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Theorizing Liberal Orders in Crisis Then and Now: Returning to Carr and Horkheimer

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This article pursues an original line of inquiry by placing E.H. Carr in direct relation with his contemporary, Max Horkheimer. Although Carr is often cited as a progenitor by realists and critical theorists, these invocations of ancestry rarely go beyond passing references to Carr in *presentist* terms—i.e., how he relates to their present-day projects. By means of an extensive engagement with Horkheimer and Carr, the article reveals a shared commitment to ideology critique directed at bourgeois civilization. The article demonstrates that Carr's epistemology, critique of the harmony of interests, complex treatment of utopianism, and theorization of social transformation all have their counterparts in Horkheimer. The recovery of Carr's depth and sophistication as a theorist by means of a comparison of his positions with those of Horkheimer shows that at the time of its composition *The Twenty Years' Crisis* was a cutting-edge exercise in critique by a theorist working on an ambitious canvas of civilizational scale. The article concludes with a section that demonstrates the continued relevance of Carr and Horkheimer by reference to contemporary debates about the crises currently affecting the liberal international order.

Este artículo sigue una línea de investigación original relacionando a E. H. Carr directamente con su contraparte contemporánea, Max Horkheimer. Si bien Carr es citado con frecuencia como un progenitor por parte de los realistas y los teóricos críticos, estas invocaciones de ascendencia rara vez van más allá de transmitir referencias a Carr en términos presentistas (es decir, la manera en que se relaciona con sus proyectos actuales). Por medio de una estrecha interrelación entre Horkheimer y Carr, el artículo revela un compromiso compartido con la crítica ideológica dirigida a la civilización burguesa. El artículo demuestra que la epistemología, la crítica de la armonía de intereses, el tratamiento complejo de la utopía y la teorización de la transformación social de Carr tienen sus contrapartes en Horkheimer. La recuperación de la profundidad y la sofisticación de Carr como teórico por medio de una comparación de sus posturas con las de Horkheimer demuestra que al momento de su composición, La crisis de los veinte años (*The Twenty Years' Crisis*) fue un ejercicio vanguardista de la crítica de parte de un teórico que trabajaba en un lienzo ambicioso a la escala de la civilización. El artículo concluye con una sección que demuestra la continua relevancia de Carr y Horkheimer haciendo referencia a los debates contemporáneos acerca de las crisis que afectan actualmente al orden liberal internacional.

Cet article suit une ligne d'enquête originale en plaçant E.H. Carr en relation directe avec son contemporain, Max Horkheimer. Bien que Carr soit souvent cité comme fondateur par les réalistes et les théoriciens critiques, ces invocations de leur ascendance vont rarement au-delà de la transmission de références à Carr en termes présentistes, c'est-à-dire, pour évoquer la manière dont il est en lien avec leurs projets actuels. Cet article s'appuie sur une implication exhaustive d'Horkheimer et de Carr et révèle un engagement commun dans la critique idéologique de la civilisation bourgeoise. Il démontre que l'épistémologie, la critique de l'harmonie des intérêts, le traitement complexe de l'utopisme et la théorisation de la transformation sociale de Carr ont tous des équivalents chez Horkheimer. La récupération de la profondeur et de la sophistication de Carr en tant que théoricien au moyen d'une comparaison de ses positions à celles d'Horkheimer montre qu'au moment où il a été rédigé, La crise de vingt ans avait été un exercice critique avant-gardiste d'un théoricien travaillant sur une toile de fond ambitieuse d'échelle civilisationnelle. L'article conclut par une section démontrant la continuité de pertinence de Carr et d'Horkheimer en référence aux débats modernes sur les crises affectant actuellement l'ordre international libéral.

The Twenty Years' Crisis has inspired generations of scholarly inquiry. Interest in Carr's work spans an unusually wide range of "adherents and disciples of all stripes, including adversaries engaged in deadly combat against each other" (Kubálková 1998, 25). An especially fierce contest exists between those who claim Carr as a realist and those who insist he was a critical theorist. Despite the fact that Carr's work resists easy categorization, he is routinely presented as "either a realist or a critical theorist, never both at once" (Babík 2013, 495). Andrew Linklater (1997, 324) has written of his determination "to release Carr from the grip of the Realists," while John Mearsheimer (2005, 139) used his E.H. Carr lecture in Aberystwyth to reassert realist ownership over *The Twenty Years' Crisis*. Rather than rehash the "Carr is a realist/critical theorist" debate, this article collapses the distinction between realism and critical theory by putting *The Twenty Years' Crisis* in *direct* relation to Max Horkheimer's contemporary articulation of critical theory. Reading Carr in parallel with Horkheimer is rewarding because Carr's "Aesopian" style obscured the "deeper meaning" (Cox 1999, 643) and masked the "sheer difficulty and rhetorical treachery" (Jones 1996, 109) of *The Twenty Years' Crisis*. A syncretistic reading uncovers neglected aspects of the text and the sophistication of its contents. As a consequence of this parallel reading, new depths are revealed in this classic work of international relations (IR) theory, and new aspects emerge from its pages.

I argue Carr and Horkheimer conducted twin critiques of the ideological foundations of liberal domestic and international orders. The argument is not that Horkheimer influenced Carr but rather that the two theorists share

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intellectual DNA to a remarkable extent, with significant implications for how IR understands the origins of realism and critical theory and for rethinking how these theorists might be used today. Carr is revealed to be a much more radical and normatively driven thinker about the nature and purpose of theory than is commonly acknowledged, while Horkheimer's hard-edged critiques of the harmony of interests and utopianism, and his theorization of crises and conflicting interests, are also restored. The syncretistic reading of Carr and Horkheimer opens up new ways of thinking about realism and critical theory and also offers the discipline critical tools with which to scrutinize critically contemporary mainstream approaches such as liberalism and structural realism. The aim of the article therefore is to demonstrate the continued relevance of Carr, who is "misremembered" in the discipline and whose writings are "reduced to a handful of aphorisms" (Pelc 2016, 70).

The article consists of three parts. The first section examines the shared opposition of Carr and Horkheimer to theory building based on uncritical avowal of "facts." For Carr and Horkheimer, lack of reflection on the complex relationship between facts and the purpose of theory leads to ideological projections like the harmony of interests gaining unwarranted significance or legitimizing sterile theories that reduce the social to determinist and machinic abstractions. The second section examines Carr and Horkheimer's efforts to develop theoretical approaches that offer the means to critique the foundations of liberal society and offer an emancipatory alternative to the status quo. The final section demonstrates the continued importance of the critical *and* realistic insights of Carr and Horkheimer by reference to current debates regarding the breakdown of contemporary liberal international order (LIO).

