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## The utopian realism of E. H. Carr\*

PAUL HOWE

E. H. Carr is a thinker on international affairs who defies easy classification. His best-known work on the subject, *The Twenty Years' Crisis*, delivered a powerful realist critique, still resonant today, of the idealist approach to international relations and helped bring about a renewed emphasis on the role of power in international affairs. Less familiar to students of international relations are Carr's more optimistic works. In *Conditions of Peace* and *Nationalism and After*, written during World War II, he was sanguine about the prospects for a peaceful postwar order and outlined the steps required to bring about that happy state of affairs. The same hopeful themes were sounded in the years after the war in *The Soviet Impact on the Western World*, *The New Society* and other shorter essays.

A number of Carr's critics have been impressed with some portion or other of his work but dissatisfied with his international relations corpus as a whole. They find therein an immiscible mixture of realist pessimism and utopian optimism. Unable to distil a homogeneous blend from his various writings, they have drawn the conclusion that Carr's work offers occasional glimmers of insight but fails to provide a cogent and comprehensive theory of international relations.

The assessment does him an injustice. Carr's work was informed by a consistent and compelling philosophy, one deferential to the basic insights of realism but unwilling to submit to the more dire implications of the doctrine. That philosophy was not always made explicit, especially in his earlier writings; perhaps the clearest articulation appears in Carr's musings on the nature of history and the historian's enterprise in his 1961 work, *What Is History?* The elusiveness of Carr's philosophy is compounded by the novelty of his approach. Reviewing his work in light of subsequent developments, it is apparent that he was in some ways writing ahead of his time. His account of global politics bears many similarities to that propounded by today's critical theorists. Like those thinkers, Carr takes exception to the stagnation and conservatism embedded in the traditional realist approach. A review of Carr's work attuned to its philosophical wellsprings reveals a thinker in possession of a coherent and provocative philosophy and a commentator on international affairs sensitive to the inertial forces tending to perpetuate an atomistic international system, but also confident that time, along with healthy measures of utopianism, would bring about a more peaceful and just international order.

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**Carr's critics**

The skewed evaluations put forward by Carr's critics may be partly due to the tendency to treat his starkest portrayal of international life, *The Twenty Years' Crisis*, as his definitive statement on international politics. This undue emphasis seems to have blinded Carr's detractors to the subtle interplay of realism and utopianism in his thought. The theme was not wholly absent from the pages of *The Twenty Years' Crisis*, but it was tangential to his central concern, which was to put forward the realist case in undiluted form. The need for adequate measures of both utopianism and realism was, however, emphasized and further explicated in his later works—but his critics seem to have paid these less attention.

In any event, the result has been a fairly consistent misrepresentation of Carr's thought. Hans Morgenthau started the ball rolling with a 1948 review of Carr's work on the pages of *World Politics*. In his evaluation of Carr's contribution to the field, Morgenthau reviews several works, but decides in the end that the optimistic tenor of later monographs cannot escape the dark, realist shadow cast by *The Twenty Years' Crisis*. The latter, he suggests, was 'primarily diagnostic and critical', while Carr's other works were 'intended to be primarily constructive and to offer a cure for the disease'.<sup>1</sup> The problem was that his realist critique of interwar idealism was too devastating, leading him to 'a relativistic, instrumentalist conception of morality' and leaving him with no materials for his own project of utopian construction.<sup>2</sup>

Hedley Bull, some twenty years later, offered a similar appraisal: 'The central difficulty of Carr's position is that though he sets out in search of . . . a moral spring for action he is prevented by his own relativist and instrumentalist conception of morals from finding one that is effective.'<sup>3</sup> More recently, Michael Smith has added his voice to the chorus of realist critics. In Smith's estimation, Carr found himself foundering in relativist seas because of his reliance on 'an ill-conceived moral philosophy of intuitionism'.<sup>4</sup> Carr hoped to find moral guidance in the views of the common man, but this, Smith tells us, leads to the problem 'common to all moral philosophies based on intuitionism: another writer can always claim that *his* version is the correct one'.<sup>5</sup> Once again, the conclusion is unfavourable: 'in the hands of E. H. Carr realism becomes an agnostic relativism of power'.<sup>6</sup> To relativism Smith adds a new charge, that Carr relied upon a 'crudely materialist sociology of knowledge' and hence was a determinist. Carr, he contends, 'argues that all thought reflects underlying economic and social conditions, seemingly denying any autonomy for the realm of thought'.<sup>7</sup>

But not everyone has been so disparaging. Dismissed by some as the advocate of a relativistic and deterministic philosophy, Carr has been lauded by others for his novel approach. In particular, some critical theorists have singled him out as a more catholic realist, detecting in his work some traces of their own philosophy

<sup>1</sup> Hans Morgenthau, 'The Political Science of E. H. Carr' *World Politics*, 1 (1948), p. 128.

<sup>2</sup> Morgenthau, 'Political Science', p. 134. For a similar critique, see Whittle Johnson, 'E. H. Carr's Theory of International Relations', *The Journal of Politics*, 29 (1967), pp. 861–88.

<sup>3</sup> Hedley Bull, 'The Twenty Years' Crisis Thirty Years On', *International Journal*, 24 (1969), p. 628.

<sup>4</sup> Michael Smith, *Realist Thought from Weber to Kissinger* (Baton Rouge, 1986), p. 97.

<sup>5</sup> Smith, *Realist Thought*, p. 95 (emphasis in original).

<sup>6</sup> Smith, *Realist Thought*, p. 98.

<sup>7</sup> Smith, *Realist Thought*, pp. 97, 95.

and method. Robert Cox, for example, has argued that Carr distinguished himself from other realists in his sensitivity to the limitations of traditional realism. Whereas most realists treat realism as an 'ahistorical' framework for analyzing international relations phenomena, Carr sought to understand the historical forces that had produced and sustained a system of sovereign states down the centuries.<sup>8</sup> Similarly, Andrew Linklater, in a recent overview of the critical theory perspective, observes that 'Carr's political realism is a useful point of departure' for scholars interested in discovering ways to transcend the systemic constraints that many realists see as an inescapable element of international life.<sup>9</sup>

Of course, this sympathetic rendering of our beleaguered protagonist may not be surprising if critical theory is itself philosophically suspect, and certainly there are some who seem to take that view.<sup>10</sup> This paper, then, is not only a defence of Carr's work, but is also, implicitly, a defence of critical theory. Coming at this task through Carr's work has certain advantages; his presentation of abstruse ideas is methodical and cogent, his prose consistently lucid and accessible. Revisiting Carr's work also sheds light on the nuances in realist thought. If Carr and his realist critics really do take issue over basic philosophical precepts, it seems odd that he was ever labelled a realist. But at the same time, recent reappraisals of other realist thinkers have drawn the conclusion that they too have been misportrayed as enthusiastic purveyors of power politics.<sup>11</sup> There is a growing consensus that realism is a more complex body of thought than previously branded, demanding more serious and thoughtful engagement on the part of its critics.

In Carr's writings philosophy and international relations commentary were usually intertwined. For analytical purposes, the two are best treated separately. Proceeding in this manner, two conclusions become clear: Carr's philosophical perspective, like that of today's critical theorists, is both tenable and valuable; and his guardedly optimistic IR realism is a provocative alternative to more traditional variants of that doctrine.

### Carr's philosophy

Carr's critics claim that his work rests on the unsteady foundations of relativism and determinism. In fact, the philosophical pillars embedded in his scholarship are of sturdier design: not relativism, but rather mistrust of purported omniscience, coupled with confidence in gradual progress and enlightenment in human affairs; not determinism, but an awareness of historical inertia and the importance of human agency in overcoming that inertia.

Omniscience, Carr felt, is unattainable because thought is always in some degree conditioned by historical circumstance. 'Man . . . is not totally involved in his

<sup>8</sup> Robert Cox, 'Social Forces, States and World Orders: Beyond International Relations Theory', *Millennium*, 10 (1981), p. 131.

