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E. H. Carr's classic work on international relations published in 1939 was immediately recognized by friend and foe alike as a defining work. The author was one of the most influential and controversial intellectuals of the 20th century. The issues and themes he developed continue to have relevance to modern day concerns with power and its distribution in the international system. Michael Cox's critical introduction provides the reader with background information about the author, the context for the book, and its main themes and contemporary relevance.

The Twenty Years' Crisis, 1919-1939 Details

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From Reader Review *The Twenty Years' Crisis, 1919-1939* for online ebook

Jason says

Though we all know you can't judge a book by its cover, we sometimes ignore that a short book can be more dense and difficult than a much longer one.

So it was with E.H. Carr's work. This is a superb work of political philosophy. It is filled with insight that rings as true today, as it did in 1939, when he wrote it. But, it is like reading a book on philosophy. The density of concepts had me re-reading sentences twice and three times to make sure I took all the ideas in. While Carr illustrates his work broadly with many examples that are familiar and commonly understood, it still resides up a couple of levels of abstraction from my usual consumption of narrative history.

So, what was it all about? Well, Professor Carr is writing just after the outbreak of World War II. Though he never expresses it directly, he is obviously mad at the ninny in the west who's head in the sky policies have brought all of this about. Yes, that's right, we've got an English historian writing a book during the phoney war phase of WWII, and he is mad at the west.

Why? It seems western thought after WWI took a decided turn to the utopian. We sought, collectively, to divorce international relations from power politics (that's right Woodrow, we are talking about you), and instead base the international system on such chimeras as "world public opinion" and the community of interests.

None of this ended up working out. We had the League of Nations, the Kellogg-Briand Pact, the Naval Disarmament Treaties. They all started from the premise that morality, without reference to power, is what should govern the affairs of nations. Furthermore, there were no intractable differences between nations, for all that needed to happen was an illumination on the benefits of the status quo to nations like Germany, Japan and Italy.

Carr thinks all of this is hogwash. He stands for the simple and intuitive proposition that morality and power have to go hand in hand for a successful foreign policy. Morality without power is empty rhetoric. Naked power is inevitably resisted. Cloaking one with the other is what is required for success. This may seem common sense these days, but in a world reeling from the impact of the "War to End War." You can imagine how western thinking got a little off course.

Carr is a member of distinguished class of British historians, including AJP Taylor and Trevor Roper that lived through the two great wars and provided invaluable insight into their origins. Interestingly, though Carr was a defender of the realist school, he also became an ardent supporter of the accomplishments of the Soviet Union (the imaginary utopia of all imaginary utopias). Like AJP Taylor, while his analysis of the interwar era is a tour-de-force of scholarship, after the second world war, he seems to have lost his way. Taylor became so rabidly anti-German he opposed NATO for Germany's participation. Carr saw so much virtue in Stalin's programme, he became convinced of the flaws of the profit motive and advocated for a socialist-planned economy.

Well, you can't be right all of the time. This book is subtitled an introduction to international relations. It certainly has more to do with that than the 1930s proper. This is a book written by a brilliant mind, and its prescience about a number of outcomes is startling at times. While it was not a "pleasure read" by any

measure, it definitely left me wiser for having read it.

Riley says

This book is impressively argued, but I couldn't help but think that I would have been a lot more interested in it when I was a college student, when the issues it raised for some reason seemed more relevant in my life.

Basically, E.H. Carr urged greater realism in international relations after the disasters of the post-World War I era and the ineffectiveness of the League of Nations. One passage I highlighted that touches on several of the points he made:

"Just as within the state every government, though it needs power as a basis of its authority, also needs the moral basis of the consent of the governed, so an international order cannot be based on power alone, for the simple reason that mankind will in the long run always revolt against naked power. Any international order presupposes a substantial measure of general consent. We shall, indeed, condemn ourselves to disappointment if we exaggerate the role while morality is likely to play. The fatal dualism of politics will always keep considerations of morality entangled with considerations of power. We shall never arrive at a political order in which the grievances of the weak and the few receive the same prompt attention as the grievances of the strong and the many. Power goes far to create the morality convenient to itself, and coercion is a fruitful source of consent. But when all these reserves have been made, it remains true that a new international order and a new international harmony can be built up only on the basis of an ascendancy which is generally accepted as tolerant and unoppressive or, at any rate, as preferable to any practicable alternative. To create these conditions is the moral task of the ascendant Power or Powers."

