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E. H. Carr: the revolutionist's realist

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Now and again a book is published that instantly makes one realise that one's knowledge of a particular area was hitherto deeply impoverished. One such book is Jonathan Haslam's masterful biography of E. H. Carr.<sup>1</sup> Anyone interested in the life and times of one of the most important intellectuals of the twentieth century, and the clashing egos, the rivalries, and jealousies of one important corner of British academic life, will find this book spell-binding. Particularly impressive is the way in which Haslam weaves together the personal and the political. With remarkable skill he lays bare the intricate workings of a highly forensic and complex mind. In doing so he provides for the first time a thorough-going interpretation of Carr's breathtakingly large and, in terms of the quality of scholarship and skill of exposition, uniformly brilliant opus.

If there is one weakness of the book it is that the author does not go deeply enough into some of Carr's key IR works. This is a minor criticism, however, since one cannot do everything in one volume, particularly when it deals with such a complex and prolific subject. What Haslam does, he does exceedingly well and from the outset he has been at pains to point out that this is a biography, not merely an intellectual biography.

This small and understandable weakness is now rectified by the publication of Michael Cox's critical appraisal of Carr.<sup>2</sup> In this edited volume, experts from a variety of fields carefully examine, often in meticulous detail, all the major aspects of Carr's work, particularly his scholarly work on international relations, his magnum opus on Russia, and his provocative thoughts on historiography. Mention should also be made here of Charles Jones's similarly able and trenchant study.<sup>3</sup> Amazingly, this was the first book-length study of Carr's thought on international relations: an astonishing fact given Carr's hallowed status in the discipline of International Relations, and the reputation of his book The Twenty Years' Crisis, published nearly 60 years previous, as one of the few classics in the field.<sup>4</sup>

These works do much to dispel the crude, one-dimensional picture of 'Carr the realist' that pervades the general IR literature. For Haslam, Carr was essentially a Machiavellian, but one who held a strong belief in progress; one who admired the 'strong men' - Lloyd George, Lenin, Roosevelt, perhaps even Hitler - who helped, however painfully, to bring it about; one who sought to attain objectivity by the puzzling method of always going against the grain - he was at his most pro-Soviet at the height of the Cold War, and at his most critical during detente; and one who had a sentimental and aesthetic attachment to ineffectual romantic utopians of the central European variety, as exemplified by his fascination with Alexander Herzen and his circle. Cox and his collaborators echo this characterization, though they give less emphasis to the Machiavellian and more to the Marxist influences in his thought. Jones provides a first rate account of the influence of Karl Mannheim on Carr's thought. He convincingly shows that one of the chief weapons Carr wields against the so-called utopians in The Twenty Years' Crisis is Marx's concept of ideology, as mediated through Mannheim, and tailored to the special requirements of international relations.<sup>5</sup> Oddly, however, Jones does not go into the perhaps equally important Influence of the American moral philosopher, Reinhold Niebuhr. Carr acquired from Niebuhr his pessimism regarding human perfectibility, but also an awareness that individual altruism is often distorted and corrupted by social selfishness: societies not being entirely benign entities but exclusive associations for the pursuit of largely exclusive

interests.<sup>6</sup>

Yet despite the great service these books have done in correcting the distorted picture of Carr that has until now prevailed, they still leave the reader somewhat confused and uncertain as to the true nature of Carr's intellectual and political colours. Was Carr a conservative or a radical? Was he more inclined to Machiavelli or Marx? How successful was his eclecticism? Was he, at the end of the day, a consistent or an inconsistent thinker?

It is these questions that this article seeks to answer. It does so: (i) by analysing two recent articles on Carr which respectively represent the opposite poles of interpretation regarding his contribution to IR; (ii) by establishing the importance of Carr's radicalism; (iii) by asking whether, or to what extent, it still makes sense to call Carr a 'realist'; and (iv) by examining some of the more damaging errors of interpretation that can be found in both textbook and more specialist treatments of Carr.

### **Realist Carr**

In 1991 the Australian scholar, J. D. B. Miller, published an article nicely entitled 'E. H. Carr: The Realist's Realist' in the American policy journal The National Interest.<sup>7</sup> It regrettably received little attention on the European side of the Atlantic. The article paints a picture of Carr that deviates little from the one found in the standard IR literature. According to this version of Carr:

- (i) morality is a product of power and not power, morality;
- (ii) it is the business of the diplomat to cloak the interests of his country in the language of universal justice;
- (iii) the clash of interests is real and inevitable;
- (iv) proponents of the League of Nations (and other 'utopian' schemes) neglect analysis of cause and effect in preference for 'the elaboration of visionary projects for the attainment of ends they have in view';
- (v) public opinion is as wrong-headed as it is impotent; etc. (to cite some of the key contentions and most telling phrases from the more realist sections of the Twenty Years' Crisis).

