IDEOLOGICAL TEMPTATIONS AND MORAL CRUSADING IN POLITICS AND DIPLOMACY: REMINDERS FROM VOEGELIN AND MORGENTHAU

Greg Russell
University of Oklahoma

Prepared for the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association

Washington, D. C.

September 2010

Not for citation or other use without author’s permission
Ideological thinking about politics and diplomacy obviously impacts, as it distorts, the manner by which societies depict the truth of their existence, the ways in which the innermost purposes of a nation or people are acted upon by representatives of that truth (be they philosophers or statesmen), as well as the ethical potential of individuals, groups, and nations in a world not yet shorn of war and violence. Eric Voegelin’s diagnosis of modern ideologies on the left and right helps to refocus our attention on the meaning of politics, political reality, and how ideological movements (as pseudo-philosophies and expressions of modern Gnosticism) empty politics of authentic moral content by seeking a world immanent rationale for the transcendent sources of being and order. While this important slice of the Voegelin corpus has received considerable attention over the years, less-often-investigated by political thinkers has been the impact of ideological claims in international politics, how to judge such claims, and how to assess the connection between ideological arguments and moral choices in foreign policy. If a truly open society is going concern for the twenty-first century, one that spans different groups and civilizations, and one that is linked to a “post-national” world, then we may well profit if ideology and ideological temptations have faded from the scene.

Hans J. Morgenthau’s defense of “realism” as a theory of international politics, and as a corrective to “idealism” and “utopianism” in American foreign policy, included a critique of ideology as a tool to misrepresent political reality, to disguise the promotion of class, party, ethnic, or parochial interests. Like Voegelin, Morgenthau believed that modern ideological thinking grew out of a restriction of scientific inquiry to positivist, secular, and progressivist agendas that deliver both power and ethics over to an intra-worldly chain of utilitarian considerations whereby distinguishing good from evil consists in acquiring empirical knowledge of how certain effects are coordinated with certain actions. From Morgenthau’s perspective, modern rationalism and “scientific ethics” precluded a proper regard for the many vitalities at play in human nature, the centrality of power in politics within and among nations, the prudent calibration of national interests through diplomatic accommodation, and the limitations of law and morality in a world of co-sovereign states. While Morgenthau is perhaps best known for his principles of political realism outlined in successive editions of Politics Among Nations, as well as his three volume study of Politics in the Twentieth Century, a substantial portion of his work included a detailed philosophical and ethical inquiry into the impact of science and technology on modern statesmanship. Against the misconceptions of rationalist philosophy and scientific formulas in politics (and political science), he sought to identify “those intellectual and moral faculties of man to which alone the problems of the social world will yield.”

Pairing these two luminaries, for the purpose of this paper, may well strike some as an unlikely combination, insofar as neither Voegelin nor Morgenthau had much (if anything) to say to say about one another. Voegelin was a thorough-going philosopher whose political science
involved the recovery of an ontologically-grounded theory of politics, a sustained inquiry into the ground of being, and the elaboration of an experiential science of right order in the soul and in society. Morgenthau’s political science typically began from less elevated horizons and with ultimate questions about existence more often implicit, rather than explicit, in his theorizing about patterns of interest and power in politics. While Voegelin studied the meaning of civilizations, Morgenthau mostly wrote about the foreign policies of nations and statesmen. While Voegelin painstakingly avoided political partisanship, Morgenthau was never a stranger to controversy or activism in the political arena. And one could fairly easily envisage a Voegelinian critique of Morgenthau’s realism, with its emphasis on power politics, as yet another ideological contraction of reality. But these differences, while not insignificant, should not obscure the fact that Voegelin was no more insensitive to what he often called the “fatality of power” among men and nations (as well as the need for prudence and proximate moral reasoning) than Morgenthau was heedless of spirituality as well as the destructiveness of power under the conditions of modern science and technology. I could do little better depicting Morgenthau’s political thought than Ellis Sandoz has done in capturing Voegelin’s outlook: “Ever the empiricist, Voegelin as a political realist regularly brings to bear the Aristotelian recognition that circumstances dictate the concrete possibilities when it comes to resolving the question of institutionalizing political order.” Proceeding in such a matter (amid differences in temperament) gave these political scientists a jeweler’s eye for the dilemmas of moralistic crusading that reduce the full range of human experience (or human nature) to vast abstractions and utopian dreamworlds that, instead of overcoming political rivalries and war, invest them with even more ferocity and deadly consequences.

Beyond or Back to an Age of Ideology

Even before the end of the Cold War, and certainly after 1945, there were those who claimed that the history of political thought was moving almost inexorably into an age “beyond ideology” or even into a post-modern era where political theorizing would no longer be relegated to reductionist behavioral science or opinionated ideology. The works of various thinkers—Voegelin, Bertrand de Jouvenel, Michael Oakeshott, Hannah Arendt, Jacques Maritain, and even Reinhold Niebuhr—pointed us beyond the abstractions and illusions of modern isms and to a recovery or principles of right order in human social existence. A science of man in society, a philosophical science of politics rooted in the inwardness of human experience, had very little to do with the tasks that the likes of David Easton and Dwight Waldo assigned to political thinkers. “Political theorists should undertake ‘imaginative moral architecture,’ and indulge their creative imaginations in utopia-building. . . .Whose function is it, if not the political theorist’s, to project ways of organizing the political aspects of our lives?” The Easton-Waldo school of thought confused normative political theory with political doctrine and utopia construction.

