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Carnegie Council on Ethics and International Affairs  
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# Speaking Truth to Power: The Quest for Equality in Freedom

Robert J. Myers



Eleventh Morgenthau Memorial Lecture  
on Ethics & Foreign Policy



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## Introduction

This is the eleventh time the Carnegie Council on Ethics and International Affairs has marked the important and influential work of Hans Morgenthau by sponsoring this annual Morgenthau Memorial Lecture.

We welcome all of you who have joined us today for this very special event. May I also note with pleasure the presence this afternoon of Susanna Morgenthau and her husband, Dr. Alan Mintz, and of Matthew Morgenthau and his wife, Linda. Their support for the Council has been a continued source of pride and satisfaction for us.

The Morgenthau lectures have presented a distinguished roster of speakers, many offering provocative and thoughtful treatments of ethics and foreign policy. The first of the lectures was in fact given by Professor Morgenthau, who for more than twenty years was a board member of this Council.

While Hans Morgenthau is identified with the concept of realism in international politics, it is clear that moral issues, questions of moral law, were central to his thinking.

From time to time it has been suggested to me that the very name of this Council implies an oxymoron; that ethics and foreign policy don't really go together—that power is what counts. Certainly that was not the view of Hans Morgenthau. "The moral law," he said, "is not made for the convenience of man, rather it is an indispensable precondition for his civilized existence."

As we have watched world history unfold over recent months, it is clear that there is a drive by men and women everywhere to establish

limits to the exercise of power. These limits are set in part by ethical conduct. The examination, the testing, the serious analysis of ethical conduct in international affairs heightens our sensitivity and improves the odds for civilized existence. That really is the mission of this Carnegie Council.

Our speaker, Dr. Robert Myers, has devoted a good part of his life, his intelligence, his energy and his understated but real passion to the analysis and development of the ethical component in the management of foreign policy. You have, I believe, all received a brochure describing Bob's achievements, in government with the Departments of State and Army, in business, as the publisher of eminent magazines, in academia and, since 1980, as President of the Carnegie Council.

I note in the printed biography you have received there is no mention that Bob is also a published novelist. In two carefully crafted novels, "The Slave of Frankenstein" and "The Cross of Frankenstein," Bob has brought the legend of the Frankenstein monster to America. I leave it to the more creative among you to ponder the connection between the Frankenstein monster and foreign policy.

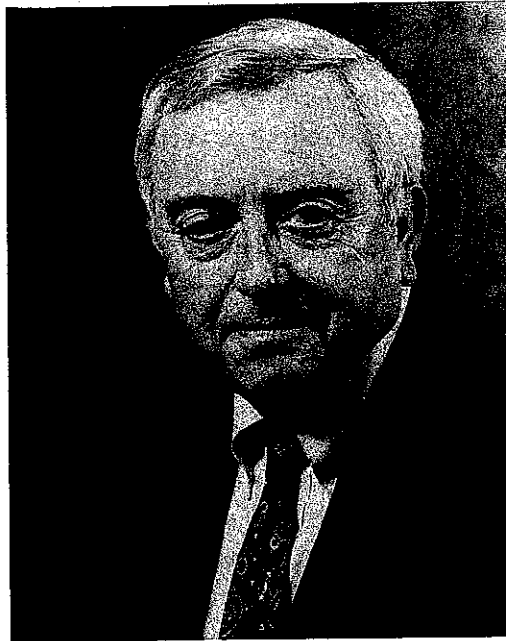
As a student and longtime friend of Dr. Morgenthau, Bob will deal tonight with a theme that was of profound interest to Hans Morgenthau: "Speaking Truth to Power: The Quest for Equality in Freedom."

It is an honor for me to present to you Dr. Robert Myers.