Daniel Clausen says

E.H. Carr's classic book remains essential reading for any student of International Relations (IR). Carr's greatness is rooted in:

- *the strength of his dialectical method
- *his recognition of the vital nature of theoretical pluralism
- *the groundwork he laid for critical approaches to International Relations
- *and the case he made for the special nature of international politics as compared to domestic politics.

In many ways, the great debates in IR have been a working out of Carr's arguments and oppositions, (though unfortunately within and among much more entrenched, demarcated lines). The fact that most of these debates have resolved little validates Carr's own methodology of pluralism and mediation.

His use of realism as a critique of IR's idealistic and legalistic beginnings, as well as his use of idealism to treat the hollowness of the realist focus on power, has provided a much needed model for those seeking to tame the excesses of theoretical orthodoxy. Carr's ability to expose the hidden dynamics of power that underpin such concepts as the harmony of interests and collective security has provided some of the practical groundwork for critical approaches that have sought to expose similar hidden relations of power and knowledge. When all of these specific contributions are taken together they add up to a foundation for a

discipline of IR that is beyond the parochial departmental politics of “choosing sides.”

The last seventy years of theoretical debate have validated Carr’s employment of a mediation of dialectical oppositions. In many ways, the three debates have been a working out of the key concepts in Carr’s *The Twenty Years’ Crisis*. Carr writes:

“The complete realist, unconditionally accepting the causal sequence of events, deprives himself of the possibility of changing reality. The complete utopian, by rejecting the causal sequence, deprives himself of the possibility of understanding either the reality which he is seeking to change or the process by which it can be changed. The characteristic vice of the utopian is naivety; of the realist, sterility” (p. 11-12).”

In his focus on causal sequences, we can see the beginnings of the neorealist arguments for structural determinism; in Carr’s admonishment of realist “sterility,” we can also see English School and critical theorist arguments for the moral and political impotency of neorealism and other “problem-solving” theory.

In his writing, Carr at once argues for a discipline attentive to causal factors, cognizant of the hidden power structures of mainstream thinking, and sensitive to the depoliticization of utopian thinking. Carr would even anticipate Hedley Bull’s moral inquiry into the international system as a society of states. Carr asks, “In what sense can we find a basis for international morality by positing a society of states?” (p. 161).

Despite the very obvious influences Carr has had on later works, the parochialism and oftentimes downright meanness of some of the debates in IR stands as evidence that the discipline has failed to capitalize on Carr’s examples to create a truly rigorous interdisciplinary pluralism. His dialectical process shuns a short-sighted, cynical disciplinary politics that asks simply: choose a side.

Nor does Carr’s approach simply lapse into uncritical pluralism. Carr’s use of theory and critical approaches to entrenched political theories is grounded in a respect for the necessities of modern politics and the usefulness oppositions can have for exposing the weaknesses idealized positions. The importance of realist analysis is based on its ability to unmask the purported universalism of idealism: to expose “the hollowness [politically and often ideologically] of the utopian edifice” (p. 89) and to prevent the catastrophic errors of judgment that occur when politicians swallow their own moral rhetoric wholeheartedly. Conversely, the vital importance of idealism is based in its ability to overcome the emptiness of brute power politics.

This theoretical pluralism is conditioned and justified by its contribution to international politics, the creation of more thoughtful political leaders/thinkers, and a more sophisticated public debate. The goals that Carr posits as the necessary contribution of idealism: “a finite goal, an emotional appeal, a right of moral judgment and a ground for action” (p. 89) are all tied to the persuasive elements of moral rhetoric. Though Carr saw one of the vital functions of idealism as the debunking of the realist concept of ‘might makes right,’ he realized that this debunking has to take place within the political fray, in the realm of politics, not the abstract realm of human reason.

In terms of the use of realism, Carr justified its employment as a cautionary force to idealism based on its ability to prevent future political follies on the scale of those enacted during the interwar period. Realism’s promise is formulated as its ability to make political idealists aware of the fact that they are susceptible to the blind, irrational collisions of diverse interests and asymmetric powers (p. 224). Thus theoretical pluralism is never justified as a good in and of itself, but rather as means to a better practice of international politics.