<sup>9</sup> Andrew Linklater, 'The Question of the Next Stage in International Relations Theory: A Critical-Theoretical Point of View', *Millennium*, 21 (1992), p. 96.

<sup>10</sup> See, for example, Robert Gilpin, 'The Richness of Political Realism', in Robert Keohane (ed.), *Neorealism and Its Critics* (New York, 1986), pp. 301–21.

<sup>11</sup> See, for example, Joel Rosenthal, *Righteous Realists: Political Realism, Responsible Power, and American Culture in the Nuclear Age* (Baton Rouge and London, 1991).

environment and unconditionally subject to it. On the other hand, he is never totally independent of it and its unconditional master.<sup>12</sup> Yet he observed in political and intellectual leaders, and indeed in society at large, the disturbing tendency to extrapolate beyond their ken, to make spurious claims of universal legitimacy for their islands of knowledge and parochial values. Morgenthau unwittingly exemplified the point when he accused Carr of espousing a philosophy that left the observer ‘unfortified by a transcendent standard of ethics’.<sup>13</sup> For Carr, fidelity to transcendent standards was part of the problem, not the solution.

Why then this pervasive proclivity? Carr identifies several factors conspiring to ossify moral and intellectual thought. First, the creator of knowledge must impose an artificial structure on facts in order to arrange them in some meaningful fashion, in order to provide an account, rather than simply an enumeration, of events. Facts, inevitably, are sifted through an interpretive filter, rendering some salient and others nondescript.<sup>14</sup> Moreover, this selective apprehension of the facts is not an entirely rational process, for it is values, not facts, that determine what we choose to study. As Carr noted, ‘the wish is father to the thought’; it was, in the first instance, a profound concern with war that led the interwar idealists to examine the causes of, and potential remedies for, that social phenomenon.<sup>15</sup>

That purpose precedes knowledge is not, in itself, necessarily a troubling claim. It has been suggested elsewhere that values may determine which issues different thinkers choose to study, but this does not impede their ability to conduct objective research within their chosen domain.<sup>16</sup> The international relations scholar who elects to focus on war rather than economic injustice is capable of producing impartial scholarship. But Carr pressed the point further. He contended that the values informing the direction of study also, in the social sciences anyway, affect the object of study: ‘the fact that human beings normally react to certain conditions in a certain way . . . is a fact which may be changed by the desire to change it; and this desire already present in the mind of the investigator, may be extended as the result of his investigation, to a sufficient number of other human beings to make it effective’.<sup>17</sup> The sentiments that moved that interwar idealists to deliberate on war could, if globally disseminated and embraced, bring war to an end.

But Carr thought such transmogrifications unlikely, for the values that lie at the heart of knowledge creation are subject to certain inertial forces and are more apt to reinforce than undermine the status quo. There is, in the parry and thrust of social commentary, none of the liberal’s cherished free market of ideas and values. Instead, dominant social values tend to impose themselves on producers of knowledge: ‘Any historical interpretation depends in part on the values held by the historian, which will in turn reflect the values held by the age and society in which he lives.’<sup>18</sup> Again, this is not necessarily problematic. After all, why should the production of knowledge not rest on a stable foundation of social values? The

<sup>12</sup> E. H. Carr, *What Is History?*, 2nd edn (London, 1986), p. 24.

<sup>13</sup> Morgenthau, ‘Political Science’, p. 134.

<sup>14</sup> Carr, *What Is History?*, pp. 1–24. There is a clear parallel with Thomas Kuhn’s notion that most scientific research operates of necessity within the confines of a dominant paradigm.

<sup>15</sup> Carr, *The Twenty Years’ Crisis*, 2nd edn (London, 1946), p. 3.

<sup>16</sup> See Kal Holsti, *The Dividing Discipline* (Boston, 1985), especially chapter 7.

<sup>17</sup> Carr, *The Twenty Years’ Crisis*, pp.3–4.

<sup>18</sup> E. H. Carr, *The New Society* (Boston, 1951), p. 101.

trouble arises when society is dominated by powerful elements, for the powerful will endeavour to mould society's values in a manner consistent with the preservation of their power and interests. 'The morality of a dominant group is always distorted by the perspective of its own interest, and it identifies the morality which protects that interest with absolute and universal good.'<sup>19</sup> This reasoning led Carr to his familiar observation that the dominant powers in the international society of the interwar period made peace a sacrosanct value because of their interest in maintaining a favourable international status quo.

Clearly Carr took exception to the notion of the detached commentator quietly observing and reflecting on history as it passes by outside his window. As he saw matters, society's commanding elements underwrite society's values, and those values permeate the process of knowledge creation, with the result that knowledge is sometimes little more than an implement used to reinforce an existing structure of power. But he did see light at the end of the tunnel. In the first place, Carr held that the individual is constrained, not brainwashed, by society. The creator of knowledge—the scholar, the political leader, the social agitator—is capable of generating innovative ways of thinking. Furthermore, he was of the view that both domestically and internationally, challenges to orthodoxy were, over the long haul, forcing societies to incorporate hitherto disempowered elements. In the result, governing values were coming to reflect the mores and preferences of society at large, to salutary effect; for if values are the motive power behind knowledge, the ascendance of more just values would, in some sense, lead to more objective, or at least more democratic, knowledge.

But the long run is a long way off and we will leave this aside for the moment. In the short-term, the scholar sensitive to people's propensity to idealize a favourable status quo is guided towards certain projects. One is to try to spread the word about the limitations on human knowledge. Carr did this in subtle fashion in many of his writings and more directly in *What is History?* Another is to ruffle the feathers of those who refuse to recognize the limitations on human knowledge. 'Piecemeal improvements' cannot penetrate the armour of intransigent opponents. The renegade scholar must 'present fundamental challenges in the name of reason to the current way of doing things.'<sup>20</sup> In the short run, then, Carr did not want to dispense with grand vision. If social orders, once established, tend to ossify, alternative grand visions are needed to break their hold—we must fight fire with fire. In short, social change at certain periods proceeds of necessity in a dialectical fashion: a dominant thesis must be challenged by an antithesis, resulting in some manner of synthesis, which itself is likely to become a thesis, and so on.

Thus, we see in *The Twenty Years' Crisis*, a scholar, conscious of the entrenchment of thought and the myopia of dogmatists, throwing out a challenging antithesis (realism) to the dominant thesis (idealism). Carr's purpose was to disturb settled assumptions about the workings of international politics. Rather than aim for a balanced account, he challenged the halcyon images of the interwar idealists with what was, in places, a dark, unremitting realism. As he wrote in the preface to the second edition, '*The Twenty Years' Crisis* was written with the deliberate aim of counteracting the glaring and dangerous defect of nearly all thinking, both

<sup>19</sup> E. H. Carr, 'The Moral Foundations for World Order', in Ernest Llewellyn Woodward (ed.), *Foundations for World Order* (Denver, 1949), p. 67.

<sup>20</sup> Carr, *What is History?*, p. 150.

academic and popular, about international politics in English-speaking countries from 1919 to 1939—the almost total neglect of the factor of power.’<sup>21</sup> Carr’s monograph was not his final word on international politics, it was an initial salvo meant to spark vigorous debate between idealists and realists, from which there might emerge some manner of tentative compromise and consensus.

