

Realism, emotion, and dynamic allegiances in global politics

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This article appeals to classical realism for new insights into the role emotions play in shifting the terrain of political allegiance in global politics. Although undetected in readings emphasizing rational statecraft, realists such as Hans Morgenthau and Reinhold Niebuhr were centrally concerned with human emotions and their political impact. While following the intellectual currents of their time in regarding emotions as fixed impulses, these realists' deep appreciation for the contingencies of history also led them to cast emotions as socially conditioned mechanisms of adaptation. By revisiting the texts of classical realism, this paper develops a fresh account of how emotion responds to and engenders change in the social world – in particular, change in the location of political allegiances. I then show how Morgenthau and Niebuhr applied these ideas not only to the nation-state but also to the most vexing *transnational* phenomena of their time – communism and liberal internationalism. In conclusion, the paper speculates that these reflections on dynamic allegiances at the transnational level offer realists and other international relation theorists insight into the emotional appeal, adaptability, and organizational complexity of contemporary non-state movements and actors.

Keywords: emotion; classical realism; political allegiance; communism; transnational movements.

Global politics in the 21st century is revealing new sites and mechanisms of political allegiance. Alongside the European Union and other formal institutions, informal collectivities – such as social movements and terrorist networks – are exerting new pressures in sometimes unexpected places. These globally dispersed communities involve modes of political allegiance that confound conventional levels of analysis. Transnational advocacy networks may, for example, maintain fidelity to states, supranational authorities, and local supporters all at once. And terrorist and other radical organizations may not only seek support from states but also tap wide audiences of sympathetic followers connected through new media technologies. Such allegiances also reveal peculiar psychological, social,

and cultural underpinnings: instead of unifying ideologies, norms, or cultural identities, informal groups such as protest movements and terrorist organizations are often rooted in looser social networks and ephemeral patterns of sentiment. Human emotions seem to be fuelling complex global allegiances across levels of analysis and without the guiding work of identity. Scholars of international relations (IR) need to learn more about how such processes are changing the landscape of global politics.

To that end, this article finds unexpected insights into the tradition of classical realism, especially the writings of Hans Morgenthau and Reinhold Niebuhr.¹ Seeking to complement the more narrow focus of structural realism, various scholars have returned to the core insights of early realists in IR (Petersen 1999; Bain 2000; Koskenniemi 2002; Craig 2003; Lebow 2003; Williams 2005, 2007; Scheuerman 2009, 2010; Schuett 2012; Levine 2013). However, as Solomon (2012) has recently noted, these interventions have yet to appreciate the importance of love and other emotions in the classical realist assessment of power. New syntheses of realism have variously sought to weed out a theory of human nature deemed overly deterministic (Guzzini 1998; Donnelly 2000), emphasize the rationalist orthodoxy at realism's core (Freyberg-Inan 2006), and rehabilitate early realists' hidden commitment to moral reflection (Williams 2004; Steele 2007). Meanwhile, the wider ascendancy of constructivism in IR theory has fuelled skepticism toward all theories of human nature by treating biological aspects of political behavior as necessarily invested in deterministic modes of explanation.² The result is an assumption that a defensible realism must purge rather than renegotiate its engagement with emotion.³

Challenging this commonplace view, I return to Morgenthau and Niebuhr to recover resources for the study of emotion in IR. Recognizing that emotions are a neglected dimension of global politics, IR scholars have reached beyond conventional theories to a variety of extra-disciplinary resources – including neuroscience, sociology, social psychology, and cultural

¹ I focus on Morgenthau and Niebuhr because they most explicitly connect historical and political analysis to assumptions concerning the biological and psychological elements of human agency. For wider-ranging commentary on writings by E. H. Carr, John Herz, and other mid-century realists, see especially the works by Donnelly, Guzzini, and Scheuerman cited in this paragraph.

² Sterling-Folker rightly argues that realists need to reclaim their controversial concern for human biology but with attention to the variability of its effects in the social world (2002, 95–7). I argue that elements of this orientation already exist in the work of Morgenthau and Niebuhr.

³ For exceptions that critically engage with the emotional dimensions in the realist canon, see: Crawford (2009), Lebow (2003), and Solomon (2012).

theory – in order to make sense of what emotions are and how they affect political behavior (Ross 2006, 2014; Bially Mattern, 2011; Bleiker and Hutchison 2008; Crawford 2009; Mercer 2010; Hall 2011; Sasley 2011). In the meantime, under our noses lies a theoretical tradition – political realism – whose long-standing concern for evil, fear, and tragedy indicates a potentially bountiful source for thinking about human emotion and its role in international politics. Niebuhr attributed the dangers of imperialism and nationalism to the ubiquitous human tendency toward ‘pride’. Morgenthau, in his 1946 book *Scientific Man Versus Power Politics*, famously spoke of an insatiable *animus dominandi* that fuelled the excesses of power politics. And, while his *Politics Among Nations* is often interpreted as a treatise on the need for hard-nosed and level-headed statesmanship,⁴ there is good reason to treat that text as an attempt to identify, negotiate, and manage the political effects of the emotional impulses exposed in *Scientific Man*. *Politics* thus describes nationalism as a ‘political mysticism’ inclined to excess and attributes the limitless ambitions of imperialism to the ‘lust for power’ (1967, 155, 53). These classical realists argued that the tragic recurrence of war during the first half of the 20th century could only be explained by powerful affective forces; far from cool-headed rationalists, they were profoundly attuned to the volatile politics of emotion.

Classical realist reflections on emotion were more nuanced than later critics would suggest and can offer some surprisingly timely lessons for current efforts to theorize emotions in IR. While Morgenthau and Niebuhr often spoke in sweeping terms of ‘passions’, ‘impulses’, and ‘instincts’, they did not assimilate these generalized descriptions into a strictly deterministic account of emotional behavior. Both regarded the capacity to have emotions, and the psychological need for certain forms of emotional fulfillment, as universal, but treated their manifestations as products of historical and social context. Emotions, in this view, are socially constructed biological forces. Moreover, these classical realists found at the heart of human emotion an intimate relationship to social and political change. To be sure, Niebuhr and Morgenthau attributed to emotions certain recurrent patterns of behavior, such as nationalist pride and the desire for prestige. But both also offered a more nuanced understanding of the shifting intensity and content of emotional responses across time and space. At the heart of their theorizations of nationalism, for example, lies an account of emotions as the fulcrum on which the psychological needs of individuals pivot onto nation-states as surrogate sites of fulfillment. Emotions are not simply repetitive impulses

⁴ Indeed, he announces in the first chapter that, while ‘irrational elements’ of foreign policy are worthy of study, the specific purpose of the book is to explore rational statecraft (1967, 7).

locked on to the status quo but engines of adaptation that shift the location and intensity of political allegiance.