In addition to Carr’s contributions to theoretical pluralism and his focus on the needs of international politicians, Carr also set important groundwork for critical IR theory. In differentiating problem-solving

theory from critical theory, Cox (1986) states that, whereas problem-solving theory is essentially conservative and seeks to smooth out the functioning of the system as it currently stands, critical theory attempts to show hidden injustices within current systems of governance and mainstream discourse, and to posit viable alternatives (p. 207-210). In the *Twenty Years' Crisis*, Carr employs both idealism and realism as critical theories as defined by Cox.

Though Carr identifies idealism as having the ability to create alternative political orders, realism is the key tool he uses to debunk such entrenched concepts as *laissez-faire*, collective security, and the harmony of interests strain of thought that runs through both of these concepts. Instead of a true harmony of interests, Carr shows how the interests of the world community are selfishly identified as being the same as “that part of it in which we are particularly interested” (p. 167).

Finally, Carr helped create a disciplinary space for IR. In his discussion of the difference between international and domestic morality, Carr frequently points to the lack of an international government as a conditioning factor for the difference between international and state politics. In his discussion of the differences between international and domestic morality, Carr writes: “One reason why a higher standard of morality is not expected of states is because states in fact frequently fail to behave morally and because there are no means of compelling them to do so” (p. 161). Carr sets much of the framework for IR as a discipline by showing how the state of anarchy influences all aspects of world politics. In terms of morality, anarchy helps undermine the formation of an international morality that would overtake national interests. Thus, “the role of power is greater and that of morality less [than domestic politics]” (p. 168). In terms of international law, anarchy creates a legal system based on custom more so than legislative authority (p. 171). These key distinctions regarding the conditioning power of anarchy on international politics, as opposed to domestic politics, would be foundational in justifying the study of IR as a separate discipline of politics.

Will E.H. Carr’s seminal work continue to be required reading? If it has stood as one of the foundational works for over seventy years, then surely it will continue to be a must-read ten, fifty, even a hundred years from now.

Rob Shurmer says

I was pleasantly surprised at how much I enjoyed reading this, primarily because Carr uses the period between the wars (though he didn't know the Second World War was beginning as his book went to the printers) as a sounding board for his theories on politics and history. At the core of his argument is that politics, rather than being a choice between two pole-star theories, is rather a combination of both Utopianism and Realism. While I mostly disagree with his sentiment, critique, and conclusions, the intellectual exercise was stimulating.

Steve Greenleaf says

This book was published in September 1939 as Britain was going to war with Germany over the invasion of Poland. The book, despite new editions and having remained in print since that time, makes few concessions

to changed views or ideas. Thus, as a history, it's a first draft, but it's best remembered as a foundational text of what was to become the academic study of international relations. Carr, after having spent around 20 years in the British Foreign Office, accepted an academic post in Wales, where he was working at the time of the publication of the book. The book serves as an outstanding introduction to international relations because whatever its shortcomings as history, it's a brilliant exposition of the issues of international relations (IR), especially from the realist point-of-view.

Carr is a proponent of the realist view as opposed to what he termed the "utopian" view. In short, he attributed to the utopians the belief that treaties, tribunals, and public opinion would overrule the forces of "power" that create wars. This was the age, following the First World War, when the League of Nations was created and the Kellogg-Brian treaty (1928) that sought to outlaw war as a means of state action. As you know, neither of these worked well for long. Instead, following a long history of realist thought, Carr notes that the struggle for power marked relations between nations during this period, and unlike the situation within nation-states, where governments and laws held sway, relations between nations was one of relative anarchy marked by the use (or threat) of force.

Carr's arguments and prose are concise and pithy. He understands the crucial differences between and the relation of politics and law. He also concedes the role of morality (however defined) in decision-making, and its effect on public opinion, which while not controlling, is a matter of concern to each government. In short, while a realist, he shows himself a realist who understands that power is more than simply the ability to deploy military force and win wars. He also understands that nations vie for status and power in many ways and that something often guides them other than a cold, hard rationality.

While I consider myself a realist in matters of international relations, I appreciate that other perspectives (liberal internationalism, constructivism, and so on) all have their value and provide insights into this complex field. For someone new to the field, I recommend Carr's work as an introduction from the realist perspective; i.e., the ability of each state to exert power—primarily by the threat or use of force—is the most reliable guide to understanding the interactions between states. But Carr isn't blind to other perspectives, either, which serves to enhance the value of his book.