But Miller also notes another Carr: one who wrote a chapter on 'The Limitations of Realism'; who felt that sound political thought and sound political life will be found only where both realism and utopianism have their place; who wrote a 'utopian' book, Conditions of Peace, shortly after the 'realist' Twenty Years' Crisis; in whose thinking one finds a degree of economic determinism; and whose propositions, or at some important ones, are either 'basically' or 'vaguely' Marxist.

Given this, Miller's choice of title is, to say the least, odd. It is the chief contention of this article that to the extent that Carr is a realist he is not the realist's realist but, on the contrary, the revolutionist's.

## **Critical Carr**

In an article that appeared a few years later, Andrew Linklater painted quite a different picture.<sup>8</sup> As part of an attempt to 'release Carr from the grip of the Realists', Linklater provides a convincing account of the radical and 'emancipatory' aspects of Carr's thought. This is the Carr who: viewed the nation-state as obsolescent; who saw sovereignty as ever more blurred and indistinct; who argued for the sacrificing of economic advantage for social ends and the extension of these social ends beyond the national frontier; who maintained that 'the main unifying purpose in the contemporary world ... is the common ideal of social justice'; and who expressed great faith in 'international planning to promote welfare internationalism'. In broad terms Linklater interprets Carr as a proto-Critical Theorist, someone who sought to extend the boundaries of moral and political community, who 'set out the case for post-exclusionary forms of political organization', and who saw the outlines of such forms 'already immanent in the existing order of things'.

But although Linklater recognises that Carr also stressed the 'darker side of modernity such as totalitarianism and war', he remains silent about what might be called the darker side of Carr himself: his indifference to democracy, his disparagement of individualism, the almost celebratory tones with which he greeted the 'perfection' by the Soviet Union of propaganda as an instrument of foreign policy, his uncritical attitude towards Hitler, the ease with which he was seduced by 'bigness' (on which, more in a moment). Nor does he mention that Carr not once suggested that realism - and the crude epistemological and ethical relativism central to his conception of it - was wrong: only that it was 'psychologically unsustainable' i.e. that a consistent and thorough-going realism was simply intolerable to the human mind.<sup>9</sup> Most crucially of all, Linklater fails to mention that the dialectic between realism and utopianism is, for Carr, an endless one, and it is certainly not clear from his IR writings alone whether he conceived this process as progressive. In a key passage in The Twenty Years' Crisis, one in which the twin influences of both Mannheim and Neibuhr are apparent, Carr said:

Having demolished the current utopia with the weapons of realism, we still need to build a new utopia of our own, which will one day fall to the same weapons. The human will will continue to seek escape from the logical consequences of realism in the vision of an international order which, as soon as it crystallizes itself into concrete political form, becomes tainted with self-interest and hypocrisy, and once more be attacked with the instruments of realism.<sup>10</sup>

The extreme relativism with which Carr wrestled but never managed to shake off - even in his final, last-ditch attempt in What is History? (1961) - makes him, at best, an unsatisfactory Critical Theorist: one whose critical insights will inevitably become tainted in the way he described as soon as they acquire concrete form.

## **Carr, Reality, and Revolution**

My principal objection to the way Carr is interpreted may already be apparent. It concerns the separation of the 'realist' aspects of his thought from the 'radical', 'welfare internationalist', 'revolutionist', and 'Marxist' aspects. In some accounts the latter are tagged on the end as a kind of after-thought: the inference being that they are unimportant things but things that, from a literary point of view, add a bit of spice. Sometimes they are not mentioned at all. This, I believe, is a mistake of the first order. In several respects Carr's realism and his radicalism are inseparable. Indeed, I would go as far as to say that his thought cannot be properly understood unless the intimate relationship between them is recognised.

Carr says so many things about realism that any summary of what he 'essentially' or 'basically' said is always going to be open to question. This being said, any coherent account of Carr's understanding of realism would have to contain, I submit, the following five features. The first three are from Machiavelli, whom Carr regarded as 'the first important political realist'. 'The three essential tenets implicit in Machiavelli's doctrine', Carr stated, 'are the foundation-stones of the realist philosophy.' Firstly, 'history is a sequence of cause and effect, whose course can be analysed and understood by intellectual effort, but not (as the utopians believe) directed by "imagination".' Secondly, 'theory does not (as the utopians assume) create practice, but practice theory.' Thirdly, 'politics are not (as utopians pretend) a function of ethics, but ethics of politics.' There can be no effective morality in the absence of effective authority. Morality is the product of power. To these I would add Count Walewski's maxim, quoted above, about the business of the diplomat. I would also add his quasi-Marxist conception of history as a struggle between 'haves' and 'have-nots' and his concept of peaceful change involving 'prudent yielding', to use W. T. R. Fox's phrase, on the part of the former to the use or threat of force by the latter.<sup>11</sup>

Carr radicalism takes three forms: one methodological, one prescriptive, and one analytical.