Classical realist texts can thus supply the study of emotion in IR some important lessons about how, exactly, emotions transform the social and political relations they inhabit. Morgenthau and Niebuhr offer more than just the bare assertion that emotions matter – indeed, it would not have occurred to either theorist that they might not. My analysis highlights two principal contributions. The first is a response to long-standing worries in IR about the misattribution of psychological characteristics to the state (Wendt 2004). I argue that, unencumbered by the levels of analysis schema, early realists treated the state as the synthetic product of individual psychological needs and expressions. To regard the emotions of individuals as expressed in the ambitions and desires of the state or other corporate body was not the fuzzy logic of an over-reaching ‘first-image’ theory; that organic conceptualization was instead the product of a fundamental aversion to a strict ontological separation between the psychological and the social. The work of these early realists admittedly offers no specific theory of the psychological, social, or neuro-corporeal mechanisms by which emotional expressions propagate through social interaction – topics that are now being studied more closely in IR (Bially Mattern, 2011; Hall 2011, 2012; Sasley 2011; Ross 2014). Their organic approach does, however, serve as a useful and timely reminder that segregating psychological and social processes limits our ability to understand the complexity of emotional dimensions of political life.

The second major contribution I take from Morgenthau and Niebuhr concerns the intimate relationship between emotion and change, particularly as it effects the location of political allegiance. Extending earlier insights into the centrality of change in the tradition of political realism (e.g. Walker 1987), I suggest that part of the reason classical realists were compelled to take contingency seriously was their prior appreciation for the creative role emotions play in human interaction. Whereas theories deriving from social psychology have helped to show how emotions modulate individuals’ identification with social groups (Mercer 1995; Sasley 2011), they have had less to say about how emotions, as ambiguous and flexible expressions, tend also to modify the terrain of allegiances in which individuals participate from one historical moment to the next. And theories borrowing from evolutionary biology have highlighted gradual processes of environmental selection (Rosen 2005) but not the more episodic forms of emotional adjustment affecting the beliefs, desires, and personalities of social actors. In the writings of Morgenthau and Niebuhr, I find an account more attuned to the suppleness of emotions and their potential to modify political allegiances. Contrary to those who regard state-centrism as a

necessary feature of realist analysis (Mearsheimer 2006), classical realism was guided more by changing historical context than fixed ontological blueprints. Even as it affirmed the primacy of the nation-state, classical realism pushed beyond it to conceptualize the role of emotion in creating a shifting field of transnational allegiances. I argue that Niebuhr and, especially, Morgenthau detected emotional processes at the heart of the most vexing transnational movements of their time – communism and liberal internationalism. Both recognized not only that the state confronted transnational competitors but also that human emotion was partly responsible for engendering these new sites of authority and allegiance.

I develop these ideas as follows. In Section I, I explain how and why early realists can be understood as theorizing ‘emotion’ – notwithstanding their tendency to use generalized terms such as ‘impulses’ rather than the more precise cognitivist terminology now governing the study of emotion. Section II shows that Niebuhr and Morgenthau often treated emotions as more dynamic and socially conditioned than the fixed motives associated with deterministic theories of human nature. It then explains the organic relationship these realists saw between the individual and the state and the dynamic role they attributed to emotions in transposing individuals’ allegiances onto that particular corporate entity. In Section III, I argue that early realists, while acknowledging the state as the primary locus of emotional energy in the 20th century, also paid homage to its transnational rivals. I show, in particular, that their writings contain a suggestive account of the emotional resonance and organizational complexity of liberalism and communism as global movements. Section IV briefly discusses the relevance of these insights for thinking about the emotional dimensions of contemporary transnational phenomena such as terrorist and advocacy networks.

Emotion in classical realism

The classical realist account of emotion is underappreciated in IR theory for at least two reasons. The first, already noted in work on Morgenthau’s political psychology (Schuett 2007; Solomon 2012), is Kenneth Waltz’s influential dismissal of allegedly reductionist ‘first image’ theories (Waltz 1959). As long as realism focused on an unchanging impulse to aggression, he argued, it was blinded from the real causes of state behavior – namely, structural features of the international states-system. A second, related impediment is that early realists used a vocabulary of human social psychology not immediately recognizable to subsequent generations. Whereas late-20th century discussions of emotion tend to focus on the cognitive footprint of distinctive emotions such as anger, fear, or grief,

these classical realists in IR spoke in broader terms of ‘emotions’, ‘passions’, ‘impulses’, ‘vitalities’, and ‘instincts’. Indeed, these two problems are interconnected: part of the reason Waltz and other structural realists were unsatisfied with first image theories is that these appeared to them to rely on unchanging and untestable generalizations about human psychology. Against the backdrop of these concerns, this section historicizes the classical realist account of emotional ‘impulses’ and explain how it might be placed into conversation with more contemporary approaches.

As realists reflected on the limits of human psychology in IR, they drew on wide-ranging and well-established intellectual sources. First, early realists appealed to Friedrich Meinecke and an earlier generation of German historians, who attributed to the modern state and its leaders a quasi-spiritual tendency to strive for power.⁵ For these theorists of *Realpolitik*, the state was not just a pragmatic collection of institutions but also an organism, with its own normative value and its own needs for spiritual and historical expression (Iggers 1983; Palan and Blair 1993; Cheah 2002). Second, classical realists wrote not long after the fledgling disciplines of sociology and psychology had cited human passion as a key cause of suicide, crowds, and other anti-social behaviors within the state (Hobsbawm 1989, 272–4). As scholars in these fields examined the psychological ills of society, early accounts of international politics noted a corollary impact of emotion on state behavior. Whereas evolutionary theories held that war would progressively give way to peace, a counter-discourse maintained that ‘compulsive feelings and elemental desires’ made war a permanent feature of human biology (Crook 1994, 130). Finally, as Schuett (2007) has documented, the Freudian conceptualization of human sexual drives provided an important reference point, especially for Morgenthau’s ‘lust for power’. At the end of the 19th century, historians, sociologists, and psychologists routinely spoke of the destructive passions contributing to social ills; by the middle of the 20th, realists had cobbled these ideas together into a distinctly emotional theory of IR.