For anyone seeking entry into the field of international relations, I can recommend this book. (I know it's assigned in graduate courses in IR.) Also, this re-issued edition with a preface by Michael Cox provides a wealth of background information about the book and Professor Carr, making it an especially useful edition.

Arab Millennial says

9/10

This book is incredible – in fact, many people suggest that it should be required reading for all politics students.

Edward Hallett Carr was an English diplomat, historian and journalist, and lived an incredible life. After

graduating from Trinity College, Cambridge, he joined the Foreign Office to pursue diplomatic work, getting particularly involved in Anglo-Russian relations. His notable books are *What is History?*, *A History of Soviet Russia* and *The Twenty Years' Crisis, 1919-1939*.

For many, *The Twenty Years' Crisis* is a neoliberal book, though I seriously beg to differ. In the book, Carr analyses the “peace” between World War I and World War II to criticise both neoliberalism (the idea that nation-states can cooperate over mutual, strategic gains) and neorealism (the idea that nation-states are inherently aggressive and driven by their perceived, selfish interests). Essentially, Carr believed the following:

A neoliberal worldview is too idealistic to provide political thinkers with a realistic framework for strategising.

A neorealist worldview is too grounded in reality, devoiding political thinkers of any goals, aspirations and tangible progress to work towards.

I'm almost certain that the aftermath of World War I – that came at the cost of 40 million lives, a Versailles Treaty and revolutions across Europe – had contributed, in some way, to the bittersweet air of pessimism enshrouded within Carr's book.

What I found particularly genius about was Carr's pre-World War II prediction that the next superpower to emerge would be an English-speaking nation. Carr explains that, following the British Empire, most of international politics had been institutionalised in the English language. For example, international law had begun being transferred from French to English. Therefore, the “game” of politics would be more easily played by a nation who shares this common language and has a formidable command of it.

Indeed, following World War II, the United States is now the major player in international politics. This may seem obvious in hindsight, but it is a genius prediction that has been lost amongst other great postmodern writers of Carr's time, such as Radiguet, Camus and Foucault.

Unfortunately most of the writers that were recognised for this period were men. Nonetheless, Carr's prediction for the English-speaking power begs many current questions for today's world. In a world where currency is pegged against the dollar, and where the English language is even more embedded international institutions such as NATO, the EU, the ICC and the UN, what would it take for a non-English-speaking nation to replace the US as a dominant power?

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Tara deCamp says

A political science classic and an excellent introduction to the field of international relations. Carr describes the rift between idealism and realism and the use of power. I'm glad that I finally read it -- it's constantly referenced.

Avani says

A bit redundant and privileged; Carr *really* likes his dichotomies. Too dated to be more than a historical

curiosity, but it was interesting to see the threads of where modern political thought - especially realism in international relations - came from. The first half dragged on, but the second half was more interesting.

Zohal says

I learned so much!!!

Naeem says

Simply the best introductory international relations text ever written. (Although keep your eyes on global politics: a new introduction.) Carr is one of the twentieth century's great thinkers who writes in clean clear prose, who presents insights of great depth, and who does not underestimate the reader's needs. Even after repeated reading, I find richness and resonance in his words. Published in 1939, it not only holds up, it surpasses everything since. Indeed, Carr's ability to include political economy (chapter 4 on the the "harmony of interests") as part of his discussion of idealism is marvelous.

It is enough to read the first six chapters and the conclusion to get what you might need from this.

Thucydides "Melian Dialogues" (in his *The History of the Peloponnesian Wars*), and the first three chapters of Hedley Bull's *The Anarchical Society*, Kenneth Waltz' *Man, the state, and War* are all you need to set yourself up for an introductory course on international relations.

Kiehl Christie says

The characteristic vice of the utopian is naivete; of the realist, sterility.

tis true...

The American Conservative says

No book expounding a realist view of international politics has been more influential and controversial than E.H. Carr's *The Twenty Years' Crisis, 1919-1939: A Study in International Relations*. Ever since its publication, barely two months after the start of the Second World War, this inventive, bracing work has been subject not merely to regular misinterpretation of its constituent arguments but to consistent misapprehension of its essential propositions. This is at least as much owing to the author's faults as to those of his admittedly many unsympathetic and narrow-minded critics. Undeniably, no writer in what Carr dismissed as the intellectually flimsy field of international relations has equaled the equipoise of his sentences, the detached hauteur of his style, the nonchalance of his historical erudition, the icy clarity of his forensic critiques. (The classicist M.I. Finley said that Carr's was "the most controlled intellect" that he'd ever encountered.) But *The Twenty Years' Crisis* betrays both the urgency of its time—Carr wrote it between July 1938 and September 1939, certainly the most eventful span in the annals of European diplomacy—and the urgency of an author trying to work through and reconcile a tangle of new, half-

developed ideas against a deadline imposed by history. The upshot is a book that makes excessive demands on its readers, a book that continues to yield novel and startling insights into the structure and workings of world politics, generally and, more important for our purposes here, into the sources and conduct of American foreign policy in the second decade of the 21st century.

