in human nature and necessarily seeking power over other men' (Morgenthau, 1972, p. 31). Politics nourishes a permanent struggle, whose immediate goal is power. In Morgenthau's view this struggle is fierce, and it accounts for the brutality exhibited by what he takes to be the facts of political life. The specificity of politics as a sphere of practice resides in this ongoing competition directed towards meaning imposition, and its constituting actors are eager to make their own interpretation 'the truth' for all, adopted and recognised as such.

The change in the meaning at stake in the political game is achieved at the end of a demanding battle over power, and the successful meaning imposition exercised by an actor is reflected in the others' following of it. Morgenthau argues that throughout this fierce struggle for meaning imposition, truth becomes a mere function of political power.

Moreover equally important for the present discussion is Morgenthau's assumption according to which power is a quality of interpersonal relations 'that can be experienced, evaluated, guessed at, but that is not susceptible to quantification' (Morgenthau, 1970, p. 245). As Morgenthau explains in *Truth and Power*, certain elements that go into the making of power, individual or collective, can be quantified. Nevertheless we should not make the mistake 'to equate such a quantifiable element of power with power as such' (Morgenthau, 1970, p. 245). In Morgenthau's example, it is certainly 'possible and necessary' to determine how many votes a politician controls, but these are not a reliable indicator of how much power that political actor actually has (Morgenthau, 1970, p. 245). Suggestive and important in summing up Morgenthau's position in this regard is his categorical formulation, according to which if one wants to know how much power this politician or that government has, he 'must leave the adding machine and the computer for historical and necessarily qualitative judgment' (Morgenthau, 1970, p. 245).

These statements represent a good introduction to the main theme of this chapter: 'the disenchantment of politics'. In Morgenthau's view, in modernity, human existence and within it the sphere of politics itself have been disenchanting, which means that they have been subjected to, and reduced to, calculations which tell us nothing about their intrinsic meaning. There is a strong case that disenchantment is central to Morgenthau's understanding of modern politics, and in the articulation of this topic, Morgenthau mirrors Weber's criticism regarding the consequences of rationalism, and the employment of methods pertaining to the natural sciences in the domain of the social sciences in particular. As Molloy puts it, unsurprisingly given his background and training, Morgenthau's political science 'was derived from the German understanding of science as *Wissenschaft* and was essentially hermeneutic rather than "scientific" in the Anglo-American understanding of that word' (Molloy, 2004, p. 6).

An excellent analyst of the phenomenon of disenchantment, Weber argued that the increasing intellectualisation and rationalisation of

modern life do not indicate 'an increased and general knowledge of the conditions under which one lives' (Weber, 1948, p. 139). The present interpretation contends that this view stands as a leitmotif for Morgenthau's approach on the issue as well. A crucial problematic in his theory due to his early intellectual encounter with Weber's work, Morgenthau discusses the topic of disenchantment in the context of his confrontation with the post-war US so-called behavioralist revolution, which he witnessed unfolding at the University of Chicago, and returns to the critique of rationalism throughout his life, with views unchanged. Rationalist attempts have rendered politics meaningless, and Morgenthau fights against this tendency, continuously trying to raise awareness that the 'truth' of political science is not mainly about international treaties or institutional reform. On the contrary, it is 'the truth about power, its manifestations, its configurations, its limitations, its implications, its laws' (Morgenthau quoted in Molloy, 2004, p. 8), about the 'brittleness of power' with all its arrogance and blindness, its limits and pitfalls (Morgenthau, 1970, p. 28).

Morgenthau's critique of rationalist politics, and his outcry against the disenchantment of politics, appear in many of his works, and mark a guiding thread and a central pillar among his theoretical concerns. This is a theme which will preoccupy Morgenthau all his life, and he will continuously point to the perils of disenchantment, lamenting the loss of meaning in politics, and the significant negative developments which have transformed this realm. In an early text Morgenthau claims that any 'true and genuine' culture is, on the one hand, able to understand the facts of political life 'as they exist', while on the other hand, it is able to transcend these facts by 'a spiritual conception of life' (Morgenthau, 1947a, p. 1). However, says Morgenthau, 'our civilization refuses to recognize the facts of political life, and, because of this refusal, it is unable to transcend these facts through a spiritual conception of life' (Morgenthau, 1947a, p. 1).

Meanwhile, in *Scientific Man vs Power Politics* – an early, forceful attack upon rationalism in politics, and also a plea against the disenchantment of this realm – Morgenthau argues that in this field, in the past, the lust for power pursued its violent game; now, by contrast, we witness endeavours undertaken by the proponents of a 'science of peace' (Morgenthau, 1947, p. 70), for whom politics 'plays the role of a disease to be cured by means of reason' (Morgenthau,



1947, pp. 66–7). According to their hopes, in this field, the all too worshipped goddess – reason – ‘would reign supreme through the medium of the political scientist, the economist, the sociologist, the psychologist, etc’ (Morgenthau, 1947, p. 34). The reform by rationalisation, by simplifying an otherwise complex reality and disenchanting it, is ironically portrayed by Morgenthau:

Political manoeuvring should be replaced by the scientific “plan”, the political decision by the scientific “solution”, the politician by the “expert”, the statesman by the “brain-truster”, the legislator by the “legal engineer”. The technical efficiency of the business enterprise becomes the standard for the evaluation of governmental activities, the “business administration” the ideal of governmental perfection. Even revolution becomes a “science”, the revolutionary leader the “engineer of the revolution”.

(Morgenthau, 1947, pp. 31–2)

Morgenthau explores the topic of the disenchantment of politics at length in *The Decline of Democratic Politics* as well, and here he draws the readers’ attention to the fact that political problems ‘grow out of certain conflicts of interests, certain basic antagonisms which no amount of knowledge can eliminate as such’ (Morgenthau, 1962a, p. 313). Political problems cannot be solved ‘by the invention of a mechanical formula which will allow mankind to forget about them and turn its attention toward a not-yet-solved political problem’ (Morgenthau, 1962a, p. 313). Being ‘projections of human nature into society’, Morgenthau maintains, such problems cannot be solved at all: they ‘can only be restated, manipulated, and transformed, and each epoch has to come to terms with them anew’ (Morgenthau, 1962a, p. 313). In Morgenthau’s bleak conclusion, politics dies, and its meaning is lost in the hands of scientism: ‘the ideal of scientism as applied to politics is the disappearance of politics altogether’ (Morgenthau, 1962a, p. 314). Morgenthau rejects scholars’ academic formalism ‘which in its concern with methodological requirements tends to lose sight of the goal of knowledge and understanding which method must serve’ (Morgenthau, 1962a, p. 45). Time and again, he stresses the gap between the moral ideal and the facts of political life, and criticises the ‘presently fashionable theorizing about international relations’, which is ‘abstract in the extreme and totally unhistoric’

and which 'endeavours to reduce international relations to a system of abstract propositions with a predictive function' (Morgenthau, 1962a, p. 65), the latter being an action Morgenthau is quick to condemn. He draws attention to the fact that following the emphasis on theoretical abstractions which do not properly convey the processes at work in politics, a 'divorcement from reality' has been performed in abstract modern political science (Morgenthau, 1962a, p. 33).

Moreover in Morgenthau's contention expressed in the collection of essays *Truth and Power*, which points to the contextual factors which shape his assumptions, it has become obvious that the great issues of the day – which in his time were represented by the militarisation of American life, the Vietnam war, race conflicts, poverty, the decay of the cities, and the destruction of the natural environment – 'are not susceptible to rational solutions within the existing system of power relations' (Morgenthau, 1970, p. 6). He argues that the rationalists use the wrong intellectual resources to understand, and to deal with, the main political questions. Their contributions seem to neglect 'the moral dilemmas, political risks, and intellectual uncertainties inherent in politics' (Morgenthau, 1970, p. 243). They overlook the fact that political events are unique occurrences indeed. Rationalists also seem to forget that the rationalistic, quantitative approach is of limited applicability even to economics, for 'even here it neglects psychological forces that interfere with the smooth operation of the rational calculus' (Morgenthau, 1970, p. 245). As Morgenthau is keen to emphasise, the proponents of rationalism need to take into account that their theories are not created in a vacuum, but in a social context and a very competitive and dynamic political space.

Morgenthau argues that politics 'has its own standards of excellence, which are different from those of other spheres of action' (Morgenthau, 1970, p. 201), and that when one tries to understand the phenomena which make up international relations, he deals with human individuals per se 'as spiritual and moral beings' (bio-psychological drives are therefore put in accord with moral considerations), whose actions and reactions 'can be rationalized and quantitatively understood only in the lowest level of their existence' (Morgenthau, 1970, p. 245). In *Truth and Power* Morgenthau warns his readers that theoretical understanding of international relations 'cannot say, with any degree of certainty, which of the alternatives is the correct one and will actually occur' (Morgenthau, 1970, p. 256), while in *Science: Servant or*

*Master?*, he states that in the 'real' political world, man 'cannot afford to treat political problems as though they were scientific ones' (Morgenthau, 1972, p. 61).

Morgenthau argues that the common aim of the academic schools of thought informed by rationalist assumptions is to accomplish 'the pervasive rationalization of international relations by means of a comprehensive theory' (Morgenthau, 1970, p. 242). Their ultimate purpose is 'to increase the reliability of prediction and thereby remove uncertainty from political action' (Morgenthau, 1970, p. 242). Moreover, rationalist approaches are reductionist to Morgenthau, as they try to reduce, for instance, politics to economics – as Morgenthau maintains, 'what characterizes contemporary theories of international relations is the attempt to use the tools of modern economic analysis in a modified form in order to understand international relations' (Morgenthau, 1970, p. 244). In their account, nations confront each other 'not as living historic entities with all their complexities but as rational abstractions, after the model of "economic man", playing games of military and diplomatic chess according to a rational calculus that exists nowhere but in the theoretician's mind' (Morgenthau, 1970, p. 244). These theories espouse a dogmatic attitude and 'do not so much try to reflect reality as it actually is as to superimpose upon a recalcitrant reality a theoretical scheme that satisfies the desire for thorough rationalization' (Morgenthau, 1970, p. 243). As Morgenthau argues further, in a strikingly Weberian formulation, the dogmatism of the contemporary theories of international relations reveals itself as a 'new scholasticism', that is, an intellectual exercise, frequently executed with a high degree of acumen and sophistication, 'that tells us nothing we need to know about the real world' (Morgenthau, 1970, p. 246). They do not take into account, and do not reflect upon, the social and political 'reality' of the struggle for power as meaning imposition, as Morgenthau sees it.

Morgenthau maintains that the experience of the bureaucratisation and mechanisation of social life and the consequent diminution of the human person are 'particularly pronounced in the political sphere' (Morgenthau, 1970, pp. 236–7). Contemporary political relationships are marked by an unprecedented discrepancy in power between the wielder of power and its object, and power 'overwhelms the individual not only by its irresistibility, but also because of its mechanized and bureaucratized nature, by its unfathomable anonymity' (Morgenthau,

1970, p. 237). In Morgenthau's view, the individual lives 'in something approaching a Kafkaesque world, insignificant and at the mercy of unchallengeable and invisible forces' (Morgenthau, 1970, p. 237). Within this context, Morgenthau repeatedly emphasises 'the unbridgeable gap' that exists between the reality of the political issues with which humans must come to terms, and the modes of thought and action by which they are being governed (Morgenthau, 1970, p. 237).

Human plurality leads to unpredictability in social and political affairs. Consequently, Morgenthau contends that there exists an element of uncertainty which makes it impossible to plan effectively in the international sphere, and he often mentions 'the secrets of the human mind', and the contingent character of political history. However, instead of finding an acknowledgment of these facts (which to him are unquestionable) in IR, Morgenthau finds a mode of thought which maintains that you can deal with international politics in the same exact, precise and objective way in which you deal with natural sciences. In Morgenthau's view, a chasm exists between human reality, with all its forces – 'indifferent, if not actively hostile, to the commands of reason' – and the precepts of rationalism as they are applied to politics. This chasm is unbridgeable and stands as proof of the inability of rationalism to grasp the ever-changing distributions of forces which characterise this field. Molloy aptly summarises this complex position by saying that for Morgenthau modern thought is 'basically inadequate and inapplicable to the task of interpreting the social world' (Molloy, 2004, p. 5).

Morgenthau concludes by saying that the new theories are utopian, and criticises them for their underestimation or even plain neglect of the struggle for power and of the contingency of historical developments. What Morgenthau calls present day utopias reflect the theoreticians' desires and wishful thinking but not the real physical world, which to him appears dominated by the principle of indeterminacy, by perspectivism and a larger form of relativism, and predictable 'only by way of statistical probability' (Morgenthau, 1970, p. 245). In Morgenthau's view, the only difference between the new, rationalist utopias and the utopias of the past comes from the fact that they 'replace the simple and obvious deductions from ethical postulates with a highly complex and sophisticated methodological and terminological apparatus, creating the illusion of empirical demonstration' (Morgenthau, 1970, p. 243).

In Morgenthau's bleak picture of modernity after the death of God, political institutions have lost their transcendent meaning. Following the developments outlined above, the meaning of politics itself – as an autonomous sphere of thought and action likely to nurture a destructive struggle, but also construction and re-enchantment – is destroyed, and its disenchantment completed. Rationalist approaches have disenchanted politics by imposing a meaning which fails to do justice to the myriad of unpredictabilities contained within the political realm, to the protean nature of politics as a sphere of human interaction par excellence. As Morgenthau maintains, instead of working towards revealing the meaning of politics, they have imposed an erroneous interpretation, and have rendered politics meaningless.

In Morgenthau's interpretation, the statesman is rendered powerless in front of the rationalist attack, which leaves him without room to demonstrate his political creativity, without the power to decide, and then to implement his decisions. He turns into a slave of rationalism, which imposes upon him an interpretation that neglects perspectivism and uncertainty, the intrinsic characteristics of politics. Morgenthau contends that what rationalism does is not so much to inform the will of the statesman, but to replace it. Each social problem 'is supposed to be soluble by the one rational solution, scientifically determined', and the political act itself 'is transformed into the technical application of the scientific solution' (Morgenthau, 1971, p. 619). In Morgenthau's interpretation, 'the uncertainty of choice is thus removed from the political act', and politics, formerly a struggle of interests defined in terms of power, 'is reduced to the demonstration of the truths the social sciences have to offer for the solution of political problems' (Morgenthau, 1971, p. 619). The role of the statesman is therefore reduced to that of reproducing the findings of scientism, with no creative will behind it, with no awareness of the contingency and perspectivism which characterise politics.