Implicit in much of the behavioral and neo-positivist literature was a latter-day affirmation of the scientific system (or “science of ideas”) adumbrated by Antoine Destutt DeTracy, who first coined the term ideology in his book Élemens d’ideolgie (in 1801). Influenced by the philosophical empiricism of John Locke and Etienne de Condillac, he retained a faith in universal reason, with rationalism hereby understood as the methodological
construction of a scientific system which could provide certain knowledge of both humanity and nature. Tracy’s new science of ideas was an extension of Francis Bacon’s assault on the “idols of the mind” (the distorting powers of premodern science) as well as an offshoot of the eighteenth century critique of politics and ethics adumbrated by the French *philosophes* (whose general theory of prejudices was transformed—by the likes of Helvetius and Holbach—into a radical critique of class society). For the leaders of the modern behavioral movement in political science, no less eager to subdue unruly value biases and religious impulses, political theorizing amounted to little more than “moral relativism” (a schedule of various preferences) which might yield “conceptual schemes” and “testable empirical hypotheses” for building causal theory.

Admittedly, the understanding of ideology would evolve (and often in contradictory ways) over the course of two centuries. A full telling of that story is far beyond the scope of this paper and only a few summary remarks will have to suffice. The progressivist *idéologues* (whose new science would provide guides of social action in post-revolutionary Europe) prompted Napoleon’s pejorative (though admittedly self-serving) attack on ideology. The *idéologues* became the scapegoat for the failures of the Napoleonic regime. Returning to Paris in December 1812, after the disastrous Russian campaign, the French emperor accused the *idéologues* of undermining the state and rule of law. Addressing the Council of State, he condemned ideology as contrary to the stern realities of politics and statecraft.

> We must lay the blame for the ills... France has suffered on ideology, that shadowy metaphysics which subtly searches for just causes on which to base the legislation of peoples, rather than making use of laws known to the human heart and lessons of history. These errors must inevitably and did...lead to the rule of bloodthirsty men... When someone is summoned to revitalize a state, he must follow exactly the opposite principles.

Over time, and in an ironic twist, the term ideology would be appropriated by those who denied the very possibility of universal reason. Karl Marx considered Enlightenment rationalism a false ideology, with the main point being that these rationalists were unaware of the historical and contingent propositions that shaped their fundamentally biased and distorted thinking. Ideology is time bound and narrow, a creation produced in conformity with the social and material relations at a particular stage of history.

Karl Mannheim, influenced by German historicist philosophy and Marxist sociology, radicalized and further relativized Marx’s conception of ideology. Like Marx, he believed that the structure of human consciousness was existentially determined as well as a product of diverse social and economic forces. Unlike Marx, however, he did not limit false consciousness to a particular class or enshrine all historical truth or true knowledge to some post-revolutionary cadre of party elites. Mannheim’s sociology of knowledge makes all knowledge relational to the context of group struggle or the historical goals of a concrete group. The philosophical search for truth, then, is eclipsed by the desire of one group to dominate another.
We may regard competition as such a representative case in which extra-theoretical processes affect the emergence and development of knowledge. Competition controls not merely economic activity through the mechanism of the market, not merely the course of political and social events, but furnishes also the motor impulse behind diverse interpretations of the world which, when their social background is uncovered, reveal themselves as the intellectual expressions of conflicting groups struggling for power.7

In Ideology and Utopia, Mannheim makes clear that the distinction between the former and the latter is different from the traditional distinction between truth and error. Both represent false forms of consciousness, with ideologies being the weapons of a dominant class geared to upholding the status quo and utopianism being the shield of oppressed groups that seek the transformation of the status quo. Utopianism, Mannheim argued, is no more compelling than ideology as an accurate or comprehensive diagnosis of political conflict. Utopian consciousness is concerned less with the diagnosis of an existing reality and more with providing a call to arms or a justifiable system of ideas to legitimate and direct change. Gone is any reference to transcendent principles of order or any objective standards by which various opinions can be evaluated beyond their utility to a particular group perspective. While Mannheim himself was not prepared to countenance a thorough-going relativism and cynicism in important political matters, it is difficult to see how he—any more than he thought Aristotle or Marx—could insulate himself from the fetters of group or occupational interest (and formulate any kind of political knowledge other than a recognition of diverse opinions of diverse groups about political reality).

The close of the twentieth century, and eclipse of the Cold War, brought forth numerous obituaries on totalitarian ideologies and, if this moment did not exactly signal the “end of history,” it did bring forth visions of a new world order liberated from messianic political creeds and utopian nightmares that led to gas chambers, killing fields, and death camps. Voegelin, while suffering few illusions about the machinations of power in politics, spoke of mass ideologies as something of a spent force. His words are worth recalling:

. . .we have, since the great ideologists of the mid-and late-nineteenth century, since Comte, Marx, John Stuart Mill, Bakunin (and so on), no new ideologist. All ideologies belong, in their origin, before that period; there are no new ideologies in the twentieth century. . . .Without peering into the future we can prognosticate that. . .nobody will be a great thinker of the type of Marx or Hegel or Comte. . .because that has all been done. There will be no further ideological thinker of any stature. We have had them all.8