Firstly, Carr was much influenced, as suggested, by the two Karls: Marx and Mannheim. In particular, he extensively utilized the Marxist conception of ideology and Mannheim's sociology of knowledge in his analysis of 'nineteenth century liberalism' and his critique of the transplantation, by the 'utopian' school, of the assumptions of nineteenth century liberalism into the special field of international relations

The notion of a natural harmony of interests of all in laissez faire - involving a minimal, night-watchman state, free individual (vis à vis collective) bargaining in industrial disputes, the due process of law, consitutional government - was not, for Carr, a truth or axiom of universal validity, but the special ideology of the rising commercial class. To the extent that the notion had been realized in practice - to the extent that a harmony of interests actually existed in the world of facts - this was due not to the existence of any pre-ordained harmony, but to the special conditions of the nineteenth century: what Carr not wholly without irony described as the 'golden age' of continuously expanding territories and markets, of a world-wide money market under the 'beneficiant financial autocracy' of the City of London, and of a 'world policed by the self-assured and not too onerous British hegemony'.<sup>12</sup>

Similarly, the supposed absolute and universal principles of the utopian - free trade, international law and order, the indivisibility of peace - were not principles at all, 'but the unconscious reflections of national policy based on a particular interpretation of national interest at a particular time'. To cite another telling phrase: 'The intellectual theories and ethical standards of utopianism, far from being the expression of absolute and a priori principles, are historically conditioned, being both products of circumstances and weapons framed for the furtherance of interests'.<sup>13</sup> The debt to Marx and Mannheim could hardly be clearer.

This is, I would argue, the key contention of Carr's Twenty Years' Crisis: the unifying idea of the book: the source of its intellectual appeal and diagnostic strength.

Secondly, there is a large element of functionalism in Carr's work. It is not widely known, but Carr was much influenced by the father of international functionalism, David Mitrany, with whom he worked on the Chatham House study group on nationalism which convened during the early stages of the War. One of the interesting things about this is that Mitrany is someone who is conventionally seen as an idealist, though Carr certainly did not see him as such.

Carr asserted, for example, in his much overlooked Conditions of Peace, that the most 'fundamental of problems of the world to-day express themselves in economic terms, and that a political settlement will have little chance of lasting unless it emerges as the crown and coping-stone of successful economic reconstruction'. Such reconstruction would be slow and gradual and guided 'by practical needs rather than by preconceived theories'. He contended that the 'urgent need is to alter not the location of frontiers [as happened at Versailles], but their meaning'. He urged, in connection with this, that 'men must be induced to determine themselves into different units for different purposes' (and that the national unit had become 'visibly too small' for the control of military and economic policy). He talks of 'practical international cooperation' - involving 'far-reaching schemes of international public works' - as a 'psychological substitute for war'. He talks of 'new loyalties' being forged in the performance of 'common tasks' and the fulfilment of 'newly felt needs'. Allied to this, he talks of the formal shape of the post-war order being determined 'not theoretically according to some a priori conception of league, alliance or federation, but empirically as the outcome and expression of a practical working arrangement'.

As to the nature and shape of these 'practical working arrangements', he advocated, among other things, a European Relief Commission, a European Transport Corporation, a European Reconstruction and Public Works Corporation, a European Central Bank (!) and, most ambitiously of all, a European Planning Authority ('the master-key', he claimed, 'to the problem of postwar settlement'). All of these bodies, he further declared, would form part of what he called, with purposeful frugality, the 'European Unit', and their 'constitutional form would vary according to function'.<sup>14</sup>

Thirdly, there is a materialist thesis underlying all of Carr's work - certainly his IR

work from the publication of The Twenty Years' Crisis in 1939 to publication of The New Society in 1951.