It was on this intellectual canvas that Niebuhr, Morgenthau, and other early realists painted human emotion as a key factor sustaining group conflict at the international level. In virtually all of his writings, Niebuhr emphasized the ubiquity of ‘pride’ as the fount of all evil. Because man is subject to the insecurity of worldly existence, ‘he seeks to overcome his insecurity by a will-to-power which overreaches the limits of human creatureliness’. The result, Niebuhr argues, is that all human endeavors

⁵ Ludwig August von Rochau, the first to use the term *Realpolitik*, saw it as ‘an antidote to the illusions that had proved so debilitating to an earlier generation of German liberals’ (Sheehan 1989, 854).

‘become infected with the sin of pride’ (1996, 179). Similarly, Morgenthau argues in *Scientific Man* that human beings are driven by not only selfishness but also the mystical pursuit of power for power’s sake: the *animus dominandi* (1946, 192). Here, Morgenthau echoes an idea already present in Meinecke’s *Die Idee der Staatsräson*, which had declared *raison d’état* to consist of a twofold ‘aboriginal animal impulse’ to pursue power: one part directed toward securing the necessities of life and the other toward the acquisition of power in itself as an end and a source of enjoyment (1957, 4). In an era of total war, the state had become prone to excessive pursuits of power that seemed inexplicable without some quasi-mystical account of emotion.

This intellectual context suggests that the realist doctrine of human nature was not so much a science of emotion as a rhetorical challenge to liberal optimism. It is true that early realists tended to aggregate emotions under loosely defined umbrella terms. Niebuhr in particular offered a highly formalistic account of pride that, like the Pauline tradition from which he draws, treats all expressions of evil as products of a permanent and unchanging human propensity to sin: since sin is the attempt to suppress the ubiquity of sin, all transgressions point back to a bottomless wellspring of negative impulses. Although both Niebuhr and Morgenthau reflected on individual emotions – Niebuhr, for example, explored the political importance of guilt and other emotions associated with forgiveness (1935, 78, 82), and Morgenthau offered a suggestive account of the relationship between love and power (1962) – they generally remain at higher levels of abstraction without detailing the psychological profiles of specific responses such as anger, anxiety, or fear. But because realists were above all concerned with exposing liberalism’s narrow psychology and naïve politics, these seeming omissions were less pressing than they seem today.

The abstract conceptualization of emotion in classical realism represents both a liability and an opportunity. On the one hand, the realist account generally neglects to trace specific pathways through which emotions affect decision making or alter collective political behavior. Therefore, focused on a critique of the moral psychologies behind liberalism, realists omit consideration of how particular emotions might be tied to specific behaviors of concern. On the other hand, the more abstract treatment of emotion avoids the pitfall of attributing autonomy to responses that are in fact highly interconnected. Because classical realists were writing at a time when the cognitive revolution had not dominated the study of human emotion, they were not only less compelled to trace the cognitive profile of individual emotions but also more attuned to the fluid interplay among them. As Solomon has argued recently, Morgenthau’s reflection on the intimate connection between love, power, and loneliness demonstrates the fundamental interconnectedness of human emotions (2012, 221). Early realists in IR

described human emotion as ‘impulses’ and ‘energies’ not just because they lacked the instruments to study individual responses in their specificity but also because they appreciated its fluidity.

In abstaining from treating emotions individually, early realist accounts converge with recent findings on the complex and non-conscious genesis of human emotion. Through new technologies in neural scanning, research in neuroscience is finding that an emotion is a product of an original assemblage of neural processes rather than some discrete control center in the brain.⁶ The phenomenology of emotional experience finds a high level of interconnectedness between different emotions because each seemingly distinct emotion comprises an ever-shifting mixture of neural and corporeal ingredients from adjacent emotional capabilities. This more fluid account of interconnectedness echoes the 19th-century theory of William James, who warned against treating emotions as ‘absolutely individual things’ (James 1950, 449). The seemingly antiquated vocabulary of ‘impulses’ and ‘vitalities’ in the work of Morgenthau and Niebuhr may not help in developing theories of single emotions, but it can provide a conceptual platform from which to explore where and how their interconnectedness matters in the study of global politics.

Thus, to speak of classical realism as offering an account of ‘emotion’ requires adopting a broad definition of that term. ‘Emotion’ is now often used to refer to affective responses, such as anger, fear, joy, or grief, with distinct cognitive profiles and socially recognizable expressions. Emotions are often distinguished from ‘feelings’, a person’s subjective consciousness of some excitation or response. Niebuhr and Morgenthau use the terms ‘emotion’, ‘impulse’, and ‘passion’ as generic, umbrella terms for non-conscious dimensions of affective experience. These terms are closer to what contemporary cultural theorists term ‘affect’: the non-conscious, pre-cognitive, and embodied basis of human thought and action.⁷ Affect, in this view, is both rooted in biological capabilities but also socially constructed and transmissible. When I talk about classical realist accounts of ‘emotion’, then, I mean a spectrum of non-conscious psychological desires and expressions affecting and affected by social interaction. Because these emotions lie outside the full control of reflective reason, they are either dismissed or demonized by liberal models that presume the autonomy and sufficiency of reasoned deliberation.

Yet neither Niebuhr nor Morgenthau treats emotions merely as negations of ‘reason’. To be sure, both often allude to the ‘irrational’ or ‘non-rational’

⁶ See my discussion in the first two chapters of *Mixed Emotions* (Ross 2014).

⁷ Recent work in cultural theory builds on the account of French social theorist Gilles Deleuze. See, for example, Connolly (2002), Ross (2006), and the essays in Gregg (2010).

dimensions of human nature (Morgenthau 1946, 153–67 and 1967, 7; Niebuhr 1996, 123). And Niebuhr writes of the uncontrollable impulses impervious to intellectual controls (1996, 61). Yet, both also offer more nuanced explanations of the interconnectedness of ‘passion’ and ‘reason’ commensurate with contemporary research on the affective dimensions of rationality.⁸ Morgenthau’s *animus dominandi*, for example, seems to represent a primordial impulse capable of determining human behavior. However, bound to a critique of liberal rationalism, the idea also suggests the integration of emotion into other dimensions of human agency. The social and psychological transformations of modernity had, Morgenthau thought, allowed passions to become concealed: ‘In the midst of this upheaval, the emotional forces that had been satisfied by religion and metaphysics found in “scientific truth” a “substitute”’ (1946, 160–1). The era of ‘scientific man’ was thus founded on the fiction that reason might operate independently of passion. Declaring sympathy with William James, Morgenthau argues in *Scientific Man* that reason ‘is carried by the irrational forces of interest and emotion to where those forces want it to move, regardless of what the inner logic of abstract reason would require’ (1946, 155). Rational deliberation can never be insulated from the sentiments and inclinations that sustain it.