Although Voegelin was reasonably confident that serious philosophers would—sooner or later—“tear the epigones” and their ideologies to pieces, he cautioned against obsolescence at least in the near term. He believed one “ought not to be too optimistic with regard to the exhaustion of the power of ideologies.” Once these political or intellectual ideologies become institutionalized within regimes or an academic bureaucracy, “they last a long while, because there is a vested interest in them.” At least within most universities, “the college teaching level is usually thirty,
While Aldous Huxley’s *Brave New World* and George Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-Four* may have demonstrated that “the whole sense of utopia is shown up as nonsense,”¹⁰ the message remains unheard by some in the professoriate. One encounters a fair amount of published discourse that makes the case that utopia matters a great deal. A few examples will suffice. Antonio Negri, the Italian Marxist sociologist and political philosopher, compared postmodern, late capitalist societies to a “porcelain factory,” a delicate and fragile construction that requires an alternative political practice, one that is truly utopian.¹¹ Others fulminate about the “Disneyfication of utopia” – i.e., the creation of a “supposedly happy, harmonious, and non-conflictual space,” one that serves “to soothe and mollify, to entertain, to invent history and to cultivate nostalgia from some mythical past, to perpetuate the fetish of commodity culture rather than to critique it.”¹² Feminist cultural theorist, Sally Kitch, claims that utopianism has produced numerous political fallacies, though this does not deter her in the least from calling for a “post-utopian realism” to restart “humanity from scratch!”¹³ Anthony Giddens seizes on the idea of “utopian realism,” a state of mental determination by which one creates the illusion of radical change within the existing system of social and economic exploitation.¹⁴ Immanuel Wallerstein, though discounting utopianism, nevertheless proposes the term *utopistics* to illustrate how reform-based rationality can transform the human condition:

> Utopistics is the serious assessment of historical alternatives, the exercise of our judgement as to the substantive rationally of alternative possible historical systems
> It is the sober, rational, and realistic evaluation of human social systems, the constraints on what they can be, and the zones open to human creativity. Not the face of the perfect (and inevitable) future, but the face of an alternative, credibly better, and historically possible (but far from certain) future.

Nicole Pohl, who edits the electronic journal *Utopian Studies*, laments that what is missing from these formulations “is the aspect of utopia that propels visions of a different or better world beyond the existing status quo.” Deploring “degenerate consumer utopias,” as well as the “Randian utopia of unfettered capitalism,” she notes that “the radical potential of utopia” must resort “to a utopian heuristic or art of invention,” whereby a postmodernist perspective can come to resist, rather than reinforce, the logic of consumer capitalism.¹⁵

The kind of openness and inner-worldly liberation implicit in many of these variations on utopia (whether of a temporal or critical nature) lead, from a Voegelinian perspective, to outbursts of ideological or Gnostic politics. Given short shrift in these accounts is the fundamental philosophical question of responsiveness to the pull of the transcendental dimension of existence, as well as simultaneous awareness of the counterpull of forces that would substitute a truncated, immanentized “reality” for reality of existence in tension toward the ground of being.¹⁶ What Friedrich Meinecke wrote in 1933 about the role of intellectuals in German politics captures the characteristic weakness of contemporary ideologues on the left and right. “They could give to their political aspirations a spirit of purity and independence, of
philosophical idealism above the concrete play of interests.. but through their defective feeling for the realistic interests of actual state life they quickly descended from the sublime to the extravagant and eccentric.\textsuperscript{17}

\textit{Morgenthau, Realism, and Ideology}

While Morgenthau’s realism has been the subject of a growing literature in the field of international relations, it is enough to begin here with his admonition that any realist theory of politics will guard against two popular fallacies: the concern with motives and the concern with ideological preferences. For Morgenthau, the “rational” core to politics is always the mainstay of interest(s) defined as power. This is what was both distinctive and problematic about his intellectual legacy. In \textit{Politics Among Nations}, he claims this rational signpost is “the concept that provides the link between reason trying to understand international politics and the facts to be understood.” Such a “Germanic conception,” the seeming affirmation of all things Machiavellian, the blatant avowal of sinister “power politics”—these popular perceptions of Morgenthau immediately put him at odds with an academic discipline more often preoccupied with peace studies, world government, and international law.\textsuperscript{18} The more problematic aspect is to be found in his assertion that interest defined as power is precisely what “sets politics as an autonomous sphere of action and understanding apart from other spheres such as economics (understood in terms of interest defined as wealth), ethics, aesthetics, or religion.” The legacy of nineteenth century liberalism, taken in tandem with unique aspects of the America’s own historical experience, created the “belief that involvement in power politics is not inevitable, but only a historic accident, and that nations have a choice between power politics and other kinds of foreign policy not tainted by the desire for power.”\textsuperscript{19}

Defenders and critics of Morgenthau will continue to debate whether his realism, his understanding of rationality and power, allows one to think much beyond the arena of partisan combat and to grasp an ontological theory of politics built on an understanding of human nature that is tied to man’s awareness of the transcendental ground of all existing things. An argument can be made, however, that his critique of ideological politics ultimate led Morgenthau beyond \textit{Machtpolitik} and to a much more nuanced understanding of the moral and political predicament of the statesman, one that moved him to claim that “the moves and countermoves in the struggle for power must be intelligible as a dialectic movement toward the realization of justice.” As Morgenthau would write: “The actor may subordinate all ethical considerations to the realization of his political goal; however, his act cannot be beyond good and evil, even from his own point of view, as long as he makes the apparent harmony of his act with the ethical standards part of the goal to be realized.”\textsuperscript{20}

Nowhere did Morgenthau examine the historical basis of modern ideologies with the kind of philosophical depth that characterized Voegelin’s lengthy treatment of modern political religions. In addition, Morgenthau often incorporated into his analysis of politics and power different meanings or usages of ideology, depending on the subject matter at hand and his readership audience. Sometimes his more popular foreign policy commentary would treat ideology in the general sense of philosophic, political, and moral convictions. These convictions
function as “an ideological manifestation of the contradiction between political reality and political preferences.” In both *Scientific Man vs. Power Politics* and *Politics Among Nations*, he more clearly and specifically draws on Mannheim’s notion of “particular ideology.” In Mannheim’s words:

> The particular conception of ideology is implied when the term denotes that we are sceptical [sic] of the ideas and representations advanced by our opponent. They are regarded as more or less conscious disguises of the real nature of a situation, the true recognition of which would not be in accord with his interests. These distortions range all the way from conscious lies to half-conscious and unwitting disguises; from calculated attempts to dupe others to self-deception.