*Maurice S. Spanbock*  
Chairman, Board of Trustees  
Carnegie Council on  
Ethics and International Affairs

## Speaking Truth to Power: The Quest for Equality in Freedom

by Robert J. Myers



*Robert J. Myers*

Professor Hans J. Morgenthau's career was marked by his primary concern with moral philosophy and therefore an imperative as a person to speak truth to power. He was convinced of the validity of the enterprise, despite occasional reverses. "In the long run...the voice of truth, so vulnerable to power, has proved more resilient than power. It has built empires of the mind and the spirit that have outlasted, and put their mark upon, the empires of power. On January 22, 1967, about thirty people demonstrated in Pushkin Square in Moscow against the arrest of four persons who had transcribed the court records in the trial against Andrei Sinyavsky and Yuli Daniel. One of the organizers of the protest, Khaustov, who was sentenced to three years at hard labor, admitted at his trial that he had read Kant and Hegel and that his reading of Kant 'made me see a lot of things in a new light.' The experience of the 1960s has dispelled the illusion that truth can show power the way in direct confrontation. But historical experience reassures us that truth can indeed make people see a lot of things in a new light. And when people see things in a new light, they might act in a new way."<sup>1</sup>

There are many themes that one can constructively pursue if one wishes to discuss the legacy and political wisdom bequeathed to us by Professor Hans J. Morgenthau. From

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<sup>1</sup> Hans J. Morgenthau, *Truth and Power* (New York: Praeger, 1970), pp. 8-9.



what I hear and observe, there are a number of biographies of Professor Morgenthau in process on particular aspects of his life. My only concern in regard to these ongoing projects—and the cottage industry at the University of Virginia where the Morgenthau papers are currently located—is that some day he may suffer the fate of Plato—there are so many books about Plato that it is allegedly impossible for anyone in a single lifetime to consult the extant bibliography let alone write anything about the whole personality. Yet something of that fate for Professor Morgenthau seems inevitable. The title that I have chosen, on speaking truth to power, adumbrated by the opening quotation, may give some insight into both Professor Morgenthau and our current political condition.

I will discuss three interrelated subjects that preoccupied Professor Morgenthau—the creation of his realism doctrine and its influence on American foreign policy, some enduring dilemmas of American democracy; and finally the threat of nuclear death, of the mass destruction of humanity. While it was the development of “realism” as a distinct theory of international relations that is likely to remain his claim to historical significance, these other two topics are well worth exploring not only to demonstrate the range of his intellectual interests, but also as lasting contributions to his vision of the purpose of America.

After all, what is the truth that Professor Morgenthau presented to power? One is struck by a persistent message in his works—equality in freedom. This is articulated best in *The Purpose of American Politics*, but it reverberates powerfully in all his writings. The purpose of foreign policy is to assure our security, so that each citizen can have the opportunity for life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. As Hamilton put it, “No government could give us tranquility and happiness at home, which did not possess sufficient stability and strength to make us respectable abroad.”<sup>2</sup> Thus secure, our democratic system provides the possibility for each citizen to fulfill his potential. The just society requires equality in freedom.

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<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 12.

Morgenthau’s distress at the deficiencies of American foreign policy at the end of World War II was forged in his personal experience in Germany in the interwar years. Born in 1904 in Coburg, his memory of World War I was largely fragmentary; but his life under the Weimar republic and the coming of Naziism was vivid indeed. He suffered personal indignities because he was a Jew, such as his humiliation upon graduation from high school as the baccalaureate speaker; and his difficulty as a Jew of finding suitable employment for his talent in Germany, then Switzerland and Spain. Finally, he reached the United States in 1937, friendless and poor; his exceptional ability and determination resulted in two books that set him apart on the American intellectual scene, *Scientific Man vs. Power Politics* in 1946 and *Politics Among Nations* in 1948. Intellectually, he concluded that in the light of interwar history, America simply had not learned how to use power with responsibility. The very word power seemed to cloud any American foreign policy enterprise; the natural tendency of American foreign policy makers was to prefer idealistic solutions that eschewed power. Power politics, a true tautology, was considered a phrase of opprobrium. How should he go about educating the American leadership as well as the academy and the people in general about how the world really worked so that the egregious blunders of the past would not be repeated? This was a self-appointed task of great magnitude, for an assistant professor of political science at the University of Kansas City. How would he set about doing that?