Horkheimer and Carr's Critiques of the Harmony of Interests and Rejection of Fact Worship

In his inaugural address as director of The Institute for Social Research in Frankfurt, Horkheimer ([1931a] 1993, 1) identifies the emergence of a dominant ideology of the harmony of interests and the rise to prominence of positivism in social science as particularly pressing problems for social philosophy to address. The difficulty posed by "the direct belief in the prestabilized harmony of individual interests" is the alienation that results from the disparity between the promise and the lived experience of bourgeois modernity. Uncritical positivist fact worship exacerbates this alienation because it allows no room for reconsidering social existence by reference to value judgments that lie outside the purview of "legitimate" science (Horkheimer [1931a] 1993, 5). In this context, social philosophy must set against fact worship alternative "ideas, essences, totalities, independent spheres of objective Spirit, unities of meaning," to reinvigorate a society locked in a cultural, ideological, and intellectual dead end (Horkheimer [1931a] 1993, 7). Against the facile optimism of bourgeois ideology—as encapsulated by the harmony of interests—Horkheimer ([1939] 2002, 259) stressed that the social function of philosophy is to warn "that the individual could be ruined and nations headed toward disaster."[1]

Exposing the Harmony of Interests as an Ideological Sham

One of social philosophy's primary functions is to reveal the ideological and contingent status of liberalism. The ideological *leitmotif* of the harmony of interests is important because "[t]he image of … interests as harmonizing and producing a frictionless functioning of the whole economy was applied to society as a whole" (Horkheimer [1933a] 2002, 12).[2] Critical theory's task is to reveal "that modern thought had replaced the dialectic of social conflict with the individualist notion of a harmony of individual interests" (Brincat 2016, 567) and that under the ideological veil of the harmony of interests the power of capital was employed for the benefit of the bourgeoisie.

Awareness of the harmony of interest's ideological function separates those who "tacitly accept the hoax of past decades that everything is harmony" from the genuinely critical thinker (Horkheimer 1978, 85–86). Instead of harmony, Horkheimer ([1937a] 2002, 16) argues that the "existence of society has either been founded directly on oppression or been the blind outcome of conflicting forces," and that the emergence of society was "not the result of conscious spontaneity on the part of free individuals."[3] The harmony of interests is a "yearning thought" formed from "a beautiful vision out of the unchanged elements of the present … a charitable miracle" (Horkheimer [1933b] 1993, 56). The "view that the present social order is essentially harmonious" is not merely mistaken but "serves as an impetus to the renewal of disharmony and decline" in society, whereas a "correct theory of the prevalent conditions" would instead be "the doctrine of the deepening of crises and the approach of catastrophes" (Horkheimer [1935] 1993, 190–91).

The persistence of the harmony of interests is rooted in a fundamental problem of rationalist philosophy itself, i.e., the unjustified belief that "the universality of reason cannot be anything else than the accord among the interests of all individuals alike." On the contrary, according to Horkheimer ([1941] 1982, 30), "society has been split into groups with conflicting interests. Owing to this contradiction, the appeal to the universality of reason assumes the features of the spurious and the illusory." Liberalism is reduced to ideology because it tries "to uphold a theoretical harmony that is given the lie on every hand by the cries of the miserable and disinherited" (Horkheimer 1947, 123).

The Rejection of Positivist Fact Worship

Horkheimer draws an important distinction between materialism and positivism. Although both acknowledge "as real only what is given in sense experience," materialism "is not tied down to a set conception of matter," unlike positivism that insists on the "ahistorical invariability of natural laws" (Horkheimer [1933a] 2002, 42, 35–36). Positivism "downgrades natural knowledge and hypostasizes abstract conceptual structures" degrading "the known world to a mere outward show" (Horkheimer [1933a] 2002, 40, 38).[4] Positivism is politically and socially conservative because it

[1] The social function of philosophy is a product of the Frankfurt School's conviction that reason was a "critical tribunal" in which the "irrationality of the current society was always challenged by the 'negative' possibility of a truly rational alternative" (Jay 1973, 61).

[2] Horkheimer ([1932] 1993, 115–16) contrasts the eighteenth-century belief in progress as liberation from "feudal restraints" against the "dogma" of the harmony of interests.

[3] For Horkheimer, "the pursuit of self-interest in bourgeois society does not lead automatically to a harmonious totality or the preservation of everyone's best interests. On the contrary, it unleashes a *bellum omnium contra omnes*, which if left to follow its "natural" course would lead to chaos, barbarism, and self-destruction" (Abromeit 2012, 239).

[4] "Positivism of all kinds was ultimately the abdication of reflection. The result was the absolutizing of facts and the reification of the existing order" (Jay 1973, 62).

"relates solely to what is and to its recurrence. New forms of being, especially those arising from the historical activity of man, lie beyond empiricist theory" (Horkheimer [1937b] 2002, 144).[5] Positivism's effect is pernicious because its reification of the status quo as a natural order militates against recognition of possible social transformation (Held 1990, 168).

Because positivist tests of knowledge claims are made by reference to "crucial experiments" rather than "struggle and counter-struggle," a concept such as the harmony of interests "becomes a fact … that has even more general a character than a law of nature" (Horkheimer [1937b] 2002, 148).[6] Positivism encourages a "lack of critical self-reflection and a tendency toward conformism" because of its fetishistic worship of natural science (Lohmann 1993, 391). If social science becomes positivist, "it will be participating passively in the maintenance of universal injustice" by serving the interests of "[p]owerful economic forces" that "expect the scientist to provide the technical means for perpetuating the established order" (Horkheimer [1937b] 2002, 151, 178).[7] The most powerful economic force is the middle class "whose consciousness is best outlined by this philosophy," and because it is in their interest to do so, its members "have come to regard the established order as the natural one" (Horkheimer [1937b] 2002, 179). The net social effect of positivism is regressive because it "suspended the facts in aspic and falsely eternalised the status quo" (Jeffries 2016, 145). From this, Held (1990, 169) draws the important conclusion that positivism abstracts "unjustifiably from the experience of a particular epoch a general view of the structure of the object of social science. As such reality is distorted on a number of accounts." Horkheimer ([1937b] 2002, 166) denies the equivalence "between physics and social theory," because in "physics, the selection of material and concepts can be undertaken calmly. But in social science, the same activity requires conscious decision, for otherwise everything remains in a state of sham objectivity." To escape positivism's "ghostlike and distorted picture of the world," it is necessary to recognize that the "facts of science and science itself are but segments of the life process of society, and in order to understand the significance of facts or of science generally one must possess the key to the historical situation, the right social theory" (Horkheimer [1937b] 2002).

Carr against Fact Worship

Carr's first task in *The Twenty Years' Crisis* is to debunk the assumption that the "business" of IR should be "to collect, classify and analyse our facts and draw our inferences" (Carr [1945a] 2001, 4). Carr rejects, like Horkheimer, the simple equation of the physical and political sciences.[8] Hard facts, e.g., those pertaining to medicine, do not apply because "[i]n the political sciences, which are concerned with human behaviour, there are no such facts" (Carr [1945a] 2001, 5). Facts in the political sciences are malleable: it is a "fact" that human beings "normally react to certain conditions in a certain way," but crucially he adds that "this is not a fact comparable with the fact that human bodies react in a certain way to certain drugs" (Carr [1945a] 2001). The key distinction is that this "fact" "may be changed by the desire to change it; and this desire, already present in the mind of the investigator, may be extended, as a result of his investigation, to a sufficient number of other human beings to make it effective" (Carr [1945a] 2001). Carr's attitude toward fact necessarily puts him at odds with positivism. Charles Jones (1997, 232) identifies "the dialectical structure of *The Twenty Years' Crisis*" as part of Carr's "distinctly post-positivist social scientific methodology."[9] The meaning of facts is also subject to alteration as the passage of time changes their historical and/or social scientific significance. The relationship between "fact," time, and interpretation is one in which "facts do not speak for themselves and cannot be considered apart from an interpretive context that gives them meaning" (Germain 2019, 3).