Finally, Morgenthau even wrote about “a positive approach to democratic ideology,” trying to distinguish between two standards—the philosophic and the political—for the projection of ideas and values in foreign policy.

Insofar as Morgenthau treated ideologies almost as a pathological if not inevitable feature of politics in general, the depth of the ideological problem will hinge upon how he defined the role (and limits) of power in international politics. And, as we shall see, the way Morgenthau connected ideology and power grew out of his sustained critique of modern rationalism (at least in positivist guise) as well as his philosophical appraisal of human nature. These issues require some summary treatment before turning to the question that is at the core of this paper—i.e., why the political art and practical wisdom of the statesman, aware that there is seldom an escape from the insecurities of men and nations, is at odds with the ideological temperament of foreign policy crusaders who seek either to banish power politics through visionary schemes (from law, economics, ethics, or religion) or to wield power for self-interested ends while “making the contest for power psychologically and morally acceptable to the actors and their audience.”

*Science, and Modern Rationalism*

Morgenthau’s rather heavy-handed indictment of modern rationalism and scientism riveted in on two assumptions: the conception of the social and 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 physical world. The solution of social problems, then, depends upon the quantitative extension of the method of the natural sciences to the social sphere. Morgenthau depicted the fundamental shortcoming of rationalistic positivism in the following terms:

> Fascinated by the success of the exact sciences in the empirical world, it has lost sight of the very existence of the unknowable. . . . The relation between what is known and unknown is here conceived strictly in quantitative terms. What is missing in this conception of science is the tension between the finiteness of our knowledge and the infinity both of our desire to know and of the universe; for the
infinite is...nothing more than a collection of objects that happen to be not yet known but will be known in due course of time. What is, in consequence also missing, is the awareness of the tragic limits of human knowledge, hemmed in by the mysteries of the universe.\footnote{24}

The philosophy of rationalism, Morgenthau asserted, “does not see that man’s nature has three dimensions: biological, rational, and spiritual.” And, by ignoring the biological and spiritual aspirations, “it misconstrues the function reason fulfils within the whole of human existence; it distorts the problem of ethics, especially in the political field; and it perverts the natural sciences into an instrument of social salvation for which neither their own nature nor the nature of the social world fits them.” For Morgenthau, the key to the laws of man is not in the facts from whose uniformity the sciences derive their laws; rather, “it is in the insight and the wisdom by which the more-than-scientific man elevates his experiences into the universal laws of human nature.”\footnote{25} Yet Morgenthau’s originality, in publishing Scientific Man in 1946, was less a philosophical breakthrough in discovering new truths about modern liberal reason than it was an explanation of how the epistemological roots of the behavioral sciences (and what he deemed to be their methodological rigidity) prevented political scientists from taking seriously the role of “political philosophy and statesmanship at the center of things political.”\footnote{26}

As for rationality and international politics, the modern science of peace (particularly in its Liberal incarnation) operates on the premise of a world that is rational throughout and that contains all the elements necessary for the harmonious cooperation of mankind. Territorial claims, sovereignty over national minorities, the distribution of raw materials, the struggle for markets, disarmament, the relation between “have” and “have not” nations, and the peaceful organization of the world in general—these are not political problems to be solved temporarily and always precariously on the basis of the distribution of power among competing nations. They are “technical” problems for which reason will find one—the correct—solution, to the exclusion of all others—the incorrect ones.\footnote{27} Such technical and factual knowledge, Morgenthau pointed out, is often “useful as an instrument of ideology through which antagonistic social pressures justify themselves before the scientific spirit of the age, demonstrating superiority before and after the decision.”\footnote{28} Ideology, in Morgenthau’s view, distorts the full range of forces at work in human nature, obscurses the ways that the insecurity of human existence challenges the wisdom of man, and dissolves into fiction the existential struggle that the statesman endures between fate and freedom, necessity and chance.\footnote{29}

\textit{Power Politics And Ideology}

Morgenthau retained a lifelong skepticism about most all devices or instrumentalities designed to do away with the struggle for power. He had little patience with moralists for whom politics epitomized all that was evil and had to be uprooted.

Whatever the ultimate aims of international politics, power is always the immediate aim. Statesmen and people may ultimately seek freedom, security, prosperity, or power itself. They may define their goals in terms of a religious, philosophic, economic or social ideal. . . .But whenever they strive to realize their
goal by means of international politics, they do so by striving for power.  

What some critics find to be a narrow and dangerous fixation on power overlooks an extensive amount of Morgenthau’s writing on the limitations of national power. He looked to international law, international organizations, world community, international cooperation, and national purpose for effecting such limitations. Kenneth W. Thompson rightly observes that it is the tragic element in life and politics which, more than any other, preoccupies Morgenthau: men seek power as the means to worthy ends, but mankind and its ends are corrupted by the pursuit of power; ideological foreign policy is a contradiction to successful diplomacy, but foreign policy not rooted in national purpose is aimless; and the national state is obsolete, but no effective world community has yet come into being. For Morgenthau, the politics among nations are played out at the point of such apparent contradictions and antinomies.