In the preface to The Twenty Years' Crisis he stated that he was concerned with the 'underlying and significant' rather than the 'immediate and superficial' causes of the war.<sup>15</sup> These 'underlying and significant' resided in the 'great social revolution' which had its roots in the breakdown of the old liberal order of the nineteenth century and was still having profound effects the world-over. Imperialism, the Bolshevik revolution, the Nazi revolution, totalitarianism, Militarism, the two World Wars, and other great ills of the twentieth century world, were, in Carr's view, the symptoms of this great social revolution, not diseases in themselves.<sup>16</sup>

This revolution was essentially a revolution in large-scale social and economic organisation. Laissez-faire, free competition, the discipline of the 'economic whip', the sovereignty of the consumer, were giving way to economic planning, combination, monopoly, the big trade union, mass advertising. Small-scale, liberal democracy was giving way to mass, social and economic, democracy. The small, 'supervisory', 'non-interventionist' state was giving way to the 'creative', 'remedial', 'social service' or 'welfare' state.<sup>17</sup>

At this point it is important to note that Carr's thesis is, in all essential respects, a highly deterministic one. The main lines of development of his 'great social and economic revolution' were, he seems to be saying, inevitable, in the same way that the main lines of development of the Industrial Revolution - the factory, the city, the emergence of a new commercial class, a new division of labour, and so on - were inevitable:

Laissez-faire individualist capitalism - the regime of private enterprise in the true sense of the term - has evolved by an inherent process of development into monopoly capitalism. Monopoly capitalism has provoked and made inevitable the intervention of the state as a more or less active directing force in the economic order.<sup>18</sup>

Even factory legislation, education reform, social insurance, and the growth of social services, were not due simply to the growth of a social conscience or a sudden outburst of humanitarian sentiment. Rather, as with the other things which brought about the decay of laissez-faire capitalism, they were the direct outcrop of 'the forces making for concentration within capitalism itself':<sup>19</sup> the big firm begot the big trade union, and the big firm and the big trade union together begot the big state. The state, in other words, increasingly had no choice but to intervene mitigate the struggle between capital and labour, protect the consumer, ameliorate the effects of periodic economic crises, and maintain social order in the midst of a decaying social and economic system.

The materialism underlying all this is clear. But just to underline it further he also says:

Experience shows that the structure of society at any given time and place, as well

as the prevailing theories and beliefs about it, are largely governed by the way in which the material needs of the society are met.<sup>20</sup>

This may not clinch the argument that Carr was a Marxist thinker. But it does suggest that his thinking was clearly impregnated with Marxist ideas.<sup>21</sup>

### **Is Carr a Realist?**

It is sometimes said that Carr was an inconsistent thinker and that three relatively distinct phases can be identified in his thought. His most important realist phase in the 30s, it is said, gave way to a somewhat utopian phase (predicting the end of the nation-state and the advance of international planning) in the early 40s, and this, in turn, gave way to a rather misguided Marxist phase with the publication of The Soviet Impact on the Western World in 1946, and the onset of his monumental history of the Bolshevik revolution in the 1950s.

But it can be argued that, given his range of interests and concerns, and the eclecticism of his approach, Carr was, on the contrary, a remarkably consistent thinker. There are certainly a number of different elements in Carr's thought: he was the consummate intellectual magpie, extremely skilled at taking an idea from here and a concept from there and weaving them together in a remarkably coherent way. But these elements are visible right from the outset. The Twenty Years' Crisis is rightly famous for its bold re-statement of the principles of realism. But in this, his most influential book, he also advocates 'the subordination of economic advantage to social ends', 'production for use rather than production for profit', the provision of 'free housing, free clothing, and free motor cars', and the extension of the social ends of policy (social stability, equitable distribution, full employment) beyond national frontiers.<sup>22</sup>

Most importantly, the 'crisis' of the Twenty Years' Crisis is not only the failure to halt the slide into war, the failure to adequately rearm, the failure of collective security, the breakdown of free trade, the collapse of the League. Carr depicts all these things, and many more, as 'crises'. The real, fundamental, crisis for Carr was the failure of the Western Powers to 're-adapt to the needs and conditions of a new historical epoch':

The international tension of 1939 [he said in a seldom quoted sentence] is the product, not the cause, of the real international crisis, which is the final and irrevocable breakdown of the conditions which made the nineteenth century order possible.<sup>23</sup>

The old order was dead. It could not be restored. A drastic change in outlook was needed to understand, survive, and prosper in the new.

In the light of this it might be, and increasingly is, asked: 'Is Carr a realist?' There are three possible answers to this question, all of them equally true.

The first answer is, yes, Carr is a realist, but a realist of a very peculiar kind. For

Carr, the key contributors to realist thought were not only Machiavelli, Hobbes, Bodin, and Spinoza, but also Marx, Engels, Lenin.<sup>24</sup> Carr's own definition of realism was, thus, quite broad. It embraced not only the 'endemic struggle for power between independent political communities' (and similar formulations); but, far more importantly, the conception of history as a process of cause and effect in which consciousness, if not entirely, then to a very large extent, is a product of material circumstances. So, the first answer is: Yes, Carr is a realist, but only if a large place is reserved in one's definition of 'realism' for what might broadly be called 'dialectical materialism'.