The ascendancy of what Morgenthau calls 'the scientific elites' constitutes a function 'not only of their monopoly of esoteric knowledge, but also of the abdication, in the face of it, of the politically responsible authorities and of the politically conscious public' (Morgenthau, 1970, p. 236). The retreat from the confrontation with rationalism, and from politics altogether, is often criticised by Morgenthau. In his article 'The Evil of Politics and the Ethics of Evil', he contends that the retreat from politics amounts to 'a particular kind of personal

selfishness which cultivates the peace of one's own conscience bought by abstention from meaningful political action' (Morgenthau, 1945, p. 3). In view of the forces forever engaged in a battle over good and evil, and of the ethical and political risks which are unavoidably incurred in meaningful political action, the actor's abstention from it for the sake of moral purity is condemned since it 'seems to miss the point', and 'the concern of the conscientious objector for the letter of the moral law seems incongruous' (Morgenthau, 1945, p. 4). Here it is clear that for Morgenthau the *homo politicus's* duty is to act, to take a stand, and to try to counteract the disenchantment of the political sphere, by means of reaffirming his creativity. If he does not, Morgenthau suggests, the dominance of rationalist politics may trigger consequences likely to be more dramatic than it is generally assumed, such as a nuclear total war.

In Morgenthau's account, there are indeed many dangers in applying an 'unrealistic', 'quarantined', scientific interpretation to political affairs. As he argues in *Science: Servant or Master?*, in response to the arms race which was escalating at that time, technological development is bad because the natural sciences have put into the hands of governments 'the technical means with which to exercise totalitarian control over their citizens and to destroy humanity' (Morgenthau, 1972, p. 11), they have 'drastically impaired man's freedom and dignity and alienated him from society and government' (Morgenthau, 1972, p. 11). Moreover Morgenthau notes that in modernity scientific arguments have become 'indispensable weapons' in the struggle for power within the executive branch, and the scientific elites are the providers of these weapons. Starting out as the disinterested purveyors of esoteric knowledge, the scientific elites thus end up 'by rationalizing and justifying political interests by dint of their possession of esoteric knowledge' (Morgenthau, 1970, p. 232). In this context, Morgenthau often emphasises the relationship between Fascism and scientism, and in private correspondence contends that, 'in a sense', Fascism, 'no less than Bolshevism', represents 'the fruition of scientific politics' (Morgenthau's reply to Oakeshott, 22 May 1948, Morgenthau Papers, Box 44, page 1). In Morgenthau's view, expressed in an early unpublished lecture, Fascism 'with cold calculation has tried to subject political affairs to scientific analysis and scientific control' (Lecture 1, 2 January 1946, Morgenthau Papers, Box 169, pp. 9–10). Morgenthau adds further that in modern times 'you find a widespread movement

sailing under different colors – Liberalism, Marxism, Fascism – each of which tries to understand international affairs in a scientific way and to control them according to certain scientific laws' (Lecture 1, 2 January 1946, Morgenthau Papers, Box 169, p. 10). As Morgenthau mentions in *Scientific Man vs Power Politics*, the appearance of Fascism in our midst 'ought to have convinced us that the age of reason, of progress, and of peace, as we understood it from the teachings of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, had become a reminiscence of the past', and the failure of Fascism has given Western civilisation 'another chance to re-examine its own philosophy, to revise its own assumptions, and to reconcile its traditions with the experiences and exigencies of modern life' (Morgenthau, 1947, pp. 13, 15).

As argued in previous chapters, Morgenthau's repeated warnings regarding the nature of Fascism and the perils of rationalisation stand as a proof of the impact of Morgenthau's life experience in Nazi Germany upon his thought. Morgenthau is critical of rationalist approaches and of technological development, which he perceives as inherently bad, and likely to trigger disastrous outcomes if used irresponsibly. As he states in 'Freedom and Technology', modern technology 'opens up undreamt-of new worlds to the individual and promises more', yet it also 'diminishes the individual by making him a part and object of technology itself' (Morgenthau, 1973, Morgenthau Papers, Box 175, p. 15). In Morgenthau's analysis, the danger here stems from the fact that the individual 'tries to recover his dignity as an individual by finding vicarious satisfaction in secular religions such as nationalism, a process that culminates in totalitarianism' (Morgenthau, 1973, Morgenthau Papers, Box 175, p. 15). Morgenthau poignantly sums up his concerns by asking questions which preoccupied him all his life – he argues that 'the issue before us, simply stated is: how can we enjoy the benefits of technology without having to suffer its depredations? How can we master technology so that it does not master us?' (Morgenthau, 1973, Morgenthau Papers, Box 175, p. 15).

This section has shown that in Morgenthau's view rationalist politics imposes a particular set of meanings onto modern understandings and practices of politics which does not do justice to the latter. For Morgenthau, they represent erroneous and dangerous impositions which theorists must depart from if they want to embark on discovering the 'real' wonderment and meaning of the political. As Morgenthau often reminds his readers, in the 'true order of things',

it is the political will that dominates, and this is a will 'not primarily informed by scientific theory but by wisdom' (Morgenthau, 1971b, p. 620). As the present interpretation demonstrates, in Morgenthau's account another form of power politics does exist, and it represents a viable and desirable alternative to scientific power politics. Morgenthau's alternative is what I would like to call 'thoughtful politics'. This is a kind of politics performed by an actor who takes a responsible stand in international relations, and is endowed with moral courage, superior knowledge and reflective creativity. Equally important, as Morgenthau is quick to emphasise, he is not a proponent of rationalism, but stands as a political force conducive to creative, interpretative and responsible endeavours.

Morgenthau's superior hero is endowed with greatness, which represents 'the ability to push the human potential for achievement in a particular respect to its outer limits, or beyond them if they are defined in terms of what can be expected in the ordinary course of events' (Morgenthau, 1970, p. 133). As Morgenthau explains in *Truth and Power*, when we speak of great painters, great writers, great statesmen etc., we call them great 'because they have done what others may do well, indifferently, or badly, with a measure of excellence that at least intimates perfection' (Morgenthau, 1970, p. 133). The actions undertaken by the great political actor can re-imbue the political with meaning, and therefore re-enchant the world, and they can contribute to the achievement of the crucial goal of the age, as spelled out by Morgenthau in *The Decline of Democratic Politics*: 'the restoration of politics as an autonomous sphere of thought and action' (Morgenthau, 1962a, p. 3). Contrary to many assessments of Morgenthau's theory which emphasise the contrary, and point to the supposedly amoral, or even immoral, character of his vision of politics, here it becomes clear that Morgenthau does not endorse an interpretation of the political world made up only of a 'pure' struggle for domination, capable of never ending destructiveness. Morgenthau's theory is also about construction through responsibility, about construction as 'art', about politics as a sphere of human action which can provide outstanding opportunities.

The best way of tackling the constructive part of Morgenthau's theory is through unpacking his vision of leadership. The next section is devoted to this task, and it will focus on the re-enchantment brought about by thoughtful politics, which to Morgenthau represents a viable



and constructive alternative to the destructiveness and disenchantment of scientific politics. As Morgenthau states in *Politics among Nations*, the statesman 'is allowed neither to surrender to popular passions nor disregard them', and must 'strike a prudent balance between adapting himself to them and marshaling them to the support of his policies' (Morgenthau, 1967, p. 548). In a metaphorical paragraph which conveys his thoughts on the meaning of leadership nicely, Morgenthau asserts that the statesman 'must perform that highest feat of statesmanship: trimming his sails to the winds of popular passion while using them to carry the ship of state to the port of good foreign policy, on however roundabout and zigzag a course' (Morgenthau, 1967, p. 548).

### **Thoughtful politics, as a solution to the evil of politics**

Hans Morgenthau's *In Defense of the National Interest* opens with a quotation which is relevant for the present discussion of the wise statesman's qualities, and of his mission. Morgenthau quotes here from Winston Churchill – one of the few statesmen he admired for their 'art', along with Richelieu, Metternich, and Bismarck, and in whose thought he saw, as admitted in an early lecture at the Oriental Institute, 'not only eloquence, but a summary of the experience and the wisdom of the ages' (Morgenthau, 7 April 1950, Morgenthau Papers, Box 169, p. 15). Morgenthau quotes Churchill arguing that although people cannot live without idealism, 'idealism at other people's expense and without regard to the consequences of ruin and slaughter which fall upon millions of humble homes cannot be considered as its highest or noblest form' (Morgenthau, 1982, p. 2). In this quotation, significantly placed at the beginning of one of his major contributions to IR theory, a theme which is dear to Morgenthau surfaces: the responsible, consequentialist oriented politics, in which great characters are engaged.

Taking into consideration the central place it holds in Morgenthau's theory, it is surprising that so far very few scholars have treated Morgenthau's account of leadership methodically and at length. This insufficiency is addressed in what follows, with an outline of Morgenthau's analysis of thoughtful leadership and an emphasis on its capacity to provide solutions to the disenchantment and evil of politics. As is shown below, there are strong grounds for holding that,

for Morgenthau, while scientific politics acts in relation to scientific truths, thoughtful politics acts in relation to anticipated consequences, hence the importance of the concept of political responsibility in Morgenthau's account.

Moreover in contrast to critics who have emphasised the supposed lack of concern with values embedded in his theory, there is no better place to see Morgenthau's ethical concerns at work than his account of leadership, and this is an important reason for examining it in detail. Morgenthau links his interpretation of leadership with his discussion of values, and his account stands as an ethical analysis of individual political action. Aware of what he calls 'the curious dialectic of ethics and politics, which prevents the latter, in spite of itself, from escaping the former's judgment and normative direction' (Morgenthau, 1947, p. 177), Morgenthau pleads for a re-enchantment informed by knowledge, performed by an actor likely to use the opportunities provided by the death of God to create and impose values, while also keeping an eye on the consequences of his actions, and demonstrating prudence. In a modernity plagued by rationalism, and in a disenchanted political sphere, Morgenthau suggests that there seems to be one hope available. This hope springs from the responsible imposition of meaning performed by a character whom Morgenthau calls the 'genuine' statesman or diplomat, who exhibits wisdom and greatness.

When discussing the issue of human greatness, Morgenthau borrows from Pascal and Emerson. For the former, man was great because he was aware of being miserable. As Pascal said, being miserable is synonymous with knowing oneself to be miserable, and man 'is neither angel nor beast and his misery is that he who would act the angel acts the brute' (quoted in Morgenthau 1947, p. 173). The awareness of human limitations and the propensity for reflectivity and self-knowledge are thus crucial constitutive elements of greatness. Moreover, in a draft to 'The Mind of Abraham Lincoln', Morgenthau quotes from Emerson: 'he is great who is what he is from nature and never reminds us of others' (March 1975, Morgenthau Papers, Box 116, p. 2). Greatness is here synonymous with uniqueness, and it is native too. Morgenthau incorporates these attributes of greatness into his discussion of the statesman/diplomat, and in the articulation of this concept, he echoes Weber's account of charismatic leadership. The present reading argues that although Morgenthau's account of

wisdom has some similarities with Weber's charisma (to be spelt out below), it cannot be reduced to the notion of charisma in the Weberian sense. Far from being an unreflective translation of Weber's works into the realm of international politics, Morgenthau's account employs a multifaceted interpretation of leadership which points to its author's particular concern with meaning imposition, understood as a creative endeavour.

To Weber, 'charisma' is the quality of a personality 'which is esteemed as extraordinary', and because of it the bearer is considered to be endowed 'with supernatural or superhuman or at least extraordinary – not given to every man – powers or properties, or as God-sent or exemplary, and thence as "the Leader"' (Weber quoted in Whimster & Lash, 1987, p. 317). As Weber adds further, 'how the quality in question should be evaluated in an "objectively" correct way from any ethical, aesthetic or other point of view whatsoever, is naturally entirely irrelevant here' (Weber quoted in Whimster & Lash, 1987, pp. 317–18). Similarly, to Morgenthau, greatness is a quality 'inherent in men, not something to be acquired like power and riches' (Morgenthau, 1970, p. 173). It is a 'gift of heaven that is given to those who deserve it (because in a sense they already have it), not to those who seek it' (Morgenthau, 1970, p. 173). As Morgenthau asserts in one of the essays in *Truth and Power*, 'those who seek greatness with frenzied effort reveal through their very frenzy that they are lacking what it takes to be great' (Morgenthau, 1970, p. 173). Moreover for Morgenthau wisdom is 'the gift of intuition', and political wisdom 'is the gift to grasp intuitively the quality of diverse interests and of power in the present and future and the impact of different actions upon them' (Morgenthau, 1971b, p. 620). Clearly for Morgenthau political wisdom cannot be learnt: as he asserts in 'Thought and Action in Politics' and in *Science: Servant or Master?* a year later, political wisdom is 'a gift of nature, like the gift of artistic creativity or literary style or eloquence or force of personality' (Morgenthau, 1971b, p. 620 and Morgenthau, 1972, p. 45). As such, it 'can be deepened and developed by example, experience, and study. But it cannot be acquired through deliberate effort by those from whom nature has withheld it' (Morgenthau, 1971b, p. 620 and Morgenthau, 1972, p. 45).

In a political world in which so many actors are still ignorant of what they lack, and seek salvation in a rationalised, disenchanting experience, the charismatic superior characters impress through their

rare thoughtful reflection, and their commitment towards responsible creation. The sadness which these statesmen often feel is, despite appearances, a sign of strength: as Morgenthau states in *Politics among Nations*, knowing what they knew about themselves, their actions, and the world, 'they could not be but sad', and their sadness 'denotes the resigned acceptance of the moral and intellectual imperfections of the political world and of their precarious place within it' (Morgenthau, 1967, p. 235).

In his discussion of political leadership Morgenthau often compares the fate of the intellectual with that of the statesman. In *Politics among Nations* for example, Morgenthau states that there are two qualities which are not necessarily present in the intellectual, but are essential in the statesman: first, a sense of limits – 'limits of knowledge, of judgment, of successful action'; second, 'a commitment to a grand design, born of a sense of purpose that neutralizes the doubts arising from the awareness of limits' (Morgenthau, 1967, p. 235). The latter part of this quotation shows that for Morgenthau, the human capacity for achieving creative excellence, for going beyond the limits of the 'customary' in order to bring about a 'grand design', makes up another element of greatness. Man's capacity for transcendence through creation is emphasised here.

Cavalli remarks that Weber 'attributed to charismatic leaders the power to produce the most important change – that taking place in *interiore homine (metanoia)*' (Cavalli in Whimster & Lash, 1987, p. 317, emphasis in the original). Morgenthau suggests in a similar fashion that 'genuine political thinking' is action and, at the very least, 'it changes the consciousness of the thinker. However, by changing himself, he has already begun to change the political world' (Morgenthau, 1972, p. 59). In Morgenthau's formulation, expressed in *Science: Servant or Master?*, 'the political world exists in relations among men, and if the consciousness of even one single man is changed, the political world is changed at this particular point' (Morgenthau, 1972, p. 59). What the statesman says and does 'forms an integral part of a dynamic field of pressures and counterpressures', and consequently his words and actions 'must be adapted carefully to the conditions from which they arise and which they are intended to influence, and they are bound to fall short of the logical consistency and theoretical purity that are the earmarks of the intellectual detached from action' (Morgenthau, 1970, p. 17).