Niebuhr too rejected the dualism of reason and emotion. Beginning with *Moral Man and Immoral Society* (1932), he argues that Kant and other ‘moralists’ overestimate the autonomy of reason and misunderstand the relationship between mind and body.⁹ Kantian ethics involves a one-sided understanding of moral law, as Niebuhr puts it: ‘Reason may provide the law but does not, of itself, furnish the reverence’ (1960, 37). For Niebuhr, it is telling that even the key architect of secular morality erected his ethical maxims on the foundation of a ‘pietistic religious worldview’ (1960, 58). Later texts extend the critique, arguing that Kant was mistaken to associate reasoned reflection with morality and single out passion as the root of all evil (1996, 119 and 1935, 208). Drawing from Augustine, Niebuhr argues that the self is not a mind fending off sensible inclinations but a synthetic unity of mind and body (1953, 121 and 2008, 83). And therefore, both negative emotions (e.g. pride and anxiety) and positive ones (e.g. love and forgiveness) involve an irreducible combination of reason and impulse.

⁸ Most contemporary research on emotion in both cognitive psychology and neuroscience suggests that emotion comprises a mode of rationality rather than a rival faculty (Damasio 1994; de Sousa 1987). In IR, see also Mercer’s discussion of these ideas (2005).

⁹ Niebuhr’s criticisms echo the most radical counter-philosophies of his time, including those of Nietzsche, Freud, and Bergson. And yet he argues that all had managed only to invert the priority of reason and passion while preserving the dualism between them (1996, 34, 40–3).

Emotion, context, and change

While Morgenthau and Niebuhr often lapsed into deterministic descriptions of human emotion, both also regarded the latter as intimately bound to social and historical context. Niebuhr argues, for example, that even the most primal impulse is ‘altered because of its incorporation into the human psyche’ and ‘modified, extended, repressed, and combined with other impulses in countless variations’ (Niebuhr 1996, 40, 55). His later writings, moreover, abandon the concern for a core impulse responsible for war in favor of a critique of social manifestations of pride, its corollary emotions, and its remedies. Niebuhr begins to see scientific fascination with ‘aggressiveness’ as itself another expression of pride – part of a liberal pretension to identify and contain the exact source of irrational violence (2008, 123). Understanding the biological elements of human agency is important, but ‘aggressiveness is compounded of spiritual, historical, social, and cultural forces, which cannot be measured by our computations taken from biology’. Passions, in this account, are biologically rooted but supple responses that vary according to social conditions.

Morgenthau and Niebuhr show that, while the disposition to have emotions is permanent and universal, how and when we express them varies across space and time. Thus, for Morgenthau, national morale decreases with military or diplomatic failures; demands for prestige increase when populations feel insecure (1967, 130, 79). For Niebuhr, the impulse to act selfishly is exacerbated by virulent forms of nationalism, but then mitigated wherever forgiveness, irony, and guilt are strong. Basic impulses such as aggression are, he argues, ‘informed by... manias, illusions, historic aberrations and confusions’ (2008, 60). Niebuhr thus rejects not only the opposition between passion and reason but also that between nature and culture. Isolating a simple impulse of aggression is too easy, he thinks, for it tells us so little about the historical contexts in which human beings express emotion in practice. Not every social environment is uniformly disposed to strong emotions. For example, post-WWII America – with newly found power and a messianic creed – offered an especially hospitable environment for pride. Like Augustine and Nietzsche before them, these classical realists saw the *capacity* for emotion as universal but did not connect this assumption to a deterministic account of how human beings behave in every social setting.

For these classical realists, emotions are social mechanisms that help people adapt to changing environments. Love, which these authors regard as both an emotion and a principled belief, offers an illustration. In the Christian tradition, Niebuhr explains, the ‘loving will’ always incorporates ‘the impulses and emotions in nature through which the self is organically related to other life’ (1935, 210). Love is thus central to a person’s social

relations with others. Solomon argues that love for Morgenthau is the motivational basis for a person's engagements beyond the self (2012, 208, 211–2). Love is intimately connected to power because both are modes of social engagement; the lust for power is, like love, a relational rather than individual emotion (Morgenthau 1946, 192–3). Both emotions are centrally implicated in inspiring and regulating social interaction; they are private feeling-states but also conduits of social allegiance and antipathy.

Emotions are also affected in turn by the social encounters they enable. The experience of expressing emotion in social contexts can diminish, augment, or transform those emotions over time. Both Niebuhr and Morgenthau thus regard love as a response conditioned by the experiences of its subject. Niebuhr explains that expressions of love are the product of both an individual's 'socio-spiritual inheritance' and 'concatenations of circumstance in which the pressure of events endows the individual with powers not ordinarily his own' (1935, 215). For Morgenthau too, love adapts itself according to social experience: because no other can perfectly match a person's affections, he explains, the desire to overcome loneliness through love is invariably thwarted. The result is an experience of frustration that finds compensation in the pursuit of power over others (Morgenthau 1962, 247–8).¹⁰ As Solomon notes, Morgenthau treats the emotions of loneliness, love, and frustration as intimately connected (2012, 221). Love is thus modulated and transformed by the relative degree of success a person enjoys in its pursuit. An emotion such as love is not a fixed impulse but a malleable psycho-social need – expanding, contracting, and transforming according to social experience.

In these realist accounts, emotions are intimately connected to the contingency of political life. Folk psychology tells us that emotions are mere impulses consigning a person to immature forms of behavior: those who listen to emotion rather than reason give themselves over to primitive and repetitive drives. For Morgenthau and Niebuhr, this moral psychology is reversed, with emotions supplying some of the contingency that political realism must navigate. Political realism, in this view, is centrally preoccupied with the task of managing this indeterminacy through precarious practices such as the balance of power. Morgenthau's 'policy of prestige' is subject to special volatility partly because it involved unpredictable emotions, such as trust, love, humiliation, and awe.¹¹ In *Politics*, he stresses the need for moderation in the pursuit of prestige precisely because the phenomenon is so

¹⁰ Niebuhr agrees that 'pure love' cannot be realized by human beings but then regards faith as its primary site of 'displacement' (1996, 75).