As it developed, he had a two-part strategy which somehow evolved in his thinking about the world and America. His first level of criticism of American international politics was its facile assumption of the solubility of all problems, including political problems, through a naive faith in the sciences. The success of Newton in the physical sciences would be repeated in the social world. Reason would find solutions to all of our political, economic, and social ills. The Enlightenment and European philosophers, such as Condorcet, Bentham, Marx and Spencer, were convinced that the advances in the physical sciences and the biological sciences could be applied to the

newly discovered “social sciences” of government, history, sociology, economics, and so on. This was in effect the public administration approach to problems of politics, the assumption that identifying the problem (let’s say the division of income, a border dispute, the class structure, the balance of trade) paved the way to its actual solution, totally disregarding the role of power and interest in why things were as they were. It was this simplistic faith that convinced Morgenthau that people trained in this type of philosophy, this utopian wide-eyed view of the world, would once again commit the same blunders that had all but destroyed Western civilization in World War I and II.

A corollary of scientific man was his lack of understanding of the weakness of human nature, despite the cautions from religion, in terms of its capacity for evil as well as the limitations of human competence to understand fully complex situations, let alone act on them intelligently, i.e., in terms of both self-interest and national interest. Americans particularly did not understand the tragic nature of political choice and political action, that their efforts to do good often met the Biblical admonishment cited in Romans 7, that trying to do good often creates evil results. They had not yet learned that the experience of making fateful moral choices was the only way they could learn both moral courage and moral wisdom. Instead, they learned nothing, relying on feeble institutions, such as the League of Nations or the United Nations, to do what they could not do in the international world: confront power with superior power.

It was these views, expressed in *Scientific Man*, that formed two of the six principles of Morgenthau’s theory of political realism which he published two years later in 1948 in his seminal work, *Politics Among Nations*. The first point, to repeat, was the imperfection of man’s nature, the tendency to do evil while trying to do good. He called our attention to the fact that human nature, “in which the laws of politics have their roots, had not changed since the classical philosophies of China, India, and Greece endeavored to discover these

laws. Hence, novelty is not necessarily a virtue in political theory, nor is old age a defect.”<sup>3</sup> The second principle is: “Political realism is aware of the moral significance of political action. It is also aware of the ineluctable tension between the moral command and the requirements of political action.” These two carryover principles from *Scientific Man* were joined by three others to make up the difference between realism and any other school of political thought. The additions were, first, the necessary focus on “interest defined as power”; second, the assertion that interest is not “defined once and for all”; that the content and manner of the use of power is conditioned by the political and cultural environment; and third, the denial of realism that moral aspirations of particular states are the same as universal moral laws. No state can claim a monopoly on virtue. These five principles result in the sixth, that politics constitutes an autonomous sphere, that the politician thinks of interest defined as power, “just as the economist thinks of interest as defined as wealth.” To this philosophical base were added four fundamental diplomatic rules: (1) diplomacy must be divested of the crusading spirit; (2) the objectives of foreign policy must be defined in terms of the national interest and must be supported with adequate power; (3) diplomacy must look at the political scene from the point of view of other nations; and (4) nations must be willing to compromise on all issues that are not vital to them.<sup>4</sup>

What was the significance of this new formulation of the philosophy of international relations? First of all, it was welcomed as an intellectual and practical alternative to the failures of the past, particularly of the failures begun in the Woodrow Wilson era. Wilson’s efforts to head off World War I and the whole sorry sequence of circumstances leading through the interwar period, from the rise of the future Axis powers—Germany, Italy and Japan—to the appeasement policy of the European allies, once again led to war. The failure of the League of Nations was apparent to all, but the lesson seemed

<sup>3</sup> Hans J. Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations*, Third Edition (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1962), p. 4.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 563–64.

to be that the answer was to create a better League, the United Nations, which still contained many of the weaknesses of the old. The principal defect was no effective check on the sovereignty of states. Such policies and blinded vision were “utopian,” or idealistic. Morgenthau’s realism, to be brief, was a call for clear-eyed concentration on the national interest—at that time, a word that did not seem to require a detailed explanation—a due regard for the international balance of power, and adequate armaments and allies to counter the new threat after the Axis, the Soviet Union and its apparent mission to communize the world. This was an altogether new peril and America was uncertain how to deal with this unprecedented menace.