To be superior, a statesman must also demonstrate another attribute of greatness: he must possess the ability 'to look at oneself from a distance without being overly impressed', which allows a man 'to see the world as it is, undistorted by the involvement of his ego' (Morgenthau, 1970, p. 157). Like all other tasks mentioned above this one is demanding and difficult to accomplish, and Morgenthau is aware of the challenges. Morgenthau endows his ideal political actor with detachment, and this is a quality of personality which he portrays in the collection of essays *Truth and Power* when he argues that the political actor

Must detach himself from his own emotions and aspirations and judge the other man with an objectivity similar to that with which a scientist tries to understand the phenomena of nature. He must put himself into the other man's shoes, look at the world and judge it as he does, anticipate in thought the way he will feel and act under certain circumstances [...] Paradoxically, he must be just in judgment in order to be effectively unjust in action.

(Morgenthau, 1970, p. 69)

In his essay on John F. Kennedy, Morgenthau spells out other qualities which carry 'the promise of greatness' within them: 'a keen and open intellect, an unusual intellectual voracity, energy, and restlessness, an openness to new ideas, a hospitality to experiments', and also 'the ability to grow, not just to learn from experience [...] but to transform experience into a new intellectual quality, wisdom' (Morgenthau, 1970, p. 158). All these paint a picture of an extraordinarily gifted, caring and reflective individual, for whom leadership represents a fruitful usage of his potentialities to the benefit of his fellow men. This is a leader whose superiority is shown at various levels, and the most important test for his success is represented by his demonstration of responsible action.

The responsibility to act with an eye to consequences is crucial to Morgenthau: as he states in an article published at the beginning of his US academic career, 'the political actor has, beyond the general moral duties, a special moral responsibility to act wisely – that is, in accordance with the rules of the political art – and for him expediency becomes a moral duty' (Morgenthau, 1945, p. 10). As Morgenthau adds further, what is done in the political sphere 'with good intentions

but unwisely and hence with disastrous results is morally defective, for it violates the ethics of responsibility to which all action affecting others and hence political action *par excellence* is subject' (Morgenthau, 1945, p. 10, emphasis in the original). According to Morgenthau, all action affecting others is subject to the ethics of responsibility, and in order to demonstrate wisdom a diplomat should always work according to its principles: as emphasised by Morgenthau in *Politics among Nations*, a diplomacy 'that thinks in legalistic and propagandistic terms is particularly tempted to insist upon the letter of the law, as it interprets the law, and to lose sight of the consequences such insistence may have for its own nation and for humanity' (Morgenthau, 1967, p. 545). From this perspective, it is not surprising to Morgenthau that responsible statesmen and diplomats 'do less than they probably could' and 'refuse to consider certain ends and to use certain means, either altogether or under certain conditions' (Morgenthau, 1967, p. 225). As Morgenthau tells his readers in *Scientific Man vs Power Politics*, the success in preserving international order depends 'upon extraordinary moral and intellectual qualities which all the leading participants must possess', and a statesman who does not correspond to these high standards, by 'judging contrary to the exigencies of the moment', may 'ruin his country forever' (Burke quoted in Morgenthau, 1947, p. 187). The importance and subtlety of such an endeavour makes statecraft depart from all bureaucratic, vocation-less, 'rationalised' professions: in determining the goals of his country, in assessing those of others, in employing the adequate means suited to the pursuit of certain objectives, the statesman turns into an artisan, and his decisions are crucial not only for his country, but for humanity at large. Morgenthau contends that politics 'is an art and not a science', and that what is required for its mastery 'is not the rationality of the engineer but the wisdom and the moral strength of the statesman' (Morgenthau, 1947, p. 16). He adds that 'the social world, deaf to the appeal to reason pure and simple, yields only to that intricate combination of moral and material pressures which the art of the statesman creates and maintains' (Morgenthau, 1947, p. 16). As emphasised by Morgenthau in *Politics among Nations*, 'a mistake in the evaluation of one of the elements of national power, made by one or the other of the leading statesmen, may spell the difference between peace and war' (Morgenthau, 1967, p. 549).

In order to act successfully on the political stage, the statesman must demonstrate that he has 'a respectful understanding' of the object, nature, interests, propensities and potentialities of politics (Morgenthau, 1970, p. 69). Subsequently in Morgenthau's portrayal of the superior statesman, the grand themes of power interpreted as meaning imposition, responsibility and (self) knowledge are interrelated. For Morgenthau, the genuine statesman is endowed with the gift of recognising 'in the contingencies of the social world the concretisations of eternal laws' (Morgenthau, 1947, p. 187) – the 'mechanisms' of human nature. Moreover in Morgenthau's view, expressed in *Politics among Nations*, before the adoption of a decision, the diplomat should first and foremost ask himself consequence-related questions, and 'beyond the victory of tomorrow', his mind, 'complicated and subtle', anticipates 'the incalculable "possibilities of the future"' (Morgenthau, 1967, p. 547). In a relevant quotation taken from *Truth and Power*, Morgenthau asserts that great statesmen are those who possess 'a lucid awareness, both intellectual and moral, of the nature of the political act, of their involvement in it, and of the consequences of that involvement for themselves and for the world' (Morgenthau, 1970, p. 134). It is precisely this awareness the one which gives thoughtful statesmen 'the intellectual distinction and moral sensitivity that set them apart from the common run of politicians' (Morgenthau, 1970, p. 134). In an age in which religion can no longer assure salvation, man can be saved from despair 'only by an understanding that portends mastery' (Morgenthau, 1970, p. 69): understanding thus paves the way to transcendence.

Morgenthau's superior political actor must gauge the importance of a new development on the political and social scene. He must evaluate new factors correctly, but as seen from the quotation above he must also anticipate the other human agents' actions under certain conditions. In Morgenthau's view, anticipation seems to be a paramount quality, and to anticipate correctly is not at all an easy task in his account, especially under the 'gambling-like' conditions which characterise foreign affairs. The difficulty of the statesman's job is fully revealed when he faces the insecurity of the political realm, and has to act not only decisively but also responsibly in his confrontation with the contingent forces of the unknown.

The superior political character must be aware among others of the evil of political action, of the fragile and ever changing political

developments, which can easily escape control. In Morgenthau's view, there is no escape from the evil of power:

No ivory tower is remote enough to offer protection against the guilt in which the actor and the bystander, the oppressor and the oppressed, the murderer and his victim are inextricably enmeshed. Political ethics is indeed the ethics of doing evil. While it condemns politics as the domain of evil *par excellence*, it must reconcile itself to the enduring presence of evil in all political action.

(Morgenthau, 1947, p. 172)

In Morgenthau's account the superior political actor must be aware of all these, and must realise that the 'vital task' of the age is 'to transform the shock of wonderment that has its source in politics to the theoretical, systematic understanding of that source' (Morgenthau, 1972, p. 33). In Morgenthau's conclusion, that understanding has two purposes: 'to create a philosophical order in our minds through the transformation of an unintelligible and discordant reality into a theoretical system for its own intellectual sake', and to serve 'as a preliminary to the elimination of the threats to human existence by transforming reality' (Morgenthau, 1972, p. 33).

Morgenthau reminds his readers in *Science: Servant or Master?* that what has defeated political action throughout history has been 'the lack of factual knowledge, the sheer ignorance of what was going on, both in one's own and in the enemy camp' (Morgenthau, 1972, p. 41). For Morgenthau, this lack of knowledge can lead to disastrous outcomes likely to affect not just the ignorant political actor but also a high number of other people, and following this the actor should always be aware of the responsibility that rests on his shoulders. As Morgenthau explains in his early article 'The Evil of Politics and the Ethics of Evil', 'what is done in the political sphere, by its very nature concerns others who must suffer from unwise action' (Morgenthau, 1945, p. 10. See also Morgenthau, 1947, p. 160). Morgenthau adds here that what is done in the political realm 'with good intentions but unwisely and hence with disastrous results is morally defective, for it violates the ethics of responsibility to which all action affecting others and hence political action *par excellence* is subject' (Morgenthau, 1945, p. 10. See also Morgenthau, 1947, p. 160) – and here the connection



between knowledge and responsibility in Morgenthau's account of the political actor is fully revealed once again.

Taking into account the evil of politics, Morgenthau's emphasis on the need for the statesman to possess good knowledge of the political realm is hardly surprising. Nevertheless, it is important to emphasise here that this does not mean that Morgenthau argues in favour of the rationalist statesman, who is likely to bring about disenchantment through his knowledge, thoughts and actions. As this interpretation shows, there is an important distinction in Morgenthau's theory between the knowledge demonstrated by the responsible superior statesman and that endorsed by the statesman who is a proponent of rationalism, and following the above distinction there is no contradiction in Morgenthau's account from this perspective. Whereas the rationalist statesman looks at the political world as if it were reducible to rules and calculations, and as if its problems were easily solvable by appealing to sophisticated theories derived from principles to be found in natural sciences, Morgenthau's superior statesman has an awareness of the uncertainties of politics, of the moral dilemmas and complicated questions which need to be addressed responsibly. Detachment, anticipation of consequences, knowledge of politics and awareness of its uncertainties, and rejection of simplistic solutions and disenchanting actions – these all concur to paint the picture of an extraordinary political agent: Morgenthau's superior statesman.

The statesman's position and role in relation to the disenchantment of politics plays an important role in Morgenthau's account of leadership. Within this context, Morgenthau reintroduces his criticism directed towards the political actors' endorsement of empty moral abstractions, and their surrender to the forces of rationalisation and disenchantment. Morgenthau warns that charismatic legitimacy is vulnerable to failure once it is stripped of its enchanted, ethereal quality: as a 'gift from heaven', Morgenthau argues, it must remain enchanted in order to continue to capture people's imagination. Once it is so exposed, it is emptied of its substance, and becomes disenchanting and meaningless, losing the ability to charm with its superior power and knowledge resources. The disenchantment of the political realm thus extends upon the statesman, and he himself becomes a victim of the negative developments of the time.

Morgenthau continuously guards against the statesmen's submission to the disenchantment of politics, and argues that what they must

do instead is to try to counteract the phenomenon, and to acknowledge the contingencies and power struggles which make up the political world. According to Morgenthau, a foreign policy 'guided by moral abstractions, without consideration of the national interest, is bound to fail; for it accepts a standard of action alien to the nature of the action itself' (Morgenthau, 1982, pp. 33–4). Consequently, he criticises those statesmen who invoke some abstract moral principle 'in whose image the world was to be made over' (Morgenthau, 1982, p. 4), and who choose the path of what Morgenthau calls 'the moral crusade'. In writings composed in response to the Cold War ideological battle, Morgenthau criticises the crusading moralist in the political realm, who 'projects the national moral standards onto the international scene not only with the legitimate claim of reflecting the national interest, but with the politically and morally unfounded claim of providing moral standards for all mankind to conform to in concrete political action' (Morgenthau, 1982, p. 37). To counteract this tendency, Morgenthau tries to raise the political actor's awareness of the perspectivism and relativism which, in his view, currently permeate the realm of (international) politics. He tries to make the statesman acknowledge the uncertainties and contingencies of power, and the complexities of experience, with which the political world confronts its protagonists. He asks the political actor to consider the importance of the cultural arrangement that supports his particular philosophic conception, the various social and intellectual forces that struggle for the minds of men, and the fact that politics is not abstract, quantifiable and static, but a very sophisticated and dynamic struggle, a complex realm made up of confrontations among minds and wills.

Morgenthau argues that the statesman 'must think in terms of the national interest, conceived as power among other powers' (Morgenthau, 1982, p. 223), and from Morgenthau's account we can see that he takes the national interest to be an important variable, which the statesman must take into account prior to implementing a political decision. It concerns the power relationships among nations, and as such its importance should not be underestimated – after all, Morgenthau points out, all the successful statesmen of modern times from Richelieu to Churchill 'have made the national interest the ultimate standard of their policies' (Morgenthau, 1982, p. 34). As Morgenthau indicates in the passionate ending to *In Defense of The National*

*Interest*, 'it is not only a political necessity but also a moral duty for a nation to follow in its dealings with other nations but one guiding star, one standard for thought, one rule for action: THE NATIONAL INTEREST' (Morgenthau, 1982, p. 242, capital letters in the original). The analysis of the concept of the national interest does not form the object of this interpretation, hence this brief mention of it here and in Chapter 5, in the context of the discussion of Morgenthau's vision of political construction, which points to the connection between the national interest and the demanding tasks of leadership.

Several of Morgenthau's books (see, for example, Morgenthau, 1947 and 1967) end with sections devoted to the constructive potentialities embedded in the statesman/diplomat. In both cases, what Morgenthau emphasises is their potential for benign mission, and his overall message ends therefore on a positive note. In Morgenthau's words, expressed in an unpublished lecture held at the University of Chicago, 'an element of art enters into the solution of political problems', and in politics 'you have to be a creative artist' (Twenty-eighth lecture, 18 March 1946, Morgenthau Papers, Box 169, p. 13). Human greatness can thus be found on the political arena, although, in Morgenthau's view, very few are those who can rightfully claim to be 'great'. As Morgenthau explains years later in *Truth and Power*, after all, greatness is not a quality that the big masses of today want to discover in their leaders: on the contrary, they want their politicians to be 'wholehearted and uncomplicated in their pursuit of power' (Morgenthau, 1970, p. 136). According to Morgenthau, in a democracy, it is ordinariness, not greatness, which gains power: 'once a great man [...] has gained power under the cover of ordinariness, he can afford to bare his greatness to the multitude, but not before' (Morgenthau, 1970, p. 137).

Instead of succumbing to wishful thinking, endless schemes and moral abstractions, and also to a rationalisation which reduces their creative potentialities, and renders their endeavours meaningless, the statesmen should try to responsibly affirm their individuality on the political stage, and to counteract disenchantment. In Morgenthau's account, the thoughtful statesmen represent therefore viable alternatives to the optimistic proponents of liberal internationalism, and forces likely to deal successfully with the disenchantment brought by rationalist thinking. Moreover, by virtue of their wisdom, they are likely to be successful in confronting the evil of politics, and its most

destructive consequences. In Morgenthau's interpretation, rather than being possessed by power, great statesmen are those who possess power, and 'rather than being devoured by it, they tame it' (Morgenthau, 1970, pp. 133–4). The essence and meaning of political wisdom, and of the political actor's fate, are summarised by Morgenthau as follows, in an article published at the beginning of his US academic career:

To act successfully, that is, according to the rules of the political art, is political wisdom. To know with despair that the political act is inevitably evil, and to act nevertheless, is moral courage. To choose among several expedient actions the least evil one is moral judgment. In the combination of political wisdom, moral courage, and moral judgment man reconciles his political nature with his moral destiny.