The second answer is, yes, Carr is a realist, but there are other significant elements to his thought e.g. a Marxist element, a functionalist element, and an 'English school' element (particularly pronounced, for example, in his chapters on international law<sup>25</sup>).

The third answer is, no, Carr is not a realist, not in the sense that Niebuhr, Morgenthau and Waltz are regarded as realists. These three thinkers are united in the belief that the struggle for power between independent states is inescapable. For Niebuhr, the root of this struggle for power resides in the fall of man and the concept of original sin. For Morgenthau it resides in the concept of animus dominandi. For Waltz, it resides in the anarchical condition of the international system. Carr shared none of these beliefs. The absence of any reference to the Church or religious faith in Carr's works, even in his discussion of international morality, is striking. Similarly, although one encounters references to 'human character', the 'human psyche', and 'human instincts' in Carr, a single, coherent concept of human nature is difficult to find. The assumption of defective human nature is certainly not the starting place for theorising as it is for Morgenthau. The weight of evidence, indeed, suggests that to the extent that Carr held a conception of human nature it was Janus-faced: consisting of the 'dual elements' of enmity and good will, self-assertion and self-subordination, realism and utopianism. Finally, Carr says very little about 'international anarchy' in the technical sense of 'absence of government'. It is true that in one place he says that the temptation to assume a natural harmony of interests in international relations is particularly strong because there is 'no organised power charged with the task of creating harmony' (in sharp contrast to domestic politics).<sup>26</sup> It is also true that he says that the fact that 'there is no authority above the state capable of imposing moral behaviour on it' is one of the reasons (though not the only one) why standards of morality in the international sphere differ from those in the domestic.<sup>27</sup> But that is about it. The concept, and the Hobbesian thesis behind it, does not have anything like the stature in Carr's thought that it does in Morgenthau's and certainly that of Kenneth Waltz. Indeed, as basic conditioning factors of international relations, the Industrial Revolution, the French Revolution, the 'great social revolution', and the Bolshevik revolution, are much more important in Carr's thesis than 'the condition of anarchy'.

Given this, in the sense that Niebuhr, Morgenthau and Waltz are realists, Carr is, at best, a quasi-realist.

## **Textbook Carr**

As hinted, the Carr of the IR textbook is a lacklustre, one-dimensional figure. There are numerous references to his 'devastating' attack on the utopians and on the emphasis he gave to the factor of power. But there are few references to his Marxism, to the critique of reason implicit in his employment of the 'sociology of knowledge', to his functionalism, to his faith in international planning. The following three shortcomings are particularly striking.

Firstly, the standard formulation of his chief contribution to the study of international relations goes roughly as follows: 'In his masterly Twenty Years' Crisis, E. H. Carr launched a devastating attack on the utopian school. He demonstrated that because of their burning desire for peace they neglected the role of power in international relations, and in their belief in the League of Nations and other visionary schemes they failed to properly analyse actual facts and the process of cause and effect. His attack led to the downfall of utopianism and its replacement by realism as the dominant paradigm of the field.' The problem with this kind of formulation is that it strongly implies that 'utopianism' was a pre-existing and perhaps intellectually self-conscious body of thought, and that Carr's 'realism' is unproblematic. As demonstrated above, Carr's 'realism' is far from unproblematic. More importantly, Carr not only critiqued 'utopianism', he created it: that is, he created this way of looking at a whole range of ideas he happened to disagree with. This is a fact of no small importance given the 'professional kiss of death', to use Ken Booth's phrase, that the label 'utopianism' has been in the post-war history of the field.<sup>28</sup>

Secondly, many textbook accounts refer to Carr's critique of the doctrine of the harmony of interests. But they fail to distinguish between a harmony of interests and the doctrine of a natural harmony of interests. This failure has provoked a good deal of confusion. Carr did not object to the notion of a harmony of interests per se, but rather to the nineteenth century liberal assumption of a natural harmony of interests: the assumption of a hidden hand which, if allowed to operate freely, would conjure up not only the greatest possible welfare for the strongest and fittest, but also the greatest possible welfare, peace, and security for humanity as a whole. Carr's critique of this doctrine - or more particularly the attempt to apply it in the very changed conditions of the twentieth century - was withering. But he did not rule out the possibility of consciously creating such a harmony; of 'creating a new harmony by artificial means'. Indeed, the achievement of such a harmony, however temporary in broad historical time, is not only the thrust of the final chapter of The Twenty Years' Crisis, on the prospects of a new international order, but also receives explicit endorsement in the main body of the text.<sup>29</sup> In his belief in the possibility of creating a technocratic, collectivist, and functionalist New Jerusalem - and not only on English soil - Carr was just as 'utopian', according to recent definitions, as the 'utopians' themselves. This conflation of two quite separate doctrines of the harmony of interests has contributed to the perpetuation of a static conception of political realism which Carr himself did not intend.<sup>30</sup>

Thirdly, and most damaging of all, what I asserted as the unifying contention of The Twenty Years' Crisis - that the absolute and universal principles of the utopian were not principles at all 'but the unconscious reflexions of national policy based on a particular interpretation of national interests at a particular time' - is rarely mentioned in textbook

treatments of the subject. It is as if several generations of teachers of the subject have knowingly or unknowingly missed the point.