Carr did, in places, anticipate, though in broadest outline only, the outcome of this debate: ‘Sound political thought and sound political life will be found only where [utopia and reality] both have their place.’<sup>22</sup> Some have seen these as bland platitudes used to paper over the gaps in a philosophically bifurcated theory. Smith, for one, finds Carr’s classic text woefully inadequate: ‘the most morality can achieve is a temporary and uneasy compromise with power. But the basis and content of that compromise remain as elusive as ever.’<sup>23</sup> But humility was Carr’s touchstone and imprecision in this instance was a virtue not a vice. The individual scholar, striving to overcome his own historical embeddedness but never certain of success, does not have the clairvoyance required to presage the outcome of a battle between antithetical ideas. Remaining oblique about the requisite measures of utopianism and realism was not obfuscation, nor was it a half-hearted and ultimately untenable concession to utopianism. Carr was simply remaining true to his own philosophical principle of epistemological humility.

Unfortunately, others were not so circumspect. After the Second World War, realism was established, for a number of years anyway, as the new imperious mode of thought,<sup>24</sup> confirming Carr’s suspicion that in the absence of intellectual modesty, thought tends to ossify, oscillate, and ossify again, and undermining his hope that debate might be elevated to a higher plane. No one, it seems, was paying much attention when a perspicacious reviewer of *The Twenty Years’ Crisis* took Carr on his own terms and enjoined others to do likewise: ‘Professor Carr has shown the entire inadequacy of Professors Zimmern and Toynbee. Who will demonstrate the entire inadequacy of Professor Carr?’<sup>25</sup>

From these initial remarks, it is not hard to see why Carr has been labelled a determinist and a relativist. On the determinism charge, dialectical change is often associated with Marxism, a determinist doctrine in theory if not in practice. On the relativism count, Carr is, in *The Twenty Years’ Crisis*, not as explicit as he might have been about the long-term effect of dialectical change. Morgenthau is critical of Carr’s remark that morality is ‘an escape from the logical consequences of realism which, once it is achieved, must once more be attacked with instruments of realism’.<sup>26</sup> Morgenthau assumes this battle between antithetical propositions never ends, that for Carr, dialectical change is movement without progress. If he is right, if Carr would have us forever attack existing dogma, both in scholarly thought and social arrangements, do we ever arrive at a point where we can hold firm convictions? If not, does this not amount to relativism?

Consider the changes in turn. On the matter of his supposed determinism, the

<sup>21</sup> Carr, *The Twenty Years’ Crisis*, p. vii.

<sup>22</sup> Carr, *The Twenty Years’ Crisis*, p. 10.

<sup>23</sup> Smith, *Realist Thought*, p. 94.

<sup>24</sup> For evidence on this point, see John Vasquez, *The Power of Power Politics* (New Brunswick, NJ 1983).

<sup>25</sup> Richard Coventry, ‘The Illusions of Power’, *The New Statesman and Nation*, 25 November 1939, p. 762.

<sup>26</sup> Carr quoted in Morgenthau, ‘Political Science’, p. 134.

basic question is: whence alternative visions? Was, for example, *The Twenty Years' Crisis* to Carr's mind a product of his own keen intellect ranging freely over the intellectual and moral issues of the day, or was it the inevitable issue of the socio-economic climate of the Great Britain of the late 1930s? We know that for Marx alternative utopias were, in the final analysis, determined by the inexorable march of economic advancement. The evolving mode of production shaped economic relations, which in turn shaped political superstructures, theoretically leaving no role for human volition in the alteration of those superstructures. Michael Smith seems to believe that Carr shared Marx's outlook, charging that he relied on a 'crudely materialist sociology of knowledge'.<sup>27</sup>

Carr shared an affinity with Marx on many issues, but this was not one of them. Smith's claim centres on Carr's observation in *The Twenty Years' Crisis* that satiated great powers assume the moral infrastructure protecting their interests to be universally legitimate.<sup>28</sup> To this interpretation, there is first the reply that the book was deliberately overstating the realist case. But more importantly, Carr did not believe that the interests of states consist solely in material aggrandizement. The promotion of ideas matters too.<sup>29</sup> That Carr held this view may have been obscured by his conviction that material matters are important in people's lives, that the allocation of tangible goods is a matter of primary moral concern. This, however, is not the same as the Marxist claim that economic relations shape social consciousness. For Carr, debates about the good life largely revolved around the distribution of material goods, but the outcome of these disputes was not predetermined by the impersonal dynamics of the economic sphere.

Indeed, when Carr wrote on the problems of his day he emphasized that they were at base moral crises that could only be set right through an act of will. In *Conditions of Peace*, Carr set out to diagnose the social malaise he thought partially responsible for the outbreak of the Second World War. There were, in his view, profound problems with Western democracy and liberal economics. But these were only symptoms of a deeper disease: 'There is no excuse for mistaking the character of the issue. The crisis cannot be explained—and much less solved—in constitutional, or even in economic, terms. The fundamental issue is moral.'<sup>30</sup> Nor was the solution to this moral crisis about to spring forth full-blown from the tensions embedded in the existing social order. As Carr ruefully observed, 'There is all the difference in the world between an examination of the conditions which a new faith and a new moral purpose must fulfil and an assurance that this faith and this purpose will come to birth.'<sup>31</sup> Carr thought it essential that those disenchanted with the status quo actively formulate and disseminate dissident viewpoints.

Carr, then, was not a determinist. That said, a caveat is in order. In Carr's historiography, the role of the masses was of critical importance, far outweighing in the long term, the influence of individuals, however charismatic or intoxicating.

<sup>27</sup> Smith, *Realist Thought*, p. 97.

<sup>28</sup> Smith, *Realist Thought* p. 97.

<sup>29</sup> Jack Donnelly, 'Twentieth Century Realism', in Terry Nardin and David R. Mapel (eds.), *Traditions of International Ethics* (Cambridge, 1992), p. 106.

<sup>30</sup> Carr, *Conditions of Peace*, p. 128. On this point, there is a close parallel between Carr's approach and Karl Polanyi's trenchant critique of classical liberal economics in *The Great Transformation* (New York, 1975).

<sup>31</sup> Carr, *Conditions of Peace*, p. 128.



He put it plainly—‘numbers count in history’<sup>32</sup>—and had little patience for the ingenuous view that ‘history is the biography of great men’.<sup>33</sup> But at the same time, Carr did not see the masses charging ahead off their own bat. He recognized that leadership plays an important catalytic role in social progress: ‘all effective movements have few leaders and a multitude of followers’.<sup>34</sup> As a preeminent scholar of the Russian Revolution, Carr was well aware that nimble leaders can effect dramatic change if their slogans and programmes strike a resonant chord with the masses. In short, as Carr saw it, the masses impart inertia to history, but do not establish a set path that must be followed.

We see, then, in contrast to the dialectical determinism of Marxism, Carr’s view of history being pulled forward in fits and starts by the locomotive of human will. The seeds of destruction are not born of the contradictions inherent in the existing order; they have to be planted deliberately. At the same time, the mass of humanity, especially in the modern age, acts as a brake, circumscribing the direction and distance a leader can take society at any given time.

The critical role accorded the masses in Carr’s historiography provides part of the argument needed to deflect the second charge levelled by his critics: that he was a relativist. The issue hinges on the malleability of the masses. They might be slow to move, but could they, in the long run, be taken anywhere by persuasive and determined leaders? After witnessing the rise of fascism, Carr might reasonably have concluded that the masses could not be relied upon to provide a moral anchor for society. But Carr was not so easily discouraged, holding firm in his optimistic long-term prognosis. To his mind, there had been, through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, a gradual expansion of reason, a trend resulting from the incorporation, into the echelons of society that matter, elements previously excluded: ‘the expansion of reason means, in essence, the emergence into history of groups and classes, of peoples and continents that hitherto lay outside it’.<sup>35</sup> Progress might be sparked by clever people thinking new thoughts and charismatic leaders spreading the word, but the final judgement on social arrangements would be rendered by the masses. For Carr, true democracy consisted in enlisting ‘the effective thought of the whole community’<sup>36</sup> and would only be achieved with the ascension of ‘mass democracy’: ‘the principle of government of all and by all and for all’.<sup>37</sup>

In effect, then, Carr hewed to an evolutionary theory of moral progress. Values, like other human characteristics and attributes, cannot be properly judged until tried on for size—‘the purposes and actions of one group or of one generation are sifted and tested, accepted and rejected, by its contemporaries or its successors’.<sup>38</sup> Looking back at the history of the past two centuries, Carr observed a progressive expansion of the judgement rendering body. This process, Carr thought, would eventually culminate in genuine mass democracy. In the long run, it was the preference of society at large for an orderly and materially prosperous social life that would determine the shape and purposes of social structures.

