



**ideals and ★
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in america's
foreign★★★
relations★★
robert endicott
osgood ★★★★★**

**the great
transformation
of the
twentieth
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ROBERT ENDICOTT OSGOOD

*Ideals and Self-Interest
in America's Foreign Relations*

THE GREAT TRANSFORMATION
OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY



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THIS BOOK HAS BEEN PREPARED UNDER THE AUSPICES OF
THE CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF AMERICAN FOREIGN POLICY
AT THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

For

GRETCHEN

FOREWORD

THE Center for the Study of American Foreign Policy was established in 1950. Its general purpose is to contribute to a better understanding of the principles, objectives, and probable results of American foreign policy and to investigate possible alternatives to current policies in the light of these principles and objectives.

Three areas of research have thus far been mapped out: the foreign policies of American statesmen, the development and principles of United States foreign policy, and contemporary problems of United States foreign policy. Dr. Osgood's book belongs to the second area of research. Of the studies of American statesmen which are in preparation, a study by Gerald Stourzh of Benjamin Franklin's conception of foreign policy is in preparation.

HANS J. MORGENTHAU
Director

PREFACE

IN THIS book I have sought to present a thesis about America's foreign relations which will have a useful application to contemporary circumstances. The historical material is developed at considerable length in the belief that this thesis requires a rather extensive illustration and documentation if the reader is to appreciate the full meaning of its generalizations and to judge their validity with relative objectivity. While I hope that this approach will be thorough enough to avoid some of the evils of oversimplification that inevitably occur when one organizes any mass of historical detail according to a particular scheme of analysis, I have not attempted to set forth a definitive or comprehensive interpretation of any particular man or event. In my research I have relied chiefly upon published material, of which there is a vast accumulation relating to the period since the turn of the century. At the same time, from consulting those who are thoroughly familiar with all the relevant historical material, including the many unpublished manuscripts and private papers, I have reason to think that an exhaustive investigation of these sources would not significantly modify my central thesis.

In so far as *Ideals and Self-Interest in America's Foreign Relations* succeeds in presenting an interpretation of America's past foreign relations that contributes to an understanding of the problems of power and moral purpose underlying her present position in world politics, it will be due, in large measure, to the encouragement and wisdom of men who know far more than I about international relations and American foreign policy. In so far as the book fails, it will be partly due to my own limitations and partly due to the substantial limitations imposed by the inordinate complexity of the problems themselves. Where fundamental principles of international relations are concerned there are no pat answers, no unambiguous generalizations, no final solutions, but only educated guesses about cause and effect and rough approximations to the impenetrable truth.

I owe a special debt of gratitude to McGeorge Bundy, of Harvard University, for devoting such great care and understanding to this work in its original form as a doctoral dissertation; to Hans J. Morgenthau, of the University

of Chicago, whose interest in my manuscript led to its revision and publication; to Richard W. Leopold and Arthur S. Link, of Northwestern University, who gave me the benefit of their extraordinary historical scholarship; and to William Yandell Elliott, of Harvard, and Edward Mead Earle, of the Institute for Advanced Study at Princeton, who gave me discerning advice on matters of emphasis and scope. My research was made easier and more profitable by the intelligent guidance of the late Nora Cordingley, custodian of the Roosevelt Memorial Association Collection in Widener Library, Harvard University. Academic and nonacademic readers alike should be as thankful as I that my wife found time to read the manuscript with the exacting eye of a shrewd nonexpert.

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INTRODUCTION

I. THE PROBLEM OF SELF-INTEREST AND IDEALS

ACCORDING to Thucydides, Pericles proclaimed in his Funeral Oration that Athens was the school of Hellas, because only Athens obeyed the dictates of the highest morality, because "we alone do good to our neighbors not upon a calculation of interest, but in the confidence of freedom and in a frank and fearless spirit."¹ But during fifteen years of the Peloponnesian War the Athenians saw their ideal of a great movement of liberation transformed into a mere struggle for power, and when their ambassadors approached the magistrates of Melos, it was expediency, not morality, that ruled the nation.