For all of the debate prompted by Morgenthau’s defense of the “autonomy of politics,” it is worth recalling his point that the struggle for power does not illuminate every action that a nation performs with respect to another nation. Examples abound of economic, legal, humanitarian activities “normally undertaken without any consideration of power.” He clearly acknowledged that a nation “is not normally engaged in international politics when it concludes an extradition treaty with another nation, when it exchanges goods and services with other nations, when it cooperates with other nations in providing relief from natural catastrophes, and when it promotes the distribution of cultural achievements throughout the world.” There are reasonable concerns about Morgenthau’s concept of the political, although these concerns overreach if accompanied by the allegation that his realism made no room for the role of diplomacy, morality, and international law.

Morgenthau did not treat political ideologies as the accidental outgrowth of hypocrisy or self-deception of particular individuals who need only be replaced by other more conscientious individuals to insure the honest conduct of foreign affairs. Ideologies reflect a deeper existential dilemma, one whereby the actor on the political science is always at the same time a prospective master and a prospective subject. This existential ambivalence also has important ethical consequences, inasmuch as the political actor “will consider his own desire for power as just and will condemn as unjust the desire of others to gain powers over him.” Part of the problem of ideology in politics is that “the deeper one is involved in the power struggle, the less likely he is to see the power struggle for what it is.” Ideologies enable politicians, with an undiminished capacity for self-deception, to cloak the projection of power in ethical or legal principles or biological necessities. Morgenthau did not insist that these principles or necessities all amount to an ideological ruse. Rather they can fulfill one of two functions (or some combination of the two). Either they can reflect the ultimate goals of political action (for which power is sought) or they can function as “pretexts” or “false fronts” behind which the machinations of power are camouflaged.

Ideological disguises in world politics embrace both liberal and non-liberal aims of international actors. In the words of Edward Gibbon: “For every war a motive of safety or revenge, of honor or zeal, of right or convenience, may readily be found in the jurisprudence of
Morgenthau made the following distinction:

Yet while non-liberal political concepts, such as “Roman Empire,” “new order,” “living space,” “encirclement,” “national security,” “haves vs. have-nots,” and the like, show an immediately recognizable relationship to concrete political aims; liberal concepts, such as “collective security,” “democracy,” “national self-determination,” “justice,” “peace,” are abstract generalities which may be applied to any political situation but which are not peculiar to any particular one.

During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, even the hallowed balance of power was utilized as an ideological weapon by defenders of the status quo and imperialists alike. What makes the balance mechanism an ideology is the political disposition of contestants to seek not an equilibrium of power but a distribution of power regarded as favorable to a particular nation or group of nations. The balance principle “assumes a reality and a function that is actually does not have, and therefore tends to disguise, rationalize, and justify international politics as it actually is.”

Voegelin, Politics, and Ideological Deformations

Both Voegelin and Morgenthau published much of their work at a time when many believed that political theory in a learned sense was dead and that the practical influence of political ideas was dying. The intellectual coinage of the behavioral sciences grew from a secular faith that ideological motivations in politics were happily on the wane, that “new technocrats had come to positions of political power, not merely in the Western world, and that political philosophy had become purely academic and historical.” Scientific modeling, death counts, and pacification programs were new weapons with which to fight wars (hot and cold) and to democratize nations in the great struggle to win over the minds of men. Morgenthau treated ideology partly as an extension of the sociology of knowledge (i.e., the derivation of ideas from circumstances) and partly as abstract ideas aimed at persuasion and action rather than verification or truth (rationalizations of power). Voegelin offered a much more profound analysis of modern ideologies as the embodiment or offshoot of Gnosticism as the essence of modernity and by which “the death of the spirit is the price of progress.” Voegelin found ideologies not only abstract and persuasive (in their formal presentation) but also total and comprehensive (i.e., explanations that prophesy or predict systematic change as against partial or particular reforms). In his Autobiographical Memoirs, Voegelin added:

I want to stress that Gnosticism, as well as its history from antiquity to present, is the subject of a vastly developed science, and the idea of interpreting contemporary phenomena as Gnostic phenomena is not as original as it may look to the ignoramuses who have criticized me for it. . . .Thus before writing anything on the applicability of Gnostic categories to modern ideologies I consulted with our contemporary authorities on Gnosticism, especially with [Henri Charles] Puech in Paris and [Gilles] Quispel in Utrecht. Puech considered it a matter of course that modern ideologies are Gnostic speculations, and Quispel brought the
Gnosticism of Jung. . .to my attention.\textsuperscript{42}

A retelling of Voegelin’s analysis of Gnosticism (both ancient and modern), and as laid out in \textit{Science, Politics, and Gnosticism} as well as \textit{The New Science of Politics}, is not attempted here; rather it will suffice to offer Voegelin’s own summary of the “Gnostic attitude” generally reflective of modern ideologies. First, the Gnostic is dissatisfied with his situation. There is an experience of the world as a dangerous and alien place into which man has strayed and from which he must find his way back home to the other world of his origin. This forlornness and turmoil is concomitant with the loss of “meaning that results from the breakdown of institutions, civilizations, and ethnic cohesion” that lead to “new formulations of the meaning of existence.”\textsuperscript{43} Second, Gnostics do not find their disorientation or alienation due to any particular deficiencies in human beings so much as in the “fact that the world is poorly organized” or in the general wickedness of the world. Third, the Gnostic attitude carries the belief that deliverance is possible from the evil and irrationality of this world. In ancient forms of Gnosticism, this is accomplished through faith in the hidden God who comes to man’s aid in order to liberate him from his prison. In modern forms of Gnosticism, that faith is transmuted in an intramundane belief in self-salvation and fully human freedom.\textsuperscript{44} Fourth, this secularized faith is predicated on a belief “that the order of being will have to be changed in an historical process.” God need not be waited upon, and grace in death can be shunted aside for progressive action in the here and now. Fifth, and as an extension of this secularized faith, a change in the order of being can be accomplished by human action. Man is the vehicle of his own self-salvation. Out of their anxiety regarding the structure of existence, the Gnostic exemplars create a “second reality” which gives more assurance to them than the apprehension of the ground of being by faith and analogical reasoning affords.\textsuperscript{45} Sixth, the Gnostic presupposition of being able to alter the structure of being depends upon “the construction of a formula for self and world salvation,” as well as the designation of a prophet “who will proclaim his knowledge about the salvation of mankind.”\textsuperscript{46} What the Gnostic or ideological mindset illustrates is that apocalypse and revelation are not less characteristic of immanent than transcendent religiousness.\textsuperscript{47}