<http://www.theamericanconservative.co...>

KimNica says

This is an amazing book. Lucidly written and full of gems, wisdom and brilliant quotes. Timely as if it had been published yesterday!

Reading this book has corrected two misconceptions I held:

1. Despite the title this is not a work of history, outlining chronologically the events that led to WWII. Quite the contrary, actually, as it is more a work of history of thought and was finished in 1939.
2. Contrary to what most IR textbooks will lead us to believe, this is not a foundational text of hard-core realism. This is a passionately argued appeal to recognize the need that there always needs to be a balance between realism and utopia, between power and morality.

Carr must have had prophetic powers; so clearly does he foresee future events and trends and so timely are many of his observations. Reading this makes you think that nothing has changed in the past hundred years - amazing!

Thomas J. Hubschman says

Edward Hallett Carr was a British historian who wrote, among other subjects, about the early Soviet Union, the period between the two world wars and, not least, a superb study of history itself. I've recently reread his book about the inter-war period, 1919-1939, that attempts to explain the failure of Europe and the United States to fashion a new international order that would prevent the very things that did occur with the rise of fascism and Nazism. It's an interesting subject, but Carr has a way of making anything he writes about seem interesting and even something more.

Because he is more than just a chronicler of events with a little analysis thrown in, Carr traces the attitudes and policies that gave rise to the stupidities that followed the conclusion of the first European conflagration, a holocaust in its own right if one looks at the number of dead, almost all soldiers, millions, sometimes tens of thousands in one battle. Carr takes us all the way back to the Middle Ages to get at the roots of the thinking or lack thereof that produced that kind of carnage and the disaster that was to follow twenty years later, though then far worse for non-combatants than for those in the militaries.

As I said, all interesting stuff, but not a book I picked up for a second time to shed light on our present world and its own stupidities. But, much to my surprise, I found in Carr's analysis of a period now almost a full century past a template over which the blunders of the last ten or twenty years fit as nicely as an old glove.

Carr reminds us that in the early twentieth century international affairs were the purview strictly of professionals frequently acting in secret, and that was the way most people thought it should be. But the

debacle of the first world war exposed the failure of that kind of diplomacy and enabled Woodrow Wilson's more idealistic, though no less disastrous, approach to foreign relations. It looked like a new and more democratic policy at the time, but from Carr's wider point of view it was actually the old medieval, utopian way of seeing things that had supposedly been routed by the Enlightenment. But that new way of thinking had then itself been contested by socialism and other social and political movements of the nineteenth century.

For Carr the pendulum swings between realists exemplified by the government bureaucrat—a conservative who insists the way things have been done is the way they should continue to be done—and the utopian who believes that if enough people want things to change for the better it will change, even to the point of bringing about a communist or other kind of millennium. For the utopians the facts are secondary to the purpose. Never mind that many of the new nations Wilsonian ideals created had no direct or even historical idea what democracy meant; democracy was the best way to live and democracy would transform them.

As I say, after a few chapters, this started to sound familiar. So, I took the template of Wilsonian idealism and over it placed the template of the neo-conservative agenda George W. Bush was identified with and came up with a surprisingly neat fit. The battle cry for the war in Iraq, once the "facts" of WMDs and Saddam Hussein's support for al Qaida were no longer tenable, became to bring the benefits of democracy to the Middle East—almost a word-for-word repetition of the Wilsonian goals to "make the world safe for democracy" and his post-war policy of offering, if not imposing, democracy on the parts of Europe that were supposed to be clamoring for it.

George W. Bush was no Wilson, of course, but he was a handy vehicle for the neo-cons whose policies he came to espouse who maintained over and over that human beings are born with a yen to live in a democratic state, by which they mean pretty much our own republican, elective and, most importantly, free-market system. The facts of another nation's history and traditions are bothersome but not insurmountable. All mankind thirsts for freedom. Our job, indeed our God-given mission, is to give them the opportunity to slake that thirst at the pure well of American-style free enterprise and representative government.