But you and we should say what we really think, and aim only at what is possible, for we both know that into the discussion of human affairs the question of justice only enters where the pressure of necessity is equal, and that the powerful exact what they can, and the weak grant what they may

For of the Gods we believe, and of men we know that by a law of their nature wherever they can rule they will. This law was not made by us, and we are not the first to have acted upon it: we did but inherit it, and shall bequeath it to all time, and we know that you and all mankind, if you are as strong as we are, would do as we do.²

Thus Thucydides, himself the child of an age in which the imperatives of survival had darkened man's outlook, gave classic expression to the eternal conflict between ideal principles and sheer power in the service of self-interest. The conflict between ideals and self-interest is as much a part of the international life of the United States as it was of Athens. It is, in fact, a fundamental part of all human relations, whether among individuals or groups of individuals, for man's conscience is geared to ideal aspirations which his innate selfishness prevents him from attaining. Yet because man's conscience, as well as his ego, demands satisfaction, the reconciliation of ideals with self-interest is one of the central problems of all human experience and philosophical speculation. It is, of course, the kind of problem men are forever trying to solve but never solving; and yet those who would preserve the highest values of civilization cannot afford to abandon the attempt to unreasoning impulse or the blind rush of events. The problem of reconciling national self-interest with universal ideals transcending the interests of particular nations forms a central theme of this study of America's foreign relations.

A problem which involves so many intangible elements capable of so many different meanings demands, at the outset, an attempt to define terms and objectives and underlying assumptions. However, the reader should be warned that the process of definition, although essential for analytical purposes, necessarily distorts the infinite complexities of a nation's thoughts and actions by lending them a precision and logical simplicity which they could never possess in reality. The full significance of ideals and self-interest in America's foreign relations can be discovered only amid the concrete historical details of the nation's experience in world politics. The general statements in this introductory chapter are merely a rough guide for that discovery.

2. THE SOURCES OF AMERICAN CONDUCT

This book is, primarily, a historical interpretation of the evolution of the American attitude toward world politics since the turn of the century. However, in its broadest aspect it is concerned with two more general areas of inquiry, which are essential parts of this interpretation. On the one hand, it inquires into the nature of some of the underlying sources of America's international conduct as they bear upon the nation's adaptation to its status as a world power; on the other hand, it seeks to develop and apply to specific historical situations in terms of this analysis some basic principles of conduct that ought to guide the United States in its foreign relations. Both the sources and the principles of America's foreign relations are examined in terms of the relation between universal ideals and national self-interest.

With respect to the guiding principles of American conduct, this study is concerned with the conditions under which the nation can hope to reconcile its self-interest with transcendent ideals. With respect to the sources of American conduct, it analyzes the relation between ideals and self-interest in three different ways: first, the role of these two ends in shaping America's international conduct and the conduct of nations in general; secondly, the role which Americans believe these ends ought to play in international relations; and, thirdly, the role which Americans believe these ends do, as a matter of fact, play in their own conduct and the conduct of other nations.

These three ways of looking at the relation between universal ideals and national self-interest are considered as sources of America's international conduct in that they are basic ways in which Americans orient themselves to their international environment. Obviously, they are interrelated, and it is their interrelation which determines their total significance in shaping the course of America's foreign relations.

Stated abstractly, this proposition may seem obscure, but in practice we com-

monly recognize its truth in the sphere of personal relations. Thus we recognize that there is a certain relationship between a man's estimate of human nature, the quality of his ideal aspirations, and his conduct toward his fellowmen. For example, if a man believes that human beings are basically selfish and mean, then he might well conclude that reform has very narrow limits and that it behooves him to bend his efforts toward furthering his own interests lest he lose out in the competition for survival. But if, on the other hand, a man believes that his fellowmen are basically unselfish and good, then he will expect them to respond to appeals of reason and moral suasion, and duty beckons him to strive toward the finest aspirations the imagination can construct. It need hardly be remarked that what a man believes to be the facts of human nature may be just as important as the actual facts themselves. At the same time, we expect a stable individual to hold beliefs that correspond fairly closely to reality; otherwise, he will be constantly acting upon unrealistic expectations and committing himself to aspirations which are bound to be disappointing.