Voegelin was even more explicit than Morgenthau in making a connection between the sciences of the external world and the ideological deformation of reality. Once the assumption takes root that the methods of the natural sciences are a criterion for theoretical relevance in general, thereby subordinating theoretical relevance to methodology, then “an ideology has arisen which is called scientism.”\textsuperscript{48}

The pretense that the sciences concerning the order of man and society are not sciences, and that the subject-matter with which a science of consciousness and its order is concerned does not really exist; the decline of the science of order; the disappearance of rational criteria of order and disorder from the public scene; the abolition of the authority of reason; the rise of irrational mass movements, without resistance in the surrounding society. . .has been obscured by the ideology of scientism.\textsuperscript{49}

Contradictory doctrines arose to replace the old spiritual religion, ones authenticated by the
science of the world whose insights claim legitimacy as replacements of the old revelatory and mystical truths: scientific world views, scientific socialism, scientific race theory, and the riddle of the world are substituted.50

Gnostic ideologues are guilty of hubris and revolts against the human condition with all of its uncertainty and tension between finiteness and freedom. Both Voegelin and Morgenthau insisted on a sound philosophical anthropology (understanding of human nature) by which to judge the claims of ideology and power whether in reference to man’s ultimate ends or to the practical wisdom of the statesman. Voegelin characterized man’s quest for the open society as having “the structure of the In-Between, the Platonic metaxy, and if anything is constant . . . in history. . . . it is the language of tension between life and death. . . . perfection and imperfection. . . . between the virtues of openness toward the ground of being such as faith, love, and hope, and the vice of unfolding closure such as hybris and revolt. . . .” As hereby formulated in Voegelinian terms, the open society can never prevail within time and the world but must represent an enduring goal forever beyond the reach (but not the understanding) of man.51

It might be useful to recall at his juncture that Morgenthau, writing on philosophical consciousness, exhibited a similar concern with the limits and tension of man’s participation in a multidimensional reality. Between the cognitive impulse and the reality to be understood, “thinking exists in the tension between the darkness of not knowing and extinction from an excess of knowledge.”53 Certainly, Morgenthau appreciated what the classical philosophers found to be the tension, the dynamic movement, that designates the poles of human consciousness—the immanent-transcendent. In one of Morgenthau’s most important passages, he alluded to the fundamental experience engendering the “In-Between” in human existence.

In the middle, thinking comes to rest: the rest of creation when in the middle the tension is kept in equilibrium, the rest of lassitude and of the attrition of what is specifically human in man’s existence when consciousness dissolves the tension by dropping out of it. The rest is the end of all movement . . . in the consciousness toward the unknown. . . . In this tension, thinking bears witness to the perils to which man is exposed as a seeker after all knowledge and as a creature endowed with the will to live.54

Both Morgenthau and Voegelin affirm the spiritual impulses of human beings—i.e., whereby man experiences himself as tending beyond human imperfection toward the perfection of the divine ground that moves him.55 Yet their language of openness and tension also reveals a core dimension of realism that brings to bear the Aristotelian recognition that circumstances dictate the concrete possibilities when it comes to institutionalizing a political order as well as balancing the requirements of justice and order within and among nations.

The realism and common sense that characterized Voegelin’s work as a philosopher is equally evident in his discussion of the Gnostic nature of modernity and its representation in world affairs. Yet a cautionary word is in order insofar as Voegelin the philosopher never aspired to produce any theory of international politics, diplomacy, or foreign policy. And he
certainly kept most of his cards close to his vest with regard to partisan advocacy on global issues of his day. As he explained to numerous correspondents, to have entered into debate between conservatives and liberals, or even between realists and idealists, on wide-ranging issues would have been a philosophical derailment and a descent into the very ideological realm he found at odds with the truth of existence. To ascribe a temperament of realism to Voegelin is not to box him into any narrow academic specialization; rather it signifies a disposition to take seriously the role of human nature in politics, the conjunction of interest and power in foreign policies, the often tragic element in international relationships (i.e., the unbridgeable gulf between human aspirations and attainment), and the deficiencies of theories of progress about human perfectability whether dressed up in the garb of liberal or Marxist ideologies.