Instead of fact worship, Carr ([1945a] 2001, 4) proposes a *purposive* political science "to cure the sickness of the body politic." For Carr, purpose and analysis of social facts "become part and parcel of a single process" (Carr [1945a] 2001, 5). Marx's *Capital* is used by Carr to show the interrelationship between purpose and alteration of the facts that comprise reality as it was "inspired by the purpose of destroying the capitalist system just as the investigator of the causes of cancer is inspired by the purpose of eradicating cancer. But the facts about capitalism are not, like the facts about cancer, independent of the attitude of people towards it. Marx's analysis was intended to alter, and did in fact alter, that attitude. In the process of analysing the facts, Marx altered them" (Carr [1945a] 2001). Carr ([1945a] 2001, 6) links judgement, action, analysis, and normativity: "Every political judgement helps to modify the facts on which it is passed. Political thought is itself a form of political action. Political science is the science not only of what is, but of what ought to be."

The Exhaustion of Liberal Ideology: Carr's Critique of Benthamism and the Harmony of Interests

Horkheimer's key move, the exposure of the exhaustion and inversion of elements of the enlightenment and liberal ideology, is paralleled in Carr's work by his unmasking of the outdatedness of the nineteenth-century principles that underpinned the liberal settlement of 1919. Carr ([1945a] 2001, 26) identifies Benthamism as the primary ideology of modernity, which "gave to nineteenth-century utopianism its characteristic shape." Like Horkheimer, Carr illustrates the extent to which the dominant ideology persisted despite being subject to sustained critical scrutiny. The "belief in the sufficiency of reason to promote right conduct" was undermined by developments within psychology, while the simple equation of virtue and enlightened self-interest "began to shock philosophers" (Carr ([1945a] 2001, 28). The peculiar fate of international politics in the interwar period was its recasting in the image of Benthamite rationalism at a time when "it would have been difficult to find … any serious political thinker who accepted the Benthamite assumptions without qualification." The "utopian edifice" therefore is the

[5] Here, Horkheimer means logical empiricism/positivism not Baconian empiricism.

[6] Positivism's negative impact is linked to its rejection of metaphysics and opposition toward "transcendent ideals of any type, even progressive ones such as universal rights, human dignity, or a just society" (Abromeit 2012, 126).

[7] Positivism "implied silence in the face of the horrors which the totalitarian inheritors of the reactionary elements of liberalism had brought to the world" (Wiggershaus 1995, 184).

[8] Ido Oren (2009, 295) draws attention to Carr's "remarkably lucid exposition of how the relationship between fact and value, object and subject, in the study of politics differed from its counterpart in the natural sciences. The sophistication of the exposition belies the perception, held by present day realists, that their "classical" predecessors were naïve in the ways of social science."

[9] In a similar vein, Kubálková (1998, 33) argues, Carr is "certainly antipositivist. For Carr, positivism in the form he knew it in the 1930s was unacceptable, mainly because of the disagreement he would have with the totally nondialectical separation of man and nature as subject and object, and treating social phenomena as if they were natural phenomena."

product of traditional theory as understood by Horkheimer: as Carr observes—"virtually all popular theories of international politics between the two world wars were reflexions, seen in an American mirror, of nineteenth-century liberal thought" (Carr [1945a] 2001, 28–29; Jones 1998, 48–49). Ideas specific to time and circumstances of the nineteenth century had become reified, hypostatized shibboleths. The failure to invest these shibboleths with the power of the United States in the interwar period ensured that it was only a matter of time before the forces hidden behind the veneer erected by Wilson burst through and exposed the weakness of the post–World War I system.[10]

Carr ([1945a] 2001, 29) examines the failure of the League of Nations in the light of a critical theoretical distinction between empiricism, which "treats the concrete case on its individual merits," and rationalism, which refers the concrete case "to an abstract general principle."[11] According to Carr, "[a]bstract rationalism" permeated the League from 1922 onward, leading to attempts to "perfect the machinery, to standardize the procedure, to close the 'gaps' in the Covenant by an absolute veto on all war, and to make the application of sanctions 'automatic.'" The various attempts to "legalize" international politics, such as "[t]he Draft Treaty of Mutual Assistance, the Geneva Protocol, the General Act, the plan to incorporate the Kellogg–Briand Pact in the Covenant and 'the definition of the aggressor,' were all milestones on the dangerous path of rationalization" for Carr, who objected to the set of theoretical assumptions that served as the foundation for these policies (Carr [1945a] 2001, 30–31). The very language by which concrete issues were discussed was fatally compromised by the rationalist tendency to abstract generalization, "[a] conventional phraseology came into use, which served as the current coin of the delegates at Geneva and League enthusiasts elsewhere and which soon lost all contact with reality … These linguistic contortions encouraged the frequent failure to distinguish between the world of abstract reason and the world of political reality" (Carr [1945a] 2001, 31).[12] The presumptions of the "metaphysicians of Geneva" that abstract rationalism could provide a formula by which to make war extinct could, in Carr's formulation, "only provoke nemesis":

> Once it came to be believed in League circles that salvation could be found in a perfect card-index, and that the unruly flow of international politics could be canalized into a set of logically impregnable abstract formulae inspired by the doctrines of nineteenth-century liberal democracy, the end of the League as an effective political instrument was in sight (Carr [1945a] 2001, 31).[13]

Carr ([1945a] 2001, 39) argues that the "foundations of nineteenth-century belief are themselves under suspicion. It may be not that men stupidly or wickedly failed to apply right principles, but that the principles themselves were false or inapplicable." The issue for Carr is systemic, and rooted in the traditional *beliefs* of the system: "The breakdown of the nineteen-thirties was too overwhelming to be explained merely in terms of individual action or inaction. Its downfall involved the bankruptcy of the postulates on which it was based" (Carr [1945a] 2001, 39). Carr's fundamental message is that "the twentieth century is different to the nineteenth: it presents a different challenge and calls for a different response. Old liberal modes of thought—not 'bad' or 'foolish' in themselves are totally inappropriate in the new situation" (Evans 1975, 82). Faced with the emergence of mass democracy in heavily industrialized societies, classical liberalism could not respond effectively to "the most urgent problem of the day—shrinking markets and economic depression. The prevailing orthodoxy worked for a time but could not stretch to accommodate the needs and demands of society at large" (Howe 1994, 292). Horkheimer makes a similar point by identifying as a crucial problem of liberalism that its once progressive qualities had become problematic by persisting longer than the era in which they had played a positive role. There was nothing wrong with these ideas in the nineteenth century, but in the twentieth century they were retarding social progress.

Carr's Critique of the Harmony of Interests

If Benthamism plays a role akin to that of bourgeois philosophy in critical theory, Carr's realism provides a critical theoretical perspective on international society. The first target of Carr's ([1945a] 2001, 43) critique is one familiar from Horkheimer's critique of liberal optimism, i.e., the harmony of interests. This concept, according to Carr ([1945a] 2001), "was handed on from the eighteenth-century rationalists to Bentham, and from Bentham to the Victorian moralists" and eventually to the inheritors of the liberal legacy in twentieth-century international politics.[14] Carr subjects the harmony of interests to historical and critical test, revealing that its meaning changed in response to contextual shifts, from a simple expression of universal economic harmonization in the interests of all within society to a Darwinian notion amenable to the Great Powers and their policies of domination.[15] As Nishimura (2011b, 439–40) observes, the "utilitarian synthesis" of the harmony of interests "inherently entailed the danger of exploiting those who were not counted within 'the greatest number.'"