<sup>32</sup> Carr, *What is History?*, p. 44.

<sup>33</sup> T. Carlyle quoted in Carr, *What is History?*, p. 43.

<sup>34</sup> Carr, *What is History?*, p. 44.

<sup>35</sup> Carr, *What is History?*, p. 144.

<sup>36</sup> Ernest Barker quoted in E. H. Carr, *The Soviet Impact on the Western World* (London, 1946), p. 19.

<sup>37</sup> Carr, *The New Society*, p. 111.

<sup>38</sup> Carr, *The New Society*, p. 117.

This helps explain why Carr, in *The Twenty Years' Crisis*, justified his assertions about morality by appealing to intuitions about the common man's outlook. Looking around at the various political systems scattered about the globe, Carr felt that all lacked one or another essential prerequisite of mass democracy. At this incipient stage, intuitionism was, for him, the only valid form of moral justification; for evolutionary moral progress necessarily consists in the advancement 'toward goals which can be defined only as we advance towards them, and the validity of which can only be verified in a process of attaining them'.<sup>39</sup> The scholar or leader might hazard a guess as to our eventual destination, but it would not do, in the manner of bygone idealists, to proclaim natural law in the here and now and demand the immediate submission of all. Michael Smith warns that a reliance on intuitionism invites one's opponents to claim contrary intuitions.<sup>40</sup> This is not problematic as long as everyone recognizes their intuitions for what they are—intuitions that contribute to the debate, rather than epiphanies that decide the debate.

Clearly, then, Carr was not a relativist. He had a strong sense of right and wrong, as well as confidence in the eventual triumph of right in the guise of mass democracy.<sup>41</sup> Some might even say excessive confidence. There is in places a sense of the inexorable in Carr's portrayal of the march towards mass democracy. Just as Marx blindly assumed that socialism would triumph in the end, so Carr at times seems to presume that mass democracy *must* eventually reign supreme. As a result, Carr's thought starts to look eschatological, which is problematic since it seems to delimit the role for human volition and to reintroduce the charge from which Carr was exonerated above—determinism.

But Carr was never so dogmatic. He emphasized always the need for dogged questioning and criticism of existing social structures. Just as evolving organisms shape themselves to the configurations of a specific environment and continue to evolve as their environment changes, so the body politic, even the mass democracy, must always be ready to adapt to changing circumstance. It is only when all else holds that an entity can settle into a stable, unchanging equilibrium with its environment—but it is never the case that all else holds for long, especially in the realm of social and political affairs.<sup>42</sup> New technologies emerge (nuclear weapons), new problems develop (the environment), and society must adjust. Carr believed that mass democracy, properly constituted, would be especially adept at responding in a brisk, orderly, and just fashion to the ongoing challenges and vicissitudes that test any society's mettle.<sup>43</sup> Thus, whereas natural law thinkers all too often try to legislate the *substance* of the just society, Carr advocated the *form* of society he thought capable of producing and reproducing just social arrangements. Carr was

<sup>39</sup> Carr, *What is History?*, p. 113.

<sup>40</sup> Smith, *Realist Thought*, p. 95.

<sup>41</sup> If this rendition is sound, Carr's philosophy ends up looking something like Kant's. For both thinkers, society is moving fitfully forward to a point of stability at which lies the triumph of the individual and the full emancipation of reason. As F. H. Hinsley puts it, Kant offered us a 'novel unilinear concept of history as continuous progress towards an end' in which 'reason did not develop instinctively. It required trials, experience and information in order to progress gradually from one level to the next'. F. H. Hinsley, *Power and the Pursuit of Peace* (Cambridge, 1963), p. 73.

<sup>42</sup> This argument borrows from Herbert Simon's concise discussion of social evolution in *Reason in Human Affairs* (Stanford, Ca. 1983), pp. 37–74.

<sup>43</sup> John Rawls makes the same point about the inherent stability of the just society. See John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, MA, 1971), pp. 496–503.

not interested in destinations; he was concerned about fluid forward movement: 'The notion of a finite and clearly definable goal . . . has proved inapplicable and barren . . . I shall be content with the possibility of unlimited progress—or progress subject to no limits that we can or need envisage.'<sup>44</sup> If Carr's faith in the eventual triumph of mass democracy was a form of eschatology, it was certainly a more open-ended eschatology than most.

There is then, in Carr's philosophy, ample provision for the things most people, politicians, scholars and laypersons alike, hold dear: free will and progress in human affairs. Conversely, there is none of the stultifying determinism or thoroughgoing relativism that the critics have found in Carr's writings. Perhaps some of the misplaced criticism, on the latter count, is connected to Carr's observation that relativism is sometimes used as a tool to undermine confidence in an entrenched status quo. In *The Soviet Impact on the Western World*, he observed that 'Marxist and Soviet criticism has . . . not been concerned to pursue [relativism] to this extreme and logical conclusion [that all knowledge is purely subjective], but rather to use relativism as a weapon to discredit and dissolve the theories and values of *bourgeois* civilization.'<sup>45</sup> To wit: the espousal of relativism is sometimes simply another attempt at purposive dialectical progression. Just as the Soviets appealed to equality to counter the West's cardinal value, liberty, they used relativism to undermine the faith in absolutist truths that rendered its values sacrosanct. Carr might well have done likewise. It certainly would not have been inconsistent with his philosophy or the dialectical strategy he thought necessary to unsettle ossified thought. Commentators who detect a hint of relativism in this or that passage should hesitate before ascribing relativist sympathies to Carr. He, as much as anyone, recognized the futility of the doctrine in its undiluted form: 'consistent relativism, by attacking every absolute, renders any position untenable'.<sup>46</sup>

The ideas that form the core of Carr's philosophy—the denial of human omniscience and the affirmation of progress through the evolutionary procession of reason—have gained prominence in international relations literature in recent years. The denial of omniscience has come from any number of writers, whose ideas are usually slotted under the rubrics of critical theory, postmodernism and poststructuralism. These same writers differ substantially in the role they scope out for reason. Critical theorists tend to stress the themes discussed here: the historically conditioned nature of knowledge leavened by an affirmation of evolutionary rationality.<sup>47</sup> There are others, however, also calling themselves critical theorists, who are uncertain whether critical theory should make such generous concessions to rationality and universalism.<sup>48</sup> And then there are others still, usually deemed

<sup>44</sup> Carr, *What is History?* p. 113.

<sup>45</sup> Carr, *The Soviet Impact*, p. 95 (emphasis in original).

<sup>46</sup> Carr, *The Soviet Impact*, p. 97.

<sup>47</sup> The notion of an evolutionary rationality is discussed in Mark Hoffman, 'Critical Theory and the Inter-Paradigm Debate', *Millennium*, 16 (1987), pp. 231–51; and Mark Hoffman, 'Conversations on Critical International Relations Theory', *Millennium*, 17 (1988), pp. 91–5.