¹¹ Morgenthau mentions explicitly the trust, love, and humiliation involved in prestige (1967, 27, 76). Throughout Chapter 6 of *Politics*, he describes the policy as capable of

prone to both excess and neglect (1967, 78–9). Dictators invest too heavily in prestige, while leaders in the liberal West underestimate its potential. Following Khrushchev's September 1959 visit to the United States, Morgenthau wrote that the event, ostensibly designed to extract military-strategic concessions, had instead given the Soviet Union unexpected reputational benefits (1962, 188–9). The gap between strategic intentions and historical outcomes seems to result partly from the contingency of emotional politics: politics is least predictable where it involves the aspirations and anxieties of social groups and their leaders.¹²

Morgenthau and Niebuhr saw that, where social actors confront changing circumstances and novel challenges, emotion helps to generate a suitable response. In this way, they affirmed affinities between emotion and the capacity for creativity, an association that enjoyed considerable intellectual support in the early 20th century.¹³ Niebuhr, for example, notes that anxiety is both the 'precondition of sin' (since it gives rise to the desire for pride) and the 'basis of all human creativity' (1996, 179). As we seek ideologies and principles from which to safely inhabit a world of 'contingency', we are inspired first by the anxiety such contingency instills within us (1996, 183–5). For Morgenthau, a person's lust for power is different from her or his intellectual beliefs by virtue of its *limitless* quality: 'The satisfaction of one demand will', he argues, 'stimulate the will to power to ever expanding claims' (1946, 194). Because the lust for power is an insatiable wellspring of energy, it becomes invaluable in supporting ever new attempts to achieve security. Of course, emotions may or may not succeed in this role; for both Morgenthau and Niebuhr, they are always at risk of overcompensating for the provocations to which they respond.¹⁴ Successful or not, emotions often serve as engines of innovation and adaptation in a world of complex human interactions.

The special role of emotion in facilitating adaptation is evident in the classical realist account of nationalism and political allegiance within the

changing images, but the mechanism for 'impressing' such perceptual changes is not only cognitive but expressive and symbolic (diplomatic ceremonies and shows of military force).

¹² As another example, he describes national morale as an especially 'fleeting element' in the estimation of power (1967, 147).

¹³ Henri Bergson, William James, and Théodule Ribot all affirmed this connection (Ribot 1906; Bergson 1935; James 1977). For contemporary discussions, see Joas (1996) and Ross (2014).

¹⁴ It is interesting that Morgenthau cites approvingly Walter Cannon's *Wisdom of the Body*, since Cannon's research offered physiological evidence that emotions serve to restore the body's equilibrium after some stimulus or disruption (1967, 162). Like Cannon, Morgenthau regards emotions as vehicles of restoring balance or homeostasis (Cannon 1939, 227–9); unlike Cannon, however, he attributes to love and power an insatiability that unsettles human life even as it seeks to secure it.

state. Morgenthau remarks in *Scientific Man* that the nation-state had become 'the most exalted object of loyalty' for individuals in the secular world (1946, 197). Both he and Niebuhr regarded nationalism as an especially intense and disruptive concentration of emotional allegiances. Niebuhr laments in *Moral Man*, for example, that outsiders become demonized as the national community claims moral attention. By intensifying emotional solidarity, a national community changes the scope and intensity of obligation. Belligerent nationalism is, for him, a macro-social manifestation of selfishness and pride. But how exactly do emotions – what we normally consider properties of individuals – become aggregated into the *corporate* entity of the nation-state? For Waltz and other systemic theorists, classical realism never adequately addressed this question, relying on a magical leap from the psychological dispositions of individuals to the behaviors of nations.

However, a closer look at Morgenthau's account of nationalism suggests that emotions are central to closing the gap between individual and corporate agency. Unlike structural realists, Morgenthau sees international conflict as a synthesis of individual desires, domestic social processes, and international pressures. For him, a state exhibits outward hostility when its members face social frustrations within. When poverty, insecurity, and memories of past struggles are acute, individuals 'find vicarious satisfaction in identification with the power drives of nations' (1967, 98). The purest expression of Morgenthau's frustration–aggression dynamic is Germany's National Socialism, which he argues 'channeled all those thwarted emotions into one mighty stream of nationalistic fanaticism' (1967, 104). The 'emotional intensity' of nationalism is proportional to the insecurity felt by individuals: as European societies became less stable during the 19th century, Morgenthau explains, 'the emotional attachment to the nation as the symbolic substitute for the individual became ever stronger' (1967, 102). Nationalism, for him, is always a complex synthesis of 'thinking, feeling, and acting' (1967, 97).

The idea that individual emotions became transposed onto the state was common in the intellectual milieu of the late 19th century. German philosophers and historians from Hegel to Meinecke regarded the state as a living organism with its own spiritual will. Freud notably spoke of an essential connection between the psychic desires of individuals and the ambitions of society at large. Schuett thus describes Morgenthau's conceptualization of diverted frustrations as a 'trick' learned from Freud (2007, 63). But the synthesis of individual emotion into corporate political allegiance can also be regarded as a peculiar product of emotional creativity. The emotional need for power is insatiable, but also indeterminate as to its mode of fulfillment. Not only is the lust for power an artificial surrogate

for frustrated love, but it is also highly adaptable to different levels and locations of expression. A person affected by the lust for power might initially seek to satisfy it within society; however, when met with legal prohibitions or other social sanctions, that desire can migrate to an alternate object of attachment. The transposition from individual to state is, in this view, less a ‘trick’ than an adaptation made possible by the malleability of human emotion.

The intimate connection between individual emotions and their corporate surrogates offers a useful alternative to the levels of analysis schema in IR. Most ontologies in IR theory insist on a strict separation of levels. Wendt’s recent study of state personality, for example, adopts the view that collective emotions, if they do exist, must be set apart from individual ones. If a state is to have ‘feelings’, he suggests, these must be the feelings of some whole that is distinct from its parts (2004, 314). Wendt offers a provocative account of collective, intentional agency, but he ultimately leaves the levels of analysis intact. By positing social groups as organic totalities, classical realism offers an alternative conceptualization. Each group resonates with the emotions of the individuals who comprise it and yet is more than a simple aggregate of them. Love, pride, anxiety, and other emotions serve as fulcra on which individuals pivot from seeking the satisfaction of psychological needs and desires alone to seeking them in a collective entity whose interests and ambitions resonate with their own. For Morgenthau and Niebuhr, then, there is no ontological chasm between the emotions of individuals and the aspirations of the state; the state expresses those emotions in all its endeavors.

Allegiances beyond the state

By the middle of the 20th century, no other collective actor had exhibited emotional intensity equivalent to that of the state. The nation-state was, as Morgenthau noted, the ‘most exalted object of loyalty’. And yet both Morgenthau and Niebuhr were sensitive to rival social formations seeking to tap emotional commitments previously tied to the state. In considering such alternatives, they treated the resonance of the nation-state as a temporary achievement: as patterns of allegiance change, so also will the locations of collective agency and political authority. Whereas neorealism has a structural dependency on the state to populate its international system, classical realism remains open to a more diverse repertoire of actors. Classical realists understood that emotions connect us to many constituencies, pulling in several directions at once. While the empirical reality of non-state agency had not come into focus by the middle decades of the 20th century, these theorists recognized that pride, fear, and other

emotions were creative responses that could in principle push political allegiances beyond the nation-state.

