

The realism that did not speak its name: E.H. Carr's diplomatic histories of the twenty years' crisis

Abstract

E.H. Carr was one of Europe's preeminent thinkers in the field of international affairs. Yet his contribution to International Relations theory is continually questioned. Realists depict Carr as a quintessential realist; revisionists draw from his wider corpus to qualify his contribution. Although not inaccurate, the revisionist literature is incomplete as it neglects a number of Carr's diplomatic histories. Refocusing on these, especially the manner in which traces of Ranke's the primacy of foreign affairs tradition are evident, this paper points to a more conservative and less critical Carr. Utilising an interpretivist framework, this shift in traditions of thought is explained by the dilemmas Carr faced. Although works of history rather than theory, the paper contends that Carr's diplomatic histories remain relevant, particularly with regard to the embedded criticism of *realpolitik* they contain. This realisation is made evident through a reading of Carr in parallel with the concept of tragedy.

Introduction

*History begins when men begin to think of the passages of time in terms not of natural processes...but a series of specific events in which men are consciously involved and which they can consciously influence...Man now seeks to understand, and to act on, not only his environment but himself.*¹

The above passage from *What is History* can be applied to modern International Relations (IR) theory. Sylvest notes that the 'history of international thought, broadly understood, is now a fast-growing field'.² IR's historiographical turn has resulted in a conscious effort to revisit, revise and deepen our understanding of IR theory and the history of international thought. This has resulted in a questioning of the discipline's foundational myths, concepts and categories.³ It has also led to a veritable cottage industry challenging tired understandings of canonical, typically realist figures.⁴ Potentially traced to Ashley's attempt to create a wedge between classical and modern forms of realism,⁵ the movement has sought to chart intellectual and epistemological linkages between classical theorists and contemporary critical theorists. This has involved a greater appreciation of the critique of modernity contained within the classical works; a greater recognition of the influence of Mannheim and the Frankfurt school on the

¹ E.H. Carr, *What is History?* (London: Penguin, 1964), p. 134.

² Casper Sylvest, *British Liberal Internationalism, 1880–1930: Making Progress?* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009), p. 5.

³ See, for instance, Brian Schmidt, 'The historiography of academic International Relations', *Review of International Studies*, 20:4 (1994), pp. 349–367; Peter Wilson, 'The myth of the first great debate', *Review of International Studies*, 24:5 (1998), pp. 1–16; Lucian M. Ashworth, 'Where are the idealists in interwar International Relations?', *Review of International Studies*, 32:2 (2006), pp. 291–308; Brian Schmidt (ed.), *International Relations and the Great First Debate* (London: Routledge, 2012).

⁴ This literature is impressively large and growing. Indicative texts include, Richard N. Lebow, *The Tragic Vision of Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Michael C. Williams, *The Realist Tradition and the Limits of International Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Seán Molloy, *The Hidden History of Realism: A Genealogy of Power Politics* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006); Michael C. Williams (ed.), *Realism Reconsidered: The Legacy of Hans J. Morgenthau* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); Duncan Bell (ed.), *Political Thought and International Relations: Variations on a Realist Theme* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

⁵ Richard K. Ashley, 'The poverty of neorealism', *International Organization*, 38:2 (1984), pp. 225–286.

classical works, especially with regard to the conditionality of knowledge; and a desire to point to the misreading of the classical realist works by modern realists.⁶ Although undoubtedly the vast majority of work in this vein has focused on the iconic Hans J. Morgenthau, a significant number of scholars have turned their intellectual spades onto the fertile ground left by Britain's equally iconic figure, E.H. Carr. Carr's previously one-dimensional characterisation, in turn, has increasingly been destabilised.⁷

As will be shown in the first section, recent advances in scholarship in Carr have sought to deepen our understanding of his work and his place in the IR discipline by: i.) undertaking a closer and more thorough reading of his most (in)famous work, *The Twenty Years' Crisis*; and ii.) developing a broader appreciation of his work as a whole by situating *The Twenty Years' Crisis* alongside his other pre- and post-war scholarship. The point of this essay is not to challenge this development outright; nor do I wish to suggest that the broadening and deepening of our understanding of Carr is inaccurate. Instead, I use the space below to suggest that the revisionist turn with regards to E.H. Carr is incomplete because it has hitherto overlooked a number of diplomatic histories of the twenty years' crisis that he produced in the course of his long and productive career. Turning to these, and particularly focusing on the manner that they reflect the *Primat der Außenpolitik* tradition, I suggest that in his diplomatic histories we find a more conservative and traditional realism and a less critical realism.

Utilising an interpretivist framework that allows for an exploration of the dilemmas that influence a thinker's traditions of thought, this article accordingly seeks to explore Carr's evolution from a radical international political theorist into a conservative historian. Focusing on three works on Soviet affairs that he produced at the twilight of his career, the paper explores the influence that Ranke's the primacy of foreign affairs tradition had on Carr, if indirectly and implicitly. Although traditional histories, which separates Carr from the North American realist tradition, and certainly lacking in critical theorising *vis-à-vis* his inter-war work, it is argued that these works still have contemporary relevance for Carr-specific scholars and IR theory more broadly. In closing, the paper reflects on how Carr's final thoughts regarding the *dénouement* of the twenty years' crisis may help us appreciate and understand this tragic figure.

I. Carr's realism with adjectives

Carr revisionism has challenged realist orthodoxy. It is argued that realists oversimplify Carr's work in two respects. First, realists undertake a one-dimensional reading of his most (in)famous

⁶ See, for instance, William Bain, 'Deconfusing Morgenthau: Moral inquiry and classical realism reconsidered', *Review of International Studies*, 26:3 (2000), pp. 445–464; Murielle Cozette, 'Reclaiming the critical dimension of realism: Hans J. Morgenthau on the ethics of scholarship', *Review of International Studies*, 34:1 (2008), pp. 5–27; William E. Scheuerman, 'Realism and the Left: The case of Hans J. Morgenthau', *Review of International Studies*, 34:1 (2008), pp. 29–51; Hartmut Behr and Amelia Heath, 'Misreading in IR theory and ideology critique: Morgenthau, Waltz and neo-realism', *Review of International Studies*, 35:2 (2009), pp. 327–349; Felix Rösch, 'Puovoir, puissance, and politics: Hans Morgenthau's dualistic concept of power', *Review of International Studies*, 40:2 (2014), pp. 349–365.

⁷ This one-dimensional depiction is still evident in certain quarters. Elman and Jensen, as an example, write that the classical realist research programme, which can be traced to the publication of *The Twenty Years' Crisis*, hones in on the fact that the 'desire for more power is rooted in the flawed nature of humanity'. That is, 'states are continuously engaged in a struggle to increase their capabilities'; that for classical realists, 'international politics can be characterized as evil'; and that 'classical realism explains conflictual behavior by human failings'. Colin Elman and Michael Jensen (eds.), *The Realism Reader* (London: Routledge, 2014), p. 3.

work, *The Twenty Years' Crisis*, which ignores the text's subtleties and nuances.⁸ Second, realists typically read *The Twenty Years' Crisis* in isolation, failing to appreciate it in terms of the wider pre- and post-war literature that Carr produced.⁹ In challenging convention, revisionists have more clearly delineated Carr's realism with a number of qualifying adjectives.

Utopian realism can be traced to Booth.¹⁰ Calling Carr a 'potential utopian realist', Booth pointed to the positive and normative ideas Carr voiced regarding a more progressive post-war order.¹¹ Referring more widely to Carr's corpus of work, Howe likewise contended that while Carr accepted aspects of realism he was nevertheless 'confident that time, along with healthy measures of utopianism, would bring about a more peaceful and just international order'.¹² More recent work by Kenealy and Konstantinos, whilst never using the label, also touches upon these ideas. Charting the principal ideas animating Carr's pre- and post-war work, they stress Carr's concern with building a new order following the Second World War.¹³ Applying this specifically to Carr's writing on the state, Carr's distinctive realism rested in the principle that power had to be directed toward a progressive goal.¹⁴ Utopian realism reminds us of the way in which Carr's work was future-orientated, concerned ultimately with a more progressive international order. Critical realism, in contrast, connects Carr's work to contemporary critical theory. Linklater, as an example, sought to 'release Carr from the grip of the Realists and to highlight certain affinities between his writings on the state and critical theories of international relations'.¹⁵ Linklater's central point was that Carr's work was emancipatory given that he was concerned with transnational forms of community and citizenship.¹⁶ Likewise, Babik emphasises the influence of the Frankfurt school on Carr's major texts, concluding that 'the term "realism" simultaneously connoted for Carr many elements nowadays associated with critical theory'.¹⁷ Others stress Carr's historical method and outlook, however. This can initially be traced to Cox's emphasis on Carr's historical materialism.¹⁸ It is Germain, however, who has made the most extensive case for the qualified historical realist label.¹⁹ Focusing on *The Twenty Years' Crisis*, *Nationalism and After*, *The New Society* and *What is History*, Germain points to Carr's stress on historical change and his balance of determinism and

⁸ E.H. Carr, *The Twenty Years Crisis 1919–1939: An Introduction to the Study of International Relations* (reissued edition edited by Michael Cox, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), p. xiii.