<sup>48</sup> See the reply to Hoffman's arguments in N. J. Rengger, 'Going Critical? A Response to Hoffman', *Millennium*, 17 (1988), pp. 81–9.

postmodernists or poststructuralists, who do not seem to be troubled about repudiating reason altogether.<sup>49</sup>

These labels are introduced to tie in Carr's thought to contemporary theoretical debates. Carr's critics, it will be recalled, claim he sees power behind all purported morality, that he is, in the result, an extreme relativist. They are then puzzled that he enjoins us to challenge dogma by constructing alternative utopian visions. After all, why, and on what grounds, would a sincere relativist criticize anything? If this assessment were accurate, Carr might reasonably be deemed an early post-structuralist, and his work would be subject to some of the same criticisms that have been directed at that body of thought.<sup>50</sup> But it is a flawed rendering. Carr's scholarship emerges out of the important middle ground between absolutism and relativism. He sees in the world neither eternal, meaningless, power struggles nor epiphanies of enlightenment. Carr echoes the sentiments of many critical theorists when he cautions that 'man, when he cuts adrift from reason, denies his own nature and is lost'.<sup>51</sup>

Indeed, it is difficult to sympathize with those who want to jettison reason completely. How are we to begin theorizing about international politics without some sort of appeal to modes of thinking, acting, and perhaps even moralizing, that transcend international borders? That said, we should, if we are impressed by the critical theory critique, invoke universals that are sensitive to the multiplicity of views generated by intellectual and moral questions. Universals should be pitched at levels that encompass and embrace, rather than exclude and reject, the diverse elements of global society.<sup>52</sup> The individual secured to these philosophical moorings implicitly recognizes the limitations on personal reason, which, for Carr, was crucial. As he once observed, 'Man's capacity to rise above his social and historical situation seems to be conditioned by the sensitivity with which he recognizes the extent of his involvement in it'.<sup>53</sup> In the final analysis, critical theory is an emancipatory tool capable of speeding the progress towards more enlightened political arrangements and obviating the need for forceful, and often violent, challenges to the status quo. But until it finds a place in the tool box of every social engineer, Carr thought it likely we would continue to suffer the harsher effects of dialectical challenge and change.

<sup>49</sup> See, for example, the essays in James Der Derian and Michael Shapiro (eds.), *International/Intertextual Relations* (Lexington, 1989). For a useful summary of the points of divergence and convergence between these new approaches, see Jim George and David Campbell, 'Patterns of Dissent and the Celebration of Difference: Critical Social Theory and International Relations', *International Studies Quarterly*, 34 (1990), pp. 269–93.

<sup>50</sup> See, for example, the critique of poststructuralism in Roger D. Spegele, 'Richard Ashley's Discourse for International Relations', *Millennium*, 21 (1992), pp. 147–82.

<sup>51</sup> Carr, *The New Society*, p. 105.

<sup>52</sup> Notes Thomas Biersteker in this vein: 'One important current in the post-positivist literature . . . views itself as taking a decidedly critical stance on international theory, opening up new possibilities, giving voice to silenced discourses. It is not pluralism without purpose, but a *critical* pluralism, designed to reveal embedded power and authority structures, provoke critical scrutiny of dominant discourses, empower marginalized populations and perspectives, and provide a basis for alternative conceptualizations.' Thomas J. Biersteker, 'Critical Reflections on Post-Positivism in International Relations', *International Studies Quarterly*, 33 (1989), p. 264.

<sup>53</sup> Carr, *What Is History?*, p. 38.

### Carr's view of international politics

To reiterate: the central pillar in Carr's philosophy is the denial of human omniscience tempered by an affirmation of long-term progress in human affairs. In the best of all possible worlds, enlightenment in these matters would expedite our political and moral advancement. But still the halting and sometimes violent progress towards mass democracy in our less than perfect world is to be preferred to the stagnation and eternal recurrence implicit in other, more dour, world views.

When Carr applied his critical theory perspective to international relations, he posited a different realism, a more historical realism, than many of his counterparts. The essence of his view was this: Change in the nature of states, resulting from the gradual adoption of more inclusive, universal norms, was slowly undermining the conditions that had made realism the most compelling theoretical account of international affairs. The process had started in force with the populist revolutions of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Principal among these, for Carr, was the French Revolution. This episode had unloosed the idea of popular sovereignty and catalyzed the long and arduous search for the universal values that would underscore mass democracy, an evolutionary development in which the domestic and international realms were inextricably intertwined. Revolution and reform within states, war and cooperation between states, were part of a larger historical process of dialectical progression towards a more just and orderly world.

If this all sounds plausible but rather nebulous, it is because Carr was primarily concerned, in his scholarly work, with the broad sweep of international evolution and generally eschewed detailed discussion of contemporary foreign policy. Understandably: after all, in the first edition of *The Twenty Years' Crisis*, written after Munich and before Hitler's invasion of Poland, Carr had offered the view that appeasement was a necessary and therefore sound policy.<sup>54</sup> Events were to suggest otherwise. Through the alteration of a few key passages, this ill-starred endorsement was deleted from the 1946 second edition of *The Twenty Years' Crisis*, and later works generally sidestepped the quagmires of the day to concentrate on the big international picture viewed over the long haul. The cynical interpretation of Carr's reluctance to analyze current policy in terms of his broader theoretical framework is that it allowed him to present grand theories that could not be proven wrong by immediate events. A more charitable assessment would make it the natural outcome of Carr's philosophy, wherein much depended, in the short run, on the intent and resolve of a bevy of leaders and societies. Confident prediction was only appropriate when it came to the evolutionary forces slowly moulding mass democracy and thereby ensuring the eventual victory of reasoned policy over the whim of arbitrary authority.

In any event, Carr is by no means the only IR theorist to have preferred grand theorizing to tackling the thorny issues of the day. And he was hardly cautious or feckless in his chosen endeavour, for in forecasting the eventual transmogrification

<sup>54</sup> E. H. Carr, *The Twenty Years' Crisis*, 1st edn (London, 1940), pp. 277–8. Carr did not state explicitly the rationale behind his vote of support for appeasement. Were Hitler's opponents supposed to acquiesce permanently in the loss of Czechoslovakia or was appeasement simply a wise tactical manoeuvre, coming as it did at a time of British and French military unpreparedness? For a discussion of this point, see William T. R. Fox, 'E. H. Carr and Political Realism: Vision and Revision', *Review of International Studies*, 11 (1985), pp. 4–6.

of the international system, he took a bold step outside the ring of traditional realist thought. Most realists assert that the nature of the international system since 1648 has remained, in its essence, unchanged. Despite significant alterations to the internal constitution of the players, the conditioning effect of anarchy on the behaviour of states has meant that international relations have continued undisturbed. Self-regarding states continue to compete for political goods in a system of anarchy—and will continue to do so for the foreseeable future.<sup>55</sup>

Some realists have paid lip-service to the limitations of the doctrine. Kenneth Waltz, for example, admits that his neo-realist account of international politics depends on the assumption that states are self-regarding. But he hastens to add that this assumption is not especially restrictive since it captures such a diverse range of potential attitudes: ‘the aims of states may be *endlessly varied*; they may range from the ambition to conquer the world to the desire merely to be left alone’.<sup>56</sup> Endlessly varied? Carr, the catholic realist, would have demurred. Waltz’s spectrum covers stances ranging from self-regarding insularity to self-regarding belligerence, but excludes the possibility that states might be other-regarding. The full range of potential state disposition runs from untrammelled belligerence to complete self-abnegation. Carr’s faith in the benevolence of mass democracy led him to the conclusion that states were, at a minimum, moving away from the belligerent, and towards the insular, end of Waltz’s self-regarding spectrum. Moreover, some states were even showing faint signs of transcending the realist limitations by developing an other-regarding outlook.<sup>57</sup>

Carr, then, is one of the few realists—assuming the cap still fits—who senses significant changes afoot in the international system. Revolutions in the name of popular sovereignty, most notably the universalist clarion call of the French Revolution, were slowly chipping away at the pillars of the Westphalian state system.<sup>58</sup> In locating the source of impending international change 150 years back, Carr naturally had to account for the lengthy interlude between cause and effect. He did not undertake to do this systematically, but his persistent pursuit of certain themes provides insight into his thoughts on the matter. There were, to his mind, several factors responsible for the highly sporadic and uneven effects of populist revolution, some operating ubiquitously throughout the realm of politics, others conditioning the impact of revolution in the international sphere specifically. They are, for the most part, intimately connected to Carr’s ideas about the nature and progression of knowledge and morality.