(Morgenthau, 1945a, p. 18)

In this chapter the specific characteristics of politics in Morgenthau's account have been addressed, and its disenchantment caused by rationalist endeavours analysed. The struggle for power as meaning imposition has been highlighted, and the dangers and the possibilities stirred up by the death of universal values have also been addressed. Last but not least, the chapter has outlined Morgenthau's critique of action for action's sake, and also his endorsement of a vision of responsible imposition of meaning, performed by superior political characters.

Surprising as it may appear to some observers in light of the considerations spelled out earlier, to Morgenthau the 'real world' has not become a myth yet, there is still a 'true' meaning of politics, and in a godless and disenchanting world, universality of values is still a possibility. Morgenthau criticises those statesmen who invoke abstract, supposedly universal moral principles, and tries to raise the political actor's awareness of the perspectivism and relativism which characterise present day politics. On the other hand however, he also pleads for a re-enchantment informed by a return to universal values and tradition.

The next chapter is dedicated to the analysis of Morgenthau's commitment towards universal values, and of the meaning of this endorsement for his theory. Moreover, it deals with the question of the supposed tension in Morgenthau's account, which stems from

his commitment to both individual value creation and universal, transcendental values. The chapter argues that Morgenthau's sophisticated position provides a solution to the challenges raised by contemporary politics. It is a solution which tries to reconcile identity with difference, unique creativity with universal humanity, while also justifying the continuing relevance of tradition, perceived as a barrier against the proliferation of action for action's sake. Morgenthau's concept of thoughtful politics stands as an ethical politics performed by superior statesmen who adhere to a set of standards understood as an ethos, to values which come to us from the past, and are still relevant to present-day political problems.

# 5

## Closing the Openness: Morgenthau on Meaning, Tradition, and the Statesman's Mission

Chapter 3 has addressed Morgenthau's endorsement of the 'death of God' diagnosis, his awareness of the relativism and perspectivism embedded in moral and epistemological arguments, and his concern with the status of truth and meaning in modernity. Chapter 4 has analysed the translation of Morgenthau's metaphysics into a political theory with disenchantment and power as meaning imposition at its core, and has discussed the elements which make up Morgenthau's vision of political leadership. The present chapter represents the resolution which brings together the various strands of the argument so far, and focuses on Morgenthau's commitment to the creative restoration of tradition, and on his attempt to close the openness announced and discussed by Nietzsche and Weber. The creative restoration of the 'old' constitutes Morgenthau's solution to the nihilistic crisis, and the unit by which he argues that the strength of political leadership is measured. Morgenthau's strategy for avoiding absolute relativism encompasses the use of a particular conception of man in order to stabilise meaning, and involves a constant move between universality and particularity, obvious in his conceptualisation of the statesman. The argument in this chapter demonstrates that Morgenthau finds the idea of tradition in politics very appealing, and he perceives it as a viable foundation likely to offer guidance in the production of theory, and in the interpretation of current political developments.

The present chapter also aims to shed light on the apparent tension present in Morgenthau's thought, nourished by Morgenthau's often vague statements, between the emphasis on the creative overcoming

of the 'old' morality, and his insistence on the return to the wisdom of this morality. As outlined in previous chapters, Morgenthau takes on board Nietzsche's relativist and perspectivist assumptions, and Weber's rationalisation theme, and incorporates significant parts of them into a theory permeated by a pessimistic account of modernity. He takes issue with the search for certainty, order and meaning, and with the unfolding of disenchantment, regards critically the fact that many political actors still find certainty appealing, and points to the potentialities embedded in its demise.

On the other hand however, in an early lecture held at the University of Chicago, Morgenthau argues that there are 'certain truths in the field of the social, and more particularly, the political sciences, which have a lasting character and which are as objective in truth as any statement of the natural sciences can be' (Third lecture, 7 January 1946, Morgenthau Papers, Box 169, p. 7). This vision will permeate Morgenthau's account up until the end of his career: in his 'Human Rights and Foreign Policy' lecture delivered in 1979, we see Morgenthau maintaining that there exists one moral code, albeit 'filtered through cultural and moral particularities' (Morgenthau, 1979, p. 10). Consequently, this interpretation argues that in Morgenthau's view there is still a 'true' meaning of politics, there is still one 'truth', springing from the wisdom of tradition, derived from the dictum of the 'old' moral order. Thus, Morgenthau does not reject the old moral framework. On the contrary, he pleads for its consideration in politics, and for a stabilisation of the meaning of politics which appears very important to him, taking into account the threats posed by actions for actions' sake and by nuclear total destruction.

Morgenthau's argument reveals a different understanding of plurality – not unbound, but always regulated, carefully expressed so as to avoid a total relativism, and to emphasise the wisdom of tradition, while also drawing fruitfully on humans' interpretative potential. Depending on the particular contexts within which he was writing, Morgenthau emphasised the two aforementioned facets of his theory at various points in his career, and as stated earlier, this led to him being perceived as contradictory. The argument that follows will show that these two facets coexist without contradiction, and their coexistence is to Morgenthau absolutely necessary, taking into account modernity's grappling with the crisis

of values and with rationalisation. The present reading argues that by holding such a vision, Morgenthau is ambivalent but not contradictory, and that the two stances complement each other within a sophisticated political theory, which represents Morgenthau's answer to the crisis of values and leadership, and is relevant to discussions on modernity and postmodernity. Their coexistence also stands as a proof of Morgenthau's concern with morality, and of his rejection of amoralism, and of an 'anything goes' absolute relativism.

The chapter begins with a discussion of Morgenthau's account of moral universality, and an emphasis on his understanding of tradition as universality. Morgenthau's concept of tradition is constituted within a formalistic and abstract scheme, which he hardly ever explains in detail. The chapter provides a much needed interpretation, and a clarification, of the meaning of Morgenthau's concept of tradition, and shows that it applies to two realms: of values and of knowledge. The first section also argues that for Morgenthau, just like for Nietzsche, tradition 'does not only constitute a past that is gone, [...] but our present as well' (Nehamas in Magnus and Higgins, 1996, p. 242), and it provides a necessary core of meaning. It nurtures responsible creativity and prevents the excesses of relativism while also allowing for the consideration of dissimilar interpretations, and of cultural and historical differences.

The second section of the chapter focuses on Morgenthau's superior political actor, who is in charge of the reinterpretation of tradition referred to earlier, and whose political thought is creative, and 'illuminates the political experience of the day – and of all days – by discovering within it the perennial forces, problems, and patterns of interaction, of which political life consists' (Morgenthau, 1962a, p. 1). As shown in previous chapters, the issue of human agency is central to Morgenthau's theory, and he focuses on it with the awareness that humans are as much the problem as they are the solution to the ongoing crisis.<sup>1</sup> The chapter will show that Morgenthau's superior hero is a creator by virtue of his responsible actions, which are not a mere reproduction of tradition, but an imaginative reframing of it, relevant to the context and issues of the day. This is the meaning which according to this interpretation is attached by Morgenthau to the concept of political creativity.



### **Creation as reinterpretation: Morgenthau's meaning of universality**

In his short study called 'Nietzsche, Modernity, Aestheticism', Alexander Nehamas provides a persuasive interpretation of the supposed tension in Nietzsche's thought, between his awareness of nihilism and subsequent celebration of human creativity, and his longing for a metaphysical overcoming of morality. As Nehamas explains, it is impossible to classify Nietzsche as 'the last metaphysician' the way Heidegger did, because Nietzsche maintains a 'double relation to any grand narrative, including, in particular, the philosophical tradition itself': he 'undermines that tradition, though he knows he cannot completely reject it; he looks beyond it, though he knows that he cannot see anything fundamentally different there' (Nehamas in Magnus and Higgins, 1996, p. 231). In Nehamas's view, Nietzsche's attitude towards modernity was 'complex and divided' indeed: 'absolute rejections, like absolute distinctions, are very much what he constantly, absolutely tried to avoid' (Nehamas in Magnus and Higgins, 1996, p. 245).

Such an ambiguous position has attracted criticism, observers pointing out that Nietzsche 'remained an idealist and a moralist' in several key respects (Ansell-Pearson, 2005, p. 116). As Ansell-Pearson emphasises, Nietzsche's analysis of the phenomenon of European nihilism remains 'too centred on a crisis of meaning and, as a result, it perpetuates the very thing it seeks to overcome, namely, metaphysics' (Ansell-Pearson, 2005, p. 103). Within this context, Nietzsche's allegiance to Kant is often referred to: although he was a severe critic of Kant's attachment to metaphysics, Nietzsche 'could not renounce philosophy's pretension to legislate through the creation of new values' (Ansell-Pearson, 2005, p. 115. For an analysis of the 'Kantian foundations' of Nietzsche's thought, see also Hill, 2003).

The argument here is driven by the reading that, similar to Nietzsche, Morgenthau himself does not renounce modernity's moral foundation, as represented by Judaeo-Christian and Kantian values, and he does this with good reasons. First, Morgenthau still believes in the value of this framework, and in its potential to provide meaning. Second, he is aware that his criticism is enclosed within the bounds of the very tradition he takes issue with, and that he cannot thus renounce it completely. From this latter perspective, the present

reading suggests that Nehamas's assessment of Nietzsche captures well the essence of Morgenthau's own position in relation to grand narratives, and his views regarding the coexistence of contingency and perennity following the death of God.

As previous chapters have shown, Morgenthau focuses on 'truth' – as a concept which dominates and conditions his thinking about the nature of politics (see Molloy, 2004, p. 1) – and questions its validity in the aftermath of the death of God, when the breakdown of universality has left the world exposed to the perils of disenchantment. Morgenthau subscribes to Nietzsche's views regarding the advent of nihilism, as 'the state in which a being has the need to call himself continually into question, to raise continually the question of the grounds of his existence, without anything being able to count as such grounds' (Ansell-Pearson, 2005, p. 103). Moreover, he is aware of the competition for meaning imposition, in which humans eager to commit others to their particular version of the 'truth' are presently engaged. Following the demise of universal values, humans look at the world and judge it from the vantage point of their interests. As Morgenthau states in his 1970 collection of articles *Truth and Power*,

We judge and act as though we were at the center of the universe, as though what we see everybody must see, and as though what we want is legitimate in the eyes of justice. Turning Kant's categorical imperative upside down, we take it for granted that the standards of judgment and action produced by the peculiarities of our perspective can serve as universal laws for all mankind.

(Morgenthau, 1970, p. 64)

We have seen that Morgenthau pleads in favour of the creative overcoming of morality, and he praises men's capacities in this regard. The present reading maintains that Morgenthau has faith in the opportunities provided by the fragmentation of the universal realm of values, and that just like for Nietzsche, for Morgenthau 'the most powerful magic of life' resides in the fact that life 'is covered by a veil interwoven with gold, a veil of beautiful possibilities, sparkling with promise, resistance, bashfulness, mockery, pity, and seduction' (Nietzsche in Ansell-Pearson and Large, 2006, p. 236). Interestingly enough however, while asking humans to strive towards new, creative

ways of thinking and action in the aftermath of the death of God, Morgenthau also decries this death of moral universality. Far from rejecting modernity's values, Morgenthau insists on their creative reworking, in light of various cultural backgrounds and political developments. For Morgenthau, life is endowed with an ethical framework within whose confines humans can interpret – and thus generate a plurality of meanings – and then struggle for the imposition of their newly created meanings. Nevertheless their interpretations must be in accord with the initial, traditional framework referred to above. Aware that he cannot abolish modernity's universal platform of values, Morgenthau works out the implications stirred by the latter's weakening, and claims that any 'true' creation must resonate with the old moral order.

Morgenthau points to the fluctuating international political situation on numerous occasions, and in this context, he pleads for an adaptation of modes of thought and action to the developments of the day, among which the threats pertaining to the nuclear age are of particular importance to him. Humans need to change their traditional habits of thought and action, in response to a changed world. While emphasising the changed character of the new world, which requires further changes at the level of the individual, Morgenthau also maintains that in the international political realm there should be universal moral values which transcend national values. In an unpublished lecture Morgenthau argues that a complete relativism in politics 'leads either to mere propaganda [...], or irrelevant empirical studies of a mere quantitative nature where no clearly conceived value judgments and values are necessary, even though there are hidden ones' (Lecture 4, 12 April 1962, Morgenthau Papers, Box 171, pp. 22–3).

A good example of Morgenthau's nuanced position on the issue of values and on the relationship between universal and particular is represented by his 1979 lecture at the Council on Religion and International Affairs called 'Human Rights & Foreign Policy'. The context is very important for understanding the meaning of Morgenthau's plea: the paper was written during a time when the US administration's emphasis on the universal respect for human rights was at its height. Morgenthau begins his presentation by pointing to what he takes to be 'a decline in the adherence to moral values in general', and he argues that we are living 'in a situation in which the moral

restraints that in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries contributed greatly to the civilized relations among nations are in the process of weakening, if not disappearing' (Morgenthau, 1979, p. 3). He then turns to a critique of a universal interpretation of human rights, by emphasising the relative character of the concept. In response to the claim according to which human rights have universal validity, he maintains that human rights are 'filtered through the intermediary of historic and social circumstances, which will lead to different results in different times and under different circumstances' (Morgenthau, 1979, p. 4). However, in the same paper, when discussing the necessity of a universal moral code, Morgenthau also tackles the issue of universality, and the way in which he addresses this concept helps him avoid falling into a relativist position. He argues that 'there is one moral code', albeit 'filtered through cultural and moral particularities' (Morgenthau, 1979, p. 10). As Morgenthau argues further, there are certain 'basic' moral principles which are applicable to all human beings. Such a principle is the preservation of life – in Morgenthau's formulation, 'I assume that the sacredness of human life is a general moral principle, subject to certain qualifications' (Morgenthau, 1979, p. 25). As he maintains, the moral code is 'something objective that is to be discovered', and 'not a product of history' (Morgenthau, 1979, p. 10):

There exists a moral order in the universe which God directs, the content of which we can guess. We are never sure that we guess correctly; or that in the end it will come out as God wants it to come out.

(Morgenthau, 1979, p. 36)

Morgenthau implies that difference cannot exist without identity, and emphasises the necessary multiplicity within unity: the more humans are different, the more they are the same in their intrinsic humanity, and in their adherence to the traditional 'God' of meaning and universal values. Morgenthau often states that the individual must see national problems in their universal perspective, and for him the transcendent space is not empty, but meaningful. The restoration of the meaning of universality represents one of Morgenthau's main concerns, and informs his narrative on the potentialities of creative leadership and the re-enchantment of the political space, the

latter perceived as a viable project. Significant in this regard is Morgenthau's disapproval of the loss of the ability 'to apply transcendent objective standards to political reality by which political reality can be judged' (Lecture 12, 17 May 1962, Morgenthau Papers, Box 171, p. 22), and his critical views on what he takes to be the fact that 'neither Hegel nor Marx have a transcendent standard by which they can judge political events or actions' (Lecture 12, 17 May 1962, Morgenthau Papers, Box 171, p. 21).