In what would become a characteristic concern with the economically struggling sectors of society, Carr ([1945a] 2001, 49) declares: "[b]iologically and economically, the doctrine of the harmony of interests was tenable only if you left out of account the interest of the weak who must be driven to the wall, or called in the next world to redress the balance of the present." At the international level, the promotion of the idea "that there is a world interest in peace which is identifiable with the interest of each individual nation helped politicians and writers everywhere to evade the unpalatable fact of a fundamental divergence of interest between nations desirous of maintaining the status quo and nations desirous of changing it" (Carr [1945a] 2001, 51).[16]

[10] As Kuniyuki Nishimura (2011a, 53) observes, when it was divorced from its original context, Benthamism "became an abstract theory. The interwar crisis was a delayed reaction to modern utopianism."

[11] Carr does not mean empiricism in the sense of the "logical empiricism" Horkheimer employs synonymously with positivism. Carr has in mind the earlier empiricism exemplified by Francis Bacon.

[12] E.H. Carr, *Twenty Years' Crisis*, p. 31.

[13] Carr's "card index" is akin to Adorno and Horkheimer's "ticket thinking," i.e., "to practice adaptation to illusion petrified as reality, which endlessly reproduces itself through such adaptation" (Adorno and Horkheimer 2002, 170).

[14] Randall Germain (2000, 331) argues insightfully that the harmony of interests served as both myth and ideology for Carr. "As a myth it helped to explain how and why certain kinds of agency were necessary within a given structure of the world, while as an ideology it helped the powerful to co-opt the weak into their view of the world."

[15] "The doctrine of the harmony of interests underwent an almost imperceptible modification. The good of the community (or, as people were now inclined to say, of the species) was still identical with the good of its individual members, but only those individuals who were effective competitors in the struggle for life. Humanity went from strength to strength, shedding its weaklings by the way" (Carr [1945a] 2001, 47).

[16] As Graham Evans (1975, 80–81) writes, "application of the 'harmony of interests' doctrine … to the changed conditions of the twentieth century world

Carr professes a theory based on a politics of force and counterforce, of irreconcilable interests, that might be mediated by means of human effort, but *not* as a *natural* function of a harmony of interests.[17] For Carr ([1945a] 2001, 57), like Horkheimer, the "clash of interests is real and inevitable; and the whole nature of the problem is distorted by an attempt to disguise it."[18]

Ultimately, Carr comes to an almost identical conclusion to Horkheimer regarding the harmony of interests, albeit transposed to the international level: "What confronts us in international politics today is, therefore, nothing less than the complete bankruptcy of the conception of morality which has dominated political and economic thought for a century and a half" (Carr [1945a] 2001, 58). The bankruptcy of the harmony of interests was the inevitable consequence of the "prevailing orthodoxy" being unable to "stretch to accommodate the needs and demands" of politics in the age of the masses (Howe 1994, 292). The harmony of interests could not stretch to meet these demands because there was no power equivalent to that of British sea power in the nineteenth century willing to underwrite its operation (Evans 1975, 84, 86–87).

Critical Theory and Tempered Realism

In "Traditional and Critical Theory," Horkheimer demonstrates the extent to which the former bolsters bourgeois society, while the latter offers a means by which to reconsider the foundations of social life. Traditional theory, taking its cues from the natural sciences, seeks to classify both inanimate and animate nature in the same manner, using a "conceptual apparatus" designed to delineate "the rules for derivation, the symbols, the process of comparing derived propositions with observable fact." Incapable of reflexivity, traditional theory is blind to humanity's actual social needs.

Traditional theory orients itself to the manipulation of nature and society through "the amassing of a body of knowledge such as is supplied in an ordered set of hypotheses," the problem being that eventually "the conception of theory was absolutized, as though it were grounded in the inner nature of knowledge as such or justified in some other historical way, and thus became a reified, ideological category" (Horkheimer [1937a] 2002, 194). This reification of "scientific method" marked the point for Horkheimer when a critique of traditional theory became imperative. The fetishization of "science" is opposed by critical theory, which refuses the claims of traditional theory in favor of promoting "the self-determination of humankind" (Breuer 1993, 263).

Operating within such a framework "the given world, is seen by the perceiver as a sum-total of facts; it is there and must be accepted"—it is against this conviction that critical theory must struggle (Horkheimer [1937a] 2002, 199–200). The struggle is all the more necessary when it is remembered that traditional theory is *not* possessed of the timeless quality it professes. Horkheimer's ([1937a] 2002, 198) decisive move is to reject the "mathematical knowledge of nature which claims to be the eternal Logos" and to insist that the "self-knowledge of present-day man" forms the basis of a "critical theory of society as it is, a theory dominated at every turn by a concern for reasonable conditions of life." In contrast to the passive acceptance of the "facts," critical theory argues that the world is the product of both nature *and* man—an intensely political and social understanding of the world and what is possible within it. In contrast to the acquiescent man of "fact," who accepts society as presented according to reigning ideology, "the critical attitude of which we are speaking is wholly distrustful of the rules of conduct with which society as presently constituted provides each of its members" (Horkheimer [1937a] 2002, 207). As Devetak (2018, 50) observes, critical theory "required a methodology capable of illuminating the normative deficits, disintegrative effect, and arrested possibilities of the given reality. Rather than accept the given reality as immutable, philosophy carries a social function … to enlighten humanity about its conditions of existence and to provide the intellectual resources for critique." Critical theory then "provides the standpoint for the critique of the status quo. Rather than criticize the prevailing order in terms of some blueprint for an ideal society, critical theory criticizes it on the basis of the unfulfilled potential that already exists within it—that is, through a form of *immanent* critique" (Wyn-Jones 2005, 220).

Critical theory seeks to transform, as opposed to "improve," the foundations of society. Its key principle is that the "overall framework" we inhabit "originates in human action and therefore is a possible object of planful decision and rational determination of goals" (Horkheimer [1937a] 2002, 207). Social problems are due to the persistence of "circumstances of production which are no longer suitable to our time," which are maintained by dominant social classes and the ideological power they wield (Horkheimer [1937a] 2002, 213). Critical theory reveals the tragedy of bourgeois civilization and traditional thought to be that they have outstayed the epoch in which they played a progressive role, becoming instead counterweights against freedom and prosperity, ultimately undermining their own achievements by hindering social and political evolution and creating the conditions for a "new barbarism" (Horkheimer [1937a] 2002, 227).[19] Writing in exile in the United States as Nazism dismantled the achievements of bourgeois liberalism in the name of totalitarianism, Horkheimer is clear that "the present distress" compels the critical theorist to consider how best to achieve, and what would constitute, "the rational state of society" (Horkheimer [1937a] 2002, 216–17).

Horkheimer's Critique of Utopia

In response to the identification of the threat posed by the emergence of a new barbarism, critical theory promotes "the idea of a reasonable organization of society that will meet the needs of the whole community" (Horkheimer [1937a] 2002, 213). As immanent critique, however, this development rejects outright a *positive* utopianism divorced

enabled the status quo powers to ignore their basic conflict of interests with the revisionist powers … belief that all states shared an equal interest in peace together with the uncritical identification of national interest with universal interest by the major powers, resulted in a complete failure both to comprehend the direction of international politics and to provide a realistic mechanism for peaceful change."