<sup>55</sup> See Kenneth Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Reading, MA, 1979).

<sup>56</sup> Waltz, *Theory*, p. 91 (emphasis added).

<sup>57</sup> The need for theory that accounts for the disposition of the state apart from its structurally conditioned aspects is discussed in Alexander Wendt, ‘The Agent–Structure Problem in International Relations Theory’, *International Organization*, 41 (1987), pp. 335–70; and Alexander Wendt, ‘Levels of Analysis vs. Agent and Structures: Part III’, *Review of International Studies*, 18 (1992), pp. 181–5. See also Andrew Linklater, *Men and Citizens in the Theory of International Relations* (London, 1982), chapter 2.

<sup>58</sup> Imagery courtesy of Mark Zacher, ‘The Decaying Pillars of the Westphalian Temple: Implications for International Order and Governance’, in James Rosenau and Ernst Otto Czempiel (eds), *Governance Without Government: Order and Change in World Politics* (Cambridge, 1992).

*The elasticity of revolutionary slogans*

Among the ubiquitous factors responsible for our laggardly progress towards a better world is the malleability of revolutionary canons. While Carr did not dispute that certain universalist slogans (liberty!, equality!) could evoke widespread empathy, he held that values are too nebulous to judge until they are put into practice. Populist revolutions had unleashed powerful ideas but they provided no blueprint for the establishment of institutions and norms that would turn ideas into tangible political goods. 'Henceforth the demand was freedom in general, freedom as a matter of principle, freedom for all. The makers of the French Revolution did not know what this meant; indeed, we have been trying to find out ever since.'<sup>59</sup> It was only with the gradual incorporation of society's excluded elements and the concomitant process of evolutionary moral development, that the people would decide for themselves the concrete social arrangements that would satisfactorily embody the revolutionary spirit of bygone centuries.

Carr, for his part, derived two broad implications from the revolutionary proposition of freedom for all. First, by making freedom a universal right, the French Revolution recognized the essential *equality* of all people. Secondly, freedom was given an expanded definition. Freedom from interference had to be supplemented with freedom from want if it was to be of any value to the common man.<sup>60</sup> Carr realized, however, that even these elementary extrapolations were not self-evident. And indeed much virulent intellectual debate and political upheaval has centered around these very matters. Is freedom for all at base an affirmation of equality?<sup>61</sup> If so, are equal measures of freedom from interference enough to discharge our duty to equality, or do we also need equal—or perhaps just 'equitable'—measures of material well being?

Any number of answers has been offered to these questions, in the form of philosophical tracts and political programmes, all claiming to be *the* present day incarnation of one or another revolution carried out in the name of the people: witness classical liberalism, welfare state liberalism, socialism and communism. The ambiguity inherent in abstract moral formulations is one reason why a group, once imbued with a preferred interpretation, has difficulty seeing the world any other way. Others are assumed to be self-serving, cynical manipulators of ideas. Carr saw this dynamic at work in the Cold War. 'Much of what has been written in English-speaking countries in the last ten years about the Soviet Union, and in the Soviet Union about the English-speaking countries, has been vitiated by this inability to achieve even the most elementary measure of imaginative understanding of what goes on in the mind of the other party, so that the words and actions of the other are always made to appear malign, senseless or hypocritical.'<sup>62</sup> States used to be frankly egocentric and amoral. Now, while they still exhibited egocentric

<sup>59</sup> Carr, *The New Society*, p. 107.

<sup>60</sup> Carr, *The New Society*, p. 107.

<sup>61</sup> This is, for example, the gist of Ronald Dworkin's provocative challenge to more traditional liberals who insist on the primacy of liberty within the liberal tradition. See Ronald Dworkin, *A Matter of Principle* (Cambridge, MA, 1985), pp. 181–204.

<sup>62</sup> Carr, *What is History?*, pp. 18–19.

tendencies, they also felt compelled to justify their policies and actions with the rider 'my country is always right'.<sup>63</sup>

Carr was by no means the only realist aware of the introduction of ideology into foreign affairs, but he was one of the few to take it seriously in all its guises. He saw both sides in the Cold War as genuine ideologues, committed to the emancipatory spirit of populist revolution. Both coveted power not solely for the sake of the national interest but also to advance ideas to which they felt beholden. Other realists were unconvinced. Morgenthau wrote, 'the element of power as the immediate goal of the policy pursued is explained and justified in ethical, legal, or biological terms. That is to say: the true nature of the policy is concealed by ideological justifications and rationalization.'<sup>64</sup> Others thought that ideology mattered for one side only. They knew that the Soviet Union was really imperialist Russia dressed up in ideological costume, but felt that the West sometimes started to believe its own rhetoric, and this worried them. George Kennan, for example, cautioned the American government that 'its primary obligation is to the *interests* of the national society it represents, not to the moral impulses that individual elements of that society may experience'.<sup>65</sup>

For Carr, such injunctions were bound to be ineffectual. Both sides in the Cold War were sincere and adamant in the universalist ideology they espoused. That they seemed to be separated by an ideological chasm was not to be taken as evidence that moral debate is empty rhetorical mud-slinging. Different social arrangements can reasonably be construed to represent the emancipatory heritage of populist revolution. It is only in the hurly-burly of political life that we put flesh on the bones of the values we hold dear.

### *The role of power and self-interest*

This then leads to another reason why the road to mass democracy and a reformed international system has been fraught with twists and turns. In the hurly-burly of political life, self-interest and power play important roles. This aspect of Carr's work has been overemphasized, probably because in *The Twenty Years' Crisis* he stated baldly that states use power to advance their interests and then cover their tracks with a veneer of morality. It was in other works that he qualified this Machiavellian view of the world.

Certainly, Carr was not oblivious to the role of power in political affairs. He did not think people saints. Change running counter to the interests of dominant groups is resisted with disarming regularity. But it is rarely resisted solely in the name of self-interest. Righteousness is also invoked. In other words, dominant groups opposed to change sincerely believe in their own rectitude: 'The morality of a dominant group is always distorted by the perspective of its own interest, and it identifies the morality which protects that interest with absolute and universal good.'<sup>66</sup> Simply put, the strong will tend to rationalize a profitable status quo.

<sup>63</sup> Carr, 'The Moral Foundations', p. 69

<sup>64</sup> Hans Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations*, 5th edn revised (New York, 1978), p. 92.

<sup>65</sup> George Kennan, 'Morality and American Foreign Policy', *Foreign Affairs*, 64 (1985/6), p. 206 (emphasis in original).

<sup>66</sup> Carr, 'The Moral Foundations', p.67.



Fortunately for the strong, the malleability of revolutionary slogans means they are able to gather, without much effort, some philosophical fodder or other to feed their sense of virtue.

And so it falls to the dispossessed and disenchanted to show the powerful the folly of their ways. This is no easy matter. Nevertheless, that people care about righteousness means that ideas are an important tool for dismantling the status quo. From Carr's assumptions about human nature flowed his belief that casting light on the darker motives underlying human conduct makes it difficult for the powerful to continue to act with impunity and a clear conscience. At the subconscious level, people may, as Morgenthau and others assumed, covet power, but at the conscious level people generally find this an unacceptable basis for civilized behaviour.<sup>67</sup> Thus, Carr believed that many of the alterations to classical liberalism through the twentieth century—the dethroning of *laissez faire* economics, efforts to make government more representative of society at large—were attributable, in part, to the enervating impact of Marxist ideas: 'The Soviet leaders in the early days were the first to proclaim the appeal of the revolutionary idea as the source of their strength.'<sup>68</sup> The introduction of new interpretations of freedom and equality helped push Western society towards more inclusive forms of social arrangement, in what was an important step forward on the road to mass democracy.