The transcendent character of Morgenthau's theory has been noted by several observers. Molloy for instance states that important transcendent elements present in Morgenthau's theory concern 'morality in politics and statecraft, the responsibility of the intellectual to speak "truth to power", the importance of philosophy to Morgenthau's approach to international relations, and, indeed, his recognition of the importance of spiritual forces in man and politics' (Molloy, 2002, p. 24). As Petersen points out, for Morgenthau, like in Nietzsche's case, 'man undeniably resides in a shared space of meaning and intelligibility without which he would not be man but beast, because consciousness and its corollary, agency, presuppose determinacy – that is, the existence of a whole' (Petersen, 1999, p. 93). Frei argues that Morgenthau's normative ethics juxtaposes 'the *is* with an *ought to be* that is not of this world', which 'transcend individual existence and reach upward, as it were, toward a heaven of supreme values (*hochste Werte*) in order to place life under timeless obligations' (Frei, 2001, p. 166). These transcendent values – 'objective, independent, eternal' – serve 'as ultimate goals and also as standards for evaluating thought and action' (Frei, 2001, p. 166). Here Frei inserts a relevant quote from Morgenthau, who in an unpublished manuscript dated 1930 pointed out that he was inspired by a 'belief in a higher, spiritual destiny for mankind as expressed in the European values' (Morgenthau quoted in Frei, 2001, p. 167).

Morgenthau rarely addresses the issue of moral values directly, or states his position clearly, and this has led to confusions and misinterpretations. In fact, as stated in this book on several occasions, Morgenthau maintains a not so explicit position regarding the content of the moral order he refers to throughout his life. During one of his lectures given in 1962 for instance, he argues that 'only God knows, and I mean this literally, what the objective standards actually are' (Lecture 11, 15 May 1962, Morgenthau Papers, Box 171, p. 22).

Moreover, when asked by a student about the objective standards envisaged, Morgenthau once again does not provide a clear-cut answer, telling his student that 'what you are really asking me is what is my political philosophy, and that is<sup>2</sup> a very indiscrete question' (Lecture 4, 12 April 1962, Morgenthau Papers, Box 171, p. 23). The nature of the values endorsed is revealed unequivocally in a letter in which Morgenthau mentions that he affirms two basic moral values: 'the preservation of life and freedom in the sense of the Judeo-Christian tradition and, more particularly, of Kantian philosophy' (Letter to Edward Dew, 22 August 1958, Morgenthau Papers, Box 17, p. 1).

As emphasised at various points throughout this reading, there are strong reasons for taking the view that Morgenthau's foundationalism transpires in his analysis of the political realm in the aftermath of the death of God. As seen from an early lecture given in the US, Morgenthau maintains that there are 'certain truths in the field of the social, and more particularly, the political sciences, which have a lasting character and which are as objective in truth as any statement of the natural sciences can be' (Third lecture, 7 January 1946, Morgenthau Papers, Box 169, p. 7). In support of this claim, Morgenthau points to human nature, which comprises 'the basic psychological and mental qualities of man', that 'have remained constant throughout known history' (Third lecture, 7 January 1946, Morgenthau Papers, Box 169, pp. 7–8). As Morgenthau adds further, 'the fact that men want power is again one of those basic and perennial factors of human nature' (Third lecture, 7 January 1946, Morgenthau Papers, Box 169, p. 8). Significantly, as pointed out several times in the present book, this view is held by Morgenthau up until the end of his career.

Contrary to those critics who dismissed his theory for its emphasis on a supposedly unregulated struggle for power, Morgenthau argues against the obscuring of the 'moral significance' of political facts and against the glorification of power 'as the source of all material and moral good' (Morgenthau, 1962a, p. 317). In the essay 'The Escape from Power' he condemns the act of denying 'an independent existence' to those transcendent concepts 'by which power must be tamed, restrained, and transformed' (Morgenthau, 1962a, p. 317). Careful to distinguish his concept of political action from mere action for action's sake, Morgenthau implies that the former is held

in check by a transcendent orientation. Informed by the values of truth and order amongst others, and still successful in endowing human life with meaning, the universal moral foundation referred to above should not be overlooked in the political realm. In Morgenthau's account, its constituting values make up the very end of politics – as he is keen to emphasise, 'to say that a political action has no moral purpose is absurd; for political action can be defined as an attempt to realize moral values through the medium of politics, that is, power' (Morgenthau, 1962a, p. 110).

The importance of foundations in the theory and practice of politics is clear to Morgenthau, and he reiterates it at various stages in his career. As Morgenthau concludes a lecture given in 1946, 'there must be some element of scientific objectivity inherent in international affairs. For if nothing could be said about international affairs beyond mere subjective opinion, then there would be no science of international affairs at all' (First lecture, 2 January 1946, Morgenthau Papers, Box 169, p. 12). Moreover, in an article published in 1955, in reaction to the behaviorist revolution, Morgenthau points that 'even the most anti-philosophic science of politics is founded upon a philosophic understanding of the nature of man and society, and of science itself' (Morgenthau, 1955, p. 449), and forcefully adds that 'political science is of necessity based upon, and permeated by, a total world view – religious, poetic as well as philosophic in nature – the validity of which it must take for granted' (Morgenthau, 1955, p. 449). He points to the present day denial of the legitimacy and relevance of political philosophy for political science, and asserts that by means of this denial, political science 'cuts itself off from the very roots to which it owes its life, which determine its growth, and which give it meaning' (Morgenthau, 1955, p. 449). Meanwhile, in another account on the topic, Morgenthau draws his readers' awareness to the 'objective, general truths in matters political' (Morgenthau, 1962a, p. 44), and argues that political science 'presupposes the existence and accessibility of objective, general truth', and that 'if nothing that is true regardless of time and place could be said about matters political, political science itself would be impossible' (Morgenthau, 1962a, p. 45). As Morgenthau maintains in a later account made public in his lectures on Aristotle's *The Politics*, and around the time when he was working on the important statement-book *Science: Servant or Master?*, in contrast to the technical and

scientific problems, social and political problems 'do not change through history', and are therefore 'of a perennial nature' (Morgenthau quoted in Lang, 2004, p. 15). Morgenthau adds further that any social investigation, 'if it is not utterly mechanical like counting the number of cobblestones or measuring their size, receives its sense and meaning from a philosophic presupposition' (Morgenthau in Lang, 2004, p. 24). That presupposition in Morgenthau's view 'may be unconscious, inchoate, or unsophisticated. But it exists' (Morgenthau in Lang, 2004, p. 24). While fully aware that political concepts do not carry blueprints, automatically generated meanings, but get them from the particular environments and circumstances in which they are interpreted by a multitude of human agents/meaning creators, Morgenthau also points that, in contrast to the technical and scientific problems, the social and political ones do not change throughout history:

The problem of authority, the problems of the relations between the individual and the state, the purpose of the state, the common good, the issue of law versus naked power, the problem of violence, the class problem, the distribution of wealth in political terms – all those problems are of a perennial nature. They have not been discovered or invented in the 20th century.

(Morgenthau in Lang, 2004, p. 15)

In Morgenthau's interpretation, the above considerations make up what he calls 'the tradition of political thought', from which 'truth' in matters political stems. Morgenthau affirms the value and wisdom of tradition at the very beginning of his academic career. The Morgenthau who emerges from the unpublished lectures argues in favour of creative thought, and emphasises the importance of rediscovering 'the eternal truth and perennial laws of foreign policy as they have been formulated throughout the ages' (Fifth lecture at the Oriental Institute, 7 April 1950, Morgenthau Papers, Box 169, p. 1). Without overlooking the lust for power and power politics itself, 'in all their threatening ugliness as the inevitable elements of human life in a political society' (Morgenthau, 1947a, p. 9), the superior actor should nevertheless promote a return to tradition, universal meaning, and religious knowledge. As Morgenthau explains in a moving paragraph taken from 'The Escape from Power in the Western World',



a text which he prepared for a symposium held at the University of Chicago in September 1946, and which was later published in an edited collected volume,

Let us also face the facts of spiritual life, those transcendent values which give meaning to our political struggles and to our political sufferings, and which may enable us to overcome, first, in our own consciousness and, then, on the political scene itself the misery of political power.

(Morgenthau, 1947a, p. 9)

An extended analysis of the concept of tradition is undertaken in the preface to one of the collections of articles which Morgenthau published in 1962, and there are strong reasons for this to be read as a reaction to the aforementioned behaviorist revolution. This book, Morgenthau states, assumes 'not only the continuing value of the tradition of political thought for the contemporary world but also the need for the restoration of its timeless elements': it is especially concerned 'with the restoration of politics as an autonomous sphere of thought and action' (Morgenthau, 1962a, p. 3). In Morgenthau's account, political thought in every epoch 'is but the particular manifestation and application of a general philosophy' (Morgenthau, 1962a, p. 2). Moreover, each epoch of history has the task 'to disengage from the tradition of political thought those truths which fit its own experience and, in turn, to separate out of the welter of its own experience the perennial configurations of political life' (Morgenthau, 1962a, p. 1). In Morgenthau's view, therefore, tradition is a living and evolving concept. Each epoch of history 'must test yesterday's dogmas against the facts of today and today's orthodoxies against the perennial truths', liberating itself 'from the dead hand of tradition without falling victim to new dogma or else being lost in the labyrinth of uncomprehended experience' (Morgenthau, 1962a, p. 1).

The reinterpretation of tradition and its positioning at the centre of politics are imperative to Morgenthau, taking into account the context he writes against (behaviouralism). He denounces the 'presently fashionable' theorising about international relations, which is 'abstract in the extreme and totally unhistoric', and which endeavours to reduce international relations 'to a system of abstract propositions

with a predictive function' (Morgenthau, 1962a, p. 65). He draws his readers' awareness to the temptation 'to throw all tradition overboard and either to deny the existence of objective political truth altogether or else to seek it in some novel political arrangement or device, apparently unencumbered by past political experience' (Morgenthau, 1962a, p. 2). In contrast to Morgenthau's theory, which is historical, in his account the other theories neglect the contingencies of history and the concreteness of historic situations, and they 'must fail both as guides for theoretical understanding and as precepts for action' (Morgenthau, 1962a, p. 66). Finally, in a formulation which he will reiterate in his human rights lecture, 17 years later, Morgenthau warns against the careless use on the international scene of a particular interpretation which overlooks the 'truth' of politics. While finding the perennial truths of politics 'imbedded in the shell of historic contingencies', Morgenthau asserts, each generation is 'tempted by its prideful or spiteful identification with its own times to give the contingent the appearance of the perennial' (Morgenthau, 1962a, p. 1). The picture of politics following these endeavours is bleak:

Of politics nothing is left but the struggle of individuals and groups for access to the levers of power, in terms either of majority or oligarchic rule, crying out again either for expert management or else for utopian reform, oblivious of the distinction of what is desirable and what is possible and of the ineluctability of power itself.

(Morgenthau, 1962a, p. 3)

Against a disenchanting political life, Morgenthau advances the ideal of restoration. He pleads in favour of a reconsideration of tradition, convinced of the latter's wisdom and capacity to guide political action in a post-Nietzschean era. In his critical reaction to the behaviouralist developments, we notice his forceful commitment to tradition, perceived as a living, evolving concept, open to new interpretations, yet also made up of an immutable hard core of meaning. To what he takes to be the behaviouralists' abstractions, Morgenthau opposes a vision which is almost equally abstract, but which differs from that of the behaviouralists in its emphasis on interpretative and responsible creativity, as the basis for a successful politics.

Nehamas shows that along with the issue of the grounding of value, the erosion of the authority of tradition preoccupied Nietzsche throughout his life as well (see Nehamas in Magnus and Higgins, 1996, p. 226). He was aware that 'once the value of tradition has been called into question, we cannot appeal to the fact that, say, a practice belongs to a tradition as a reason for valuing it' (Nehamas in Magnus and Higgins, 1996, p. 226). Despite this, Nietzsche regarded tradition positively, and guarded against the latter's neglect: 'one considers tradition a fatality; one studies it, recognizes it (as "hereditary"), but one does not *want* it [...] it is the disorganizing principles that give our age its character' (Nietzsche quoted in Magnus and Higgins, 1996, p. 226). Similar to Nietzsche, who in Nehamas's interpretation argues that 'suspiciousness of tradition and the past is of a piece with resignation about the new and the future' (Nehamas in Magnus and Higgins, 1996, p. 227), Morgenthau pleads in favour of a re-enchantment informed by the values brought to us by previous centuries.

In this task, a crucial role in Morgenthau's account is played by the statesman, who has the necessary skills to implement responsible creation. It is him who can contribute to the accomplishment of the vital task of our times: the understanding of the 'true' meaning of politics, which to Morgenthau has got a lot to do with power struggle and conflicting moral voices, and little to do with rationalist measurements and calculations. Like Nietzsche's *Übermensch*, Morgenthau's statesmen are 'the strongest', to quote one of Nietzsche's most discerning observers. They are 'the most moderate ones who do not need extreme articles of faith, but can concede a good deal of contingency and nonsense and even love it, and who can think of man with a moderation of his value without becoming small and weak in return' (Ansell-Pearson, 2005, p. 102).

This chapter has so far examined the concept of 'tradition' as it appears in Morgenthau's theory. The focus now turns to the issue of political creativity, and to the superior interpreter of tradition in particular, as portrayed by Morgenthau: the statesman. The analysis of the statesman is important and necessary in this context since the superior actors are the only ones who in Morgenthau's account can reinterpret tradition responsibly, and avoid action for action's sake. While the last section of Chapter 4 has pointed to these superior actors' main qualities as noted by Morgenthau, and to their endorsement of a Weberian ethics of responsibility, the following section will differ

from Chapter 4 in its emphasis on the statesman's mission which is re-enchantment in Morgenthau's view, on his critique of unskilled statesmanship/diplomacy, and on the depiction of the issues in Morgenthau's account which are likely to attract criticism.

### **The statesman and his mission: Re-enchantment**

In his 1970 collection of articles *Truth and Power*, Hans Morgenthau embarks on a detailed and significant analysis of political leadership which mirrors his interest in the topic, and argues that 'there are two ways to be great in the pursuit of power' (Morgenthau, 1970, p. 133). On the one hand in Morgenthau's account, there are those statesmen who have chosen power 'as the ultimate aim in life', and who 'must use truth and virtue as means to their chosen end and discard them when they do not serve that end' (Morgenthau, 1970, p. 133) – the examples given here are Borgia, Stalin and Machiavelli's prince. These are the political leaders who in Morgenthau's assessment 'will sacrifice all other values for the sake of power', and their greatness consists in 'that single-minded, ruthless pursuit of power, of which lesser – and better – men are incapable' (Morgenthau, 1970, p. 133). On the other hand, perhaps surprisingly for those who still see him as a hard-nosed Machiavellian, Morgenthau's second understanding of political greatness is that which 'owes less to Machiavelli than to Plato's postulate of the philosopher-king and to the Hebrew-Christian ideal of the wise and good ruler' (Morgenthau, 1970, p. 133). In this latter case, political greatness 'consists not in the single-minded pursuit of power but in the ability to subordinate the pursuit of power to transcendent intellectual and moral values' (Morgenthau, 1970, p. 133).