⁹ Peter Wilson, 'Radicalism for a conservative purpose: The peculiar realism of E.H. Carr', *Millennium—Journal of International Studies*, 30:2 (2001), pp. 123–136, at p. 125.

¹⁰ Ken Booth, 'Security in anarchy: Utopian realism in theory and practice', *International Affairs*, 67:3 (1991), pp. 527–545.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 530–531.

¹² Paul Howe, 'The utopian realism of E.H. Carr', *Review of International Studies*, 20:3 (1994), pp. 277–297, at p. 277.

¹³ Daniel Kenealy and Konstantinos Kostagiannis, 'Realist visions of European Union: E.H. Carr and integration', *Millennium—Journal of International Studies*, 41:2 (2012), pp. 221–246.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 241–242.

¹⁵ Andrew Linklater, 'The transformation of political community: E.H. Carr, critical theory and International Relations', *Review of International Studies*, 23:3 (1997), pp. 321–338, at p. 324.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 330–338.

¹⁷ Milan Babik, 'Realism as critical theory: The international thought of E.H. Carr', *International Studies Review*, 15:4 (2013), pp. 491–514, at p. 504. See, also, Tim Dunne, 'Theories as weapons: E.H. Carr and International Relations', in Michael Cox (ed.), *E.H. Carr: A Critical Appraisal* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), pp. 217–233.

¹⁸ Robert Cox, 'Social forces, states and world orders: Beyond International Relations theory', *Millennium—Journal of International Studies*, 10:2 (1981), pp. 126–155, at p. 131.

¹⁹ Randall Germain, 'E.H. Carr and the historical mode of thought', in Michael Cox (ed.), *E.H. Carr: A Critical Appraisal* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), pp. 322–338.

voluntarism to argue that Carr's 'approach is "realist" in terms of its practical acceptance of the structural parameters of every life and historical in terms of his method'.²⁰

One may think that the growth of interest in Carr's work has exhausted all that could be known about his work. Such a view would be erroneous. Whilst no doubt accurate, the revisionist literature is currently incomplete. This is because it overlooks the work that Carr produced on Soviet foreign affairs in the twilight of his career. Although historical, and generally seen as relatively minor, they may have much to tell us about Carr's political thought specifically and his thought toward IR more broadly. If it is true that we can only gain a deeper understanding of Carr's thought as a whole by engaging with his *oeuvre* in its entirety, then the neglect of his historical work is an oversight in need of correction.

II. Traditions and dilemmas

To more clearly specify the problem: can we relate Carr's pre- and post-war IR work, which has been depicted in more critical theoretical terms in the revisionist literature, with his more traditional histories of Soviet foreign affairs, which have often been marginalised in the revisionist literature (and indeed amongst realists)? More broadly, this is a question of how and why a scholar's thought evolves over time. To address this question, it seems logical to turn to Bevirian interpretivism, outlined initially in *The Logic of the History of Ideas* and subsequently utilised to interpret *inter alia* international political thought.²¹

In *Logic* Bevir outlined and defended an anti-foundationalist hermeneutic which called for intellectual historians to translate the 'people of the past to us today'.²² Studying the ideas of the past for Bevir meant recovering and reconstructing the meaning of said ideas.²³ Meaning is thus crucial for interpretivists because they argue that 'people behave as they do because of their beliefs and theories about how the world works'.²⁴ An individual's beliefs and theories of the world are not *sui generis*, however. This is because individuals cannot be isolated from society in any meaningful respect. Carr was aware of this notion. He made clear in *What is History*, '[that an individual's] earliest ideas come...from others'.²⁵ To understand this logic, Bevirian interpretivists refer to traditions. Traditions are conceived of as a set of beliefs and understandings that are received by an individual through socialisation processes.²⁶ Traditions can be transmitted in a variety of ways, e.g. through peers, parents and forms of political

²⁰ Ibid., p. 332.

²¹ Mark Bevir, *The Logic of the History of Ideas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Ian Hall and Mark Bevir, 'Traditions of British international thought', *The International History Review*, 36:5 (2014), pp. 823–834; Leonie Holthaus, 'L.T. Hobhouse and the transformation of liberal internationalism', *Review of International Studies*, 40:4 (2014), pp. 705–727; Leonie Holthaus and Jens Steffek, 'Experiments in international administration: The forgotten functionalism of James Arthur Salter', *Review of International Studies*, 42:1 (2016), pp. 114–135. See, also, Mark Bevir and Roderick A.W. Rhodes, *Interpreting British Governance* (London: Routledge, 2003); Mark Bevir, Oliver Daddow and Ian Hall, 'Introduction: Interpreting British foreign policy', *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, 15:2 (2013), pp. 164–174; Mark Bevir, Oliver Daddow and Ian Hall (eds.), *Interpreting Global Security* (London: Routledge, 2014); Mark Bevir, Oliver Daddow and Pauline Schnapper, 'Introduction: Interpreting British European policy', *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 53:1 (2015), pp. 1–17; Mark Bevir and Oliver Daddow, 'Interpreting Foreign Policy: National, comparative and regional studies', *International Relations*, 29:3 (2015), pp. 273–287.

²² Bevir, *Logic*, p. 158.

²³ Ibid., p. 31.

²⁴ Ian Hall, 'The Promise and Peril of Interpretivism in Australian International Relations', *Australian Journal of Public Administration*, 73:3 (2014), pp. 307–316, at p. 308.

²⁵ Carr, *What is History*, p. 31.

²⁶ Bevir, *Logic*, p. 200.

discourse, including texts.²⁷ The idealised teacher-pupil relationship, although not necessarily formalised, is often used as a metaphor to explain traditions.²⁸ The pupil receives knowledge from their teacher and, in turn, transmits this knowledge to subsequent generations. The idealised teacher-pupil relationship, however, fails to capture how traditions mutate over time. As Bevir explains, ‘As beliefs pass from teacher to pupil, so the pupil modifies and extends the themes, or conceptual connections, that linked [their] beliefs’.²⁹ Accordingly, Bevirian interpretivists refer to situated agency: whilst traditions may initially condition an individual’s beliefs, because individuals have agency to interpret and reinterpret, traditions ultimately do not determine individual beliefs.³⁰ To flesh out this logic Bevirian interpretivists refer to dilemmas. Dilemmas are conceived of as ‘authoritative understandings that put into question...existing webs of belief’.³¹ In accepting new information as true, if said new information conflicts with an individual’s existing web of belief, an individual is compelled to reconsider their understandings of the world. In turn, an individual can ‘retrench, revise, or even reject some or all of [their] inherited knowledge’.³² Importantly, individuals engage in this process innovatively and creatively. Carr’s and Gilbert Murray’s different responses to the Abyssinian crisis evidence this (Carr turned from liberal internationalism toward a realism infused with Marxism while Murray retrenched his liberal internationalist worldview).³³ In the subsequent sections of this paper traditions and dilemmas are employed to help us chart and understand Carr’s evolution from critic to traditionalist historian. To do so, it is first necessary to outline important traditions of thought that he inherited and the salient dilemmas he faced in the course of his career.