One persistent object of analysis for classical realism was the notion of supranational world government. Scheuerman has recently argued that Morgenthau, like Niebuhr and other classical realists, supported a 'world state' in principle but regarded it as lacking in practice the requisite social underpinnings (2010, 262). The 'supranational society' necessary for a world state involves a diversion of loyalties and dependencies that individuals might otherwise direct to the state. For Morgenthau, this shift was unlikely to occur as long as the nation-state continued to ask individuals to make profound sacrifices and moral commitments on its behalf; relocating one's loyalties onto some alternative corporate body would demand, he argues, 'almost superhuman moral strength' (1967, 245). Nevertheless, in post-WWII Europe, where the beleaguered nation-state no longer supplied a credible surrogate for emotional needs, Morgenthau thought supranational allegiances could emerge: 'Only the future will show whether this acute sense of insecurity... will lead to political creativity in the form of the political, military, and economic unification of Europe' (1967, 102). While the nation-state had prevailed over its historical competitors, it bore only a contingent affinity with the emotional needs of its citizens.

Classical realists feared above all that world government would become a façade for the imperialist intentions of one or several powerful states. During the Cold War, both East and West were prone to universalizing their respective ideologies in such an imperialist manner. The liberalism of the Cold War represented, alongside National Socialism and Soviet communism, a form of what Morgenthau termed 'nationalistic universalism' that was fundamentally different from the liberal nationalisms of the 19th and early 20th centuries. As the restrained liberalism of the 1930s swung back into the emboldened ideology that inspired foreign policies in the West during the Cold War, emotional processes seemed to Morgenthau integral to the shift. While both share the nation as their 'ultimate point of reference', the universalist version takes the nation as a point of departure rather than a natural resting place: 'The nation is but the starting-point of a universal mission whose ultimate goal reaches to the confines of the political world' (1967, 323). The fusion of nationalism and universalism was no less troubling for Niebuhr, who regarded it as an especially intense manifestation of pride. Both realists were impressed with liberalism's protean and paradoxical capacity to extend itself onto transnational terrain.

Liberalism's metamorphosis into nationalistic universalism occurred as malleable allegiances shifted. As noted above, Morgenthau considers the

nation-state a repository of individual hopes, anxieties, and frustrations – but no longer a fully credible one by the middle of the 20th century. In such a climate, Morgenthau suggests, the psychological profile of the nation undergoes a complex transformation. The individual ‘experiences in his own conscience the feebleness of universal standards’ and, as a result, ‘his conscience does not cease to be ill at ease’ (1967, 245). While recognizing this weakness is not exclusively an emotional process, Morgenthau appears cognizant that the deficiencies of the state are understood intellectually but also experienced on a deeper, affective register. The synthesis of nationalism and universalism becomes possible only where the force of the latter has been eroded by anxiety. Anxiety impels the modern individual not to abandon universal morality but to fuse it with its nationalist alternative: ‘He pours, as it were, the contents of his national morality into the now empty bottle of universal ethics’ (1967, 246).

For Niebuhr, the emotional phenomenon of transnationalism lies at the heart of international morality and Christian ethics. He too rejected the notion that a ‘world community’ could simply willed into existence and argued that such an experiment demanded above all changing the ‘mood’ of its key participants: from pride and cynicism to ‘humility’, ‘love’, ‘faith’, and ‘hope’ (1944, 185–9). However, while love and hope are emotional capabilities pushing moral recognition beyond the nation-state, for Niebuhr their achievements are inherently limited and paradoxical. On the one hand, ‘sacrificial love’ is the basis of all ethics; on the other hand, he, like Morgenthau, regards the successful achievement of love among all peoples as impossible in the face of historical contingency and human fallibility (1996, 74). As a remedy, he proposes a dialectical relation between love and reason, where love provides the impetus to moral concern and reason the laws through which to maximize its social benefit (1996, 248). To sustain such ethical and political engagement without the possibility of success, Niebuhr appeals to a higher level of emotional practice – religious faith. Faith, for him, is the requisite mood for navigating an always imperfect practice of transnational ethics without lapsing into pride (1996, 321 and 1944, 189). We rely on faith in order to cope with the strain of our fettered strivings: ‘The new world must be built by resolute men who “when hope is dead will hope by faith”’ (1996, 285). By transferring the emotional energy of hope onto faith, he thinks liberal internationalism can avoid the pitfalls of pride.

For both Niebuhr and Morgenthau, the universalist ambition of liberal ethics, fraught with political problems, could not be understood without attention to its emotional impetus. Whether through displaced anxieties or sentimental forms of love, the emotions associated with universal liberalism gave it a kind of secularized religious appeal. Moreover, although

advocates of liberalism celebrated its rational qualities, for Morgenthau claims to pure rationality must always be regarded with skepticism. Like all the great political schemas of the scientific age, the reason behind liberal internationalism is inseparable from its emotional undercurrents. Following James, Morgenthau describes it as ‘driven toward its goals by the irrational forces the ends of which it serves’ (1946, 154). Morgenthau regards utopian liberalism as an ideology, which is to say not a purely logical system but an attempt to layer upon ‘irrational qualities the earmarks of reason’. Ideology, for him, is a stamp of intellectual approval, bestowed upon allegiances forged affectively (73, 155). For these realists, both the dangers and limitations of liberal internationalism stemmed from its tendency to conceal its own affective roots.

The other ideological movement in the post-WWII period, communism, had arguably greater success in securing transnational allegiances. Niebuhr and Morgenthau often argued that American policies toward communism were rooted in a poor appreciation for their social and psychological appeal. Communism had succeeded not because it was backed by a materially powerful nation-state but because it had a deeper resonance, which both couched in religious terms. For Niebuhr, communism was a secular religion that harnessed popular hopes for justice into a virulent form of utopian pride. For Morgenthau too, the religious quality of communism helps to explain its historical success. The Bolshevik Revolution was, he argues, ‘a quasi-religious occurrence’ that captured the hopes and ambitions of the masses (1962, 142). As he explains in *Politics*, the success of a political movement is a function of not its philosophical truth but its capacity to resonate with the experiences and aspirations of ordinary people (1967, 326–7). Communist ideas had spread through Eastern Europe and the Third World because they tapped into the moral desires circulating in those societies. It had thrived, Morgenthau explains, wherever its promise of social and economic justice appealed to those with a ‘longing for equality’.¹⁵ That there were political interests behind Soviet policy did not change the fact that communism as a social phenomenon had powerful emotional roots capable of fuelling its strategic prospects.