Morgenthau's superior characters are often portrayed, and their role emphasised, in the context of Morgenthau's discussion of the fate of man following the disintegration of moral universality. In his account, the 'death of God' with all its subsequent challenges requires in the political realm the emergence of powerful agents, who engage in acts directed towards meaning imposition, perceived as a demanding, crucial enterprise. Just like for Weber, for Morgenthau skilful (that is, creative and responsible) leadership is required to address the issues raised in a post-Nietzschean age characterised by nihilism and disenchantment. Morgenthau's discussion of leadership

within the context of democratic regimes is a case in point. In Morgenthau's interpretation, just like in Weber's, the advantage of 'leader-democracy' over 'leaderless democracy' stems from the fact that the latter 'furthers the creative power-politics of great politicians, while the former tends to the "diminution of control" or, more precisely, to a lightening of the burden of leadership' (Mommsen in Stammer, 1971, p. 116). While echoing Weber, whose thinking was characterised by 'a markedly aristocratic individualism' throughout his life (Mommsen in Stammer, 1971, p. 115), Morgenthau is not very far from Nietzsche's interpretation of history either. For Nietzsche in Mommsen's account history only gains any meaning 'from the creative activity of great personalities' (Mommsen in Stammer, 1971, p. 115). As Mommsen explains further in his discussion of Weber and power politics,

Great charismatic personalities who erect values have a duty, especially in a world declining into routine, to win a following for themselves, and in the furtherance of their own aims not to be afraid to use power if necessary even in conflict with moral law, in order to keep open a society threatened by uniformity and atrophy through the increasing enclosure of social activity in legal formulae.

(Mommsen in Stammer, 1971, pp. 115–6)

In his analysis of leadership, Morgenthau often points to what he takes to be the two constituting realms of politics – the ephemeral and the perennial – and introduces the issue of tradition into the discussion, the concepts of leadership and tradition being therefore interrelated. In Morgenthau's words, expressed in his seminal preface to *The Decline of Democratic Politics*, 'both the tradition of political thought and the contemporary experience of political life [...] contain two elements: one contingent and ephemeral, the other necessary and perennial' (Morgenthau, 1962a, p. 1). In facing the realm of the contingent and ephemeral, the statesman must act with a view to the teachings of the tradition of political thought, and moreover, he must adapt the latter so as to serve his present day experiences.

As Good maintains, Morgenthau 'sees two realms, the realm of the actual characterized by "the misery of politics"; and the realm of the universal ethical norm', and between the two 'there must exist an

“ineluctable tension” (Good, 1960, p. 613). The second level of Morgenthau’s account of leadership concerns the statesman’s response to this perennial realm of values, and to the teachings brought to us by the past ages. The latter’s rediscovery and then propagation of the eternal truth and of the perennial laws of foreign policy are of utmost importance to Morgenthau. The meaning imposition exercised by superior individuals is necessary in order to avoid what we could call ‘negative destruction’, and these heroes’ actions, which at a first glance may appear destructive themselves, are in the end portrayed by Morgenthau positively. By giving politics its meaning back, through genuine statesmen’s interventions, order and peace are likely to be brought into the picture of reality.

There are strong reasons for taking the view that in Morgenthau’s account, there is no tension between the two aforementioned realms. He regards them as forming two equally important elements, against which the statesman’s skills are tested. Differing from the behaviouralists, who emphasise predictability and calculation in politics, Morgenthau’s vision is built upon an account of the human agent who is perceived as unpredictable and therefore unlikely to conform to such calculations. Moreover, it places a considerable burden of responsibility on the superior actor’s shoulders, who has to move constantly between universality (tradition) and particularity (current political events), and to absorb knowledge from the former so as to skilfully tackle developments within the latter.

Saurette integrates his discussion of Morgenthau within a broader analysis of the philosophical foundation of the Will to Truth/Order, which in his view informs IR, in both its Realist and Cosmopolitan Idealist renditions (Saurette, 1996, p. 2). As Saurette argues, this foundation ‘sets profound limits on the horizon of normative theory by establishing as “natural” an intellectual framework which severely circumscribes the very definition, and thus the normative potential, of *politics*’ (Saurette, 1996, p. 2, emphasis in the original). In his thorough analysis of Nietzsche’s and Arendt’s contribution towards revitalising the promise of ‘the political’, in light of the philosophical crisis of modernity, Saurette points to Nietzsche’s exploration and critique of the philosophical tradition of the Will to Order, and emphasises the importance of Nietzsche’s attack upon the concept of ‘truth’. Saurette argues that ‘once it becomes clear that our modern understanding of political action, be it international or domestic, evolved

from and depends upon the philosophical foundation of the Will to Order/Truth, it also becomes apparent that both these models are increasingly untenable in late modernity, and that it is imperative to contemplate a renewed model of politics and philosophy' (Saurette, 1996, p. 2). Saurette draws the readers' attention to what he calls 'the double strategy of realism', as '(1) the attempt to impose order on the international through "reasoned foreign policy" and power, while (2) retreating into the normative value of the state, and its circular normative justification of domestic order and state survival' (Saurette, 1996, p. 15). Saurette points to Morgenthau's 'embarrassing assumptions about power' (Saurette, 1996, p. 14), and argues that

it is absolutely paradoxical and yet completely consistent for Morgenthau to decry the international as the realm of irrationality and emergency, while nostalgically yearning for objective scientific laws which would allow the statesman to impose theoretical order on international politics, and thus lead to the actual control and mastery of the international realm.

(Saurette, 1996, p. 15)

The argument developed here acknowledges Morgenthau's contribution, similar to that of Nietzsche, in questioning the Will to Order and the concept of 'truth' following the death of God. It also suggests that Morgenthau's theoretical attempt resonates precisely with what Saurette has called 'Nietzsche's paradoxical charge': 'to overcome the Will to Truth and found a renewed philosophical will to power, while simultaneously avoiding the abyss of modern nihilism' (Saurette, 1996, p. 21). Like Nietzsche, whose position was masterfully articulated by Nehamas at the beginning of the previous section, Morgenthau implies that constructive endeavours cannot avoid being based upon modernity's realm of values, and he is aware that the 'old' tablet is impossible to be erased. Instead, Morgenthau argues, these values should be reinterpreted and reintegrated within the realm of a post-Nietzschean experience. Morgenthau emphasises that such a foundation provides humans with the necessary guidance in confronting a disenchanted existence, while also being adamant that this foundation is not fixed, but open to a variety of interpretations, according to concrete historical and cultural factors. Following from this, for example, Morgenthau points to the adaptation of the Ten

Commandments 'to the concrete conditions under which men live' (Morgenthau quoted in Lang, 2004, p. 94). As Morgenthau argues in one of his published lectures on Aristotle's *The Politics*, 'to comply with the Ten Commandments in the literal sense requires a total human goodness, a total virtue that is not attainable by the man in the street' (Morgenthau quoted in Lang, 2004, p. 94).

The adaptation of traditional diplomatic practices to current developments in the international political arena is paramount to Morgenthau. The need for a stable ground, able to provide the necessary all-encompassing meaning, and to counteract the likely destructive effects of the fight over meaning imposition, is imperative in his view, and he emphasises the importance of the statesman's/diplomat's mission in this regard throughout his career. In his contextually aware interpretation, men live in a period characterised by 'the breakdown of universal religion and [...] universal humanism', when 'the strength of non- and anti-universal allegiances is greater today than it was at any time in the history of Western civilization' (Sixteenth lecture, 6 February 1946, Morgenthau Papers, Box 169, pp. 7, 8). It is a period of history in which Morgenthau argues that 'old ideas, old practices and old institutions become obsolete very quickly' (Morgenthau, 3 January 1965, Morgenthau Papers, Box 172, p. 14). As Morgenthau insists in 'Man and Society', 'it is vitally important that these traditional modes of thought and action be adapted quickly, and if necessary, radically to new circumstances' (Morgenthau, 3 January 1965, Morgenthau Papers, Box 172, p. 14). He emphasises the necessity to change traditional habits of thought and action 'in response to a changed world', and concludes bluntly that 'if we do so we will be the masters of the new age. If we fail to do so we will become its victims' (Morgenthau, 3 January 1965, Morgenthau Papers, Box 172, p. 14).

In his 'American Foreign Policy' lecture, Morgenthau argues that since 1945 the task of the US has been 'to resuscitate its traditional interests and the methods by which they can be pursued from the ruins of the Utopianism which has guided much of recent United States foreign policy' (Morgenthau, 24 June 1954, Morgenthau Papers, Box 169, p. 2). In Morgenthau's account,

The fate of the United States and of the civilized world will depend upon the speed and adequacy with which the United States will



be able to rediscover the perennial foundations of its foreign policy and to adapt that foreign policy to the changed conditions of a revolutionary age.

(Morgenthau, 24 June 1954, Morgenthau Papers, Box 169, p. 2)

Meanwhile, in the 'Permanent Values in the Old Diplomacy' lecture from 1955, Morgenthau nuances his interpretation, and here he states that the traditional methods of diplomacy 'must indeed be adapted to the ever-changing conditions of the international environment, yet at the same time their objective, rational essence must be preserved' (Morgenthau, 4 October 1955, Morgenthau Papers, Box 170, p. 2). As he emphasises, 'this is the task which the recent rediscovery of the traditions of diplomacy poses for both the theoretical observer and the practitioner of diplomacy' (Morgenthau, 4 October 1955, Morgenthau Papers, Box 170, p. 2). Morgenthau emphasises years later in *Truth and Power* that the establishment of peace depends upon skilful leadership, and that 'the supreme task of diplomacy' is represented by the creation of a 'higher harmony' out of 'disparate and contradictory national interests' (Morgenthau, 1970, p. 107).

The ephemeral and unpredictable is difficult to accommodate and intimidating, and Morgenthau is aware of this. In one of his early unpublished lectures, he asserts that 'an element of art enters into the solution of political problems', and is keen to emphasise that this is 'more than a metaphor' (Twenty-eighth lecture, 18 March 1946, Morgenthau Papers, Box 169, p. 13). His vision of skilful statesmanship is revealed further when he states that 'you have to be a creative artist in order to feel the distribution of power at a particular moment, to see the relation of the different aspects of the problems to each other, and to find a stable solution for this particular problem' (Twenty-eighth lecture, 18 March 1946, Morgenthau Papers, Box 169, p. 13). He adds compellingly that 'you have also to visualize instinctively the possible development of this temporary solution of the problem in order to find means to keep it solved from day to day', and maintains that great statesmen such as Richelieu, Bismarck and 'to some extent at least', Washington 'have had this kind of instinct' (Twenty-eighth lecture, 18 March 1946, Morgenthau Papers, Box 169, p. 13). Hamilton for instance, and also Jefferson, Morgenthau adds, had 'this kind of artistic feeling for the political possibilities which a particular problem offers' (Twenty-eighth lecture, 18 March 1946,

Morgenthau Papers, Box 169, pp. 13–14). In his day-to-day activities and actions the statesman confronts a challenging, very difficult environment, making up a situation which in Morgenthau's account 'requires a much greater reservoir of moral and intellectual qualities than the propounders of easy formulae such as world government suspect' (Twenty-eighth lecture, 18 March 1946, Morgenthau Papers, Box 169, p. 14). The always evolving events on the political arena with which the statesman is confronted stand as one of the most challenging features of his mission. He is the one who, if skilful, faces not just tradition, but also everyday experience successfully, and throughout his actions, he is the one who re-imbues the political with meaning, and re-enchants the world.

Taking into account the emphasis placed on the importance of the statesmen's enterprise, Morgenthau's lamenting of the situation in the field of diplomacy, which in his view is characterised by a substantial lack of diplomatic good performance, is not at all surprising. Morgenthau directs his critique to the unskilled diplomacy, whose rigid proponents embrace rationalisation, and are afraid of the unexpected changes and fluctuating factors which are part and parcel of the political. He criticises some of the diplomats of his day for their application of the teachings of tradition in a canonical way, which does not take the contextual dimensions into account. In the book *In Defense of the National Interest*, Morgenthau condemns what he calls 'the abdication of leadership', whose manifestations in the field of policy are 'thrift, muddling, improvidence, and fear of the new and unknown' (Morgenthau, 1982, p. 237). The unpredictability of the political environment should not frighten but inspire, and while confronted with the unpredictable, the diplomat/statesman is given the chance to demonstrate his creative potential, and such an opportunity should not be missed.

A fluctuating, always-evolving factor the statesman has to take into consideration and to address, is the national interest, which is a variable in Morgenthau's account, and which challenges the statesman by virtue of this very changing nature. While thinking in terms of the national interest, 'conceived as power among other powers', the statesman 'must take the long view, proceeding slowly and by detours, paying with small losses for great advantages; he must be able to temporize, to compromise, to bide his time' (Morgenthau, 1982, p. 223). As Morgenthau warns in his book *In Defense of the*

*National Interest*, 'a foreign policy guided by moral abstractions, without consideration of the national interest, is bound to fail; for it accepts a standard of action alien to the nature of the action itself' (Morgenthau, 1982, pp. 33–4). This does not mean, however, that the national interest is devoid of moral purpose. As noticed by Good, Morgenthau does invest the national interest with moral content, and endows it with a transcendent frame of reference: 'while constructed from the raw materials of self-interest, self-preservation and power, Morgenthau's "national interest" incorporates in its design a notion of responsibility that by its nature must transcend pure self-interest' (Good, 1960, p. 610). In his analysis, Good points to the transcendental character of Morgenthau's concept of the national interest, and draws attention to the danger of stretching 'the distance separating the real from the norm so that the tension uniting the two snaps' (Good, 1960, p. 613). Good adds further that 'if Morgenthau constantly balances on the brink of this error, it is because his ethic is only transcendental, which is another way of saying that his view of man is too pessimistic' (Good, 1960, p. 613). In Good's assessment of Morgenthau's position,

In relating interest to principles, Morgenthau, to say the least, is ambivalent. Indeed, the overall impact of his thought leads one to conclude that Morgenthau's concept of principle is so transcendental that it can play *only* a judgmental role in the life of political, sinful man, saving him from hypocrisy (by demonstrating to him that he is not God), but not necessarily saving him from cynicism (by failing to demonstrate that he is more than a beast).