III. Traditions and dilemmas in the thought of E.H. Carr

Trying to unpack the traditions that influenced E.H. Carr is problematic, chiefly because he was exceedingly eclectic in his approach to political thought. Molloy even calls him ‘magpie-like’ in this regard.³⁴ His major pre-war work, *The Twenty Years’ Crisis*, was primarily a polemic undertaken to influence British political discourse with regard to Germany.³⁵ According to Carr, whilst ‘it was not exactly a Marxist work, [it] was strongly impregnated with Marxist ways of thinking, applied to international affairs’.³⁶ *Conditions of Peace*, in contrast, was what Carr termed his ‘sort of liberal Utopia’.³⁷ Although comparatively less analysis of *Conditions* has been undertaken, it would be reasonable to hypothesise that George Lloyd’s and Edward Wood’s (later Lord Halifax) *The Great Opportunity* influenced Carr’s more idealist prose.³⁸ Nevertheless, those with a close working relationship with Carr recognise that he was very much influenced by the realist tradition.³⁹ Carr struggled with realism,

²⁷ Hall and Bevir, ‘Traditions’, p. 828.

²⁸ Bevir, *Logic*, p. 203.

²⁹ Bevir, *Logic*, p. 204.

³⁰ Bevir et al., ‘Introduction’, p. 167.

³¹ Bevir, *Logic*, pp. 221–222.

³² Hall and Bevir, p. 829.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 829.

³⁴ Molloy, *The Hidden History of Realism*, p. 53.

³⁵ Charles Jones, *E.H. Carr and International Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 46.

³⁶ E.H. Carr, ‘An Autobiography’, in Michael Cox (ed.), *E.H. Carr: A Critical Appraisal* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), pp. xii–xxii, at p. xix.

³⁷ Carr, ‘Autobiography’, p. xix.

³⁸ George Lloyd and Edward Wood, *The Great Opportunity* (London: John Murray, 1919). Carr admitted in his biographical statement (see previous footnote) that he was ashamed of the harshness of *The Twenty Years’ Crisis*. This dilemma potentially explains his evolving thought between these publications.

³⁹ Jonathan Haslam argued that Carr was ‘ultimately indifferent’ to his image as a ‘hard-boiled advocate of *Machtspolitik* (Power Politics)’ because ‘he recognised the image to be not altogether inaccurate’. Jonathan

however. His 28th December 1938 diary entry records that he was ‘Still on realism. Still very odd’.⁴⁰ In turn, Carr’s interpretation of the realist tradition was innovative and creative. This is particularly true with regard *The Twenty Years’ Crisis*. It actually contained two realisms: a conservative, practical and pragmatic realism versus a radical, theoretical and critical realism.⁴¹ Whereas the former, which was evident most clearly in the text’s second chapter, was influenced by the conservative realist tradition, the latter which was most prominent in the text’s fifth chapter, was influenced more readily by Marxism broadly and Mannheim’s *Standortgebundenheit des Denkens* more specifically.⁴²

The conservative realist tradition includes ideas known commonly as the *Primat der Außenpolitik* (the primacy of foreign affairs), which can be traced to Leopold von Ranke in terms of philosophy and Otto von Bismarck in terms of practice.⁴³ Although Ranke did not explicitly use the term—instead it was coined by Wilhelm Dilthey—the *Primat der Außenpolitik* is virtually synonymous with the Rankean worldview.⁴⁴ Ranke’s political theory is articulated most prominently in a number of articles he published in *Historisch-Politische Zeitschrift*, a journal he edited in the 1830s. Important here is “A dialogue on politics”, in which Ranke stressed themes such as the organic state, self-preservation and security, sovereignty and independence and political necessity.⁴⁵ Crucial here are the supremacy of security, the necessity of alliances and the subversion of principles to expediency. Ranke saw state security as the first priority. The ‘supreme law of the state’ is to ‘organize all its internal resources for self-preservation’ he argued.⁴⁶ Nevertheless, despite the primacy of sovereignty and independence, Ranke concluded that when threats were great enough alliance formation was a necessity. Writing on the anti-Napoleonic alliance, he wrote: ‘[it was only] the huge danger of a newly risen power, which threatened independence everywhere, [which] finally created, in the face of annihilation as it were, a common defense’.⁴⁷ Lastly, for Ranke, what mattered in terms of international relations was not ideology or opinion but rather interest shaped by political necessity. In discussing the Austrian-Russian alliance and its dissolution, he concluded that there ‘is no trend of opinion, however dominant, which can break the force of political interests’.⁴⁸ Also important is Ranke’s “The great powers”, which traced the rise of Prussia under Frederick II, the French revolution and the Napoleonic wars.⁴⁹ Although historically dense, it is possible to draw out a major theme from this text: for Ranke, the internal development of the Prussian state was a product of the international relations it was situated

Haslam, *No Virtue Like Necessity: Realist Thought in International Relations since Machiavelli* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), pp. 199–200. In terms of Carr and the realist and *realpolitik* traditions see Ian Hall, *Dilemmas of Decline: British Intellectuals and World Politics, 1945–1975* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), pp. 29–34; John Bew, *Realpolitik: A History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), pp. 177–181.

⁴⁰ Carr’s Appointment Diaries 1938, Carr Papers, Box 29, (Cadbury Research Library, University of Birmingham).

⁴¹ Jones, *E.H. Carr and International Relations*, p. 60; Hall, *Dilemmas of Decline*, p. 33; Seán Molloy, ‘Spinoza, Carr, and the ethics of *The Twenty Years’ Crisis*’, *Review of International Studies*, 39:2 (2013), pp. 251–271, at p. 261.

⁴² Carr, *The Twenty Years’ Crisis*, pp. 11–21, 63–88.

⁴³ Otto Pflanze, *Bismarck and the Development of Germany: The Period of Unification, 1815–1871* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1968), p. 71.

⁴⁴ John Farenkopf, ‘The challenge of Spenglerian pessimism to Ranke and political realism’, *Review of International Studies*, 17:3 (1991), pp. 267–284, at pp. 269–272.

⁴⁵ Theodor von Laue, *Leopold Ranke: The Formative Years* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1950), pp. 152–180.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 167.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 169.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 172.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 208–215.

within and subjected to.⁵⁰ This is what Simms and Mulligan refer to as the descriptive aspect of the *Primat der Außenpolitik*, i.e. the notion that a state's internal development is a product of its external relations.⁵¹ Or, as von Laue puts it, 'Foreign affairs, then, were the supreme factor in political life'.⁵² Indeed, in "The great powers" Ranke, quoting Heraclitus' maxim that war is the father of all things, basically contends that to understand the development of the European states and the system they inhabited one has to first appreciate the wars of the period.⁵³

Carr was familiar with both Ranke and Bismarck. His 19th August 1938 diary entry records that he read Bismarck.⁵⁴ *What is History* indicates that he was equally aware of Ranke, particularly in terms of Rankean historiography.⁵⁵ Whether Carr was familiar with Ranke's *Primat der Außenpolitik* is debatable. However, Carr was certainly familiar with Meinecke's inter-war work, which is evidenced by the fact that he cited it in *The Twenty Years' Crisis*.⁵⁶ Meinecke, particularly prior to the Second World War, was in many respects the heir to the primacy of foreign affairs tradition.⁵⁷ At the least, then, Carr inherited the tradition indirectly with Meinecke acting as a conduit. To bring some clarity so that a consideration of the influence of the primacy of foreign affairs tradition on Carr's later historical work can be undertaken, following Simms,⁵⁸ I distil the *Primat der Außenpolitik* to three aspects. First, security is prime because state's have to consider their defence, security and territorial integrity above all else. Second, as a result, internal factors such as *inter alia* ideology that might preclude a state from seeking security can be overcome if political necessity dictates it. The example here is that ideologically divergent states may ally themselves if circumstances necessitate it. Third, although the external environment (i.e. geopolitics and geopolitical events) may condition policy, it does not determine it. Policy outcomes are open, that is, and agency is a historically real factor.