“Political realism” then was the answer to the misfortunes of the past and the sure guideline to durable and successful foreign policy of the future.<sup>5</sup> His message came at the right moment, just as Churchill called our attention to the iron curtain. The American nuclear monopoly was soon compromised and the new balance of power was inherently dangerous and unstable. Foreign policy held the key to peace and the preservation of civilization. This is the way Morgenthau expressed his dedication to this field, despite personal preferences. “After World War II, I made a conscious choice in concentrating my efforts on foreign policy because I realized that the existence of the United States and even of mankind depended on a sound foreign policy. What good was it to speculate on philosophical topics if in a couple of years or decades the world would be reduced to radioactive rubble? So ever since, for more than twenty years, I have been caught in this self-imposed public service which by no means coincides with my real intellectual interests.”<sup>6</sup> Yet his foray into world politics, with no diplomatic or political experience of any kind, was an incredible success. He spoke truth to power and power listened in the intellectual

<sup>5</sup> For a full treatment of the realist philosophy, see Joel H. Rosenthal, *Righteous Realists* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1991). Also see Greg Russell, *Hans J. Morgenthau and the Ethics of American Statecraft* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1990); and Michael J. Smith, *Realism from Weber to Kissinger* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1986).

<sup>6</sup> Kenneth W. Thompson and Robert J. Myers, eds., *Truth and Tragedy* (New Brunswick: Transaction Press, 1984), p. 381.

vacuum that existed. Realism was the answer on how to deal with the cold war. The textbook, *Politics Among Nations*, was an enormous success and the “powers that be” sought his advice. By preserving the strength of the republic, he was helping to assure what he saw as the purpose of America in freedom.

In the domestic area, Morgenthau found the going more difficult as he applied his principles to the workings of American democracy. The connection between international relations and domestic politics in America came to Morgenthau easily if imperfectly. “When I first arrived in the United States,” he writes, “my conception of the American scene was primarily formed by two influences: class B Hollywood movies and the novels of Upton Sinclair. I realized that those impressions were not completely at variance with the American reality, but also that the American reality was much more variegated and complex than the original sources of my knowledge would indicate.”<sup>7</sup> And in another passage: “Intellectually, I was quite unprepared for the United States. I had read William James in German translation but I had found him rather flat, common-sensical, and not particularly interesting. I had been brought up in a tradition entirely different from American pragmatism. That tradition had been influenced by such people as Max Weber and Hans Kelsen. So I was quite taken aback by the optimism and pragmatism characteristic of the American intellectual tradition.”<sup>8</sup> He was also not acutely aware of the “can-do tradition” that remains an American characteristic, that has produced great triumphs and great disasters. One of those was the Vietnam war; in criticizing that war, early on, Morgenthau found himself in the unaccustomed position of being an outside critic—like most critics, he preferred the insider position. And so he was surprised at the controversy which rose like a black cloud over his 1965 article in *The New York Times* magazine in opposition to the Vietnam war.

*The New York Times* magazine piece questioning American involvement in the Vietnam war was based on one of Morgenthau’s basic foreign policy aphorisms—“Never Put Yourself in a Position

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 378.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 378–79.