[17] "To make the harmonization of interests the goal of political actions is not the same thing as to postulate that a natural harmony of interests exists, and it is this latter postulate which has caused so much confusion in international thinking" (Carr [1945a] 2001, 51). Peter Wilson (1998, 13) argues that the achievement of "artificial" harmony, arrived at through reasoned compromise, "is not only the thrust of his final chapter on the prospects for a new international order; it also receives explicit endorsement in the main body of the text."

[18] Eric Heinze (2008, 114) identifies in the doctrine of the harmony of interests "the ideological basis for maintaining the status quo, whereby the dominant powerful states sought to equate their interests with the interests of international society as a whole and therefore maintain their dominant position."

[19] Horkheimer identified the aftermath of the 1848 revolutions as the date the bourgeoisie became socially conservative as positivism became dominant. Positivism's anti-transcendentalism extended not just against religious and metaphysical ideas and concepts but also "progressive ones such as universal rights, human dignity or a just society" (Abromeit 2012, 126).

from existing circumstances. A critical theorist must practice "aggressive critique not only against the conscious defenders of the status quo but also against distracting, conformist, or Utopian tendencies within his own household" (Horkheimer [1937a] 2002, 216). The commitment to critique both the status quo and utopianism is consistent with what Abromeit (2012, 48) calls Horkheimer's "critical realism," i.e., "a refusal to entertain illusions of any kind." Abromeit also stresses Horkheimer's "characteristic sober realism" in preferring the cold calculations of Machiavelli and Hobbes to "utopians' fantasies of a just society" (Abromeit 2012, 97).

Only as the basis of a critique of what exists does utopianism have value (Horkheimer [1930] 1993, 369). Utopianism's projection of a better society is harmful because it eternalizes "the categories of the prevailing system" (Horkheimer [1933b] 1993, 27). Liberal civilization is blind to the fault lines produced by its own workings because it professes "a Utopia that had come true, needing little more than the smoothing out of a few troublesome wrinkles. These wrinkles were not to be blamed on the liberalistic principle, but on the regrettable nonliberalistic obstacles that impeded its complete fruition" (Horkheimer 1947, 94). It was the failure to exercise critical reflection on the nature of liberal ideology itself that led to the unravelling of liberal civilization across Europe.

Utopianism's conservatism leads Horkheimer ([1939] 2002, 269) to argue for the replacement of utopia "by a scientific description of concrete relationships and tendencies, which can lead to an improvement of human life."[20] Horkheimer ([1939] 2002, 270) distinguishes between the *false* idealism of utopianism ("that it is sufficient to set up the picture of perfection with no regard for the way in which it is to be attained") and the *true* idealism ("that it is possible to introduce reason among individuals and among nations"). The difference lies in the latter's "sober desire to know how these ideas can be realized on earth."[21] In contrast to utopia ("a theory that does not lead to action"), Horkheimer insists that "[r]eality should be measured against criteria whose capacity for fulfilment can be demonstrated in a number of already existing, concrete developments in historical reality" (Adorno and Horkheimer 2011, 88).

Despite his growing pessimism, Horkheimer refused to abandon "the idea of a radical alternative to instrumental rationality" (Bronner 1994, 90) and the machinelike concept of society it entailed. Horkheimer evolved a theory of *negative* utopianism in two phases to facilitate social criticism distinct from the false idealism of positive utopianism.[22] Materialist utopianism is dedicated to the "negation of suffering"—a utopianism that takes as its negative point of orientation the idea that suffering "is an objective mark of that-which-should-not-be, a reminder that the task is, still, to change the world" (Benzaquen 1998, 152). The second phase embraces "the yearning for the 'other,' alien to this world." In this complex formulation, "[t]he completely 'other' is not conceived as 'utopia' in the sense of an illusion to be forsaken, but on the contrary, precisely in the sense of reality. However, it is always distinguished as a dimension existing beyond the horizon of current reality, which is perceived as unreal and evil" (Gur-Ze'ev 1999, 142, 144). Negative utopia then might be understood as both the means by which emancipation from current reality might be achieved and the end of a just society resulting from that emancipation.[23]

Critical Theory, Emancipation, and the Constellations of Reality

Horkheimer's explorations of negative utopianism are intrinsically linked to the primary criterion against which reality might be judged, i.e., the principle of emancipation. Achieving emancipation depends on combining dispassionate political analysis with a commitment to "the idea of a future society as a community of free men." Horkheimer ([1937a] 2002, 217) conceives of this in immanent terms as a theory that works from *what is* to *what ought to be*. The first philosophico-historical task of emancipation is to identify how and why "the transformation of the concepts which dominate the economy into their opposites" occurred, a process by which "fair exchange [was transformed] into a deepening of social injustice, a free economy into monopolistic control, productive work into rigid relationships which hinder production, the maintenance of society's life into the pauperization of the peoples." The second task is to propose an emancipatory response to this inversion of meaning (Horkheimer [1937c] 2002, 247).

The "consciously critical attitude" then "contains both a protest against" the existing order of things, "a protest generated by the order itself, and the idea of self-determination for the human race, that is the idea of a state of affairs in which man's actions no longer flow from a mechanism but from his own decision." For critical theory, the issue becomes a recasting of necessity, "from a blind to a meaningful necessity" subject to control not by natural forces but by humanity (Horkheimer [1937a] 2002, 229).[24] Necessity itself therefore can be understood in terms of the force and counterforce of the coercive power of nature and society's capacity to resist the principle of natural determination. The mechanistic, deterministic, and necessitous understanding of nature is a product of traditional theory's Cartesian dualism, which is "congenial both to nature and to bourgeois society in so far as the latter resembles a natural mechanism" (Horkheimer [1937a] 2002, 231). This understanding is challenged by critical theory, which is committed to the notion of human agency in that "in the transition from the present form of society to a future one mankind will for the first time be a conscious subject and actively determine its own way of life," based at least in part on a "conscious reconstruction of economic relationships" (Horkheimer [1937a] 2002, 232).

[20] Horkheimer's rejection of utopianism, like that of Carr, is *not* total. Utopia must be retained, despite its absurdity: "The less renunciation, the more desolate reality. Precisely because of this, utopia is an absurdity, and pious self-deception the idea of a realm of freedom that sought to overcome it. And yet we have no choice but to attempt to perpetrate that absurdity" (Horkheimer 1978, 224).

[21] See Shannon Brincat's (2011, 221) discussion of Horkheimer's treatment of utopianism as ideology.

[22] Gur-Ze'ev (1999) provides a detailed engagement with Horkheimer's conceptualisation of utopianism in both negative and positive senses.

[23] Richard Wyn Jones (2005, 223) expresses well the stakes involved in Horkheimer's (and Adorno's) negative utopia: "it has no relationship to the real world. It is literally unimaginable … epistemologically it is only this possibility that gives critical theory coherence and, indeed, purpose. Without keeping some notion of emancipation in play, critical theory cannot demur from the stress on repetition, calculability, and predictability characteristic of traditional theory." Jones is not, however, convinced by "what amounts to a godless theology … the type of critique that could be built on these foundations was immanent only in the loosest, and most tenuous, sense and certainly has not satisfied subsequent generations of critical theorists."

[24] Brincat (2016, 569) argues critical theory "takes an active posture to history: not only is humankind the producer of its history and way of life, the necessary conditions for its emancipation from suffering already exist." Brincat (2016, 570) also argues that the path to emancipation is closely associated with "the importance attached to human 'association,' basic forms of intersubjectivity, through which emancipation is re-cast not as some abstract utopia but a real possibility within present conditions and productive forces."