Bevirian interpretivism maintains that dilemmas are crucial to understanding how an individual's thoughts and ideas evolve over time. Dilemmas may explain, therefore, why Carr turned from a more radical, theoretical realism to a more pragmatic, conservative form of realism. Many dilemmas shaped Carr's thought over the course of his scholarly career, which in turn influenced how he spun his web of beliefs. Notable was the Manchurian crisis and, as previously mentioned, the Abyssinian crisis. The former led Carr to accept the conclusion 'that members of the League...were not prepared to resist an act of aggression committed by a powerful and well-armed state' while the latter caused the realisation that 'Great Britain was not less firm than France in her resolve not to be drawn into war with Italy'.⁵⁹ The Prague crisis, which evidenced the collapse of the Munich settlement, also saw Carr reorient the meanings

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 184

⁵¹ Brendan Simms and William Mulligan, 'Introduction', in William Mulligan and Brendan Simms (eds.), *The Primacy of Foreign Policy in British History, 1660–2000* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), pp. 1–14, at p. 1.

⁵² Von Laue, *Leopold Ranke*, p. 99.

⁵³ Ibid., p. 215.

⁵⁴ Carr's Appointment Diaries 1938, Carr Papers, Box 29.

⁵⁵ Carr, *What is History*, pp. 8–9.

⁵⁶ Carr, *The Twenty Years' Crisis*, pp. 15, 88. On the relationship between Carr and Meinecke see Haslam, *No Virtue*, p. 185; Bew, *Realpolitik*, p. 179.

⁵⁷ Richard W. Sterling, *Ethics in a World of Power: The Political Ideas of Friedrich Meinecke* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1958).

⁵⁸ Brendan Simms, *The Impact of Napoleon: Prussian High Politics, Foreign Policy and the Crisis of the Executive, 1797–1806* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 4–5. Simms, in his formulation, actually includes a fourth factor—crisis and drama. This can be distilled into the first category.

⁵⁹ E.H. Carr, *International Relations since the Peace Treaties* (London: Macmillan, 1937), pp. 172, 228.

he attached to Chamberlain's policy of appeasement.⁶⁰ Indeed, it was perhaps Carr's advocacy of appeasement that did much to influence his scholarly trajectory. In his autobiographical statement he reflected on his shame of the text's 'harsh "realism"'.⁶¹ In private correspondence to his publishers not long after *The Twenty Years' Crisis* was published, he even implied that it was a plus that bookshops were not stocking—and had not even heard of—the work.⁶² The political climate in addition to the critical reviews of *The Twenty Years' Crisis* in particular⁶³ seemingly undermined his faith in his academic pursuits. When asked about his future research intentions in 1943, Carr responded that he did not feel 'sufficiently interested at this time to write anything of a purely historical or analytical character, and anything containing views or proposals about the future would almost inevitable be over-taken by events before it got into print'.⁶⁴ Although he would later publish on nationalism and sovereignty, post-war he was sceptical about analytical and theoretical research. In one particular review of Ernest Woodward's *The Study of International Relations at University*, he seemed to suggest that the content of IR was "what the academic" made it. In rejecting Woodward's view that intellectual dilettantism had resulted in a lack of IR in universities, Carr asked 'Is it not rather the natural result of the persistent failure to provide facilities in this country for organized modern historical research in the sense in which it was understood and practised in Germany before 1933 and is still understood and practised in the United States?'.⁶⁵ Carr's thoughts were evidently turning toward history; his empirical work toward the Soviet Union.⁶⁶ Whilst *The Twenty Years' Crisis* may have developed as a staple in the developing IR field in the United States at least, the shifting international environment, *inter alia*, meant that Carr was becoming something of an outcast.⁶⁷ By looking at Carr's later work on Soviet foreign affairs specifically, the subsequent section seeks to use these dilemmas as a backdrop for charting how Carr's use of the realist tradition subsequently evolved from the more radical to the more conservative.

IV. Carr's diplomatic histories

Carr wrote four diplomatic histories of the twenty years' crisis: *Britain: A Study of Foreign Policy from the Versailles Treaty to the Outbreak of War*, *German-Soviet Relations between the Two World Wars, 1919–1939* and his two books on Soviet interwar diplomacy, *The Twilight of Comintern, 1930–1935* and *The Comintern and the Spanish Civil War*. Prior to his death in 1982, he also began work on a companion volume to *Twilight* entitled *The Popular Front, 1935–1938*. Although the work was never completed or published, a posthumous edition was prepared by Robert W. Davies (who had previously collaborated with Carr on his *History*).⁶⁸ *Britain*, which was published in the same year as *The Twenty Years' Crisis*,

⁶⁰ Citation to manuscript currently under review.

⁶¹ Carr, 'Autobiography', p. xix.

⁶² Carr to Macmillan, 4 December 1939, Carr Papers, Box 27.

⁶³ Wilson, 'The myth of the first great debate'.

⁶⁴ Carr to Macmillan, 4 December 1939, Carr Papers, Box 27.

⁶⁵ E.H. Carr, 'Review of E.L. Woodward's *The Study of international Relations at University*', *Times Literary Supplement*, 24 March 1945. Carr Papers, Box 22.

⁶⁶ E.H. Carr, *The Soviet Impact on the Western World* (New York: Macmillan, 1947). In personal correspondence to Arno Mayer, Carr indicated that he wished to 'devote [his] energies' to completing his *History*, adding that he 'definitely' did not wish 'to return to the world of *The Twenty Years' Crisis* and all that'. Carr to Mayer, 30 April 1963, Carr Papers, Box 27.

⁶⁷ Haslam, *The Vices of Integrity*, chap. 5.

⁶⁸ E.H. Carr, *Britain: A Study of Foreign Policy from the Versailles Treaty to the Outbreak of War* (London: Longmans Green and Co., 1939); E.H. Carr, *German-Soviet Relations between the Two World Wars* (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins Press, 1951); E.H. Carr, *The Twilight of Comintern, 1930–1935* (London: Macmillan, 1982); E.H. Carr, *The Comintern and the Spanish Civil War* (published posthumously, edited by Tamara Deutscher, New York, NY: Pantheon, 1984); E.H. Carr, *The Popular Front, 1935–1938* (unpublished manuscript, prepared by

provided an overview of British policy between the wars. Aspects of the work were directed toward defending the policy of appeasement, especially after the Prague crisis in 1939. *German-Soviet Relations* was published in 1951 and was drawn from lectures Carr gave for the Albert Shaw Lectures in Baltimore. Theoretically ideas found in both *Britain* and *German-Soviet Relations* may also reflect the primacy of foreign affairs tradition. However, the subsequent analysis focuses specifically on Carr's histories of Soviet foreign affairs as a coherent set of ideas produced in a relatively coherent timeframe, i.e. in the final years of his life. To attempt to analyse works that span forty years may run the risk of presenting an idealised and timeless portrait of Carr, which would obviously stand in stark contrast to the interpretivist method employed here.

Raison d'état

As outlined above, this refers to the principle that state security is prime because states have to and indeed should consider their defence, security and territorial integrity above all other matters.⁶⁹ It can be shown that in many respects Carr's diplomatic histories of Soviet foreign affairs during the twenty year reflect the principle of *raison d'état*. Take *Twilight* as an example. Carr begins by charting the principal security threat facing the Soviet Union in the early 1930s. In the wake of the great depression and as the international system edged toward chaos, Moscow's chief anxiety was that 'the western Powers would seek to solve their difficulties, and sink their differences, in combined action against the USSR'.⁷⁰ In turn, this meant that maintaining proper 'relations with Germany were a matter of supreme importance' as a hedge against a united capitalist coalition.⁷¹ Hitler's ascendancy to power and the rise of a revisionist Japan, however, caused a *volte-face* in Soviet strategy. By the mid-1930s Germany's more aggressive foreign policy in particular carried a 'fresh threat to the USSR', created 'increasing tension in Soviet-German relations' and paved the way for *détente* between the Soviet Union and the western capitalist powers (the Soviet Union even joined the League of Nations in late 1934 and signed a mutual defence pact with France in 1935).⁷² For Carr this shift in Soviet policy, coupled with the subversion of the Comintern's revolutionary agenda to Soviet security interests, was understood in terms of maintaining the defence and security of the Soviet Union *vis-à-vis* the threat posed by Nazi Germany.⁷³ This idea is carried forward in *The Spanish Civil War* where Carr details the manner in which Soviet strategy, particularly through the Comintern, became increasingly concerned with security and national interest over the promotion of revolution. Indeed, in her introduction to the posthumously published work Tamara Deutscher noted that for Carr 'Moscow's attitude to Spain was dictated less and less by the *raison de la révolution* and more by the Soviet *raison d'état*'.⁷⁴ In principle, this meant that despite pressure amongst ideologues for more support to the republicans and Leftists fighting Franco, this 'pressure was subjected to the restraint of diplomatic expediency'.⁷⁵ That is, Moscow was determined to 'keep the foreign policy of the USSR in line with that of France

Robert W. Davies), Carr Papers, Box 15. Correspondence from Davies to Deutscher indicates that, unlike *The Spanish Civil War*, it may have been felt that *The Popular Front* was too repetitive to stand alone as an 'unfinished symphony'. Davies to Deutscher, 30 January 1985, Carr Papers, Box 15; Davies to Deutscher, 6 March 1985, Carr Papers, Box 15.

