

Hans J. Morgenthau, Revised by Kenneth W. Thompson. *Politics Among Nations* (1948, revised 6th ed. 1985), chap 1.
Chapter 1 'A Realist Theory of International Politics'

Quick summary: *political realism = nations are conceived as political entities pursuing their respective interests defined in terms of power.*

Morgenthau divides the history of modern political thought into two distinct schools, 'realism' and 'other' (presumably 'idealism'), that differ fundamentally in their conceptions of the nature of man, society, and politics.

The 'other' school assumes the essential goodness and infinite malleability of human nature. It sees education (increased knowledge and understanding) as the path to social order and peace.

Realism argues the world is a result of forces inherent in human nature (and hence fundamentally unchangeable). One must work with these forces, not against them. The world is inherently comprised of opposing interests and defined by the conflicts among them. As opposed to the alternative school, it looks to historical precedents rather than abstract principles to understand politics. It is called 'realism' because it is concerned with human nature as it actually is (versus what it could/should be) and historical processes as they actually take place.

Six Principles of Political Realism

1. **Politics, like society in general, is governed by objective laws that have their roots in human nature.** These objective laws allow us to differentiate truth from opinion – the difference between objective and rational truth (supported by evidence and reason) and subjective judgement. We must also approach political reality with a rational outline/map in order to understand chosen behaviors.
2. **Interests are defined in terms of power.** *We assume that statesmen think and act in terms of interest defined as power.* (p. 5) Politics is an autonomous sphere apart from economics, ethics, religion, culture, etc. This guards against two popular fallacies: the concern with motives and concern with ideological preferences. Motives alone can not predict either behavior or outcomes/success and are difficult to clearly identify. The intellect, will, and action of statesmen are more important than motives. Political realism is not indifferent to political ideals and moral principles but it distinguishes between the desirable and the possible. The rational elements are necessary to make reality intelligible for theory.
3. **Interest defined as power is a universally valid objective category (but the meaning can change).** The idea of interest is unaffected by time and place. This provides a link through history from Thucydides to Salisbury to Washington to Weber, etc. The kind of interest determining political action in a particular period of history, however, depends upon the political and cultural context. Goals/objectives can vary. This also applies to power. Content and use of power determined by political and cultural context. *Power may comprise anything that establishes and maintains the control of man over man.* (p. 11) The contemporary character of international relations can change. *While the realist indeed believes that interest is the perennial standard by which political action must be judged and directed, the contemporary connection between interest and the nation state is a product of history, and is therefore bound to disappear in the course of history.* (p. 12) Different units (larger or smaller) are possible but such transformation can only be achieved through the manipulation of the constant forces that have shaped the past.
4. **Universal moral principles must be filtered through concrete circumstances of time and place.** The state has no right to allow moral principles to impinge on successful political action (because of primacy of national survival). There can be no political morality without prudence. Prudence, the weighing of the consequences of alternative political actions, is the supreme virtue in politics.
5. **Moral aspirations of a particular nation do not equal the moral laws that govern the universe.** Truth and idolatry are distinguished just as truth and opinion were earlier. We must be able to judge action/interests from same standards: interests defined in terms of power.
6. **The difference between political realism and other schools is real and profound.** The political realist subordinates standards of thought appropriate to other spheres (economic, legal, moral etc) to those of politics. Defending the autonomy of the political sphere does not, however, disregard the existence and importance of these other modes of thought. It merely implies that each should be assigned its proper sphere and function. Must differentiate political realism with 'legalistic-moralistic' approaches to international politics.