(Good, 1960, p. 613, emphasis in the original)

A couple of potential problems arise from Morgenthau's vision of politics and of the statesman, and they stem mainly from Morgenthau's insufficient clarification of the concept. In the article 'Morgenthau's Struggle with Power: The Theory of Power Politics and the Cold War' published in 1995, Nobel criticises Morgenthau's theory from several perspectives. He starts by aptly noting that Morgenthau's theory of political realism 'was essentially a plea for the restoration, as far as possible, of the moral requirements of rational politics', and that Morgenthau's rational 'essence' of politics 'was derived from the real world via the dialectics of a necessary balancing of nihilistic

tendencies' (Nobel, 1995, p. 65). Nobel points further that 'far from venting his lust for power on the world, Morgenthau's statesman represents the essence of rationality', and he is 'the wholly disinterested guardian of that supreme abstraction of realist theory: the "national interest"' (Nobel, 1995, p. 66). In Nobel's account, Morgenthau's theory was 'essentially a model of rational politics', 'a critical instrument rather than an explanatory one', which although derived from historical experience, 'at the same time it sought to transcend that experience' (Nobel, 1995, p. 81). He goes on to point out that when it came to explaining actuality, Morgenthau 'argued a highly relativistic view of international politics' (Nobel, 1995, p. 81), and that 'if the theory 'was sometimes "misunderstood", as Morgenthau complains it was, it was partly because ambiguity was built into it' (Nobel, 1995, p. 81, footnote 80). In Nobel's view, and here his criticism begins to unfold, 'in some respects, the theory of power politics stood in the way of a proper understanding of practical problems, rather than helping to resolve them' (Nobel, 1995, pp. 81–2). The 'rational essence' of the political process, which Morgenthau 'believed could be read from the historical record', was 'elusive' according to Nobel, and it served 'only to bolster the authority of Morgenthau's pronouncements by adding objective legitimacy to what in the nature of things could be no more than a well considered opinion' (Nobel, 1995, p. 82). Nobel also indicates that this theoretical approach 'pre-disposed Morgenthau toward an analysis of foreign policy problems in blacks and whites', in which 'radical alternatives often stood in the way of a more balanced analysis' (Nobel, 1995, p. 82), and which also denoted a 'lack of appreciation of the middle ground' and a 'theoretical penchant for clear-cut alternatives ("either peace or war")' (Nobel, 1995, p. 83). Nobel remarks Morgenthau's 'tendency to overstatement', and concludes by saying that this scholar's theoretical understanding of politics 'provided little guidance for his criticism of United States foreign policy' (Nobel, 1995, pp. 82, 85).

The present analysis agrees with Nobel's assessment regarding the rational essence of Morgenthau's theory, and his vision of the statesman who represents a symbol of rationality. While it agrees with Nobel's point regarding the ambiguity and tensions in Morgenthau's writings, which stem from his insufficient argumentation of his findings, and also insufficient explanation of the reasons behind his positions (which can be perceived as contradictory but which as

mentioned in previous chapters are the outcomes of a self-imposed strategy, and represent his reaction to contextual factors), this interpretation would nevertheless like to point to the signification and importance of Morgenthau's theory as a tool for understanding politics. The importance of Morgenthau's attempt to bring order and meaning in this field cannot be underestimated, I argue, and despite its inner tensions, the original epistemological value added by his theory to international politics is proved by its enduring character and continuing relevance to debates within the discipline, such as the one regarding modernity and postmodernity, which the present book is keen to explore.

This interpretation argues that Morgenthau's insufficient explanation of the concept of the rational statesman, and of the role played by rationality in his theory more broadly, leaves his account open to significant questioning. As seen above, on the one hand, Morgenthau asks the statesman to disregard the findings of scientism, and to fight against the disenchantment brought by the latter trend of thought. Morgenthau tries to make the statesman aware of the fact that the kind of certainty promised by scientism is impossible to achieve in an unpredictable realm of political experience: as he states, the statesman 'must cross the Rubicon without knowing how deep and turbulent the river is, or what he will find on the other side' (Morgenthau, 1970, p. 147). Rather than seek 'unattainable knowledge', Morgenthau adds further, the statesman 'must reconcile himself to ineluctable ignorance', he 'must commit himself to a particular course of action in ignorance of its consequences, and he must be capable of acting decisively in spite of that ignorance' (Morgenthau, 1970, p. 147). As Morgenthau expresses this view clearly in *Truth and Power*,

The decision of the statesman has three distinctive qualities. It is a commitment to action. It is a commitment to a particular action that precludes all other courses of action. It is a decision taken in the face of the unknown and the unknowable.

(Morgenthau, 1970, p. 146)

On the other hand however, in Morgenthau's interpretation re-enchantment does not exclude systematic knowledge. In *Science: Servant or Master?* – a book which contains a fierce critique of scientism and technology – Morgenthau supports the cause of a living political

philosophy understood as 'a rational guide to political action', and he argues that it is indeed the vital task of our age 'to transform the shock of wonderment that has its source in politics to the theoretical, systematic understanding of that source' (Morgenthau, 1972, p. 33). Acting in the spirit of this demand, Morgenthau's superior political hero must demonstrate a 'realist reasoning', which is 'based upon the calculations of advantage and disadvantage'. He must always calculate, and as seen above, while thinking in terms of the national interest, he 'must take the long view, proceeding slowly and by detours, paying with small losses for great advantages; he must be able to temporize, to compromise, to bide his time' (Morgenthau, 1982, p. 223).

Taking into account Morgenthau's critique of rationalism and of its proponents, it can be argued that his account of the calculating superior actor is more like reminiscent of Weber's notion of prudence, and that he does not think of his wise hero as being an exponent and a symbol of disenchantment. Moreover, as emphasised in an earlier paragraph, Morgenthau maintains the distinction between rationalism and rationality, and argues that the latter can help the implementation of a thoughtful politics. Nevertheless due to the insufficient explanation of his ambivalent stances, his positions on these important issues, largely unaddressed in Morgenthau's work, are likely to be seen as contradictory. Significant here is the fact that in a letter sent to Oakeshott in 1948 in response to Oakeshott's review of *Scientific man vs Power Politics*, Morgenthau himself agreed with his distinguished reviewer's criticism on the topic, and acknowledged that his attempts in the aforementioned book 'to make clear the distinctions between rationalism and rational inquiry, scientism and science', had been 'in vain' (Morgenthau, 22 May 1948, Morgenthau Papers, Box 44, p. 1). As stated further by Morgenthau, 'I think I was fully aware of the importance and the difficulty of these distinctions when I wrote the book, and it is now obvious to me that I have failed in the task to make my meaning clear' (Morgenthau, 22 May 1948, Morgenthau Papers, Box 44, p. 1). Unfortunately, the ambiguities on this topic persisted over the years, and constituted an easy target of criticism for those who perceived Morgenthau to be a contradictory thinker.

Morgenthau's views regarding the statesman's impact on tradition, and his concept of creativity in political thought, lead to other

important questions: how can the statesman be creative when what he is advised by Morgenthau to discover are the old 'perennial forces'? If 'truth' is the truth of tradition, then what is the input of the present, and is there really any value in it, apart from the value given by the rereading – be it skilful – of the wisdom provided by the past? As seen from above, the present interpretation argues that Morgenthau's two realms of the political are intermingled, and they work in harmony towards providing the superior actor with the opportunity to affirm his political creativity. The statesman does have an input in these endeavours, and as explained earlier, he does not simply replicate the teachings of tradition, but reinterprets and recreates them with an eye to present-day developments. This vision implies coherence, and the argument developed here maintains that Morgenthau's account on the topic is coherent. Nevertheless we cannot fail to see it as likely to be perceived as contradictory, due to the lack of explanation on Morgenthau's part. As argued throughout this book, Morgenthau did not provide a detailed analysis of some of his concepts. In this case as well, the meaning and scope of the statesman's creativity can easily be questioned due to Morgenthau's scarce explanation of his vision of creative leadership.

While some philosophers are 'constructive', others – Morgenthau included here – 'eradicate error, disinfect a region of human self-deception, and show that certain beliefs, even if they can still be held, cannot be held in the old way'. These are Martin Wight's words, taken from his review of Morgenthau's *Dilemmas of Politics* (Wight, 1959, Morgenthau Papers, Box 111, p. 1). The argument here builds on this assessment, and points to one of Morgenthau's most important contributions in the fields of Political Theory and IR. Following the 'death of God', humans in general, and political leaders in particular, have to reconsider their relationship with a world characterised by nihilism and disenchantment, and they must strive to re-enchant it by using their creative capacities. Moreover, while doing this, Morgenthau tells us, they must also take into account the wisdom of a thoroughly questioned past, whose merits and value should nevertheless be acknowledged. How do we come to terms with the unique *and* with the familiar, with moral and political creativity on one hand, and moral and political submission to tradition on the other? In our judgments, should we treat one of these two realms preferentially? As Morgenthau asks himself, 'where is the line

to be drawn between the similar and the unique?’ (Morgenthau, 1962a, p. 8)

Morgenthau’s theory of leadership provides answers to such questions by equally emphasising the realm of contingency and that of permanence, the ephemeral and the everlasting. In his account, both of these realms are important: while the current political context provides the actors with the opportunity to exercise their creativity, tradition forms that realm of ‘true’ knowledge and universal ethics with which the actor’s deeds must always be in harmony in order to avoid a politics of action for action’s sake, which Morgenthau constantly criticises on normative grounds. Following from this, for Morgenthau, the purpose of each new political age should be one of rediscovering tradition – that ‘store of objective, general truths’ inherited by us from the past (Morgenthau, 1962a, p. 45) – but also of making it ‘speak’ to the present relevantly. As Morgenthau puts it, each epoch of history ‘must liberate itself from the dead hand of tradition without falling victim to new dogma or else being lost in the labyrinth of uncomprehended experience’ (Morgenthau, 1962a, p. 1). While decrying the death of God and the advent of moral nothingness, Morgenthau ponders at an early stage of his life and academic career upon ‘a new approach that could foster a system of binding values justifying the boldest ventures and truly great endeavors’ (Morgenthau quoted in Frei, 2001, p. 154). Because he wants to avoid action for action’s sake, Morgenthau envisages in the religious and cultural realm a demand ‘for new ties that once again embed human life in a broad spiritual system and thereby imbue it anew with meaning and sacredness’ (Morgenthau quoted in Frei, 2001, p. 154). As we have seen, to Morgenthau political creativity is not synonymous with political action for action’s sake, it does not lead to purposeless relativism, or means that ‘anything goes’. For Morgenthau, the statesmen’s creativity always manifests itself within the confines of a tradition, with which their deeds must be in accord, and against which these must always be judged.

This chapter has analysed Morgenthau’s account of tradition in both moral and epistemological terms, and has pleaded for a reconsideration of it, in light of the central place it occupies in Morgenthau’s theory. It has also pointed to Morgenthau’s use of a particular conception of man in order to stabilise the meaning of politics and to avoid absolute relativism, and has analysed Morgenthau’s concept of



superior leadership. Moreover, it has pointed to the potential sources of criticism in Morgenthau's theory: a 'too transcendental' vision of ethics; an allegiance to moral values which are never spelt out clearly; an insufficiently detailed account of the scope of political creativity; a vision of the statesman which, since missing a clear distinction (to be made by Morgenthau) between rationalism and rationality, may be read as a plea in favour of rationalist, disenchanting politics, which Morgenthau is otherwise keen to criticise.

The final chapter will draw together the findings arrived at in the present interpretation, which regard the role of Nietzsche and Weber in the articulation of Morgenthau's perspective, Morgenthau's endorsement of the 'death of God' diagnosis, the centrality of the topic of meaning in his account, power as meaning imposition, the disenchantment of human life and politics, and Morgenthau's concept of the creative and responsible leader. It will also provide an overall assessment of Morgenthau's theory, emphasising its importance for 21st century IR, and the value of revisiting Morgenthau and his solution to the dichotomous choices of modernity and postmodernity.

# 6

## Conclusion: Hans Morgenthau's Discussion of Meaning, Disenchantment and Leadership

This chapter rounds off the arguments developed throughout the book, highlighting the key points arrived at in previous chapters, and indicating their originality vis-à-vis other evaluations of Morgenthau's theory. It also points to certain issues in Morgenthau's account which have attracted criticism, and spells out the position taken in the present interpretation. The chapter ends with an assessment of the importance of Morgenthau's thought for the modernity/postmodernity dichotomy as manifested in IR, indicating its relevance to debates related to the death of universal values and the legitimacy of a singular meaning and truth.

The first original element of the present reading concerns the interpretation of Morgenthau's theory in light of a reading of modernity and postmodernity, which locates this scholar's thought within a sophisticated understanding of the modernity/postmodernity dichotomy. In this interpretation, Morgenthau's theory provides an account which both challenges modernity's endorsement of totalities, and acknowledges the need for metaphysical certainty. Without implying that Morgenthau himself understood his thought in light of these terms (postmodernity being a term that postdates Morgenthau), this interpretation has shown in great detail the ways in which Morgenthau's thought embodies a reading and integration of modern and postmodern standpoints. In providing this analysis the book has started off from Rengger's interpretation of the 'postmodern mood' as a 'mood *within modernity*' (Rengger, 1995, p. 200, emphasis in the original), not only critical of modernity, but also constructive by virtue of its reflectivity. The present book has also drawn on Toulmin, according

to whom the perpetuation of grand, universal narratives, and its so-called religion of rationality (Toulmin, 1990, p. 176) – embodied in a series of assumptions regarding humans' rational capacities, and the generalised application of methods derived from the natural sciences – are among the most important features of modernity. As shown in Chapter 1, in International Relations modernity as a mood manifests itself in the images of the world constructed and perpetuated by various theorists, which make up the main traditions in this field – realism and liberal internationalism. The realist metanarrative, in turn, is based on a series of universal concepts, such as: human nature, carrying within it a universal lust for power, structure (in the works of structural realist Kenneth Waltz), competition, anarchy, war proneness etc.

This book has emphasised that for almost two centuries, modernity has proved not only to be a settled framework, but also one which has nurtured debates and reflections on the fate of man and universality, on the historicity of meaning, and the demise of certainty. The questioning of modernity has intensified in the last three decades, with theorists talking about the entrance into postmodernity, about the ambiguity and uncertainty of identity, about the ambivalence and plurality of meanings (see Ashley and Walker in *International Studies Quarterly*, 1990, esp. p. 263). The present contribution has spelt out the ways in which Morgenthau's thought positions itself at the crossroads of modernity and postmodernity, understood as moods and attitudes towards knowledge and values, and has focused on Morgenthau's writings as expressions of a complex allegiance to both attitudes. This finding is important because it paves the way to a detailed understanding of Morgenthau and sheds light on his commitment to certain positions that are too easily dismissed as contradictory by observers.

Moreover, this interpretation has demonstrated the crucial continuity in Morgenthau's political theory. Morgenthau shows a commitment to an orientation and to ideas which remained constant throughout his life. Starting from Morgenthau's few and scattered yet significant references regarding the importance of Nietzsche's and Weber's thought in the shaping of his perspective, the argument here has unpacked the strong connection among Morgenthau, Nietzsche and Weber. Morgenthau's experiences in native Germany, as well as the affinities between Morgenthau and Nietzsche, and Morgenthau

and Weber, have been analysed by some scholars already (see Turner and Factor, 1984; Frei, 2001). Nevertheless, no analyst has so far linked Morgenthau with Nietzsche and Weber in a detailed account, and the literature has not indicated before the Weberian influence on Morgenthau as representing a political institutionalisation of Nietzschean assumptions. The present reading has addressed these connections in Chapter 2, while in Chapters 3, 4 and 5 it has demonstrated their importance in the articulation of Morgenthau's theory, while also pointing to Morgenthau's innovative reworking of central Nietzschean and Weberian concepts.