In a general way, the same considerations apply to national conduct. If the estimate which Americans make of the existing ends and motives of nations—of their ability, for example, to transcend their selfish interests for the sake of ideal principles—does not bear a certain correspondence to the actual ends and motives of nations, including their own, then one might say that the American people were maladjusted with respect to their international environment—maladjusted, that is, in the same sense as one who is out of harmony with his environment from failure to reach a satisfactory and stable adjustment between his desires and his condition of life. For unrealistic expectations concerning human conduct encourage extravagant aspirations; and among nations, as among individuals, the result is apt to be disillusionment and an erratic fluctuation from one extreme in conduct to another. A maladjusted nation is not likely to achieve its international ends; for, in the long run, it will lack the poise and maturity to reconcile its self-interest with its ideals.

It should be stated here that the attribution of thought and behavior to nations is simply a convenient manner of speaking about significant ways in which large numbers of individual citizens think about their nation with respect to other nations. The basic unit of analysis here is not any mystical "group person" but the individual citizen as he orients himself to his international environment by identifying himself with his nation-state and projecting upon this personified group of individuals his own thoughts and emotions.

It should also be stated that this study is not concerned with the relation

between an individual and his nation. How individuals reconcile their private interests with their devotion to the nation is another matter and an important one, but in an age in which the value of patriotism is taken for granted and one of the central features of human relations is the close personal identification of individuals with their national groups, it is even more important to examine the ways in which citizens think about their own nation's conduct in relation to international society.

3. SELF-INTEREST AND IDEALS DEFINED

It should not be supposed that the analysis of the role of ideals and national self-interest as sources of America's international conduct and the problem of reconciling these two ends in America's foreign relations can be approached with anything like mechanical precision or scientific objectivity. Obviously, these ends are not simple, tangible entities with self-evident meanings. Nevertheless, the very vagueness of the terms makes it necessary, for the sake of clarity in the body of the historical interpretation that follows this introduction, to give national self-interest and universal ideals more exact meanings than they possess in ordinary usage.

National self-interest is understood to mean a state of affairs valued solely for its benefit to the nation. The motive of national egoism, which leads men to seek this end, is marked by the disposition to concern oneself solely with the welfare of one's own nation; it is self-love transferred to the national group. An ideal is a standard of conduct or a state of affairs worthy of achievement by virtue of its universal moral value. The motive of national idealism is the disposition to concern oneself with moral values that transcend the nation's selfish interests; it springs from selflessness and love.*

Of course, these ends and motives are not nearly so distinct as their definitions imply. In neither personal nor international relations does one find pure idealism or pure self-interest but only a strange mingling of ambiguous and contradictory ends and motives. One can never be sure whether selfishness belies some subtle compassion or whether altruism is the guise of a secret anticipation of self-satisfaction or the approbation of others. And even if idealism or egoism were pure and distinct, one would never find either of them perfectly embodied in a single individual—certainly never in an entire nation. Indeed the popular view encourages no such expectation but rather

* Throughout this study an end is defined as the object, result, or effect aimed at; it is a state of affairs one seeks. A motive is defined as a consideration, idea, need, or emotion that induces a choice or excites the will; it is a state of mind one experiences. Obviously, ends and motives are intermingled and indistinct; nevertheless, as the following discussion and the body of the historical narrative should show, an analysis of national conduct must take both ends and motives into account.

holds that individuals should achieve some sort of equilibrium between the two qualities. It is, in fact, the fusion of these ends and motives in men's minds that creates the really significant consequences in personal relations and, more particularly, in the international relations with which this essay is concerned.