from Which You Cannot Retreat without Losing Face and from Which You Cannot Advance without Grave Risks." In *Politics Among Nations*, his examples were Napoleon III on the eve of the Franco-Prussian war of 1870 and Austria and Germany just before World War I. He probably learned from the Vietnam article that examples from the distant past are safer than those of the contemporary political scene. "Unfavorable reaction to this article on the part of the administration was not long in coming. President Johnson expressed himself privately in quite unflattering terms about my position. I was no longer invited to the White House. I was fired as a consultant to the Defense Department. The White House established a desk called 'Project Morgenthau' for the purpose of getting something on me."<sup>9</sup> The efforts of the Johnson administration to discredit Morgenthau were not successful and those who participated in that enterprise were left with nothing to be proud of. The experience, however, left Morgenthau in a pensive mood, as revealed in a volume of his essays published in 1970. "I find my faith, suggested by some of these essays, in the power of truth to move men—and more importantly statesmen—to action the more curious since about twenty-five years ago I launched, in *Scientific Man vs. Power Politics*, a frontal (and, as it turned out, premature) attack against these and other liberal illusions. The disavowal of that faith by political experience was absorbed by me and many, if not the great mass, of my contemporaries not as an isolated incident but as the definitive refutation of one of the main tenets of liberal philosophy. We came to realize now, through political experience, what some of us had concluded before by way of philosophical reflection, that power positions do not yield to arguments, however rationally and morally valid, but only to superior power. We also came to realize that the distribution of power in America favors the continuation of policies that we regard to be indefensible on rational and moral grounds."<sup>10</sup>

After this disappointing experience, he took time to reflect on the democratic principle of dissent, a subject on which he had become an

<sup>9</sup>Thompson and Myers, *Truth and Tragedy*, p. 382–83.

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 5.

unwilling expert. In a piece published in August 1968, he outlined his view on the access in American society to the truth and the crucial role of minority rights, in the largest sense, if democracy is to be preserved. This was a central issue for equality in freedom. Like Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., he believed that relativism is the operative philosophy of the American democracy—that everyone has access to the truth, with no one having a monopoly, and that inherent in the American democratic system is the possibility that today's minority may be tomorrow's majority. Rising above this relativism, and making it workable, however, is the transcendent notion of a "higher purpose" that guides American democracy and acts as a brake on simply majoritarianism. That kind of problem was anticipated by James Madison in *Federalist* 10. The will of the majority is not, then, by definition the absolute truth and can in most cases be modified by incremental changes in what seems to be right or true. This process allows for mediation at the margins of political conflict and since it is an open-ended process, oils the democratic preference. There is not a permanent majority and a permanent minority on political issues. Changing consensus on the Vietnam war is a good example of such a shift in public and official viewpoint and appreciation of what the right policy should be, after a seemingly unending process of trial and error. Professor Morgenthau had a wry and ironic conclusion to this particular Vietnam ordeal, often the fate of any one who is prematurely correct about public policy: "For those who have made it their business in life to speak truth to power, there is nothing left but to continue to speak, less frequently perhaps than they used to and certainly with less confidence that it will in the short run make much of a difference in the affairs of man."<sup>11</sup>

Turning to some other observations on the American domestic scene, his instincts on analyzing the key problems were as astute as in the international field, relying as he generally did, on how the strength of the "powers that be" stood in relationship to reform. "What is disquieting in our present condition [writing in 1967] is the contrast

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 8.

between the gravity of the two great domestic problems that require solutions—race relations and unemployment—and the complacency permeating the thoughts and actions of government and public alike.”<sup>12</sup> These problems are still very much with us and have not only been a blot on the American conscience, but stand as a disfigurement of how American democracy wants to be perceived and what it sees in the mirror. One of his concerns was that these twin evils could result in greater violence in society and a lessening of the prospects for equality in freedom.

The content of democracy in America and elsewhere, that is, its quality, has to be a source of constant scrutiny. Its shortcomings and intransigent problems lead to the conclusion of E.J. Dionne, for example, in *Why Americans Hate Politics*, that the process of politics resolving such problems has become so flawed and the results so unsuccessful that there is a sense of helplessness in the land. He longs for a participatory democracy that revitalizes the body politic. “In our efforts to find our way toward a new world role, we would do well to revive what made us a special nation long before we became the world’s leading military and economic power—our republican tradition that nurtured free citizens who eagerly embraced the responsibilities and pleasures of self-government. With democracy on the march outside our borders, our first responsibility is to ensure that the United States becomes a model for what self-government should be and not an example of what happens to free nations when they lose interest in public life. A nation that hates politics,” he concludes, “will not survive as a democracy.”<sup>13</sup>

Michael Oakeshott, the British philosopher, thinks that part of this problem comes about because of the increasing difficulty of the individual in society to cope; the autonomous individual in today’s world is often unable to make all the determinations and decisions required of him or her as they are thrust upon them in terms of political beliefs, job preferences, religious alliance and so on. People of this

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 209.