The disasters that have ensued from pursuing the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan to free their peoples from tyranny and bring them Western-style government has, happily, shaken the faith of many Americans in the wisdom of crusades of this kind—an appropriate word; weren't the original crusades attempts to bring Western values to the non-believers of the Middle East?

It gives one pause at first, using the word "utopian" with regard to the Bush administration, but as Carr sees it utopian—as opposed to fact-driven—is what that kind of policy amounts to, i.e. an ideal- or idea-driven agenda.

Next I decided to put the previous, Clinton administration under the same template and see how it matched up or failed to match up. I was scarcely over the frisson that had accompanied my realization that Bush-Cheney-Wolfowitz-Rumsfeld were utopians than it struck me that the progenitor of this strain of contemporary American politics, more or less constant for the twenty years preceding the George W. Bush administration, was Ronald Reagan. By contrast with Bush-Cheney, Reagan now looks like a pragmatist, but it was he who convinced the electorate that God was indeed backing our jockeys and implemented as best he could a policy of brutal adventurism abroad in the name of democracy and a return to free-market free-for-all domestically. The current depression in which we are mired has its roots in Reagan initiatives against government regulation and in behalf of unfettered corporate capitalism.

It was Reagan who spoke about America being a Golden City on a Hill and the Soviets as the Evil Empire.

After a decade of disastrous pragmatism in the '70s, Americans gobbled up this kind of rhetoric, as if eager to return to the missionary zeal that had gotten us involved in a war in Vietnam from which we had exited with our tails between our legs.

George Bush senior brought us full circle, driving the Iraqis out of Kuwait, after which we were treated to a Caesar-like victory parade, chanting, We're number one! But the elder Bush was a pragmatist at heart. So was Ross Perot, the man who cost GHWB his reelection, along with an economic downturn that seems piddling by the last years' events. As a result we got eight years of Clinton who, perhaps more than any other modern president, was pragmatic to the point of ineffectual.

I think all this is worth saying because we have a tendency to associate idealism/utopianism with well-meaning if misguided good guys and realistic pragmatism with those of evil intent. And usually the idealistic eggheads are arguing for liberal—or, as they are known now, "progressive" ideals—while the realists are hell-bent on nothing more than making lots of money.

Plato, the original utopian if you leave out the Book of Genesis, was unashamedly cynical in the methods he advocated for running his ideal state—essentially a more efficient version of fascist Sparta. Plato was all for lying to the hoi polloi about religion, for instance, because, as he cynically put it, religion is a useful tool for keeping them in line.

The neo-cons, supposedly products of a Platonist who taught them at the University of Chicago, seem far more airheaded than the ancient original. Their utopian notions of a new world order are as divorced from present and historical realities as anything the communists or fascists came up with or, for that matter, the End Days of the religious fundamentalists. Even Reagan kept loonies like these at arm's length. It was 9/11 that gave them their opportunity to insinuate themselves into international policy-making, championed by Vice-President Cheney, who seems to have been a late convert to their cause, unless he was just using them to further his own agenda.

In any case, it's not a bad idea to rethink these matters from time to time, see them fresh through the perspective of someone like Carr. The truth is frequently counterintuitive. Those who do the most harm can be the very people who seem to espouse the noblest causes. Just because the consequences of a policy are death and destruction on a massive scale doesn't mean the theory behind it isn't utopian. There is no moral privilege attached to either realists or utopians. The only test that matters is who benefits and who suffers. We should beware the temptations of both pragmatists who disdain anything but chauvinistic gain and utopians who promise us a better future when that promise involves the means justifying the ends.

So far Obama seems to be a return to Clintonian pragmatism, with the same inclination to please everybody, starting with his biggest contributors on Wall Street. I've begun to suspect the only way we ever get real change in the White House is if the occupant arrives there by accident, the way Theodore Roosevelt and Harry Truman did. But even that possibility is diminished by the more rigorous vetting process modern vice-presidential candidates undergo. To give him credit, Obama did say he would do whatever we force him to do. But the only people who have put any real pressure on him are the ones who occupy corporate suites. God help us when we get the next "utopian" in the Oval Office. He or she may finally bring on the Goetterdammerung Cheney-Rumsfeld-Wolfowitz seemed to be itching for.