### **Carr in the Specialised Literature**

By comparison, the more specialised literature on the thought of E. H. Carr is subtle, thoughtful, and critical. This is perhaps to be expected given the quality of minds - Morgenthau, Bull, Fox, Booth, Linklater - that have addressed the subject.<sup>31</sup> Even so, a number of sizeable errors have been made and myths generated. The following two or three are illustrative.

First, in one of the most widely cited essays on The Twenty Years' Crisis, Hedley Bull, while recognising certain inherent 'crypto-Marxist' features, presents Carr's argument in a highly state-centric way. In this essay, which appeared in the Canadian International Journal in 1969, Bull focusses on three aspects of Carr's analysis: his exposure of the tendency of the dominant powers to identify their interests with those of the world as a whole; his attempt to discover a solution to the problem of 'peaceful change'; and his conception of world politics as a struggle between 'haves' and 'have-nots'. No reference is made to Carr's other works. Nor to his decidedly 'utopian' leanings in the final chapter of The Twenty Years' Crisis. Bull's conclusion, as a consequence, amounts to a serious oversimplification of Carr's argument:

Carr's basic theme was that the foundations of the nineteenth century international order had collapsed, and that the doctrines of international law, international morality, and international organisation that were current in the interwar period failed to take account of this fact. But having completed this work of demolition he did not go on to consider what the institutional devices are by which order has in the past been preserved among states in the absence of common government, or might be maintained in the present circumstances.<sup>32</sup>

In this passage Bull effectively judges Carr in the light of a problematique - the maintenance of order among political communities enjoying no common government - that Carr himself did not accept (at least not in the ahistorical way in which Bull presents it). Such a characterisation amounts to a serious underestimation of the dynamic nature of Carr's thesis. It takes, in particular, no account of the material dialectic which underlay virtually everything Carr had to say: a dialectic that was driving the world, almost ineluctably, in the direction of new modes of social, economic, and political organisation. Bull viewed the state as a relatively permanent feature of the world political scene and one whose effects, in terms of aggregate human welfare, were broadly positive. Carr came to no such conclusion. Indeed, he considered the place and role of the state in the 'new international firmament' to be deeply uncertain.

Second, in an article published in 1967, Whittle Johnston elaborated the now common view that Carr did not have a unified theory of international relations.<sup>33</sup> The argument is a complex one but the gist of it might be stated as follows. Carr did not have

one theory of international relations but two, and he failed to relate them in any consistent way. His divergent analyses are best reflected in The Twenty Years' Crisis, on the one hand, and Nationalism and After (1945), on the other, with Conditions of Peace representing a transitional work in which the thesis of the former is echoed, but the thesis of the latter clearly foreshadowed. The first theory concerns the struggle for power between the 'haves' and the 'have-nots'. It is essentially a moral theory. Carr lays the blame for the crisis of the inter-war years at the door of the 'satisfied' powers. These powers equated peace with the maintenance of the 'status quo'. But this status quo was one that suited them, and in equating peace with its preservation they committed the familiar error of all satisfied groups of identifying their particular interests with the general interests of the community as a whole. But the existence of such a harmony of interests was a delusion. In reality the only plausible equation is between peace and constant adjustments to the status quo. This places a moral requirement on the 'haves' or the 'satisfied' powers to make sacrifices, in the form of concessions to the 'have-nots' or 'dissatisfied' powers, for the common good. Only by such constant adjustments can the legitimacy of the existing order, and peace and stability within it, be maintained.

The second theory concerns the tension between the pressures of political autonomy and the necessities of economic and military interdependence. It is essentially a systemic theory. It traces the cause of the crisis to the break up of the world into smaller and smaller political units at a time when both military and economic developments were forcing on the world a need for large and larger concentrations of power. The crisis was thus a product of vast impersonal forces: the 'socialisation of the nation', the 'nationalisation of socialism', the explosion in the number of units in the system, and the incompatibility of these developments with a sociologically unifying trend 'deeply rooted in the industrial conditions of the period'.