Morgenthau’s psychosocial profile of communism had important political implications. Above all, it meant that a policy of anti-communism could not achieve its objectives without addressing the underlying motivations behind the movement. Applying military force to prevent the spread of communism would do little, he argues, to diminish the ‘world-wide sympathies’ that

¹⁵ Kennan’s otherwise similar account presents the emotional roots of communism more negatively, as signs of ‘impatience’ and desperation (Kennan 1947, 567).

support it. Such an approach ‘smothers ... the fire of revolution under a military blanket; but it does not extinguish it’ (1969, 9, 28). Niebuhr arrived at a similar conclusion. For him, appreciating the spread of communism in the Middle East and Asia during the 1950s was impossible without understanding the emotional experience of imperialist subjection. Imperial rule had left a legacy of resentment and frustration, and, in his words, ‘frustrated hopes combine easily with communist propaganda’ (2008, 115). Both realists saw that communism could not be effectively challenged without attention to its complex and deep emotional roots.

By parsing the tendency of emotion to elicit change, these classical realists thus demonstrate its important role in the emergence of non-state or transnational forms of collective agency. Both theorists regarded states as the primary sites of political authority in the mid-20th century and yet also saw the potential for liberal and communist movements to secure emotional allegiances beyond the nation-state. They considered the shifting patterns of loyalty embodied in these phenomena equally worrying and impressive. Movements with transnational ambitions were not only political programs but also concentrations of emotional energy capable of adjusting the scope of ethical and political concern within a population. There is no natural or inevitable container for such emotional energy: as Morgenthau says of Messianic forms of ‘nationalistic universalism’, they may ‘shift from nation to nation according to the conditions of spirit and power’ (1967, 324). And thus, nationalism in its most advanced form is an emotionally contagious movement that promises continually to exceed its temporary geopolitical locations.

In the heyday of Soviet vanguardism, international communism involved for Morgenthau not a transnational loyalty but a ‘transfer of loyalty from one’s own nation to another one’ (1967, 101). This ‘exchange’, which he describes as but an ‘ephemeral interlude’, was facilitated by the fluidity of political allegiance in the modern age. Thus, the extra-territorial loyalty that underpinned Soviet communism was, Morgenthau argues, superseded by the more complex arrangement he and others called ‘polycentrism’. Communist ideas that first achieved political success in the Soviet Union had cascaded to other locations, not all of which accepted the Soviet model. Those ideas changed as they were refracted through different cultural, psychological, and political environments. Morgenthau thus speaks of ‘a variety of Communisms’, each possessing a different degree of hostility.¹⁶ No one emotion caused the

¹⁶ He is critical of those who described communism simply as a ‘hostile political movement transcending national boundaries’, a description that legitimized the wholesale approach to anti-communism he opposed (1969, 24).

spread of communism, but the manner in which it spread, and the ease with which it adapted to local hopes and expectations, were for Morgenthau connected to the affective dimension of political allegiance. Liberalism, too, consisted of modular forces not tied to any particular nation (1967, 323). For him, then, nationalism and supranationalism were not opposing forces but nested arrangements whose constituent loyalties tend to mingle.

Early realists recognized that the distinctive forms of political allegiance associated with transnational movements were enabled by the fluidity of emotion. Emotions, in this account, sustain both simple, parallel attachments and more complex, vertically layered allegiances. The system of modern nation-states consists of parallel sites of emotional attachment: states exist alongside one another, each offering a different population a focal point for individual hopes, anxieties, and other emotions. In addition to this parallel arrangement of loyalties, however, classical realists described vertical modes of emotional allegiance as well. For Morgenthau especially, universalist ideologies and movements were not simply transnational but composite formations layered on top of the nation-state. The global spread of communism, for example, had not displaced the state but ‘filtered’ its national interests through the lens of a transnational ideology (1969, 56). That ideology became one of the many social and cultural factors contributing to the determination of national interests, and the result was a complex geopolitics of sympathy among communist governments. While nation-states were alive and well in the era of communism, some now had a powerful ideological plug-in that altered the scope of their authority.

Emotion and dynamic global allegiances

Although there is no specific theory of emotional politics in classical realism, the work of Morgenthau and Niebuhr offers important insights into the role of emotion – then and now – in global politics. For Morgenthau, the disappointment generated by love and the compensatory striving for power are distinctly *limitless* and, as such, capable of pushing political actors into new forms of domination. Niebuhr states that fundamental to human beings is ‘the desire to fulfill the potentialities of life and not merely maintain its existence’ (1944, 19). The result is that emotions are associated with both stable social structures and moments of transformation: they supply the entrenched loyalties associated with the state but also help actors shift beyond them. While these realists could not purport to capture the precise psychological or neural mechanisms of this creativity, their historical analysis suggests that they understood human

emotions to be especially adaptable and, as such, compatible with a wide range of expressive objects. The implication of the realist view is that the practice of statecraft cannot afford to presuppose stable configurations of morale, affection, pride, or fear. These classical realists recognized that in the real world of international politics, political allegiances are inherently dynamic: aspirant nations, revolutionary movements, and liberal internationalists were constantly pushing for alternative modes of social organization and new sites of political allegiance. Realism needed to be a theory not of states but of the many shifting psychosocial constellations susceptible to conflict.

Realist insights into the fluidity of emotional allegiance can help to expand the study of emotion in IR beyond a focus on states and state officials (Sasley 2011; Hall 2012) to emergent forms of authority in the 21st century. Just as communism spread by fusing its ideological message with local hopes and desires, so also are today's transnational movements tapping, resonating, and extending affective commitments across otherwise disparate scales. Studies of 'transnational advocacy networks' have long pointed to the interplay between transnational and intranational activities: global movements succeed by not only securing participation from nation-states but also resonating with a variety of sub-national constituencies. Human rights advocacy, for example, only takes hold where globally circulating norms are translated into the 'vernacular' of local communities (Keck and Sikkink 1998; Merry 2006). And transnational terrorist organizations succeed by layering political mobilization on top of kinship and other social networks at the local level (Singerman 2004). As the social theorist Saskia Sassen has demonstrated, ostensibly 'global' phenomena are in fact 'multiscalar', constituted through constellations of authority at the local and national levels (2006, 366, 372–3). Emotions may comprise a key mechanism allowing allegiances to adapt to these changing scales of authority.