<sup>13</sup> E.J. Dionne, Jr., *Why Americans Hate Politics* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1991), p. 351.

situation, Oakeshott says, become “individual manques,” who opt out of the “civic association” and therefore don’t participate in solving such pressing problems as race relations and distributive justice, if one can still talk about distributive problems in our “free market” society. The philosopher David Norton sees this as a towering problem for the kind of democracy he prefers, a democracy populated by virtue-loving individuals who seek the “good life” and are motivated to pursue, through active participation, the politics of their community.<sup>14</sup>

Morgenthau’s ongoing concern about the treatment of African-Americans in America was the denial of what he saw to be the purpose of America, equality in freedom. He expressed it this way: “The contrast between the legal and moral commitment to equal opportunity for all and the actual denial of that opportunity to a collectively defined group of citizens constitutes a tragic denial of the American purpose. Its tragic quality stems from its inescapability, its imperviousness to the good intentions of either the reformer or the paternalist....”<sup>15</sup>

This inequality, to quote Jefferson, is a “moral reproach.” Slavery, Morgenthau says, could be handled by a single legal stroke, the Emancipation proclamation. Segregation can be attacked by law, but that does not resolve the matter. “All states of the Union are segregationists in different degrees, with regard to different activities and by virtue, or in spite, of different legal arrangements. Even where the law requires integration in all fields of social interaction, segregation is still a social fact.” The prospect, as he saw it, was for a three-cornered escalation of domestic violence: “the black man against government, the lower white middle class against the black man, and the government against both.”

The issue of black inequality was intimately connected to the unemployment question. The American economy, Morgenthau thought, was now in a position to move from scarcity to abundance.

<sup>14</sup> David Norton, *Democracy and Moral Development* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), p. 110.

<sup>15</sup> Hans J. Morgenthau, *The Purpose of American Politics* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1962), p. 39.

"Morally," he wrote, "we have accepted the obligation to provide all citizens with a modicum of economic well-being and security as a precondition for having an equal opportunity to realize this human potential in freedom. It is only outmoded economic theory and practice that stands in the way of our using our productive power for this moral end."<sup>16</sup> He does not explain what the "new economic theory" might be—he was often criticized for the relatively small attention he paid to economic matters—but his message was clear. These injustices must be ameliorated or, once again, the level of violence will rise in the unequal struggle between the individual, lacking equality and opportunity, in a confrontation with the state.

Surely the purpose of America was more noble; issues like racial equality and unemployment needed to be raised to the level of public debate, giving different versions of America's destiny. He cited historical precedents as Pinckney-Hamilton, Lodge-Wilson, Borah-FDR. Instead, writing in 1959 he lamented "the lack of relevant controversy, for where nothing is clearly stated, there is nothing to oppose."<sup>17</sup>

The truth he was pointing out to the "powers that be" was that problems of this gravity, these weeds of injustice, could not be removed by the status quo. In international politics, the status quo is ordinarily highly valued for its reliability and general convenience; but in American domestic politics, if we are to be democratic, allowing for the waxing and waning of majority views, the improvement of the prospects for equality in freedom, an intransigent status quo is often dangerous. Change was urgently and immediately required. Power once again did not agree with Morgenthau but, like Immanuel Kant, he had done his duty.

Finally, in analyzing Morgenthau's international and domestic politics, we come to a related core concern, of how the individual faces the world and its institutions. He wonders how the individual can save himself from the mindlessness of mass destruction, caused by science and technology gone amuck. He wonders whether

<sup>16</sup> Morgenthau, *Truth and Power*, p. 211-13.