As with Bull, Johnston sees two theories in Carr's thought because he fails to appreciate the dynamism of his approach. These are not different theories but, rather, different levels of analysis. The emphasis in Nationalism and After is on the growth of nationalism, the emergence of new economic and political forces, and the collapse of British commercial and naval power. The emphasis in The Twenty Years' Crisis is on the failure by the status quo powers to perceive the emergence of these new economic and political conditions. There is no contradiction between blaming the 'pernicious' doctrine of the harmony of interests for the breakdown of international relations in the twentieth century, and seeing that doctrine as contributing to order in the nineteenth. This is precisely Carr's thesis: the successful application of the doctrine in the nineteenth century was due to special material conditions; these conditions no longer existed in the twentieth century; the world had moved on to new modes of social and economic organisation. It was the attempt to apply the doctrine in the very different circumstances of the twentieth century, according to Carr, that lay at the root of the problem, not, pace Johnston, the doctrine itself.

One notices other problems in the secondary literature. For example, Graham Evans concludes an excellent article, published in 1975, with the view that at the end of the day Carr's 'basic political outlook can be identified with the earlier liberalism he sought to

attack' and that one can find in his later works the elements of a 'new morality' which 'make up once again the old liberal policy of enlightened self-interest underpinned by the belief in the natural harmony of interests'.<sup>34</sup> This is a puzzling conclusion. I am not aware of any evidence that suggests that Carr ever believed in a natural harmony of interest. Nor can the depiction of Carr as a liberal be accepted without the most grave reservations. Indeed, the thrust of so much of what he says is anti-liberal.

The overwhelming shortcoming, however, that one sees in the secondary literature on Carr is the failure to appreciate the dynamism of his outlook and the broadly materialist theory of history that underlay it.

## **Conclusion**

E. H. Carr was a brilliant man with a uniquely incisive and scintillating mind. He was one of the most astute observers of twentieth century world politics. He was also a remarkably skilful writer whose literary gifts rank with the likes of Waugh, Orwell, Nabokov and other great practitioners of limpid English prose. Given this, it is source of great satisfaction and relief that Carr has recently been rescued from the stupefying clutches of the IR textbook. Carr is simply too important and too complex and subtle a thinker to be left to languish among the crude categories and simple dichotomies on which such textbooks thrive.

Recent authors have shown that the simple view of Carr as a realist among other realists is a woeful travesty of a complex reality. The radical aspects of Carr's thought have at last been brought to their rightful place at the fore. However, a word of warning is required. There is a sense in which those who see Carr as a revolutionary thinker, one who offers certain key 'critical' insights, have put forward as partial a picture as those, in the past, who have interpreted him as a conservative thinker, sceptical about morality, and doubtful of the feasibility of progressive international change. This article has demonstrated that Carr's realism and his radicalism are inseparable. They are part of a broadly materialist and progressive view of history. Carr disparaged the nineteenth century liberal view of progress based on the rational utility-maximising individual, not on the grounds that it was wrong per se, but on the grounds that the conditions in which it could take root and thrive no longer existed. In its place he put a materialist view which encompassed the inexorable working of great social, economic and technological forces. These forces often gave birth to brutal men and brutal events. But there was a sense, Carr believed, in which such acts of brutality were necessary to bring about a new, better world. Perhaps they were even inevitable: a word, incidentally, that Carr rarely shrank from using.

In a telling passage, reproduced in Halslam's biography, we find Carr asserting unflinchingly towards the end of his life that despite the terrible disasters and crimes of the twentieth century, historians in two or three hundred years time will view it as a century of great progress, especially for the peasant and the 'common man'.<sup>35</sup> In such a view one vividly sees the presence of both Carr's realism and his own particular brand of revolutionism. It has been the purpose of this article to highlight the importance of Carr's revolutionism, but also suggest that it cannot be divorced from his realism. This is

particularly the case with regard to the role of power and brute force in history, the importance and 'inevitability' of which Carr respected, perhaps even in a strange sense revered. It is also the case with regard to his conception of morality, which for Carr was historically relative, and always heavily conditioned by the material circumstances of the age.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Jonathan Haslam, The Vices of Integrity: E. H. Carr, 1892-1982 (London, Verso, 1999).

<sup>2</sup> Michael Cox (ed.), E. H. Carr: A Critical Appraisal (London, Palgrave, 2000).

<sup>3</sup> Charles Jones, E. H. Carr and International Relations: A Duty to Lie (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1998).

<sup>4</sup> E. H. Carr, The Twenty Years' Crisis, 1919-1939: An Introduction to the Study of International Relations (London, Macmillan, 1939).

<sup>5</sup> Jones, E. H. Carr and International Relations, 121-43.