The classical realist account explicated here calls for greater attention to the affective sociology behind transnational forms of collective agency. While emotions are not solely responsible for creating transnational movements, they seem to aid in sustaining allegiances across diverse social and cultural settings. Emotions are among the by-products of shared social practices associated with, for example, workplace, family, and mass media. The underlying affectivity of transnational collective agency still bears affinities to the mid-century movements diagnosed by classical realists. Indeed, as communication technologies shift from assembled rallies and printed leaflets to martyr videos, satellite television, and social media, the opportunities for emotional connection in the absence of face-to-face interaction, or 'co-presence', are only proliferating. The result is a global landscape of collective political agency in which the lines of

allegiance are flexible and in which sentiments readily migrate from one object of loyalty to another. The primary actors in such a setting are no longer either states or non-state actors but a shifting field of temporary 'social assemblages': associations whose organizing principle is minimally salient and whose parts retain connections with multiple groups and sites of authority (Deleuze and Guattari 1987; De Landa 2006). A transnational assemblage is formed when individual emotions and needs are transposed onto both nations and extra-national objects of affection; it is sustained by resonating with the emotions and needs of new followers in different cultural and historical locations.

Realist insights also urge caution before assuming the ubiquity of identity in emotional politics at the global level. Whether non-violent social movements or radical organizations willing to use violence, global actors are often said to be defined by identity. For example, public discourse in the U.S. still betrays fidelity to the idea that Islam supplies global terrorism with an underlying infrastructure of identity. And yet sociological research suggests that the emotions associated with terrorism are not identity-based hatreds but varied collections of often disconnected sentiments (Cetina 2005; Devji 2005; Sageman 2008). While radical social movements may claim to act in the name of Islam, their activities are not well captured by theories of cultural identity. Terrorist networks are often rooted less in clear and coherent religious identities and more in composite mixtures of shifting sentiments. A focus on group identities – commonplace in social psychological approaches to emotion – skews political analysis toward durable, slowly changing, and relatively uniform cultural units. By heeding the realist call on emotions, we can instead train our sights on the malleable psychosocial tissues that allow dispersed communities of supporters to converge on a transnational agenda. The emotions that bind human beings to cultural communities are both powerful and creative; they not only help to underpin relatively durable allegiances but also give rise to disruptions that amplify, interrupt, or relocate those allegiances in politically significant ways.

We might also learn from classical realism to dampen the moralism affecting the study of transnational actors and their emotional expressions. It is telling that transnational social movements based in the West are often treated as cogs in the impressive machine of global governance, while radical terrorist networks are taken as abominable threats to international security and symptoms of 'Islamic rage'.¹⁷ The tradition of

¹⁷ On the use of emotionality to delegitimize the political agency of terrorist organizations, see Ross (2010).

political realism can help to correct these moral binaries and confirm what some scholars see instead as politically diverse groups that nevertheless share significant technological, economic, and organizational conditions and characteristics (Adamson 2005). Morgenthau and Niebuhr resisted the notion that emotions can be associated with political projects of any particular normative status. Both were unequivocal in their condemnation of communism as an unscrupulous enemy of freedom, and yet both viewed it as but an extreme form of the pretensions contained also in liberalism. They treated communism on a moral continuum with liberalism rather than setting it apart as an embodiment of evil. Morgenthau later spoke of the Cold War as a ‘contest between two secular religions’, in which both sides were guilty of violence and injustice (1967, 429). Niebuhr’s (2008) critique of pride takes him further, integrating his analysis of communism with a critical assessment of America’s ironic overconfidence and presumed innocence (Steele 2010). What makes Morgenthau and Niebuhr political realists is partly their recognition that emotions such as hope, pride, and anxiety are multivalent forces that underpin a variety of political movements – Western and Eastern, fascist and liberal. As IR scholars study the transnational effects of emotion, they can benefit from realism’s antipathy to moralizing.

Conclusion

It would be overreaching to claim that classical realism advanced a specific theory of emotion. Neither Morgenthau nor Niebuhr offers evidence, ethnographic or otherwise, of specific emotions and their role in policymaking and other political behavior. And neither parses the social mechanisms affecting emotional expression: their discussions of communism, for example, never specify how a state’s institutional strength might modulate the degree of control it has over collective emotions. Nevertheless, in conceptualizing affinities between emotion and change, these writings offer something quite different from a deterministic theory of human nature and war. While Morgenthau and Niebuhr often treat emotions in a generalizing manner, they do not consider them strictly inarticulable forces about which nothing can reliably be said. Both realists combine general statements on human psychology with more specific reflections on the role of love, pride, and other emotions in phenomena ranging from diplomacy and nationalism to communism and liberal internationalism. While these reflections are not well suited to advancing law-like predictions on the role of emotion in politics, they do supply provocative, contestable experiments that can help us reconceptualize global politics in a less intellectualist key.

A key insight from classical realism is that emotions are both repetitive impulses and engines of change. Central to the realist preoccupation with contingency, emotions might therefore offer a missing piece of the enduring puzzle concerning the roots of social and political change in IR and adjacent fields (Lebow 2000; Lieberman 2002). By appreciating the role of emotion in sustaining human efforts at adaptation and innovation, realists gained analytical leverage into the dynamic nature of political allegiance at the global level. The work of Morgenthau especially offers a prescient warning that the nation-state always exists alongside many competitors: as patterns of emotional loyalty change, so also will the locations of collective agency and political authority. Classical realists understood that emotions connect individual actors with various social structures and organizations, and generally more than one at a time. While the nation-state remained the primary location of political allegiance in the middle of the 20th century, these theorists recognized that pride, fear, and other emotions were dynamic human capabilities that could in principle push the nation-state into composite, transnational forms of social organization.

By exposing affinities between emotion and change, the tradition of realism can shed light on the peculiar forms of agency associated with transnational politics. Classical realists understood well that nationalism, communism, and other problems of the 20th century stemmed from competing interests but also clashing emotions. The world could eliminate certain threats and erect better institutions, but such efforts would only precipitate new sites of impassioned contestation. Realists such as Morgenthau understood well that emotional agency sometimes comes in surprising forms that confound rationalist frameworks. These insights are all the more pressing now, as globalized communications technologies bring dispersed audiences into contact with a larger field of competing allegiances. IR scholars cannot afford to miss the contagious currents of sympathy, hope, and outrage that connect transnational actors of all sorts. As institutionalism emphasizes strategic calculations and constructivism looks to the politics of identity, realism pushes us to consider the protean forms of emotional agency fuelling political contestation across local and global levels.

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