Of course, the dissemination and incorporation of new ideas was not the only locomotive of change. Power also played its part. Classical liberalism had been profoundly altered by cataclysmic events, the Depression and World War II. The war, for Carr, was not a simple matter of country fighting country. It was in part an ideological battle, an example of dialectical struggle at its most violent and horrific. Fascism, for all its grave defects, had successfully seized upon the failure of liberalism to respond to the need for greater centralised planning and control in human affairs. Carr wrote disparagingly of Woodrow Wilson's liberal panacea and the 'sterility of the peace settlement of 1919'.<sup>69</sup> Ideological rigidity on the part of the American President, possessed, by one recent account, of a dogmatic world view 'imbued with opposites and the clash between them', bred sclerotic policy.<sup>70</sup> The masses had been gradually incorporated into society, but classical liberalism had proven incapable of responding to what then became the most urgent problem of the day—shrinking markets and economic depression. The prevailing orthodoxy worked for a time but could not stretch to accommodate the needs and demands of society at large.

The forces flowing from the French Revolution, then, had resulted in change within states, but as part and parcel of the same development there had arisen a polarization of attitude between states. War—or at least some wars—no longer issued exclusively from a clash of national interests. Increasingly, war had become a dialectical struggle between antithetical articulations of revolution for the people. 'Today it is legitimate to denounce war as cruel and brutal. But it is thoroughly misleading to describe it as senseless or purposeless. War is at the present time the

<sup>67</sup> On this point, Carr was influenced by Freud's idea that in matters of human conduct we must always distinguish between the conscious and unconscious motivations driving human behaviour.

See Carr, *The New Society*, p. 72.

<sup>68</sup> Carr, *The Soviet Impact*, p. 85. See also chapters 1 and 2.

<sup>69</sup> Carr, *Conditions of Peace*, p. 7.

<sup>70</sup> Kal Holsti, *Peace and War: Armed Conflicts and International Order* (Cambridge, 1991), p. 183.

most powerful of our social institutions; and we shall make no progress towards its elimination until we recognize, and provide for, the essential social function it performs.’<sup>71</sup>

To Carr’s mind, then, Marxist ideology disseminated by the Soviet Union and the fascist challenge of World War II together advanced the lot of humankind in that they brought important improvements to the liberal creed, making it more sensitive to the needs of the common person.<sup>72</sup> In the postwar era, government intervention to assist the common person was permanently institutionalized in the form of the welfare state. As well, a liberal world economic order was established, resulting in greater emphasis on the interests of consumers—in other words, since everyone is a consumer, the common person—at the expense of more parochial interest groups such as producers and trade unions.<sup>73</sup> More, Carr felt, remained to be done; nevertheless, prior political arrangements had been irrevocably altered for the better.

To summarize: the history of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries has been witness to the uneven and sometimes violent repercussions of populist revolutions as societies have struggled to put into concrete form the values inherited from revolutions past. Two factors present throughout the political realm have been at work, making for slow, sometimes violent, movement forward: nebulous values, and covert self-interest and power. Together they have led to unwarranted claims of ideological omniscience, which in turn has meant that progress, both domestic and international, has come slowly and, often enough, but dialectically.

### *The international sphere*

Carr identified further factors conditioning the impact of revolutionary forces in the international realm specifically. One was the standard structural realist argument, the self-perpetuating effects of anarchy. Of the Soviet Union’s move away from internationalism and towards socialism in one state, Carr wrote: ‘The marriage of the international ideals of the revolution to national sentiment was bound to occur. . . . The long isolation of Soviet Russia, the persistent hostility of the greater part of the capitalist world were bound to reinforce the trend’.<sup>74</sup> Universalist revolution was tamed by a coalition of unamused powers. Anarchy made its impact felt.

But Carr was not convinced that anarchy would succeed in recreating itself in perpetuity while the constituent elements of the system continued to undergo radical, if gradual, transformation. At the same time, he did recognize that despite

<sup>71</sup> Carr, *Conditions of Peace*, pp. 116–17. For a similar argument about the evolutionary function of war, see George Modelski, ‘Is World Politics Evolutionary Learning?’, *International Organization*, 44 (1990), pp. 18–21.

<sup>72</sup> Carr recognized that he might well be pilloried for portraying Nazism and Stalinism as part of a grand historical process of eventual benefit to humankind. In a 1978 interview, he defended his approach thus: ‘I am not prepared to submit to this kind of moral blackmail. After all, an English historian can praise the achievements of the reign of Henry VII without being supposed to condone the beheading of wives.’ (E. H. Carr, *From Napoleon To Stalin and Other Essays* (London, 1980), p. 262).

<sup>73</sup> Carr, *Conditions of Peace*, pp. 70–104.

<sup>74</sup> E. H. Carr, *Studies in Revolution* (London, 1950), p. 221.

the impetus revolution had lent to debates and battles about universal values, there was still a role for national interest in international affairs. States increasingly concerned themselves with matters of the good life, but the question remained, on whose behalf was the good life to be won and protected? In places, Carr seems to take the standard realist position: 'The essence of foreign policy is to discriminate in favour of one's citizens.'<sup>75</sup> *The Twenty Years' Crisis* carried the argument further. Borrowing from Reinhold Niebuhr, Carr suggested that the adoption of universalist ideologies does not necessarily translate into other-regarding foreign policy because people's morality suffers when they act together in groups. 'The group is not only exempt from some of the moral obligations of the individual, but is definitely associated with pugnacity and self-assertion, which become positive virtues of the group person.'<sup>76</sup>

This pessimistic tenor, however, reflected Carr's views on the world order of his day. When he reflected on the future he was guardedly optimistic. He looked forward to the day when states would practice rather than preach mass democracy, when governments would enlist and abide by the opinion of all under their rule. The question then was this: to what extent would the achievement of genuine mass democracy mitigate the damaging effects of group morality in the international sphere? Carr speculated on the matter in various places. The gist of his response was this: in the short run, the state practising mass democracy would remain self-regarding, but would tend towards insularity rather than belligerence; and in the longer run, the mass democratic state would become, at least to some degree, other-regarding.

Carr's short run prognosis arose out of his observation that Western democracy was rife with special interest groups—for example, coalitions of workers and producers—that skewed the state's policy towards their narrow interests. In the course of achieving mass democracy, such groups would be disbanded, but the mass democratic society would not necessarily rise above the immediate temptation to establish itself as a new, albeit more inclusive, interest group. Carr wrote: 'The subject of modern economics is man in society, man as a member of a number of collective groups struggling for power, of which the most powerful, the most highly organised and the most broadly based is at the present time the state.'<sup>77</sup> Once society at large controlled the state, it would, for a time anyway, work to install and protect the good life within its own borders, and exert little effort towards its realization elsewhere.

This is not to say that mass democracy, in its early stages, would be without beneficial effect. Carr's emphasis on the centrality of economic affairs in political life led him to believe that international economic cooperation would only increase among states whose external policies were dictated by the preferences of the masses. His point is well taken. Much has been made recently of the disintegrative effects of liberation in the former Soviet bloc as the nations of the region jostle for territory and power, but it is significant that many of those same nations are clambering to invest some of their newly won sovereignty in the European Community. Another palpable effect of the movement towards mass democracy has been the increased emphasis placed on ideological affinity in international

<sup>75</sup> Carr, 'The Moral Foundations', p. 60.

<sup>76</sup> Carr, *The Twenty Years' Crisis*, p. 159.