John David says

This book, perhaps the one for which Carr is best remembered, was written immediately before the start of World War II, and is considered one of the seminal texts of international relations. In fact, the preface to the first edition is dated September 30, 1939, a mere four weeks after the Wehrmacht invaded Poland. This is by no means incidental to the content, either. "Twenty Years' Crisis" is a thoroughgoing critique of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century international politics and especially the assumptions on which they rest.

It can be broken up into roughly two sections; the first is more theoretical in approach, while the second part analyzes certain instances of political structures, treaties, and international relations that support his theoretical assertions. I'm much more interested in the theory, so my focus in this review will be the first half, where Carr explores utopianism, realism, and their intellectual genealogies.

After the end of the Great War, a popular idea in diplomatic circles was that only irrationality and aggression could possibly start another war, and only the construction of a set of international institutions, like the League of Nations, could prevent a similar breakout. That certainly is a pleasing thought, considering how much carnage and loss of life there was. This hope, which Carr identifies as a naïve and empty sentiment, is perhaps the most conspicuous symptom of what he calls "utopianism." Utopians "pay little attention to existing 'facts' or to the analysis of cause and effect, but will devote themselves wholeheartedly to the elaboration of visionary projects for the attainment of the ends they have in view – projects whose simplicity and perfection gives them an easy and universal appeal" (5). Carr associates utopianism with the more intellectual strains in international relations, imputing the label to those with "the inclination to ignore what was and what is in contemplation of what should be." Utopians put their moral ideals before political observation and empiricism. He traces utopianism to the willed, persistent belief in "the harmony of interests" – the common assumption that the pursuit of individual self-interest will necessarily dovetail with the interests of the nation as a whole. This idea is similar to the social Darwinism which also populated much nineteenth-century European social thought.

Realism can in many ways be thought of as the antithesis of utopianism. Realists let observation, national interests, and power inform their view of international policy. Realists have "the inclination to deduce what should be from what was and what is." Whereas utopians let morality inform their politics, realists let their politics inform their morality. Because of the rationalist, Weberian strains Carr associates with realism, he associated realism with the bureaucrat instead of the intellectual.

While this book is often listed as the first defense of realism, Carr is extraordinarily fair-minded, and openly admits that there are problems with this approach, too. Importantly, realism fails to provide the idealism that any international policy must have. As Carr says, "Most of all, consistent realism breaks down because it fails to provide any ground for purposive or meaningful action. If the sequence of cause and effect is sufficiently rigid to permit of the 'scientific prediction' of events, if our thought is irrevocably conditioned by status and our interests, then both action and thought become devoid of purpose" (92).

Because of the respective strengths and weaknesses of utopianism and realism, Carr concludes the theoretical portion of the book by suggesting that any meaningful, pragmatic political approach must rest somewhere near the middle of the realist/utopian continuum. "We return therefore to the conclusion that any sound political thought must be based on elements of both utopia and reality. Where utopianism has become a hollow and intolerable sham which serves merely as a disguise for the interests of the privileged, the realist performs an indispensable service in unmasking it. But pure realism can offer nothing but a naked struggle for power which makes any kind of international society impossible" (93).

In the second part of the book, Carr asserts that utopians were so concerned with preventing another Great War, they began to completely ignore the element of power in international relations. For example, utopians

assumed that all nations had the same interests in maintaining peace, and for the same reasons. A simple look at the actual milieu of European politics leading up to both World Wars I and II will suggest something different.

He also spends a good deal of time pointing out how the three kinds of power that operate in international politics – economic, military, and public opinion – can't be analyzed separately and have to be considered interdependently. Also, because (at least at that time) the international community has not agreed upon a means of resolving international disputes, treaties are barely worth the paper they're printed on since countries can opt out on trivial conditions. It would have been interesting to see how the formation of the United Nations and the International Court of Justice would have changed Carr's opinion on this point, if at all.

For being over seventy years old, Carr's analysis is still fresh, fascinating, and convincing. The only part that dates the book is the second half that looks at actual international events, since nothing after 1939 is covered. I did have to read up a little on some of the treaties that are now lesser-known, like the Treaty of Locarno and the Franco-Soviet Treaty, but Carr very much rewards the reader's effort in this respect. I would recommend this to anyone with an interest in the history of international relations, or anyone who wants a full-throated defense of realism and its place in the field.