⁶⁹ Haslam, *No Virtue*, pp. 17–18.

⁷⁰ Carr, *Twilight*, p. 23

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 17. See also Carr, *German-Soviet Relations*, pp. 89–90.

⁷² Carr, *Twilight*, pp. 137–138.

⁷³ Carr, *Twilight*, pp. 151–152.

⁷⁴ Carr, *Spanish Civil War*, p. xviii.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

and Britain, its political allies against the menace of the Fascist powers'.⁷⁶ That is not to say that Soviet strategy was completely passive. Arms were supplied, military advisers were provided and Soviet influence via the Comintern was evident in political machinations that took place in Spanish politics.⁷⁷ But these were undertaken covertly and lessened over time. What Carr referred to as 'revolutionary ardour' in Soviet foreign policy gave 'place to the cool calculations of diplomacy'.⁷⁸ Lurking behind this shift was the Soviet Union's need to engage in a *rapprochement* with the western powers as a counterweight to the threat posed by Nazi Germany in particular.⁷⁹ The threat from Germany, and the necessity of maintaining good relations with the western powers, was also a crucial ingredient in terms of Soviet strategy in the latter part of the 1930s. Indicative here was the way in which Carr portrayed the Soviet response to Hitler's remilitarisation of the Rhineland. Although Maxim Litvinov, People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs, like his western counterparts denounced Germany's actions, 'he did not separate himself from the temporizing attitude of his British and French colleagues'.⁸⁰ The Soviet Union, at this juncture, was chiefly concerned with pursuing 'a coalition with bourgeois states in a common front against Fascism'.⁸¹ For Carr, this explained Litvinov's apprehension toward the remilitarisation of the Rhineland. Moreover, as with *The Spanish Civil War*, the Comintern's revolutionary impulses were superseded by the aims of the popular front (an alliance with bourgeoisie parties in opposition to fascism) as a direct result of the threatening international environment.⁸² *Raison d'état* was evidently crucial to Carr's interpretations of Soviet foreign affairs during the 1930s.

International relations trump ideology

This is equally true of the notion that political expediencies generated by international relations trump *inter alia* ideological aims. That is, Carr's interpretation of Soviet foreign affairs during the 1930s emphasised the manner in which the revolutionary aims of the Soviet Union, and by extension the Comintern, were by necessity diluted. One of the principles put forth by Carr in *Twilight*, for example, made the case that in the 1930s the 'world had become too dangerous a place for rash revolutionary adventures'.⁸³ Moscow, in other words, gradually came to the view that revolutionary outbreaks would 'provoke French intervention' and 'fan hostility to the USSR'.⁸⁴ Over time, and as a result, the Comintern 'came round slowly to the opinion that communist parties could profitably collaborate with other Left parties...even with parties which did not accept the revolutionary programme of communism'.⁸⁵ That is not to say that the suspension of ideological conflict was easy or took place evenly. Mutual antagonisms between the socialists and the communists in Germany, even after Hitler's ascension to power, made political unity problematic.⁸⁶ Nevertheless, by the mid-1930s, particularly owing to the influence of the Comintern's then leader, Georgi Dimitrov, policy was dictated by the need for collaboration with the bourgeois left. And for Carr, this resulted from the necessities generated by the international relations of the period.⁸⁷ His interpretation of Soviet policy during the

⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 15.

⁷⁷ Ibid., pp. 27, 57–59, 61.

⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 50.

⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 84.

⁸⁰ Carr, *Popular Front*, p. 51.

⁸¹ Ibid., p. 41.

⁸² Ibid., p. 41.

⁸³ Carr, *Twilight*, p. 44.

⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 44.

⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 5.

⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 93.

⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 152.

Spanish civil war reflected the same principle. In Spain the popular front was galvanised by the threat from Franco and the support he received from the fascist powers.⁸⁸ In turn, a unity government composed of socialists and communists, although not anarchists, was established in the autumn of 1936.⁸⁹ The conflict in Spain, from Carr's perspective, also hurried the process he had identified in *The Twilight*. That is, despite facing stiff resistance from hardliners such as Wilhelm Knorin and Béla Kun, Dimitrov was able to undermine cherished communist doctrine and advance the principles of the popular national front.⁹⁰ For Carr, this development was understood in terms of political necessity. The Spanish civil war, that is, was evidence of the manner in which 'leaders in Moscow' were striving to 'subordinate the distant prospects of proletarian revolution to the immediate emergency of building a broad basis of resistance to the Fascist danger'.⁹¹ The historical narrative was carried further forward by Carr in *The Popular Front*. His chapter on the French experience is indicative here. Unlike the German experience noted above, the French communist party was better placed for political cohabitation. 'France', wrote Carr, 'was continuously conscious of the military thrust from Nazi Germany'. In turn, the French communist party could 'sound a patriotic note and take its stand with parties of a different social complexion on a common platform of national defence against Fascist oppression'.⁹² Political necessity, in other words, meant ideological compromise. In terms of Soviet foreign affairs more specifically, what Carr—perhaps controversially—depicted as the victory of realism over idealism was also crucial to his historical narrative.⁹³ 'In Moscow', wrote Carr, 'the building of a firm alliance with the western powers to counter the Fascist threat seemed the supreme and over-riding aim of Soviet foreign policy'.⁹⁴ Stalin had, for Carr at least, refashioned the Comintern—subverted cherished ideology in other words—in the name of political expediency.⁹⁵

Context conditions but does not determine

As others have noted, Carr was not a determinist.⁹⁶ Instead, he tried to find an appropriate balance or synthesis between voluntarism and determinism, structure and agency or context and conduct.⁹⁷ This outlook is equally evident in his histories of Soviet foreign affairs during the latter half of the twenty years' crisis. In turn, his historical writing chimed with ideas outlined previously as reflecting the primacy of foreign affairs tradition. This is particularly evident in *Twilight* where Carr touched upon Stalin's relatively passive role in Soviet foreign affairs. Particularly in the first half of the 1930s Stalin, according to Carr, was chiefly concerned with economic and political priorities on the domestic front. Rather than exercising control, he left foreign affairs, in terms of both Narkomindel and the Comintern, in the hands of Litvinov.⁹⁸ Stalin's reluctance or indecision, from Carr's vantage, 'prolonged an anomalous situation in which officials of Comintern spoke with different voices, and directives issue to communist parties were conflicting and indecisive'.⁹⁹ Hitler's ascension to power may have

⁸⁸ Carr, *Spanish Civil War*, pp. 11–12.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 20–21.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 34.

⁹² Carr, *Popular Front*, p. 36.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 131.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 128.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 49–50.

⁹⁶ Howe, 'The utopian realism of EH Carr', pp. 282–284; Jones, *EH Carr and International Relations*, pp. 144–147; Germain, 'EH Carr and the historical mode of thought', p. 239

⁹⁷ Carr, *Conditions of Peace*, p. 6; Carr, *The Twenty Years' Crisis*, pp. 89–101; Carr, *The New Society*, p. 14; Carr, *What is History?*, p. 95.