Nevertheless, the lack of rigid distinctions between these two basic categories of ends and motives does not obviate the fact that there are basic differences; and for the purposes of analysis it is necessary not only to define ideals and self-interest but also to distinguish among different kinds of idealistic and self-interested ends and motives, for it is quite misleading to speak of either category as though it referred to a uniform entity. The following elaboration of ends and motives does not pretend to be exhaustive or universally applicable. It is intended simply as a useful scheme for generalizing the international ends and motives of Americans, while, at the same time, taking account of the fact that all modern nationalism has a good deal in common.

Basic to all kinds of national self-interest is survival or self-preservation, for upon national survival depends the achievement of all other self-interested ends. The exact nature of the national self that must be preserved at all costs is open to various interpretations, but, above all, it is the nation's territorial integrity, political independence, and fundamental governmental institutions. National security is a related but broader end, since it embraces not only survival but the nation's ability to survive. Security, in its broadest sense, is subjective; it is an absence of fear. The distinguishing motives associated with national self-preservation are the will to live and the fear of death.

One of the most commonly avowed and vaguest kinds of national self-interest is that nebulous catch-all "vital interests," which includes a wide range of ends believed to be more or less important for the nation's welfare—and there may be considerable disagreement about the importance of some vital interests—but not essential for its survival. In this category one might place equal commercial opportunity, the protection of citizens and property outside the nation's territorial limits, or the control of immigration.

Another important category of national self-interest might be called self-sufficiency, or the conduct of foreign relations without reference to other nations or to matters beyond unilateral national control. When self-sufficiency is motivated by a passive egoism, by an urge to withdraw and a longing to be left alone, it is commonly known as isolation. To be sure, isolationism may also spring, in part, from idealistic motives, but historically its determining aspect has always been a conception of national self-interest. On the other hand, self-sufficiency may be motivated by a more aggressive egoism, by an

urge to assert the national will on one's own nation's terms without regard for the will of other nations. This state of affairs is also called isolation in common usage, but its real significance might better be distinguished from the passive kind of isolation by noting that it is sought out of an urge for national self-assertion and not simply out of a passive yearning for withdrawal.

In any analysis of national ends and motives one must also take into account the desire for national prestige. Prestige includes national honor; that is, the respect of other nations for one's own nation by virtue of its reputation as a proud and self-reliant state. But it may also refer to the nation's reputation for virtue, to the admiration of other nations for one's own nation's moral excellence. The egoism in the pursuit of this form of prestige is more subtle; certainly it consists in a peculiar kind of vanity when it leads a nation to covet the approbation of other nations in order that it may exercise over them the power of "moral force." Admittedly, this is a sublimated form of self-interest, which must be sustained, in part, by genuine idealism; but it is self-interest nevertheless, and it has played a vital part in America's recurring assertions of moral purpose.

Finally, there is national aggrandizement or the increase of national power, wealth, or prestige. This kind of self-interest is readily identifiable by virtue of the vehement motives which lead to its pursuit: ambition, militancy, the urge to dominate, the will-to-power.

The ideal ends with which this study is concerned are by no means shared by all nations. They are, in fact, either largely unknown or seriously challenged by a great portion of humanity. Nevertheless, considering the diversity of social and cultural traditions in this world, it is remarkable to what extent modern nations profess their allegiance to these ideals, either from conviction or from expediency. I refer to the ideals derived from the Christian-liberal-humanitarian tradition of Western civilization.

According to these ideals, the ultimate moral value is the innate dignity and worth of every human being. From this principle it follows that every individual has certain inalienable rights of self-protection and self-expression so that he may fulfil his potentialities as a rational being. It also follows that he has certain obligations to respect the rights and dignity of other individuals by treating them as ends and never as means so that they too may fulfil their potentialities. In practice, the realization of these ideals may require various degrees of subordination of the individual to a larger group, but always the ultimate moral standard remains the individual's welfare. Idealists must recognize as a basic condition for the realization of the liberal and humane values the creation of a brotherhood of mankind in which all men, regardless of physiological, social, religious, or political distinctions, will have equal partner-