

# Washington University Law Review

---

Volume 1959 | Issue 4

---

1959

## Review of "Dilemmas of Politics," By Hans J. Morgenthau

Robert H. Salisbury

*Washington University in St. Louis*

Follow this and additional works at: [https://openscholarship.wustl.edu/law\\_lawreview](https://openscholarship.wustl.edu/law_lawreview)



Part of the [Law Commons](#), and the [Political Science Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Robert H. Salisbury, *Review of "Dilemmas of Politics," By Hans J. Morgenthau*, 1959 WASH. U. L. Q. 443 (1959).

Available at: [https://openscholarship.wustl.edu/law\\_lawreview/vol1959/iss4/8](https://openscholarship.wustl.edu/law_lawreview/vol1959/iss4/8)

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Law School at Washington University Open Scholarship. It has been accepted for inclusion in Washington University Law Review by an authorized administrator of Washington University Open Scholarship. For more information, please contact [digital@wumail.wustl.edu](mailto:digital@wumail.wustl.edu).

## BOOK REVIEWS

DILEMMAS OF POLITICS. By Hans J. Morgenthau. Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1958. Pp. 389.

Whenever a scholar brings together in one permanent volume a collection of his essays and reviews which have previously been published in a wide variety of places and over two decades of time, it is in order to ask "Why?" What is there in this disparate set of pieces which merits their reappearance under the aegis of a distinguished press? It is not a sufficient answer to say that these are the works of a distinguished man. It is more usual to bring together the fugitive writings of distinguished men after they have been dead for at least a generation, and Hans Morgenthau is very much alive. Why, then? There are perhaps two related reasons. One of them has to do with the magnitude of Morgenthau's distinctive influence, especially in the field of international relations. The fact that "schools of thought" abound may indicate that the discipline is not very far advanced. Nevertheless, in the study of international relations Morgenthau is overwhelmingly the point of reference for scholars. The academic discussion of international affairs has been dominated by the debate between pro-Morgenthau men *versus* anti-Morgenthau men for more than a decade. A second reason for bringing together Morgenthau's essays is that they are consistently informed by his central concepts. Whether he is reviewing Arnold Toynbee, attacking the Eisenhower Administration, discussing international law, or examining the nature of the political science discipline, his thoughts maintain the same essential focus. Morgenthau has rewritten and rearranged some of the material in this volume, and yet the surprising thing is that in a field not noted for its intellectual consistency, twenty years of Morgenthau writings need little revision to make them conform to his basic ideas.

The Morgenthau approach is based upon his conviction that "matters political" are different from other fields of human action, and that the quality which distinguishes politics is power. Politics, he believes, refers to conflicts of interest in which interest is defined as power (and power is not defined at all). Power is what men seek, and man's lust for power is a ubiquitous social fact. If the lust for power is a constant, then the concern with power and its problems is the only *realistic* concern of the political scientist. Thus Morgenthau's brand of international relations has come to be labeled the "realist" school as distinguished from the idealists, the legalist, and, of course, the newer behaviorists with their tendency toward the use of esoteric mathematical techniques. Using power as the central concept, Morgenthau would have political scientists analyze power relations in the contemporary world, stripping away the facades of ideologies and pro-

viding society with a critical portrait of itself thereby. He would go further, however. The task of the political scientist is not only analytical and empirical, it is also moral. He must analyze with a model in mind of what ought to be, and he must constantly remind the society of its departures from the objective standards of truth and virtue which the scholar as observer may discern. These objective standards are to be discovered through the use of reason and they are, in turn, rational in their content. The criterion by which foreign policy, for example, should be evaluated is whether the policy conforms to the requirements of the national interest. The national interest consists of what objective reason says the nation should desire. The national interest may not be what the nation in fact does seek, but what it would seek if it behaved rationally in terms of its own best interests.

There is a close relation between Morgenthau's political science and the theology of a Reinhold Niebuhr. Morgenthau's concept of power is not unlike Niebuhr's concept of sin, and both draw similar conclusions about human behavior. Both emphasize that life is a dilemma in which the aspirations must always outrun the accomplishments and in which the realist about man's nature is likely also to come closer to controlling that nature toward desired ends. Yet Morgenthau's political science is more open to criticism than Niebuhr's theology. The assertion that all men lust for power may be a valid metaphorical statement about man's relationship to God. It is *not* an empirically valid statement about the *behavior* of men. At best, Morgenthau's concepts are metaphorical, while the reality is a far more complex set of motivational factors and extremely diverse interests. More important, in *this* world objective standards of rationality are elusive indeed. It is simply not admissible to assert that one group's interpretation of the nation's interests is rational and therefore right while another's is not. (Just how one determines what the nation's interests are, apart from the conflicting interests of people within the nation, is a problem which has never seemed to bother Professor Morgenthau). Rationality as a concept altogether is a most difficult one to which to give substantive meaning, and to assert that right reason can determine the true interests of men, even though they themselves are not aware of those interests, is sheer metaphysics. Empirical analysis leading to generalized theory and prediction of behavior cannot proceed on the basis of such concepts.

To Morgenthau's credit he himself insists that empirical analysis is futile and empty without the essential moral foundation. Thus he is consistent. But his position cannot be given empirical confirmation, and there are many who would reject it as not useful for analysis. There is much in this volume which is appealing. Many of Morgenthau's targets are effectively demolished, just as many of his op-

ponents have been far less worthy of serious consideration than he. Much that he says is wise and much profound, both to the normatively inclined and to the political scientists who regard values primarily as data. His plea that political scientists work on problems relevant to the real issues of the day is appropriate provided one reserves the right to disagree with Morgenthau's canons of relevance. This is a book which a young social scientist should surely read as a part of his training. But he should then move on, for Professor Morgenthau has not provided the theoretical framework for viable political analysis.

ROBERT H. SALISBURY†

---

THE WISCONSIN BUSINESS CORPORATION. By George J. Kuehnl. Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1959. Pp. xi, 284. \$6.50.

In 1840 the population of Wisconsin territory was 31,000. By 1870 it had passed a million and was still growing rapidly. During these years of rapid growth Wisconsin, and indeed all America, underwent a social transformation that was little short of revolutionary. In that change the modern business corporation played a key role. Prior to 1800 there had been but 335 private business incorporations in the whole of American history. The Wisconsin legislature alone ground out three times that many special charters in the period from 1848 to 1871. Indeed, in one busy year, 1866, it turned out 177 special charters. The evolution of the business corporation during that period is complicated, and no one investigator can tell more than a small portion of it. Added to the similar work of Dodd, Davis, Handlin, Hartz and others, this illuminating essay helps to provide insight into the relations between the law and the economy in the formative years of our industrial society. But the surface has only been scratched, as yet. An enormous amount and variety of work remains to be done before the full story can be told.

This kind of historical research is in its infancy. Some is being done by lawyers, like Kuehnl, who may lack expertise in historiography, but who have their own special contribution to make to the understanding of the institutional arrangements of the past. The most significant work of this kind now being done is incorporated in the Wisconsin legal history project conceived and supervised by Willard Hurst. The present book is one of at least four to be published from that project within little more than a year. These four, supplemented by other books yet to come out of the project and capped by Professor Hurst's own work on Wisconsin law, will provide an incomplete but

---

† Asst. Professor of Political Science, Washington University, St. Louis, Missouri.