⁹⁸ Carr, *Twilight*, p. 122.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 124.

radically transformed the threat to the Soviet Union, but leaders still have to perceive and react to the international context. In that respect, the international context conditioned but did not determine Soviet foreign policy. Carr even noted how Stalin initially saw no threat in Hitler and the Nazis, believing that if they did come to power they would be principally concerned with looking westward.¹⁰⁰ Similar ideas are evident in *The Spanish Civil War*. Italian and German intervention in the civil war could have potentially rewritten the European balance of power.¹⁰¹ Russian policy toward the conflict, however, was relatively limited—as was the response from France and Britain.¹⁰² Domestic conditions—notably in Britain the presence of the Conservative government and the privatised armament industry and in France factional disputes amongst the leadership—influenced the direction of policy.¹⁰³ For the Soviets, Carr believed that it was not simply diplomatic manoeuvring prompted by political necessity that mattered. He also believed that capabilities were an important factor in explaining Soviet policy. Both the ‘Comintern and the Soviet government were concerned to prevent Franco’s victory’, he wrote, ‘yet neither had at their disposal adequate means to achieve this purpose’.¹⁰⁴ In *The Popular Front*, Carr also took care to point to the manner in which ideas regarding security and defence policy can be driven by factions. In particular, with regard to the principle of the popular front, Carr identified a ‘covert struggle’ in both communist parties and the Comintern leadership regarding the righteousness of the popular front doctrine.¹⁰⁵ The international environment certainly provided the context for Soviet foreign affairs in the 1930s, but individuals and institutions—and importantly disputes between them—mediated its effects.¹⁰⁶

The last point indicates that Carr’s diplomatic histories demonstrate concerns beyond the primacy of foreign affairs in Soviet foreign policy in the inter-war era. One of his major concerns in each of the three works was in charting the political and ideological disputes and differences between Moscow, Comintern spokesman and foreign communist parties.¹⁰⁷ Like aspects of his monumental *History*,¹⁰⁸ the three works on Soviet foreign affairs offered a fine-grained and highly detailed account of the institutions, personalities and factions involved in Soviet foreign affairs during the twenty years’ crisis. Ranke’s primacy of foreign affairs may have not, therefore, been the defining inspiration behind Carr’s histories of Soviet foreign affairs. Nevertheless, traces of Ranke are evident, even if silent, which is a point I will return to below.

V. The twenty years’ crisis, history and tragedy

From the preceding discussion it is evident that Carr’s often overlooked histories of Soviet foreign affairs speak in places to the primacy of foreign affairs tradition. This interpretation of his work is certainly of interest to Carr-specific scholars. More importantly, the approach outlined above, i.e. the interpretivist framework of traditions and dilemmas, offers a starting

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 52.

¹⁰¹ Carr, *The Spanish Civil War*, p. 12.

¹⁰² Ibid., p. 15

¹⁰³ Ibid., p. 14.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 85.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., pp. 35–36.

¹⁰⁶ In this respect, there is a certain amount of crossover between Carr’s diplomatic histories and the neoclassical realist approach. For this argument with regard to *Britain* and *German-Soviet* relations see Keith Smith, ‘A reassessment of E.H. Carr and the realist tradition: *Britain, German-Soviet Relations* and neoclassical realism’, *International Politics*, forthcoming. Although, as will be returned to in the next section, the similarities between Carr’s minor works and the North American realist tradition should not be hastily overdone.

¹⁰⁷ Carr, *Twilight*, p. 70; Carr, *The Spanish Civil War*, pp. 20–21; Carr, *Popular Front*, p. 34.

¹⁰⁸ Haslam, *Vices of Integrity*, p. 178–181.

point for thinking about the progress and evolution of his scholarly career and thought, particularly from the IR theorist to conservative historian. However, recovering Carr's histories—or at least recognising their potential significance—has greater implications, especially in terms of the how we think about the realist canon. Lumping together Carr, Morgenthau and Waltz, Palan and Blair conclude that their respective theories of the state result from the 'explosion of ideas in the nineteenth century, particularly in Germany, which gave to rise to the modern...version of the realist theory of international relations'.¹⁰⁹ Leaving aside the question of an unbroken and timeless realism stretching from nineteenth century Germany (if not before) into the interwar period and then Cold War era, the notion of a shared heritage does raise some provocative questions about the relationship between Carr's diplomatic histories of Soviet foreign affairs and realist work published in a similar era, although in the North American tradition. Lebow calls Ranke 'a nineteenth-century precursor of Kenneth Waltz'.¹¹⁰ There is logic behind this reasoning. Waltz fleshed out his socialisation mechanism (the principle that the competitive nature of the system compels states to act in a similar manner) with reference to the taming of the Soviet Union's revolutionary aims (interestingly enough by way of a reference to Theodore von Laue).¹¹¹ Walt's *The Origins of Alliance* is also indicative here. One of the principal arguments in this monograph was the idea that alliance formation was a product less of shared ideology and more a product of political expediency generated by external threat.¹¹² Primed, to borrow from Steele,¹¹³ for approaching Carr through the revisionist literature, I was puzzled when reading Carr, thinking Walt and hearing Waltz.

This argument has recently been advanced by Parent and Baron.¹¹⁴ Akin to the revisionist literature identified in footnote six of this article, they argue that contemporary realists—they specifically identify Waltz and Mearsheimer—have misread the classical works of Morgenthau and Carr amongst others (with regards to Carr they refer specifically to his abridged *History*). Where they detract from the aforementioned revisionist literature, is that they seek to highlight affinities between "classical" realists (for want of a better word) and those realists commonly identified as neorealists. They argue that the common neorealist charges brought against the mid-twentieth century writers—specifically that they focused on human nature to the detriment of structure and were theoretically unsophisticated—are overstated. Reviewing the centrality of key concepts across realists in time, notably anarchy and its consequences, they conclude that 'the classics are tightly allied with structural analysis and extremely consistent with neorealism'.¹¹⁵ Moreover, they contend that there is a lot more theory in the classical works than is generally recognised. Turning again to Carr specifically, and quoting liberally from *What is History*, they point to his focus on cause as evidence of his concern with theory, if from a historical explanatory basis.¹¹⁶ Overall, this allows them to make the case that 'classical realists escape charges of human nature realism and theoretical incompetence' by 'explaining

¹⁰⁹ Ronen P. Palan and Brook M. Blair, 'On the idealist origins of the realist theory of International Relations', *Review of International Studies*, 19:4 (1993), pp. 385 – 399, at p. 388.

¹¹⁰ Lebow, *The Tragic Vision of Politics*, p. 336.

¹¹¹ Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (New York, NY: McGraw Hill, 1979), pp. 127–128.

¹¹² Stephen M. Walt, *The Origins of Alliances* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1987), pp. 33, 266–268.

¹¹³ Brent J. Steele, 'Context and appropriation: The risks, benefits and challenges of reinterpretive expression', *International Politics*, 50:6 (2013), pp. 739–752.

¹¹⁴ Joseph M. Parent and Joshua M. Baron, 'Elder abuse: How the moderns mistreat classical realism', *International Studies Review*, 13:2 (2011), pp. 193–213.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 197.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 202. They do of course recognise that what constitutes acceptable knowledge is different across time; and that applying the standards of contemporary "political science" to classical works is unjust, *ibid.* In raising this "classical" point, namely the conditionality of knowledge, the authors neglect its importance for attempting to create a timeless ideal of the realist tradition.

the same patterns with essentially the same concepts and logic as neorealists'.¹¹⁷ From this vantage, part of the glue binding neorealists and classical realists is the shared intellectual inheritance from the nineteenth century German realists, Meinecke in particular and by extension Ranke.¹¹⁸

One could argue that the commensurability thesis is overdone. Whilst Carr's diplomatic histories of Soviet foreign affairs during the interwar era may share an intellectual inheritance with the North American realist tradition, there are evident differences, especially in terms of incommensurate underlying understandings of history. This is the basis of the interpretivist claim, and its strength in terms of analysing intellectual thought. Traditions are 'a starting point'; they do not determine how an individual incorporates ideas into their existing web of beliefs.¹¹⁹ Carr and notable neorealists may have been influenced by the Rankean tradition of foreign affairs, either directly or indirectly, but their respective use, understanding and development of said tradition are ultimately unique and based on creative agency. In particular, there is an evident divergence in terms of philosophy of history. Whilst neorealists typically work within a history without historicism tradition, Carr, at least in his histories of Soviet foreign affairs, worked from a traditional even Rankean approach to history.¹²⁰ History without historicism is typically concerned with the general over the particular. The historical record is seen as a testing ground for deductive theoretical propositions and hypotheses. As Hobson and Lawson state, neorealists generally use history, chiefly secondary sources, to verify, refine and refute their theoretical propositions.¹²¹ Traditional history, in contrast, is typically *atheoretical* (at least outwardly so),¹²² is concerned chiefly with (if not fetishizes) primary, archival sources (is based on historical fact in other words); and seeks to construct accurate causal accounts of historical events.¹²³ Ironically given Carr's criticism of Rankean historiography in *What is History*, there are evident traces of this traditional approach in his histories of Soviet foreign affairs.¹²⁴ His diplomatic histories are filled with what Haslam refers to as Carr's "'needlework'"—that is, 'detailed empirical research and writing'.¹²⁵ Consequently they reflect the traditional history approach just outlined. Carr's preface to *Twilight* clearly indicates that he sought to 'narrate what happened in Moscow and what happened in the parties [of the Comintern]'.¹²⁶ The works are based on archival research, with a specific focus on memoirs,