If there are major changes in the structure and processes of society, critical theory must adapt and evolve with those changes, but always with an awareness that power creates the "constellations of reality," in contrast to other social theories that denied the continued importance of property and profit and were unaware of the extent to which "juridical relations" comprise merely the surface, and not the real core, of social life. Critical theory peels back the veneers to reveal the power dynamics at work in society—dynamics that were unlikely to change as long as society itself remained fundamentally unaltered (Horkheimer [1937a] 2002, 236–37).

Carr's Critique and Reintegration of Utopianism

According to Carr, the critical theoretical power of realism resides in its ability to expose the "real basis of the professedly abstract principles commonly invoked in international politics"—the real basis being "the unconscious reflexions of national policy based on a particular interpretation of national interest at a particular time" (Carr [1945a] 2001, 80). Behind the veneer of liberal ideology and the new institutions it had produced, diplomats and politicians, whether consciously aware of it or not, reverted to the power politics of an earlier age. Liberal institutions, laws, and processes designed to effect a new way of doing international politics were eventually overtaken by the politics of narrow self-interest and used either as instruments in the service of the great powers or as a screen behind which they could operate. Carr's ultimate finding is that the "bankruptcy of utopianism resides not in its failure to live up to its principles, but in the exposure of its inability to provide any absolute and disinterested standard for the conduct of international affairs" (Carr [1945a] 2001). The statesmen of the 1930s could not resist the siren call of their states' national interests and utopianism proved no barrier to their crashing on the rocks, instead it had become part of the siren song.

Carr's challenge to utopian theory is akin to that of Horkheimer in that it is critical of utopianism but also aware of the limits and shortcomings of realism. Horkheimer ([1930] 1993, 316–36) praises Machiavelli for his creation of a new science of politics, but also finds him guilty of a certain naturalistic determinism, rendering human beings as cogs in a machine destined to repeat the same actions forever, thus eternalizing the political logic of early modern Italy as the sole possible form of politics. Likewise, Carr ([1945a] 2001, 86–87) stresses the limitations of realism when applied to its ultimate extreme and introduces an important (if unfortunately phrased, and easy to miss) distinction between "consistent" and "inconsistent" realism.

The essential difference between the two forms of realism is that "consistent realism excludes four things which appear to be essential ingredients of all effective political thinking: a finite goal, an emotional appeal, a right of moral judgment and a ground for action" (Carr [1945a] 2001, 84). Pure and consistent realism is determinist to such an extent that it deprives human agency of a role in international society and leads to a passive acceptance of the status quo. Carr ([1945a] 2001) embraces a realism—or in Horkheimer's terms develops "right social thinking"—that seeks to go beyond a purely mechanical reading of human action: "Every realist, whatever his profession, is ultimately compelled to believe not only that there is something which man ought to think and do, but that there is something which he can think and do, and that his thought and action are neither mechanical nor meaningless."

The Rehabilitation of Utopia

Carr's "inconsistent" realism requires a certain amount of utopia in order to avoid the sterile self-defeat he associates with "pure" realism. One of the unfortunate effects of the "colonisation of *The Twenty Years' Crisis* by realism" is that "little attention has been paid to the way in which Carr uses the term 'utopianism' in a constructive sense" (Dunne 2000, 226). As Evans (1975, 95) points out, even in his most critical work, *The Twenty Years' Crisis*, Carr "does not once attack the principles and beliefs of the liberal Utopians. It was the contexts not the ideas that were wrong." The book "is not a sustained attack on the Toynbees and Zimmerns; they are used as examples of a general state of mind that Carr saw as characteristic of those who drew up the Covenant of the League of Nations" (Miller 1991, 65). This general "state of mind" is typical of what Booth (1991, 536) refers to as "end-point utopias" as opposed to "process" utopias. Raymond Geuss (2015, 18) helpfully adds a further distinction between types of utopia, i.e., between "absolutist" and "wishful vision" utopias. While the former is incompatible with Carr's realism, a wishful vision utopia—aspiration for reform grounded in political reality—"should be a part of a sensible realist project" (Geuss 2015). In this vein, Shannon Brincat (2009, 591) argues that utopia understood as "a critical imaginary that acts as a heuristic device to reveal the fissures in existing reality, an ideational motivating force for progressive change," is not only compatible with Carr's approach, but has "a fundamental role to play in world politics so as to counter the banality of realism, his actual objection to utopianism does not centre on liberal internationalism's vision of a 'better' peaceful world, but its assumption of the 'harmony of interests' that masked the designs of powerful states." Carr's own "wishful vision" and "creative imaginary" utopia eschewed the blueprint and endpoint utopianism of the harmony of interests and legalistic institutionalism instead resting upon acknowledgment of the centrality of the *clashing* interests of international society's "have" and "have not" powers and developing a process by which this conflict could be mitigated.

Social Transformation and Emancipation in The Twenty Years' Crisis and Beyond

Part Four of *The Twenty Years' Crisis*, "Laws and Change," represents Carr's attempt, in the language of Horkheimer, to offer a process for the rational organization of *international* society. Any process of rational organization must, however, first confront the reality of a deeply divided international society. The political opposition of contrary forces in Horkheimer's critical theory is mirrored in Carr's realism by a fundamental conflict between satisfied ("have") and dissatisfied ("have not") powers in international society. Horkheimer's ([1937c] 2002, 251) idea that "the realization of possibilities depends on historical conflicts" is a shared principle of Carr's realism and early critical theory. The identification of the conflict, however, is only one part of the problem and the solution requires two phases: first, an account of why the conflict has not been resolved; second, a proposal as to how the relationship between the satisfied and dissatisfied members of international society might be brought to a reasonable conclusion.

Carr's analysis of international society demonstrates that he, like Horkheimer ([1931b] 2002, 7), considered that "[e]very human way of acting which hides the true nature of society, built as it is on contrarieties, is ideological." The primary ideological camouflage covering the reality of the

conflict between the satisfied and revisionist powers was international law, itself a product of the very powers that attempted to use it in order to copper-fasten their existing privileges within international society. Just as Horkheimer dismisses law as being merely the surface, as opposed to the core, of political life, Carr argues "law cannot be the supreme authority … Every system of law presupposes an initial political decision … Behind all law there is this necessary political background. The ultimate authority of law derives from politics" (Carr [1945a] 2001, 166).[25] According to Carr ([1945a] 2001, 189), the first step toward resolving the problems of international politics is to "extricate ourselves from the blind alley of arbitration and judicial procedure, where no solution of this problem is to be found."