Precisely how the statesmen is to decide upon the claims of morality and power was taken up in an exchange between Voegelin and Father Thomas Clancy, the latter having found the last chapter of *The New Science of Politics* inconclusive with regard to the ethical choices available to leaders in an ideological age. Voegelin confessed to being “somewhat a pessimist” in such matters. He conceded “that the aim of Peace does not justify evil means,” though this could not be the final word about moral reasoning in politics among nations. In fact, Voegelin was not convinced that peace, *per se*, represented “an aim at all.” More often than not, peace is derivative of “a stable order, just as happiness is not an aim in itself but the concomitant result of a certain substantive state of the soul.” An understanding of human nature, coupled with the decentralization of power in a partially-anarchic global arena, permeated Voegelin’s assertion that “what one can strive for in politics is only a stable order under given historical circumstances.” And these historical circumstances, “as we know them empirically, have never permitted moral conduct on the basis of the Sermon on the Mount.”56 The statesman is caught up “in the realm of expediency, which is linked to morality insofar as the political measures should attempt to realize a maximum of good.” The moral problem persists because foreign policy involves political choices obscured by faulty perception, controlled by national interests, and complicated by multiple purposes and goals. Voegelin could not quite “see how one can get in politics beyond the minimization of evil,” a position not far removed from Morgenthau’s blunt assertions that “the political act is inevitably evil” and that “there is no escape from the evil of power regardless of what one does” in politics.57

Voegelin argued the modern Gnosticism, even with the military defeat of totalitarian enemies in the twentieth century, “has by far not spent its drive” in world politics. Even with the collapse of the Soviet empire and containment of communism in Asia, “other variants of Gnosticism, such as progressivism, positivism, and scientism, are penetrating into other areas under the title of ‘Westernization’ and development of backward countries.” And he certainly did not exempt the United States from his assessment, pointing out that “our own ‘Westernization’ is still on the increase.”58 What Voegelin described as a “Western constant,” and accentuated in both East and West during the Cold War, was “the big dream” to evangelize all humanity and to organize, politically, an earthly empire.” At the root of all ideological deformations (of existence) was the idea of an earthly future “for humanity that would unite and liberate itself by its own power.” He certainly acknowledged a difference in tactics between the manner in which Americans conceived of the establishment of the American Way of Life and the
manner in which Russians awaited the universal reign of Communism. But he also had his reservations about the crusading zeal behind the moralism in American foreign policy. *Is it possible for an American politics still dominated by the idea of the chosen people to adapt itself to a historic situation where there are no declarations or promises made to a chosen people, but simply the human condition?* Voegelin’s question, as timely today as it was a half century ago, speaks to the statesman’s task of reconciling expressions of national purpose with national interest, of determining whether America’s mission (and the nation’s innermost purposes) are fulfilled best by its own domestic example or by recreating model societies on distant shores, of sorting out if it is even possible to represent “the truth of existence” through the political actions of states.

In the final chapter of *The New Science*, Voegelin argues that Gnostic politics ultimately is self-defeating insofar as its disregard for the structure of reality leads to continuous warfare. The twentieth century provided “the oddity of continuous warfare in a time when every political society, through its representatives, professes its ardent desire for peace.” The explanation for war and conflict stems, at its philosophical root, from ideological dream worlds of secularized reality and rejection of the transcendental *realissimum* as the source of order in history and the Ground of being. Errors with regard to the structure of reality have practical consequences when the false conception is made the basis of political action. As Voegelin summarized the dilemma:

Gnostic societies and their leaders will recognize dangers to their existence when they develop, but such dangers will not be met by appropriate action in the world of reality. They will rather be met by magic operations in the dream world, such as disapproval, moral condemnation, declarations of intention, resolutions, appeals to the opinion of mankind, branding of enemies as aggressors, outlawing of war, propaganda for world peace and world government, etc.

Against abstract and universal ideological formula, at a time “when war is peace, and peace is war,” Voegelin reasserted basic rules about the reality of politics and statecraft. His definitions and rules embody the language and principles of realism with regard to war and diplomacy. They deserve to be quoted in full.

*Peace shall mean a temporary order of social relations which adequately expresses a balance of social forces.*

*The balance may be disturbed by various causes, such as population increases in one area or decreases in another one, technological developments which favor areas rich in the necessary raw materials, changes of trade routes, etc.*

*War shall mean the use of violence for the purpose of restoring a balanced order by either repressing the disturbing increase of existential force or by reordering social relations so that they will adequately express the new relative strength of existential forces.*
*Politics shall mean the attempt to restore the balance of forces or to readjust the order, by various diplomatic means, or by building up discouraging counterforces short of war. 63*

One measure of the Gnostic or ideological orientation in world affairs is that initiatives which are designed to promote peace increase the likelihood of conflict and war. If there is a disturbance to the balance of power, and these challenges to the underlying order are not met by appropriate political action in the world of reality (as opposed to “magic incantations” about goodwill and peace in our time), then the prospects increase for misunderstanding and aggression. Voegelin cites the rise of National Socialism to power in Germany and the subjugation of most of Europe with the “Gnostic chorus wailing its moral indignation at such barbarian and reactionary doings.” The philosophical problem was whether the Gnostic dreamworld had eclipsed all possibility of a rational politics, whether the “Gnostic dream had not so corroded Western society” that war was the only alternative “left for adjusting disturbances in the balance of existential forces.” The same line of reasoning applied to the war’s aftermath where, instead of restoring a balance of forces, the Allied leaders “put the Soviet army on the Elbe, surrendered China to the Communists, at the same time demobilizing Germany and Japan, and . . .demobilized our own army.” Voegelin considered this practically an unrivaled historical example where a world power “used a victory for the purpose of creating a power vacuum to its own disadvantage.” What explained this outcome?