¹¹⁷ Ibid., p. 203.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., p. 195. See also Jeffrey W. Taliaferro, Steven E. Lobell and Norrin M. Ripsman, 'Introduction' in Steven E. Lobell et al. (eds.) *Neoclassical Realism, The State, and Foreign Policy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 1–42, at p. 26, fn. 71. For a criticism of this argument, with specific reference to Morgenthau but classical realists more broadly, in terms of discordant epistemology and ontology see Hans J. Morgenthau, *The Concept of the Political* (edited by Hartmut Behr and Felix Rösch, translated by Maeva Vidal, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

¹¹⁹ Bevir, *Logic*, p. 201.

¹²⁰ I borrow these terms from John M. Hobson and George Lawson, 'What is history in International Relations?', *Millennium—Journal of International Relations*, 37:2 (2008), pp. 415–435.

¹²¹ Ibid., pp. 421–423.

¹²² The qualifier is used because even the most *atheoretical* history contains implicit theoretical assumptions. With regard to Ranke's historiography, Krieger argues that Ranke's ideas (the independence of politics and history, the search for cause and the concern with vital insight) meant that implicitly he was committed 'to a theory of history which exalted historically rooted facts over any theory to be drawn from history'. Leonard Krieger, *Ranke: The Meaning of History* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1977), p. 23.

¹²³ Ibid., pp. 425–427.

¹²⁴ Haslam, *The Vices of Integrity*, p. 194.

¹²⁵ Ibid., p. 195.

¹²⁶ Carr, *Twilight*, p. viii, my emphasis.

typically bypassing his earlier reflective comments on this method.¹²⁷ Moreover, his three works on Soviet foreign affairs were largely *atheoretical*. Although it is possible to detect a Rankean sensibility in them, in terms of the primacy of foreign affairs, Carr made no explicit use or attested to a concern with theory here. His works on Soviet foreign affairs, in other words, contained a realism that never spoke its name.

If Carr's histories of Soviet foreign affairs during the twenty years' crisis are traditional histories, then this surely puts them at odds with his earlier work. From the interpretivist perspective, this is not problematic. In the course of a scholarly career an intellectual may come to exhibit or espouse thought that is radically different from traditions that they had previously imbibed from. As Bevir explains, '[an individual may] even reject [a tradition] in a way that might make it anything but constitutive of the web of beliefs that they [later] come to hold'.¹²⁸ We can see this through a brief illustrative contrast between Carr's diplomatic histories and *The Twenty Years' Crisis* (and indeed his other inter-war work), with the latter exhibiting a more critical-theoretical edge.¹²⁹ *The Twenty Years' Crisis* speaks more strongly to the radical, theoretical and critical tradition of Mannheim as opposed to the *Primat der Außenpolitik* tradition of Ranke. Drawing from Mannheim, and applying it to the work of Morgenthau, Behr and Heath suggest that *Standortgebunden* means 'nothing more than the theoretical acknowledgement of the socio-politically contingent character of history, and the practical recognition of a certain, if temporary, historical condition and subsequent way of acting under these conditions'.¹³⁰ These ideas are certainly evident in *The Twenty Years' Crisis*. Indeed, Evans over thirty years ago in this very journal concluded that uniting Carr's interwar *oeuvre* was the 'notion that the principles of one age cannot without great danger be carried over to another where the problems and the context are different'.¹³¹ One passage from *The Twenty Years' Crisis* can illuminate on this:

*In a limited number of countries, nineteenth-century liberal democracy had been a brilliant success. It was a success because its presuppositions coincided with the stage of development reached by the countries concerned...But the view that nineteenth-century liberal democracy was based, not on a balance of forces peculiar to the economic development of the period and the countries concerned, but on certain a priori rational principles which had only to be applied in other contexts to produce similar results, was essentially utopian.*¹³²

Carr's interwar work more broadly was concerned with progressive change. Progressiveness, according to Wilson, is the 'belief that the world does not have to look the way that it does, and that through reason, courage, imagination and determination it is possible to arrive at a better way of being and living'.¹³³ Sewed through Carr's better known work in the interwar era are hopes for and imaginations of a new and more stable political order. This is evident in his discussion of peaceful change, the prospect of post-national sovereignty and the elimination of

¹²⁷ See, for instance, his employment of Jacques Duclos' and Palmiro Togliatti's memoirs, *The Spanish Civil War*, pp. 2–3, 52–53. Carr had earlier pointed to the inherent subjectivity of memoirs as primary and authentic documents, *What is History*, pp. 15–17.

¹²⁸ Bevir, *Logic*, p. 201.

¹²⁹ I am referring specifically to the historically conditioned nature of knowledge and the emancipatory and progressive aspects of critical theory. See Nicholas Rengger and Ben Thirkell-White, 'Still critical after all these years? The past, present and future of critical theory in International Relations', *Review of International Studies*, 33:S1 (2007), pp. 3–24, at pp. 5–7.

¹³⁰ Behr and Heath, 'Misreading in IR theory', p. 336.

¹³¹ Graham Evans, 'E.H. Carr and International Relations', *British Journal of International Studies*, 1:2 (1975), pp. 77–97, at p. 83.

¹³² Carr, *The Twenty Years' Crisis*, p. 27.

¹³³ Peter Wilson, 'Where are we now in the debate about the first great debate', in Brian Schmidt (ed.), *International Relations and the Great First Debate* (London: Routledge, 2012), pp. 133–151, at p. 135.

the profit motive from foreign policy. It is also apparent in *Nationalism and After* where Carr ruminates on the prospects of a more peaceful post-war order based on individual rights, functional intergovernmental institutions and common moral principles. Carr's call for the 'revolution [to] begin at home' in *The Conditions of Peace* and his subsequent outline of a post-war social democratic welfare coupled with centralised planning also illustrate his progressiveness.¹³⁴

This critical edge is not evident in Carr's diplomatic histories; the dilemmas Carr experienced (previously outlined) potentially explain this shift from radical theoretician to conservative historian. His diplomatic histories as a story of *what was* are emptied of the progressive aspects of his other analytical work that focused on *what could be*. It should be clear that Carr's explanatory accounts of the twenty years' crisis fall outside the current disciplinary trend of reading the classics as critical theory (or at least looking for critical theory insights in the classical works). Morgenthau's *American Foreign Policy* does likewise, and could be equally mined for the *Primat der Außenpolitik* tradition.¹³⁵ Thus, while it may be true that Carr (and indeed Morgenthau) drew from traditions of thought not typically associated with contemporary realist theorising, i.e. the Frankfurt school and Marx,¹³⁶ they equally drew from traditions of thought, i.e. the *Primat der Außenpolitik*, not typically associated with critical theory.

Prima facie, then, Carr's diplomatic histories of Soviet foreign affairs during the twenty years' crisis may offer little for contemporary IR theory. They are, after all, history (and a traditional history at that). Such a view would be inaccurate, however. Reading the final chapter, "The descent into chaos", from his final unpublished work, *The Popular Front*, it is possible to interpret in Carr a Lebowean sensibility. Tracing the tragedy genre and concept to fifth-century Athens, Erskine and Lebow, drawing from Aristotle, point to the importance of *hamartia*, *peripeteia* and *anagnorisis*.¹³⁷ *Hamartia* refers to an error of judgement on the protagonist's part. *Peripeteia* refers to the reversal of fortune that results from the protagonist's *hamartia*. *Anagnorisis* is the cathartic revelation and transformation of self that results from the realisation of the initial error of judgement. Tragedy as a narrative device is concerned with *inter alia* highlighting human limitations and fallibility, particularly in terms of deliberation and decision-making in terms of competing ethical and moral commitments.¹³⁸ The 'core insight of tragedy' is therefore the process of learning it engenders, specifically in terms of knowing 'one's own limits'.¹³⁹ Utilising the works of Thucydides, Clausewitz and Morgenthau,

¹³⁴ Carr, *The Twenty Years' Crisis*, pp. 208–239; Carr, *Nationalism and After*, pp. 38–74; Carr, *The Conditions of Peace*, p. 130.

