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E.H. Carr: Approaches to Understanding Experience and Knowledge

Amelia Heath¹

Introduction

In 2002 Michael Cox's *Critical Appraisal* presented a diverse collection of essays on E.H. Carr. The essays offered biographical detail, considerations of Carr's contributions to political science, a look at his interest in Russian studies, and a discussion about Carr's work as a historian. Among praise for the book, Robert Cox applauded it for exploring Carr's historical mode of thought, stating that it leads readers into the complexity of Carr's ideas and leaves them with "the challenge to take the analysis a step further into the present."² Cox's statement illustrates that, though Michael Cox and the contributors to his volume have begun to offer a reappraisal of Carr's work, there is still much to be explored. Carr's production was prolific and his knowledge diverse. When he was not publishing books, and indeed often simultaneous to his publication of books, he was writing leaders for newspapers and articles for journals, many of which he wrote under pseudonyms. This leaves a difficult task for those who would take up Robert Cox's call to continue analysis of Carr into the present. For example, Peter Wilson has noted that it is not unusual for a student to encounter three Carrs: the 'Realist Carr', 'Soviet Carr', and 'Carr the philosopher of history'.³ This perception of 'three Carr's' is one that is reinforced in the structure (if not necessarily the individual contributions) of the *Critical Appraisal*. Of course, Carr was one man, and perhaps one step in continuing to reappraise him lies in questioning ways in which the themes in his diverse writings overlap.⁴ This does not mean claiming that Carr had one coherent theory or grand theory. On the contrary, it means accepting Carr's complexity while also questioning what overlap may lie within his broad and interdisciplinary interests, for example, how the ontological outlook in both his political and historical writings both reflect his philosophy of history.

As such, this study unfolds in three sections. The first section identifies and elaborates two specific themes from previous IR studies on Carr that offer room for further consideration of his work with regard to his philosophy of history. These themes consider philosophical rather than polemic implications: first is the consideration of a critique of *a priori* rationalism and empiricism offered by Carr, and second is the study of Carr's recurrent use of dialectical logic as a critical tool. Tim

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² Michael Cox (ed), *E.H. Carr A Critical Appraisal*, Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2000 (See editorial praise).

³ Peter Wilson, 'Radicalism for a Conservative Purpose: the Peculiar Realism of EH Carr', *Millennium*, 30(1), 2001, 123-136 (see 123-124).

⁴ This is a point emphasized by Randall Germain in his contribution to the *Critical Appraisal*. See Randall Germain, 'Carr and the Historical Mode of Thought', in in E.H. Carr a critical appraisal, edited by Michael Cox, New York: Palgrave, 2000, pp. 322-336 (see 331-334).

Dunne, Andrew Linklater, Peter Wilson, Seán Molloy, and Vendulka Kubálková form the core of the contributors considered.

Drawing from literature on these two themes contributes to the argument of this paper: Carr's critical examination of the rationalist and empiricist theories of knowledge and his use of critical dialectic are vital not only to understanding his historical approach to experience (as is studied most often in IR), but also to his epistemological philosophy of history, which was heavily influenced by R.G. Collingwood. Taking the contrary position to writers who have framed Carr as having radical shifts in thought between his career in politics and his career in history, this paper takes the position that Carr's view of politics is informed by his philosophy of history.

In order to unpack the argument, the second section of the paper further considers Carr's 'critique of reason' and use of dialectics with regard to his historical approach as a mode of understanding historical experience. His methodological reflections in *From Napoleon to Stalin, What is History?*, and *The New Society* are discussed. Carr's use of the sociology of knowledge and dialectics as a part of his critical project to expose values and logic behind the historical development of the western world are further considered. The section reflects on Carr's use of dialectical logic in disambiguating the overlap of and reciprocal influences between thought and action in social reality.

The final section then focuses on the way in which Carr's thoughts on the overlap between thought and action in social reality are related to his philosophy of history. The philosophy of history, in particular as R.G. Collingwood expounded it, is argued to elucidate Carr's categorical theory of knowledge. That is, Collingwood's philosophy of history is seen to influence Carr, firstly, in that it contributes to an epistemological idealism that underlies Carr's approach to understanding historical experience. Secondly, the philosophy of history is seen as a project by which the critique of the notion of a 'rational development' of civilization exposes heuristic presuppositions underlying that notion.