The solution to the problem of peaceful change was to be found via an analogy drawn from political economy. Carr's argument is that the relationship between capital and labor, which was predicated on power and concerned the distribution of social goods, could serve as a model for the relationship between satisfied and dissatisfied powers in international politics. The eventual stabilization of the relationship between capital and labor into one of peaceful accommodation of each other's interests via mediation and bargaining is instructive for Carr ([1945a] 2001, 199) because it demonstrated that power had to be at the center of any social analysis: "Power, used, threatened, or silently held in reserve, is an essential factor in international change; and change will, generally speaking, be effected only in the interests of those by whom, on whose behalf, power can be invoked."[26]

Faced with the failure of his preferred policy of appeasement and the outbreak of the war, Carr ([1945a] 2001, 209) writes "[o]ur task is to explore the ruins of our international order and discover on what fresh foundations we may hope to rebuild it." *The Twenty Years' Crisis* ends on a speculative note about the possibility of the social transformation of international politics. The territorial unit of power—the state—may be revolutionized to such an extent that "[i]nternational politics would be supplanted by a new set of group relationships" (Carr [1945a] 2001, 211). Sovereignty, one of the ideological mainstays of the international society, may mutate and even dissipate as political-economic considerations eclipse juridical-political systems that evolved to cope with the very different problems associated with the transition from mediaeval to modern domestic and international society. Most importantly, the distinction between how people identify with those outside their own state would have to be replaced with solidarity *across* borders.[27] The greater the degree of policymaking that favors welfare over narrowly derived politics of advantage, Carr ([1945a] 2001, 219) argues, "the less difficult it will seem to realize that these social ends cannot be limited by a national frontier, and that British policy may have to take into account the welfare of Lille or Düsseldorf or Lodz as well as the welfare of Oldham or Jarrow. The broadening of our view of national policy should help to broaden our view of international policy."[28]

The details of Carr's attempt to detail a future international order based on the transformation of the state system and international political economy of Europe and the world in *Conditions of Peace*, *Nationalism and After*, and *The New Society* are beyond the scope of this paper.[29] One theme common to these works that is of direct relevance to this essay, however, is Carr's commitment to the principle of the emancipation of the individual. Carr's dedication to this principle is clear in *Nationalism and After* (Carr 1945b, 44) where he writes: "[t]he driving force behind any future international order must be a belief, however expressed, in the value of individual human beings irrespective of national affinities or allegiance and in a common and mutual obligation to promote their well-being." It is in *The New Society*, however, that Carr comes closest to expressing the core of critical theory as pioneered by Horkheimer when he combines a progressive theory of history with the idea of freedom.

Carr, Horkheimer, and the Contemporary Liberal Order Debate

The domestic and international liberal orders of 2020 bear an uncomfortable resemblance to those of the late 1930s. Authoritarian states who reject the legitimacy of the post–Cold War liberal consensus permeate the globe. In the West itself, dissatisfaction with the effects of globalization and neoliberalism have produced two significant shocks to the system in the decision of the United Kingdom to leave the European Union and the election in 2016 of Donald Trump. The COVID-19 pandemic threatens to plunge the global political economy into a recession potentially more severe than the 2008 financial crisis that created the conditions for the political instability upon which populism and authoritarianism have thrived. The election of Trump, based on a commitment to America First policies at the expense of a "globalist" LIO of which he was at best dismissive and at worst contemptuous, is of particular significance as the withdrawal of American support for the LIO, and even active opposition to it, risked almost certain doom, much as America's refusal to underwrite Wilson's LIO scuppered the League and the liberal initiatives of the 1920s and 1930s. Although Trump appears likely to be a one-term president (barring re-election in 2024), he has overthrown the important postwar bipartisan consensus on foreign affairs and made it hostage to electoral fortune (Drezner 2019). As Hans Maull (2019, 27) writes, the current incarnation of the LIO has come "dangerously close to experiencing synchronised, systemic failure."

Attempts to theorize the current state of global politics reflect the general sense of pervasive crisis: "alarm about the fate of the liberal international rules-based order," according to Graham Allison (2018, 124), "has emerged as one of the few fixed points" in the maelstrom of anxiety that has emerged in debates about the immediate future of IR. Theorization of the crisis has largely been divided into liberal and realist camps.[30] The leading contemporary

[25] Horkheimer ([1937a] 2002, 236) states that critical theory "regarded juridical relations not as the substance but as the surface of what was really going on in society. It knows that the disposition of men and things remains in the hands of a particular social group which is in competition with other economic power groups, less so at home but all the more fiercely at the international level."

[26] The late Horkheimer (1978, 221) comes to very similar conclusions: "What is decisive today is the alignment of interests, i.e., the constantly changing constellation of prospects for power and advancement. The difference from other historical situations lies in the conceptual clarity one has about motives, the perfect awareness that they are unalloyed."

[27] Nationalism may have been a progressive force in the nineteenth century for Carr, but was a "baleful and menacing" presence in the twentieth century (Cox 2019, 254).

[28] "This sense of providing fulfilling lives for women and men was thought by Carr likely to create human satisfaction of a sort that would naturally lead to the drastic erosion of the nationalist ethos, so much so that the pressure 'nations' to possess their own states would virtually disappear" (Falk 1997, 48).

[29] Andrew Linklater (1997) offers an interesting account of Carr's treatment of the theme of social transformation of international society.

[30] Due to considerations of space, I have to limit my engagement with this debate to its two most prominent exponents; to do justice to all the various authors and positions concerned would require a long article in itself.

proponent of LIO, John Ikenberry, like his Benthamite forebears, is unshakably convinced that the originary principles of the LIO—particularly those of the FDR era—remain sacrosanct and practical (Deudney and Ikenberry 2018) and ought to be revived: "In the face of today's breakdown in world order, the United States and other liberal democracies must reclaim and update Roosevelt's legacy" (Ikenberry 2020, 139). In Mearsheimer's structural realist analysis, an Ikenberry-style restoration of the LIO is no longer plausible: at most, it would be a reapplication of the liberal veneer that covered the operation of the realist logic of the Western powers during the Cold War. The time has come, according to Mearsheimer, for some intellectual honesty, i.e., "for the U.S. foreign policy establishment to recognize that the liberal international order was a failed enterprise with no future" (Glaser 2019, 82; Mearsheimer 2019, 50).

Despite coming to seemingly opposed prescriptions, Ikenberry and Mearsheimer are much closer to each other than one might expect. Ikenberry and Mearsheimer both trace the origins of the present crisis to the end of the Cold War and the overreaching efforts of successive US administrations to promote an LIO (Ikenberry 2018a, 18; Mearsheimer 2018, 21–22, 33). Both identify the negative effects of globalization as contributing to the dissatisfaction of alienated communities within Western states (Deudney and Ikenberry 2016, 13; 2018, 18; Ikenberry 2017, 3, 9; 2018a 10, 20; Mearsheimer 2018, 8, 39–40). Both see the best interests of the West as lying in cooperation and mutual protection (Mearsheimer 2018, 47; Ikenberry 2020, 136, 142) against the rise of other great powers, especially China. There is in effect very little difference between how Ikenberry's retrenching LIO and Mearsheimer's Western bounded order are supposed to react to the rise of China. Ikenberry even concedes the foundational nature and predominantly realist qualities of the Westphalian international system upon which LIO rests (Deudney and Ikenberry 2018, 21–22; Ikenberry 2018b, 20–21, 23–24).

The degree of convergence between Ikenberry and Mearsheimer's positions may be explained by employing Horkheimer's distinction between traditional and critical theories and Carr's use of utopianism and realism. Fundamentally, Ikenberry and Mearsheimer are traditional theorists. Operating within their reified silos, Ikenberry and Mearsheimer operate ready-made theoretical international "systems" composed of sets of hypotheses. History is a source to be employed to confirm the uncontestable desirability of liberalism or to illustrate the extent to which it corresponds to the axioms of structural realism. At base, what unites Ikenberry and Mearsheimer is that they are both theorists of the status quo: behind their nomenclatural distinctions, in contrast to Carr's proposal to transform international society, both seek to preserve the existing international order with as little change as possible.