¹³⁵ Hans J. Morgenthau, *American Foreign Policy: A Critical Examination* (Methuen & Co.: London, 1951). *American Foreign Policy* demonstrated how American geography (its isolated nature) shaped American foreign policy in the early republic (p. 10). It also pointed to the manner in which changes in international relations (bipolarity, British decline and the decolonisation era) were, by necessity, altering America's foreign relations (p. 51). Moreover, Morgenthau contended that security was prime (p. 89). There are, of course, areas in the text where Morgenthau departs from the tradition, i.e. the impact of technology (pp. 52–53) and the influence of various ideological isms on American foreign policy (pp. 91–138). Nevertheless, as with Carr's diplomatic histories, there are still connections between *American Foreign Policy* and the primacy of foreign affairs tradition. For a reading of Morgenthau that sees his work as an unsuccessful attempt to systematise the diplomatic insights of nineteenth century Europe for an American political science audience see Stefano Guzzini, 'The enduring dilemmas of realism in International Relations', *European Journal of International Relations*, 10:4 (2004), pp. 533–568.

¹³⁶ For one exception see Robert Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

¹³⁷ Toni Erskine and Richard N. Lebow, 'Understanding tragedy and understanding International Relations' in Toni Erskine and Richard N. Lebow, eds., *Tragedy and International Relations* (London: Palgrave, 2012), p. 3.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

¹³⁹ Lebow, *The Tragic Vision of Politics*, p. 20.

the Lebowean sensibility depicts the bonds between community, cooperation, justice, ethics and honour and, amongst other things criticises the expediency of *realpolitik* in terms of its self-defeating consequences.¹⁴⁰ This sensibility allows us to recognise, as Lebow writes, ‘that communal bonds are fragile and easily undermined by the unrestrained pursuit of unilateral advantage... When this happens, time-honored mechanisms of conflict management... may not only fail to preserve the peace but may make domestic and international violence more likely’.¹⁴¹

These concepts can illuminate upon Carr’s thoughts, especially with regard to the appeasement of Nazi Germany and Munich in particular. Following the annexation of Austria by Germany in 1938, which Carr identified as a turning point in his view of Germany,¹⁴² increased tensions and insecurity cast a shadow over European politics. Czechoslovakia was widely seen as Hitler’s next target. The Franco-Soviet mutual assistance treaty and the Soviet-Czech mutual assistance treaty meant that the Soviet Union was obliged to assist Czechoslovakia in a conflict, but only if France did. In *The Popular Front* Carr portrays Soviet leaders, particularly Vladimir Potemkin and Maxim Litvinov, in the run up to Munich as adhering firmly to the principles of collective security and collective action against an aggressor.¹⁴³ In France, in contrast, Carr noted that the ‘forces driving France into accommodation with Germany were gathering strength’.¹⁴⁴ Likewise, the resignation of the British Foreign Secretary indicated that Britain too sought ‘a closer relationship with Germany’.¹⁴⁵ This bewildered the Soviets who saw collective action as the most effective means to confront Nazi aggression.¹⁴⁶ The result of French and British prevarication toward Hitler, and in pressing the Czechoslovakian government into appeasing Germany, meant that the Soviet Union was able to escape from the crisis without ‘public disgrace’.¹⁴⁷ In ensuring no ‘loss of credit’, the Soviet Union ensured its honour; Britain and France on the other hand ‘[betrayed], not only their obligations, but... their interests’.¹⁴⁸

This narrative of honour/honourless actions in terms of the Munich crisis is important for a number of reasons. Broadly it illustrates the importance that Carr attached to cooperative or collective action over self-interested or unilateral action in his final interpretation of the *dénouement* of the twenty years’ crisis. Had Britain and France adhered to their obligation—acted honourably in other words—then the Soviet Union too would have been forced into defending Czechoslovakia against naked German aggression.¹⁴⁹ It also illustrates the manner in which Carr interpreted—or perhaps even reinterpreted—*realpolitik* at this juncture. It was consequential in that it directly led to Soviet mistrust and the eventual tilt to Nazi Germany and, not least, the Second World War.¹⁵⁰ For Carr specifically, given his earlier advocacy and then defence of appeasement (in terms of expediency), it serves to frame his *hamartia* (his advocacy), his *peripeteia* (his irrelevance to IR) and *anagnorisis* (his realisation of his error in judgement).¹⁵¹ The tragic can therefore not just help us conceptualise world politics but can

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 16.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., p. 257.

¹⁴² Carr, ‘Autobiography’, p. xix.

¹⁴³ Carr, *Popular Front*, pp. 174–175.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 178.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 179.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 179.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 184–185

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 187.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 188.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 188.

¹⁵¹ One might conclude that Carr was bowdlerizing his own historical past here. Immediately following the Second World War, however, Carr did express doubts over the Munich agreement. On the sincerity assumption on

also help us come to grips with particular theorists who, in the words of Morgenthau, ‘showed their faces above the crowd’.¹⁵²

VI. Conclusion

Significant research has sought to challenge tired depictions of classical figures in our discipline. Long viewed—and still viewed in some quarters—as a *realpolitiker par excellence*, to borrow from Deutscher,¹⁵³ Carr’s thought has increasingly been revisited and revised. Where once textbook caricatures littered the landscape, the subtleties and nuances of Carr’s international thought now dominate, and quite rightfully so. Not seeking to challenge this movement, this paper has nevertheless demonstrated a significant gap in terms of the general neglect of Carr’s later work. Carr’s writing career spanned from the 1930s until his death in 1982. To neglect his later work is anomalous. Although his two published monographs and his unpublished and unfinished symphony on Soviet foreign affairs may be historical, they are nevertheless still concerned with interstate diplomacy. Employing an interpretivist framework, this paper has made a first-cut at understanding the relationship between the Carr of *The Twenty Years’ Crisis*, amongst other inter-war and post-war texts, and Carr the traditional Soviet historian. Locating the scholarly dilemmas which he faced following the Second World War, this paper has charted Carr’s movement from a radical and progressive realism to a more conservative and traditional realism (interestingly the two realisms that are found, if implicitly, in *The Twenty Years’ Crisis*). Contained within his historical works on Soviet foreign affairs, if in silence, are traces of the *Primat der Außenpolitik* tradition.

Although works of history, *Twilight*, *The Spanish Civil War* and *The Popular Front* are nevertheless still relevant today. Not least, they depict international relations at a time of crisis. The ideological struggles and conflict between left and left and between left and right contained within may be of a radically different era; but one cannot help think that 2016 marked a turning point in international politics. If so, Carr in his totality may be more relevant than he ever was. More specifically, however, Carr’s histories of Soviet foreign affairs may serve to illuminate upon the tragedy of his scholarly work. *The Popular Front*, in particular, can be best thought of as the final stage in his movement from advocate of Munich, to defender of Munich to critic of Munich. The tragedy framework and a Lebowean sensibility, it is posited here, help us understand and appreciate Carr’s intellectual journey. Embedded within his histories of Soviet affairs, especially in terms of the *dénouement* of the twenty years’ crisis, is a lived critique of *realpolitik*, which tragically the discipline has hitherto overlooked. Perhaps Carr’s lived experience of *realpolitik* explains why the realism in his diplomatic histories did not speak its name.

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Bevirian interpretivism, see Bevir, *Logic*, p. 236. Distortion caused by a pro-Soviet attitude may also be evident, see Bevir, *Logic*, pp. 267–270.

¹⁵² Cited in Cozette, ‘The critical dimension of realism’, p. 16.

¹⁵³ Carr, *The Spanish Civil War*, p. xvi.