The 'Critique of Reason' and Critical Dialectic

Within IR, there are a growing number of studies focused on the philosophical implications of Carr's critique of the rationalist epistemology. There are also many studies of which the focus is on Carr's use of dialectics⁵ as a logical, rhetorical, and/or critical tool. Charles Jones's and Timothy Dunne's work provides examples of Carr studies that exhibit both themes.⁶ Since 1997 and 1998 when Charles Jones published two pieces on Carr including his book *A Duty to Lie* scholars have not been able to study Carr without understanding the influences upon him of the works of Karl

⁵ There are varied uses and understandings of the term 'dialectics.' Here the term is used to define a multi-causal and dynamic understanding of change, without implying a Hegelian or Marxist teleological historical process.

⁶ Charles Jones. 'Carr, Mannheim, and a Post-positivist Science of International Relations,' *Political Studies*, XLV, 1997, 232-246

Jones, Charles. *E.H. Carr and International Relations: A Duty to Lie*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.

Timothy Dunne. *Inventing International Society A History of the English School*. Oxford: Macmillan, 1998, pp. 23-46.

Timothy Dunne. 'Theories as Weapons: E.H. Carr and International Relations,' in *E.H. Carr A Critical Appraisal*, edited by Michael Cox, New York: Palgrave, 2000, pp. 217-233.

Mannheim and the importance of the ‘sociology of knowledge’ to his approach. Jones notes influences Mannheim seems to have had on Carr’s thought: the malleability of human nature; the social construction of formal classifications of knowledge; the historically relative character of the division between domestic and international politics; the necessity of domestic planning; and the means by which relativism might be overcome and public policy firmly reground.⁷ The corollaries reinforce important aspects about Carr’s thought, namely his commitment to dynamic change rather than synchronic structures and his acknowledgement that both factual and value knowledge have bases in social reality. However, Jones argues that Carr uses the sociology of knowledge and dialectics as a rhetorical device to establish his own political positions as a ‘third way’. He explains that in the *Twenty Years’ Crisis*⁸ Carr twists the structure of Mannheim’s *Ideology and Utopia* to persuade the reader toward the realist perspective. Similarly Timothy Dunne has explored the rhetoric behind Carr’s work, but Dunne notes that “the epistemology of utopianism is ‘rationalism’, the belief that reason can deliver untarnished truth.”⁹ In counter to this, argues Dunne, Carr uses realism as an epistemic tool or weapon to “relativise all claims to a universal good in order to reveal the partial interests which underlie those claims.”¹⁰ Dunne, like Jones, focuses on the dialectical nature of the analysis in *Twenty Years’ Crisis* but does so in order to undermine “three errors” of the paradigmatic representation of Carr, one of which is the misunderstanding of the “antinomial relationship between realism and utopianism.”¹¹

Andrew Linklater has done much to advance the significance of critique in Carr’s work. He acknowledges that the *Twenty Years’ Crisis* is as much a ‘critique from the left’ of realism as it is a critique of idealism.¹² Put differently, Carr’s is a project that explores the ‘dark side of modernity’, with its ‘logics of power and control’, as well as the ‘other side of modernity’, with its ‘capacity for regenerating resistance to dominant exclusion.’¹³ He explains that Carr adopted a Marxist method of ‘immanent critique’ by which the process of change in society is driven by ideals linked with sociological accounts of historical transformation.¹⁴ He has studied the idea of immanent critique to illuminate the dynamic of transformation in Carr’s writings on nationalism, especially *Nationalism and After* and *The Future of Nations*. He argues that Carr’s portrayal of the dynamic rather than static boundaries of political community are more in line with theorists such as Rousseau, Marx, and Foucault, whose writings deal with possibilities of eliminating forms of exclusion in social formations.¹⁵

⁷ Jones, 1997: 240-246.