These policies were pursued . . .on the basis of Gnostic dream assumptions about the nature of man, about a mysterious evolution of mankind toward peace and world order, about the possibility of establishing an international order in the abstract without relation to the structure of the field of existential forces, about armies being the cause of war and not the forces and constellations which build them and set them into motion. . . . 65

Some Final Thoughts

Any preoccupation with a post-national world, and all of the novel challenges that it might bring to the structure and processes of world politics, ought not overlook continuities from the past. Both Morgenthau and Voegelin would remind us that the end of power politics is not of this world. But both would also insist the confluence of interest and power in politics does not invalidate the life of the spirit, the opening of the psyche or soul to world transcendent reality, and the defense of the “open society” (in Bergsonian terms). While these two men were eminently realistic about the “necessities” and “expedience” of politics (and the animus dominandi), one should not lose sight of (and Morgenthau would likely not dissent from) the point Voegelin made in The Ecumenic Age: “The physical separation of men into a multiplicity of societies does not alter the fact that mankind has “one history by virtue of participation in the same flux of divine presence.” 66

Truly successful and rational social action is impossible without knowledge “of the eternal
laws by which man moves in the social world.” The Aristotelian truth “that man is a political animal is true forever; the truths of the natural sciences are true only until other truths have supplanted them.” Voegelin and Morgenthau remind us that political wisdom builds on two experiences—one philosophical, the other moral. The philosophical experience is doubt about the meaning of history in terms of its recurrent and unique elements. The moral experience results from the tendency of man to claim for his position in history more in terms of his moral dignity than he is entitled to. The position of the political actor is morally ambivalent, and that ambivalence, in conjunction with the logic inherent in the political act, corrupts his judgment.

The messianic ideologue, as portrayed by Voegelin, is one whose certainty of mind leads him to believe that his doctrine or manifesto cannot coexist with others, except within the realm of temporary tactics in a larger struggle the outcome of which is already determined. Gnostic movements, and the ideologies they produce, purport to a total and uniquely true explanation of the nature and direction of society such that the holder of the ideology is necessarily involved in action to lessen mercifully the period of emergence before there is a society free of conflict. Morgenthau, even though he often did not push further than treating ideologies as expressions of particular group interests (and given historical and social situations), acknowledged that ideologies make impossible rational and ethical calculations about the role of power in politics. Even if ideologies are treated as doctrinaire abstractions (or rationalizations of one sort or another), the understanding of intentions and consequences will be affected by the political expediency of those who simply cannot endure the uncertainty of knowing their place in history. The life of the soul in openness to God—“the very lightness of this fabric may prove too heavy a burden for men who lust for massively possessive existence.” In Morgenthau’s language, this is the “tendency of man to claim for his position in history more in terms of moral dignity than he is entitled to, and to grant his fellows less than is their due.” Politicians, Voegelin said, who vouchsafe the moral quality of their acts by categorical ideals flirt with a sort of demonism in having “associated the quality of a divine command to a human velleity.” And, again, from Morgenthau: “The lighthearted equation between a particular nationalism and the counsels of Providence is morally indefensible, for it is the very sin of pride against which the Greek tragedians and Biblical prophets have warned rulers and ruled.”

Neither Morgenthau nor Voegelin, however one may wish to characterize the “realism” of their political thought, believed that state centric and balance of power models would forever suffice to explain global (and destabilizing) changes underway even during their lifetime. Believing that interest is a perennial standard by which political action must be judged does not invalidate the point that “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.” It remained an open question for Voegelin and Morgenthau, as it does today, whether the division of the world into nation states (increasingly obsolescent) will be replaced by larger, or small, units “more in keeping with the technical potentialities and the moral requirements of the contemporary world.”

Undoubtedly, the deadly game of international politics will play out on a much more
complicated and multi-level chessboard with nation states challenged by populist movements—ethnic and religious groups--that take advantage of “democratization” and new technologies (particularly information technology) to demand political and economic transformation. Resource scarcity and population growth are likely to be exacerbated by the forces of global capitalism with new class struggles tied to religion and to tensions of Third World life. Asymmetry gives terrorists and cybercriminals their strength, operating as they do outside of accepted norms of international life and resorting to atrocities as a legitimate form of war.\textsuperscript{74} Traditional forms of diplomacy may not be enough to control an ongoing biotech revolution; in addition, the acceleration of technology in genetics, chemistry, optics, and computer sciences provides immense new vistas for uncontrolled weaponry. Scientific optimism at the beginning of the twentieth century left Europeans (and Americans) unprepared for the catastrophe that would soon befall them. Twenty-first century leaders and thinkers may well wish to ponder the link between technological acceleration and barbarism.\textsuperscript{75}
NOTES


28. Ibid., p. 219.
29. Ibid., p. 223.
30. Morgenthau, Politics Among Nations, p. 27.
32. Ibid., p. 53.
34. Morgenthau, Politics Among Nations, p. 90.
35. Ibid., p. 89.

40. In addition to distinguishing carefully between ancient and modern Gnosis (the modern factor encompassing the replacement of divine intervention by human action), Voegelin noted that modern ideologies encompass three distinct strands: (1) the immanentisation of Gnosis by making the ancient salvation message a human recipe of salvation; (2) the transformation of the ancient apocalypse from historical metastasis through divine intervention to the advent of a perfect realm through revolutionary action; and (3) the replacement of the ancient symbolism of the myth by the modern symbolism of scientism. See The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin, ed. Thomas Hollweck (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2007), 30: 578.
44. Ibid., pp. 10-11, 86.
46. Voegelin, Science, Politics And Gnosticism, pp. 87-88.
54. Ibid., p. 58.
61. Ibid., p. 166.
62. Ibid., p. 170.
63. Ibid., p. 171.
64. Ibid., p. 172.
65. Ibid.
72. Morgenthau, Politics Among Nations, p. 11.

73. Ibid., p. 10.