The commitment to preserving their respective status quos blinds Ikenberry and Mearsheimer to fundamental problems with their approaches. The most significant and revealing example is Ikenberry's treatment of the incidence of crises in the LIO. Ikenberry (2018a, b, 22) describes the LIO as *consistently* crisis prone: "The liberal international project has travelled from the eighteenth century to our own time through repeated crises, upheavals, disasters and breakdowns," but does not ask *why* this is the case, and does not consider alternatives beyond the naked competition for power he attributes to realism. What Ikenberry describes as the LIO's resilience in terms of "riding the tumultuous storms of historical change" (Deudney and Ikenberry 2018, 24) elides LIO's role in *causing* or contributing to those tumultuous storms (Bacevich 2018, 212). The key problem with Ikenberry's approach is that although he is aware that "[i]t is precisely at a moment of global crisis that great debates about world order open up and new possibilities emerge" (Ikenberry 2020, 142), his answer to the problems of world order is to insist "the solutions to today's problems are more liberal democracy and more liberal order" (Deudney and Ikenberry 2018, 24). As Patrick Porter (2020, 20) writes regarding the current crisis, "we need inquest, not exoneration."

If Ikenberry is the heir of the Benthamist thinkers of *The Twenty Years' Crisis*, Mearsheimer (2019) is the heir of consistent but sterile realism. Mearsheimer's status quo is the "natural order" represented by the balance of power, which he maintains is asserting itself after a unipolar moment. The dissipation of American power, the rise of China, and reemergence of Russia mark a return to a more typical multipolar order within the wider international system. This system can oscillate between unipolar, bipolar, and multipolar orders, but it cannot change beyond these circumscribed parameters. The coming world order of "three different realist orders … a thin international order and two thick bounded orders—one led by China, the other by the United States" (Mearsheimer 2019, 44) will be no exception because within the hypostatized theoretical framework within which structural realism operates, no exception can exist as the status quo is eternalized. The hypostatized structure to which Mearsheimer reduces international politics leaves no room for agency: "The United States will have little choice but to adopt a realist foreign policy, simply because it must prevent China from becoming a regional hegemon" (Mearsheimer 2018, 228).

In contrast to the rational instrumentalism of Ikenberry and Mearsheimer, Carr's approach in *The Twenty Years' Crisis* (and even more so in *Conditions of Peace*) is consistent with Horkheimer's injunction to transform as opposed to accept or tweak the foundations of the established order. Ikenberry and Mearsheimer consider the purpose of theory to be advocacy of their respective understandings of existing order, while Carr's comprehensive critique of international society and the deficiencies of utopian *and* sterile realist theorization promotes the transformation of theory and practice. For Carr, the transformation of international society is a case of *meaningful* necessity as opposed to the blind mechanical necessity of Mearsheimer's balance of power or Ikenberry's ideological necessity to restore the LIO. Human agency is not constrained within Carr's approach in terms of the operation and recreation of international order. Carr's vital theoretical intervention in 2020 is the same as in 1939: he forces us to question whether or not the postulates upon which LIO is based are bankrupt and continues to warn against the sterility of a realism that offers no possibility of social transformation. Carr's dialectic of utopianism and realism breaks free from the either/or silos of Ikenberry and Mearsheimer and by offering the possibility of social transformation restores to realism the emotional appeal, a right to moral judgment, and human agency that he considers essential elements of effective as opposed to sterile realist theory.

Conclusion

The analysis undertaken in this article shifts the axis of interpretation regarding Carr away from debates concerning ownership or ancestry of Carr's work toward a renewed

focus on Carr's text. The syncretistic method of reading Carr in parallel with Horkheimer redirects consideration of Carr in three directions: epistemology, ideology critique, and the transformation of international society. Carr's antipositivist rejection of the hard sciences and opposition to abstract rationalism put him at odds with the epistemological foundations of much contemporary IR theory, especially his putative descendants of various (neo)realist stripes such as Mearsheimer. Carr's perspectivist collapse of the subject/object distinction destabilizes positivist or rationalist theory. Horkheimer's distinction between traditional and critical theory is helpful because it enables by the act of comparison greater insight into Carr's thinking about the purpose of theory itself. Carr's utopians are exemplary of traditional theory—taking their cues from mainstream assumptions about science, philosophy, and theory from Descartes to utilitarianism. Traditional theory, however, when applied to the changed circumstances of the interwar period, could not help but to founder on the rocks of a political and social world that it no longer reflected. The danger posed by contemporary traditional theory is that it risks the same fate.

Carr's critical theoretical task was to pierce the utopian veil by exposing the ontological presuppositions of Woodrow Wilson and his supporters as ideological projections rather than reflections of reality. The critique of the harmony of interests by Horkheimer and Carr is remarkably similar (albeit directed at different levels) in that both critically analyze this concept in order to demonstrate the hollowness of bourgeois ideology. Horkheimer and Carr debunk the pretensions of proponents of the harmony of interests and free trade more generally by revealing them to be social phenomena underwritten by powerful agents in whose interest they work as opposed to natural phenomena resulting from the mechanical operations of markets innocently employing universal reason. Nothing is natural, fixed, or given for Carr whose theory of international society is remarkably plastic. Harmony could exist, for Carr, but it would have to be created; it could not be left to nature (Wilson 2000, 186) or entrusted to those looking backward to Bentham and the nineteenth century for inspiration. Although chastened by liberalism's all too frequent failures, Ikenberry looks to the past as a golden age to be restored with some adjustments as opposed to working toward a new vision of world order.

The plasticity of international society is intrinsically linked to Carr's rejection of determinism. Carr's avowed purpose "to cure the sickness of the body politic" relies upon a concept of human agency sufficient to transform the foundations of international society in a manner that would be inconsistent with a deterministic realism like Mearsheimer's, allowing Carr to argue "that in time a new international order could be forged through the extension from the national to the international plane of models of planning" (Rich 2000, 205). Carr believed that human beings are able to transform their social structures "rather than merely suffer or reproduce them" (Jones 1998, 156). To demonstrate this possibility, Carr *has* to rehabilitate utopianism—albeit a utopianism compatible with "inconsistent" realism—in order to argue the possibility of the transformation of international society that would cure the sickness of the body politic of the interwar period, i.e., the persistence of an outmoded ideology.[31] Mearsheimer and Ikenberry cannot do this as they remain wedded to their ideological and/or mechanistic perspectives—the cure in each case is to *revert* either to an imagined LIO or to balance of power.

Carr's rejection of determinism and insistence upon progressive change in IR, yet also his requirement that any change immanent within international society be consonant with realism (as he conceives it), places him outside the purview of both neorealism and critical theory as articulated in IR but very much in the same theoretical space as Horkheimer. The interlocution of Horkheimer and Carr undertaken in this article demonstrates that "the starkly opposed representation of the relationship between realism and critical theory was always problematic" (Behr and Williams 2017, 4). At the moment of their births in the era of interwar crisis, both modes of thought shared much in common—it was only with the advent of a particular "scientific" discourse derived from traditional theory that they became sundered. Removing Carr from IR's turf wars by reading him in relation to Horkheimer not only reinvigorates Carr's intellectual legacy, but also puts him into a new framework vis-à-vis those partisans who would claim him as their own: by not fitting into their pat categories, Carr calls into question the nature of contemporary theory as much as he did that of his interwar peers.

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[31] According to Linklater (2000, 240), Carr's "emphasis on the respects in which a realizable Utopia was inherent within, though not guaranteed to emerge from, the existing order of things runs through Marx's early writings and post-Marxist approaches such as the Frankfurt School."

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