<sup>17</sup> Morgenthau, *The Purpose of American Politics*, p. 4.

technology and science will obliterate him. His thoughts on these matters are interspersed in many of his works, but principally in his essays on *Science: Servant or Master?* Man is threatened by technology as applied science, which can destroy man and his social and material environment by war, social dislocation, and pollution. "Technology has created a potential economy of abundance, while tens of millions of people in the United States and hundreds of millions throughout the world live in poverty." If this situation were not bad enough, science has compromised man's "inner freedom" through which a limited autonomy was possible. Now, even the simplest activities require reliance on technology—water, transportation, light. All these technological advances carry with them the possibility of totalitarian control and the loss of individual autonomy.<sup>18</sup>

Morgenthau sees a change away from the view of the ancients that science for science's sake was its own reward. "We are no longer capable of that self-assurance ... that salutes each new knowledge as a new victory carrying its justification within itself." The difference between the ancient and modern view of scientific advance is that of the soldier to the statesman. "For the soldier, victory is justified by itself; the statesman must search for its political meaning. For the soldier, victory is an end in itself; for the statesman, it must be a means to an end."<sup>19</sup> The critique of science is not against science per se, however, but what man has tried to do with science, by not subjecting the scientific enterprise to a transcendent standard. "Action is neutral as concerns human life: it is as willing to keep millions alive with the means science has put at its disposal as it is to kill them. The same technologies produce medicines and poison gas, machines and weapons, nuclear energy and nuclear bombs. Action, like theoretical knowledge, is divorced from transcendent meaning. As in the sphere of science it is at best still possible to distinguish between true and false, so in the field of action one can still distinguish between useful

<sup>18</sup> Hans J. Morgenthau, *Science: Servant or Master?* (New York: New American Library, 1972), p. 3-5.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

and useless, but no longer between good and bad, valuable and worthless."<sup>20</sup> Science, however, is not an independent actor, simply setting about to do what it wishes, as the title of the essays suggest, but rather its performance is subject to human volition. The failure comes from humankind's inability to "set science tasks that affirm life and enlarge it," (even though he acknowledged that goal-oriented science might destroy the very system of scientific inquiry).

The development of nuclear weapons spurred enormously the disparity between people power and the government. The knowledge of the overwhelming force of government power—despite the unlikelihood of a government using nuclear weapons on its own people—strengthened the status quo. The impossibility of popular revolution in a modern state, run by a determined leadership, was a powerful boost for the status quo, the powers that be. On the international scene, the existence of these nuclear weapons was creating irrational policies based on the idea that nuclear weapons were just another weapon, a logical extension of block-busting, air-sucking conventional weapons. Morgenthau was convinced of the unusability of nuclear weapons, beyond their deterrence value for those who saw deterrence as a feasible and moral proposition. He was scathing in his criticism of such nuclear warriors as Herman Kahn, who tried to make nuclear war thinkable and winnable. Morgenthau summarizes the Kahn position: "We can survive, and recuperate from, a nuclear war, provided we make the necessary preparations and our calculations are correct; yet the first proviso is improbable and the second, dubious. Thus a massive undertaking, which sets out as a demonstration of the acceptability of nuclear war and generally has been debated as such, ends up as a hypothetical intellectual exercise, a piece of political science fiction, divorced from reality by improbable and dubious empirical assumptions."<sup>21</sup>

The nuclear war thesis had two potentially disastrous consequences: there was no rational relationship between means and ends;

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 136.