Closely related to this issue, another original element discussed by the present reading is that of 'the disenchantment of politics', which represents a topic of utmost concern to Morgenthau according to this interpretation. Morgenthau decries the employment of methods pertaining to natural sciences in the field of the social sciences, and claims that rationalist approaches do not provide the real meaning of politics, which to him is represented by the unpredictable, always evolving struggle for power. On the contrary, rationalisation disenchantments politics and imposes upon it a certainty of meaning which is unattainable in this field. The mysteries of politics referred to often by Morgenthau succumb under technological developments which do not tell us anything about the intrinsic meaning of politics.

The fourth original finding discussed in this interpretation concerns Morgenthau's account of the human agent and his leadership theory in particular, which is closely related to the topic of re-enchantment. Morgenthau's genuine statesman stands as a creative force which can counteract disenchantment, work out a fruitful interpretation of the tradition of political thought, and re-imbue the political with meaning and values. In Morgenthau's account, man's destiny is creation, and the statesman is given the opportunity to create on the political scene by imposing a meaning which overcomes the dangers likely to accompany the aftermath of the death of God. The meaning of political creativity is unveiled in the statesman's struggle to impose interpretations in a responsible manner, while holding an awareness and anticipation of the consequences of his impositions.

This interpretation started off with a clarification of the meanings of modernity and postmodernity to be employed throughout it, with an emphasis on the concept of postmodernity as a mood within modernity. It also explored the modernity/postmodernity dichotomy in

International Relations, and indicated their diverging claims regarding the universality of moral values and the gaining of knowledge. The introductory chapter also stressed the importance of Nietzsche's diagnosis – 'God is dead' – for the unfolding of a postmodern stream of thinking which questioned modernity's appeals to totality in moral and epistemological terms. Within this context, the book proceeded to introduce Morgenthau's works, and pointed to scholars' reading of them as being built upon modernity's firm soil of certainty and belief in epistemological absolutes.

While Chapter 2 focused on Morgenthau's intellectual upbringing in native Germany, with both the positive and negative influences, on his reading of Nietzsche and Weber, and on his intellectual trajectory in the US, Chapter 3 showed that Morgenthau's metaphysics was based on a philosophical outlook which agreed with Nietzsche's and Weber's diagnosis of the death of God, and which pointed to the disenchantment of human life as a development likely to trigger disastrous consequences. This book therefore went further than those interpretations which mention Morgenthau's concern with values in politics with no detailed clarification, by taking the step of discussing the centrality of the death of the God of universal values in Morgenthau's account, and his subsequent scholarly interest in the idea of meaning. As shown in Chapter 3, Morgenthau points to the disintegration of a universal realm of values and knowledge, and acknowledges the plurality of truths which follows the demise of universality. His theory is built on perspectivist assumptions and on a certain kind of relativism informed by an awareness of historical and cultural differences, and emphasises 'the influence of the personal equation of the observer upon the truth' (Second lecture, 4 January 1946, Morgenthau Papers, Box 169, p. 10).

Morgenthau's account is informed by an individualist ontology, and he places human agents at the centre of his interpretation of disenchanted life and politics. Morgenthau's individual experiences a 'metaphysical shock' (Morgenthau, 1971b, p. 622) and searches for security, still longing for a certainty which cannot be attained under present conditions. In Morgenthau's view, the search for a singular meaning is in vain, and after the death of God a fight for meaning imposition ensues among individuals. According to Morgenthau, the world now resembles a stage on which actors are engaged in a continuous struggle for meaning imposition, for the victory of one's

values and interpretation upon the others. In a post-Nietzschean world, the meaning of power is meaning imposition for Morgenthau, and man, meaning and power make up a conceptual triad which underpins politics as a dynamic and sophisticated realm. Morgenthau employs a relational understanding of power, and the essence of politics is revealed in the ongoing struggle for meaning imposition among various agents, which constitutes a mosaic of human relations unpredictable in both the means employed by the agents, and the results attained. The book recognises meaning imposition as a form of power, and this interpretation of power – unlike that of power as influence – is in my view more fruitful in spelling out the creative potential of power, with both its positive and negative outcomes. The interpretation of power as meaning imposition points to the creativity of power unequivocally, and challenges materialistic readings of Morgenthau's theory which overlook the creative facet of the power phenomena continuously emphasised by Morgenthau in his works.

While Chapter 3 examined Morgenthau's metaphysics, Chapter 4 focused on Morgenthau's translation of his metaphysics into an understanding of politics. In this context, the theme of the disenchantment of politics was introduced and discussed. As mentioned in Chapter 4, the analysis of Morgenthau's critique of rationalism is far from new. The novelty of this interpretation lies in the in-depth analysis of the disenchantment of politics, with an emphasis on Morgenthau's concern with the loss of meaning in politics. Morgenthau is preoccupied with the concept of meaning and with the downfall of universal values, and his political theory is permeated by a critical examination of present day interpretations of politics that overlook the moral issues and the dynamic, unpredictable developments which to Morgenthau are part and parcel of the political.

As argued in Chapters 3 and 4, in Morgenthau's account the concepts of destruction and transcendence are constituted within a dynamic relationship, and their differentiation stems from humans' use of power understood as meaning imposition. If employed irresponsibly, power leads to destruction. If used responsibly, it paves the way to transcendence. At one pole, one notices the issue of destruction in Morgenthau's theory, a destruction which finds its origin in humans' 'lust for power' (see Morgenthau, 1947, esp. pp. 163–73), and is endowed with a limitless character. The individual's destructive potential is aided by technological developments which may lead to total

destruction, hence the tragic nature of the 'death in the nuclear age' (Morgenthau, 1961). In a time with no values universally endorsed, man is likely to become engaged in aimless activism. Expressing his horror at the philosophy of action for action's sake endorsed by the Nazis, Morgenthau argues that activism per se does not provide man with answers to the 'metaphysical shock', that salvation from 'empirical misery' and 'metaphysical doubt' is not possible by means of acting in this way (Morgenthau, 1971b, p. 622). In this context, he argues against filling in the aftermath of the death of God with a philosophical attitude which celebrates action for its own sake.

At the other pole of Morgenthau's account of the human, one finds responsible creation and re-enchantment, which are promoted by the statesman/diplomat. The meaning of creative political thought is unveiled in the actions of the exceptional character who skilfully reformulates 'the old'. For Morgenthau, the task of each new political age is to rediscover tradition, and also to make tradition relevant to the present developments on the political arena. According to this interpretation, political creativity means a skilful, contextually aware reinterpretation of tradition, and not a dogmatic or un-reflexive following of it. In Morgenthau's account expressed in his seminal introduction to *The Decline of Democratic Politics*, creative political thought 'illuminates the political experience of the day – and of all days – by discovering within it the perennial forces, problems, and patterns of interaction, of which political life consists', and each epoch of history 'has the task to disengage from the tradition of political thought those truths which fit its own experience and, in turn, to separate out of the welter of its own experience the perennial configurations of political life' (Morgenthau, 1962a, p. 1). Within this context, the importance of the statesman's mission is extraordinary to Morgenthau. Aware of the plurality of interpretations of tradition in the aftermath of the death of God, the statesman must have the intellectual and political qualities to make a responsible choice, and to impose his vision of tradition creatively, in a non-destructive manner, which celebrates plurality as well as disciplines it. He fights disenchantment and espouses a constructive and responsible vision in the process.

As pointed out in Chapter 5, this interpretation also acknowledges the ambiguities contained in Morgenthau's account. The beginning of the book has emphasised the abundance of Cold War assessments

which discuss the alleged amorality of Morgenthau's theory. Meanwhile, while acknowledging Morgenthau's consideration of moral values in politics, other scholars have criticised the insufficient explanation of the values envisaged, and also Morgenthau's 'only transcendental' ethic, 'which is another way of saying that his view of man is too pessimistic' (Good, 1960, p. 613). Perceived as nothing more than an advocate of a cold-blooded struggle for power, Morgenthau ended up being criticised for what he used to condemn forcefully: the neglect of moral considerations in the interpretation of events in the international political arena. The argument developed here has made the case that moral commitments are far from temporary or accidental in Morgenthau's account. On the contrary, his theoretical edifice presupposes a moral foundation, and the moral aspects of his thought arise from a particular metaphysical outlook. Having discussed Morgenthau's concern with values at length, this book has brought convincing arguments to refute the views mentioned above, regarding Morgenthau's neglect of moral considerations. It has shown that Morgenthau creatively reworked a particular philosophical position from Nietzsche and Weber which was informed by a concern with the idea of meaning as generated by values, and he reaffirmed the importance of values in the context of the ascendancy of moral and epistemological meaninglessness.

Chapter 5 also focused on another stream of criticism directed at Morgenthau, concerning the issue of the statesman looking suspiciously like a proponent of rationalism. On the one hand, Morgenthau asks the statesman to fight against scientism, and in *Truth and Power* he argues that rather than seek 'unattainable knowledge', the statesman must 'reconcile himself to ineluctable ignorance' (Morgenthau, 1970, p. 147). On the other hand however, as seen in Chapter 5, in Morgenthau's interpretation re-enchantment does not exclude systematic knowledge. The present interpretation has argued that this is a superficial tension in Morgenthau's thought. Morgenthau's account of the calculating superior actor is reminiscent of Weber's notion of prudence, and moreover it fits with the view endorsed throughout the book, according to which Morgenthau retains a distinction between rationalism and rationality, and he regards the latter positively. Based on an in-depth reading of Morgenthau's published and unpublished works, the argument developed here maintains that Morgenthau does not think of his thoughtful leader as a being a rationalist actor,



but one who embodies a creative will and acts in the political realm responsibly. Nevertheless due to the insufficient clarification of his stance on the issue, Morgenthau's remarks on the calculating statesman expose him to an array of questioning, mentioned in Chapter 5. According to the present interpretation, assessments such as those mentioned above make the mistake of overlooking the distinction between rationalism and rationality in Morgenthau's account. Having said that, the present reading admits that they also feed on ambiguities which Morgenthau himself did not fully address in his work.

Finally, this interpretation takes issue with those assessments which have located Morgenthau's theory within modernity. Chapter 5 depicts Morgenthau arguing in favour of a renaissance of tradition in terms of values, knowledge and politics, with all their metaphysical certainties. At the same time however, Chapters 3 and 4 show us that he also embraces the Nietzschean and Weberian predicaments, and maintains a plurality of truths and perspectives typically post-modern, as an attitude within modernity which questions the latter's foundational assumptions (in the understanding of the term outlined in Chapter 1). Morgenthau ingeniously works his way along both modernity's and postmodernity's paths, and his thought resembles a bridge which connects the two attitudes and incorporates their assumptions within a higher unity. Consequently, this book maintains that Morgenthau's thought contains elements which indicate a complex commitment to both modern and postmodern assumptions, both a critique of the old moral and epistemological order and an advocacy of a return to it, albeit filtered through the lenses of historical and cultural particularities and through creative wills. Morgenthau employs a productive way of working with the modern and the postmodern, and his writings are a proof of the possibility of viable analyses by embracing both modern and postmodern assumptions. According to the view advanced here, an awareness of these subtleties is needed in order to do justice to Morgenthau's all too often simplified account. Although apparently contradictory to some observers, this account represents a good discussion of the meaning of man and politics, and it addresses the dichotomies which inform the relationships between modernity and postmodernity and identity and difference in a way which is relevant and useful to ongoing discussions in IR on these topics.

The opening up of thinking space inaugurated by the postmoderns of IR has triggered reassessments of classical realism which have encouraged the questioning of realists' allegiance to a singular meaning and truth. Similarly while questioning Morgenthau's thought, the present reading has pointed to a crucial feature in Morgenthau's account: that it questions meaning, values and truth itself, albeit in response to particular contextual elements (Nazi Germany, the Cold War, the threat of total nuclear destruction etc). This interpretation has argued that taking into account its emphasis on the treatment of difference and contingency, on the need to regard differences productively, while sticking to a flexible and creative vision of universality, Morgenthau's thought is relevant to current IR debates which are replete with issues pertaining to identity and difference, and unity and multiplicity, and whose theorists attempt to find successful means for addressing divisions. Morgenthau's thought is relevant because it transgresses boundaries and epitomises the end result of such transgressions, and last but not least because it advances a solution. The key role in Morgenthau's account is held by the statesman, whose responsible imposition of meaning transcends differences, and leads to order and construction in an otherwise anarchic environment. The resolution of divisions stands as the main question to be addressed in IR according to Morgenthau, and the solution advanced by him places great emphasis on the superior political actor's role. In Morgenthau's interpretation, the practical skill of political leadership resolves the dichotomous choices of modernity/postmodernity, and the contemporary predicament of the disenchantment of politics.

In some accounts, Morgenthau 'in the broadest intellectual sense, helped to lay the foundation for international politics' (Thompson quoted in Smith, 1987, p. 134), and provided it in the US 'with philosophical underpinnings that allowed it to emerge from the morass of legalistic or moralistic argumentation to claim equal rank with other branches of the study of human affairs' (Coser, 1984, p. 223). To others such as his long time friend Reinhold Niebuhr, Morgenthau was simply 'the most brilliant and authoritative political realist' (Niebuhr quoted in Smith, 1987, p. 134). This book has not only shown that Morgenthau is a founding father, but – taking the debate forward in several respects – has demonstrated the present relevance of his approach, and of the topics which permeate it: the death of God, the disenchantment of politics, power as meaning imposition, thoughtful

leadership as a responsible and creative meaning imposition. Morgenthau's way of tackling dichotomies, of pleading in favour of unity while also encouraging diversity, may constitute a viable theoretical model to those of us who are still searching for the meaning of a post-Nietzschean politics.

# Notes

## **1 Introduction: Context and Assumptions**

1. This interpretation maintains that Morgenthau does not differentiate the 'statesman' from 'the diplomat' in his account most of the times. Following this, the terms above will be used interchangeably throughout the book.

## **3 The 'Death of God' and the Crisis of Philosophy**

1. I am grateful to Dr Sean Molloy for this remark made at the workshop 'Rethinking the Realist Tradition', Limerick, 24 November 2007.

## **5 Closing the Openness: Morgenthau on Meaning, Tradition, and the Statesman's Mission**

1. Professor David Chandler developed this compelling argument at a CRIPT workshop on the topic of posthuman politics, held at Goldsmith College London on 9 November 2006.
2. 'it' in the original typescript, most probably a spelling mistake.

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