<sup>77</sup> Carr, *Conditions of Peace*, p. 75.

affairs. As states have adopted norms for which they claim universal applicability, they have become more concerned that their closest allies be of their ideological ilk. As Carr wrote in 1945, 'both in the Soviet Union and in the United States a conscious attempt is made . . . to substitute a wider allegiance, conceived in terms of common ideals, for narrower national or racial loyalties', a principle he correctly thought they would extend to the 'multi-national agglomerations' that would coalesce after the war.<sup>78</sup> As Carr saw it, states that are ideologues believe ideas matter. Hence, they are made more secure by the endorsement of their ideology elsewhere. By this reasoning, the propensity of democracies to go to war is not what counts; what matters is that democracies believe democracies are less inclined to go to war. In the age of universalist ideologies, the security dilemma, within alliances at least, is muted.

Beyond the short term, Carr presaged other important changes to international politics that would come as self-regarding behaviour gradually yielded in some degree to other-regarding foreign policy. For this to happen a sort of Kantian moral development was required. 'The driving force behind any future international order must be a belief . . . in the value of individual human beings irrespective of national affinities or allegiance and in a common and mutual obligation to promote their well-being.'<sup>79</sup> Mass democracy would put the common man on the throne domestically, but for other-regarding foreign policy to emerge, it was necessary to 'extend the doctrine of the common man from the national to the international community'.<sup>80</sup>

Where Carr thought this international benevolence would come from is not entirely clear. Other writers have taken the position that the achievement of more just forms of governance domestically gradually cultivates the requisite self-abnegating qualities in a population. In this vein, Robert Jackson has noted that certain modifications in great power behaviour, like decolonization and the introduction of foreign-aid programmes, coincided with important alterations to the mores of democratic society, manifested, in America for example, in the establishment of the welfare state, the end of segregation, and the introduction of affirmative action programmes. Moral development domestically seems to have generated an other-regarding strand in American foreign policy.<sup>81</sup>

Carr, however, did not address the matter in any detail. His musings on the distant future were much more speculative than his reflections on the past. Indeed, it might even be said, that the charge Carr directed at the interwar idealists in *The Twenty Years' Crisis* could be turned against him: His view of the future relied more on aspiration than analysis.<sup>82</sup> But to brush these thoughts aside as wishful thinking is to misunderstand Carr's philosophy. Realism has its place in political discourse, but so does utopian vision. Progress in human affairs often comes but dialectically, as leaders, scholars, and others so moved, articulate visions that challenge an entrenched status quo. The notion that government must act in the national interest was, and perhaps still is, a settled assumption of international affairs. Voices challenging this precept have called for, among other things, the

<sup>78</sup> E. H. Carr, *Nationalism and After* (London, 1945), pp. 67–8.

<sup>79</sup> Carr, *Nationalism and After*, p. 44.

<sup>80</sup> Carr, 'The Moral Foundations', p. 71.

<sup>81</sup> Robert Jackson, *Quasi-States: Sovereignty, International Relations and the Third World* (Cambridge, 1990), pp. 74–5, 119–20, 131–5.

<sup>82</sup> Carr, *The Twenty Years' Crisis*, pp. 8–10.

enforcement of universal human rights, the establishment of a New International Economic Order, and more forceful intervention in the military conflict in the former Yugoslavia. In short, they have joined with Carr in demanding recognition of 'the value of individual human beings irrespective of national affinities or allegiance'.<sup>83</sup> If Carr was right that progress comes through the forceful promulgation of new ideas that take advantage of the human concern with righteousness by eventually converting the powerful and galvanizing the weak, there is no reason to think this dynamic wouldn't have some impact internationally.

Carr, then, half predicted and half insisted that an incipient world society, based on respect for individuals across state borders, was in the making. But he did not anticipate, much less advocate, the establishment of world government. For him, valuing individuals as ends-in-themselves entailed respecting both their divergent aspirations and their uniform needs. For 'the development of that community of national thought and feeling . . . which is the constructive side of nationalism', Carr thought it entirely appropriate to retain national units.<sup>84</sup> To meet the economic and security needs he thought common to all people, he hoped to see the introduction of international norms of wealth redistribution and the creation of an international armed force charged with protecting security and welfare rights. Just as domestic society was discovering that people require more than the right to be left alone, so Carr thought international society would come to understand that nations require more than the right to political sovereignty embodied in the doctrine of national self-determination. Liberty isn't worth much until it is secured against wanton attack and reinforced with the material resources required for virtually any human enterprise.<sup>85</sup>

This mixture of international governance and national fidelity has yet to be realized. Nevertheless, as the voices of dissent have accumulated over the years, the settled assumption of the primacy of national interest has been disturbed. Along with Jackson's observations about decolonization and foreign aid, there have been other manifestations of a mild other-regarding element in foreign policy in the postwar era—for example, the sanctions imposed on South Africa through the 1980s and the preferential access to industrial markets accorded Third World states under the 1968 Generalised Scheme of Preferences. Of course, it would be ingenuous to suppose that today's great powers do not exert their influence in ways more subtle than brandishing the biggest stick. Nevertheless, there does seem to have been a distinct, if modest, shift in attitude.

This process may well accelerate following the collapse of the Soviet bloc. This episode can be seen as a peaceful step forward on the evolutionary road towards mass democracy. Instead of war between the superpowers, the ideological dispute was resolved by revolution within states—and relatively quiet revolution at that. The emphasis on equality at the expense of personal liberty was tried for a time but finally rejected by the peoples of Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. Suddenly the world's great powers all hew to a common interpretation of our revolutionary heritage, a modern, managed liberalism (the current unsettled state of Russia's domestic affairs notwithstanding). Will we see more other-regarding behaviour from the great powers now that the threat of an opponent antithetically

<sup>83</sup> Carr, *Nationalism and After*, p. 44.

<sup>84</sup> Carr, *Nationalism and After*, p. 59.

<sup>85</sup> Carr, *Nationalism and After*, pp. 38–60.

poised can no longer be used as a reason for cleaving to prudent self-interest?<sup>86</sup> Clearly, national interest still exerts the dominant influence on foreign policy. But recent events, like the humanitarian intervention in Somalia, suggest that other-regarding foreign policy may be on the rise.

In any event, Carr's commentary on past events and his speculation about the future drive home an important point: progress in human affairs often is painfully slow and comes only through the wilful assertion of dissident viewpoints. This may help explain why revolutions committed to universalist principles have, 200 years on, had only a slight impact on international affairs. The idea of freedom for all had an immediate basic appeal, but discovering its precise meaning has required an extended evolutionary process. Nebulous values have combined with power and self-interest to entrench and ossify moral and intellectual thought. Slowly, the dispossessed have asserted and started to win their right to a voice in determining which revolutionary interpretations are sound. This fitful progression towards mass democracy has resulted in some alterations to traditional state attitudes, but the effects to date have been relatively minor, for internationally, the effects of group morality present an additional obstacle that must be overcome before we will see any dramatic change in the behaviour of states. Clearly, the dominant realist account—that anarchy imposes uniform behaviour regardless of the internal arrangements of states—is not the only possible explanation for the continued survival of a system of largely self-regarding states in an age infused with ideas about universal rights and timeless standards of justice. Through his forays into philosophy, history and politics, Carr highlights an underlying logic and progression in the cooperation and conflict of the past. Moreover, for those disturbed by the atomism that continues to rent international society, he provides strategies for the present and optimism for the future.

<sup>86</sup> This, of course, presupposes that no antithesis will arise to challenge modern liberalism, that we have, in Francis Fukuyama's terms, come to the end of history. To assume this is to adopt a Eurocentric outlook. It is to suppose that revolutions in Western states established the outer bounds of possible social arrangements whose stable middle ground we have been groping towards ever since. Others writing in this vein have made the same assumption as Carr. Kant, of course, thought republican government was the key to perpetual peace. More recently, George Modelski has suggested that in coming years '[an international] community is likely to form on the basis of shared democratic practices' (see Modelski, 'Is World Politics?', p. 22).