(even the Napoleons and Hitlers, he wrote, paid attention to this principle); and it raises the specter of nuclear death. This was the final assault and indignity against one's individual existence as a single human being, someone who matters. Equality is in fact the essence of democratic government; each person should be treated as though each is as worthy as the other, in accord with equality in freedom;<sup>22</sup> "...nuclear destruction destroys the meaning of death by depriving it of its individuality."<sup>23</sup>

The meaning of life and death, Morgenthau wrote, is in part dependent on being remembered after death; with the possibility of millions dying simultaneously, the quantity of deaths might be remembered but no individual quality. As long as nuclear weapons exist and science and technology expand the possibilities of mankind's destruction beyond the control of humanity itself, the threat of nuclear death remains: "It would indeed be the height of thoughtless optimism to assume that something so absurd as a nuclear war cannot happen because it is so absurd."<sup>24</sup>

Can anything substantial be done about this situation? Not likely if one remembers the apparent irreducibility of human nature. Seeing things in a new light may not be enough. The eight thousand years of recorded history show little change in mankind's moral behavior. Eight thousand years is not long, to be sure, in the course of evolution. But how long must we wait, if that is the only solution? One possibility is the concentration on improving each individual's interest and capacity for freedom and intellectual and moral growth. Looked upon this way, the three areas I have discussed today—the realist theory of international relations, democracy, and nuclear war—all point to the sacredness of each person. This is not an atomistic approach, that is, that each person is or should be fully autonomous. Within this autonomy, there must be a sense of community and common purpose, at the international, national and

<sup>22</sup> Will Kymlicka, *Contemporary Political Philosophy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), p. 5.

<sup>23</sup> Morgenthau, *Science: Servant or Master?*, p. 149.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 152.

local level. As Bellah's book, *Habits of the Heart*, demonstrates, there is a balance between the individual and community, full of new possibilities. This is reinforced by a study of Hans Morgenthau's life and his works. In speaking truth to power, I conclude with this observation: "Man's future," Morgenthau wrote, "depends ultimately upon himself. Although he cannot live without social ties to other men, he alone, in the solitude of his autonomous reflection, decides his future as man."<sup>25</sup> For those interested in Morgenthau's search for equality in freedom, speaking truth to power, there is hope that this decision will be for the reaffirmation of man's spirit and onward destiny, a happy reliance on Machiavelli's recommendation of the pillar of virtue, which is in our own hands, and the pillar of fortune, which is beyond our reach.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 71.

<sup>26</sup> Morgenthau, *The Purpose of American Politics*, p. 323.

## About the Speaker

**Robert J. Myers** is president of the Carnegie Council on Ethics and International Affairs. Before taking this post in 1980, he was publisher of *The New Republic* (1968–1979); co-founder and publisher (1965–68) of *The Washingtonian*; and with the Department of Army and Department of State in Asia, (1949–65).

He was educated at DePauw University and the University of Chicago: M.A., and Ph.D. He was Research Assistant to Hans J. Morgenthau, and they became life-long friends. Together with Kenneth W. Thompson he edited the *festschrift* volume, *Truth and Tragedy: A Tribute to Hans J. Morgenthau*.

Other recent publications include "After the Cold War," *Society*, March/April 1991; "Do Ethics Matter?" *Dialogue*, Spring 1990; "The Virtue of Moral Restraint," *International Journal*, 1988; "The End of the Hermit Kingdom," *Ethics & International Affairs*, 1988; *Korea: The Year 2000* (co-editor with Han Sung-joo), 1987; *International Ethics in the Nuclear Age*, 1987; *The Political Morality of the IMF*, 1987; and he was editor of a special issue of *The Annals*, January 1986, on "Religion and the State: The Struggle for Legitimacy and Power."

Dr. Myers travels extensively to other parts of the world to participate in programs and conferences. Most recently he participated in conferences on "Beliefs, Values and Ethical Choices in Today's World," and "The Ethics of Democracy," both held in Aspen, Colorado in August 1991; "The Contribution of Science and Technology to Global Environment Policy,"



an international conference held in Berlin in October 1990 and organized jointly by the Development Policy Forum of the German Federation for International Development and the Club of Rome; "Ethics and Nuclear Confrontation," sponsored by the Institute of Philosophy of the USSR Academy of Sciences, Moscow and Tashkent, USSR, May 1990; "Joint Forum for Philippine Progress," meeting in Manila, the Philippines, January 1990.

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