<sup>6</sup> For a helpful and perceptive recent analysis of Niebuhr's thought see Alastair J. H. Murray, Reconstructing Realism: Between Power Politics and Cosmopolitan Ethics (Edinburgh, Keele University Press, 1997).

<sup>7</sup> J. D. B. Miller, 'E. H. Carr: The Realist's Realist', The National Interest, Fall (1991), 65-71.

<sup>8</sup> Andrew Linklater, 'The Transformation of Political Community: E. H. Carr, Critical Theory, and International Relations', Review of International Studies, 23, 3 (1997), 321-338.

<sup>9</sup> Carr, Twenty Years' Crisis, 113, 117.

<sup>10</sup> Carr, Twenty Years' Crisis, 118.

<sup>11</sup> Carr, Twenty Years' Crisis, 81-2, 93, 264-84; W. T. R. Fox, 'E. H. Carr and Political Realism: Vision and Revision', Review of International Studies 11, 1 (1995), 6.

<sup>12</sup> Carr, Twenty Years' Crisis, 287.

<sup>13</sup> Carr, Twenty Years' Crisis, 111, 87.

<sup>14</sup> E. H. Carr, Conditions of Peace (London, Macmillan, 1942), 236-275.

<sup>15</sup> Carr, Twenty Years' Crisis, ix.

<sup>16</sup> Carr, Twenty Years' Crisis, 287-88; Conditions of Peace, 3-13.

- <sup>17</sup> E. H. Carr, The New Society (London, Macmillan, 1951), 19-79.
- <sup>18</sup> Carr, New Society, 36 (emphasis added). A page later he says: 'The nineteenth-century capitalist order has been transformed by a process of historical evolution into a system where state intervention and state planning are imperative.'
- <sup>19</sup> Carr, New Society, 46.
- <sup>20</sup> Carr, New Society, 19.
- <sup>21</sup> In his exquisite autobiographical sketch written for his dear friend Tamara Deutscher in 1980, Carr described his Twenty Years' Crisis as 'not exactly a Marxist work, but [one] strongly impregnated with Marxist ways of thinking, applied to international affairs.' The sketch is published for the first time in Cox, E. H. Carr, xiii-xxii.
- <sup>22</sup> Carr, Twenty Years' Crisis, 287-307.
- <sup>23</sup> Carr, Twenty Years' Crisis, 303.
- <sup>24</sup> Carr, Twenty Years' Crisis, 81-91.
- <sup>25</sup> Carr, Twenty Years' Crisis, Chapters 10-12.
- <sup>26</sup> Carr, Twenty Years' Crisis, 66.
- <sup>27</sup> Carr, Twenty Years' Crisis, 204.
- <sup>28</sup> Ken Booth, 'Security in Anarchy: Utopian Realism in Theory and Practice', International Affairs, 67, 3 (1991), 531.
- <sup>29</sup> Carr, Twenty Years' Crisis, 65-7, 103, 287-307.
- <sup>30</sup> A more detailed historical context is provided in Peter Wilson, 'The Myth of the First Great Debate', Review of International Studies, Special Issue, 24, 5 (1998), 8-13.
- <sup>31</sup> Hans J. Morgethau, 'The Political Realism of E. H. Carr', World Politics, 1 (1948-49), 127-34; Hedley Bull, 'The Twenty Years' Crisis, Thirty Years On', International Journal, XXIV, 4 (1969), 625-38; Fox, 'Vision and Revision', 1-16; Booth, 'Security in Anarchy', 527-45; Linklater, 'The Transformation of Political Community', 321-338. Also important are: Michael Joseph Smith, Realist Thought from Weber to Kissinger (Baton Rouge and London, Louisiana State University Press, 1986), Chapter 4, 'E. H. Carr: Realism as Relativism', 68-98; Charles Jones, 'E. H. Carr: Ambivalent Realist', in Francis A. Beer and Robert Hariman (eds.), Post-Realism: The Rhetorical Turn in International Relations (East Lansing, Michigan State University Press, 1996), 95-119; Paul Howe, 'The Utopian Realism of E. H. Carr', Review of International Studies, 20, 3 (1994), 277-298.
- <sup>32</sup> Bull, 'Twenty Years' Crisis, Thirty Years On', 637-38.
- <sup>33</sup> Whittle Johnston, 'E. H. Carr's Theory of International Relations: A Critique', Journal of Politics, XXIX, 29 (1967), 861-84.
- <sup>34</sup> Graham Evans, 'E. H. Carr and International Relations', British Journal of International Studies, 1, 2 (1975), 77-97.
- <sup>35</sup> Haslam, E. H. Carr, 258-59.