⁸ From here on some of Carr’s works are often abbreviated after their first mention. For example the *Twenty Years’ Crisis* is referred to as TYC; *The New Society* is referred to as TNS; and *What is History?* is referred to as WIH.

⁹ Dunne, 1998: 28. He is quoting Carr’s own words in the *Twenty Years’ Crisis*.

¹⁰ Dunne, 1998: 30 and Dunne, 2000: 218.

¹¹ Dunne, 1998: 32.

¹² Andrew Linklater, ‘Nationalism and the Future of Sovereign Nations’, in E.H. Carr a critical appraisal, edited by Michael Cox, New York: Palgrave, 2000, pp. 234-257 (see 239).

¹³ Andrew Linklater, ‘The transformation of the political community: EH Carr, critical theory, and international relations’ *Review of International Studies*, 23, 1997: 321-338 (see 338).

See also Andrew Linklater, *Critical Theory and World Politics Citizenship, Sovereignty, and Humanity*, London: Routledge, 1997: 43; 66; and 100-104.

¹⁴ Linklater, 2000: 240.

¹⁵ Linklater, 1997: 324-325.

Peter Wilson has put forward the argument that, “there are few references to his (Carr’s) critique of reason implicit in his employment of the ‘sociology of knowledge.’”¹⁶ While some of Wilson’s work focuses on the reception of and responses to Carr’s *Twenty Years’ Crisis*, including scrutiny of the ‘myth’ of the First Great Debate of IR¹⁷, other studies emphasize the reflective rather than polemic character of Carr’s work. His own analyses take steps toward considering the philosophical implications of Carr’s use the sociology of knowledge and of dialectics.¹⁸ Wilson notes that the dialectical logic is inseparable from the critique of rationalism in Carr’s sociology of knowledge, emphasizing that the point Carr returns to over again is the failure of political leaders to comprehend the circumstances that had led to the ‘crises’ of the twentieth century and to adapt to those circumstances.¹⁹ As such, Carr’s ‘radicalism’ serves at least both a political and philosophical function in his work.

Seán Molloy also scrutinizes philosophical topics in his analyses of Carr’s works.²⁰ Molloy’s work raises the important point regarding Carr’s theory of knowledge that his (Carr’s) project is one of complex philosophical critique. Molloy, drawing from previous theses by, for example, Dunne, Jones, and Wilson, argues that Carr’s use of the Marxist analytic (dialectics) is reflective of rhetorical and ideological criticism of modern liberalism.²¹ Both Molloy and Wilson expand on the philosophical critique of reason used by Carr in TYC, beyond the political or rhetorical purposes of the work, in acknowledging the importance of Carr’s rejection of *a priori* rationalism, which Carr saw as the philosophical basis for individual, self-interest driven ethics of utilitarianism as heavily criticized in *Conditions of Peace*.²² A theme of Molloy’s work lies in unpacking Carr’s critique of reason specifically as it relates to moral values. For example, he considers Carr’s moral philosophy of international politics as driven by the dialectic of Realism, “the view that no moral obligations are binding on states”, and Utopianism, “the view that states are subject to the same moral obligations as individuals.”²³ For Molloy, an explanation of the ‘whole range of projects undertaken in the *Twenty Years’ Crisis*’ is his commitment to pragmatism, where the “political ethics of reality are unfixed.”²⁴

¹⁶ Peter Wilson, ‘EH Carr: the revolutionist’s realist’, *First Press, The Global Site*, 2000a: 11, available at: <http://www.theglobalsite.ac.uk/press/012wilson.pdf>

¹⁷ Peter Wilson, ‘The myth of the First Great Debate’, *Review of International Studies*, 24, 1998, 1-16. Peter Wilson, ‘Responses to the Twenty Years’ Crisis’, in in E.H. Carr a critical appraisal, edited by Michael Cox, 217-233. New York: Palgrave, 2000.

¹⁸ Wilson, 2001.

¹⁹ This is an underlying theme in several of Carr’s works, such as *The Twenty Years’ Crisis*, *Nationalism, Nationalism and after*, *Conditions of Peace*, and *The New Society* and is noted in Wilson, 2000: 9.

²⁰ Seán Molloy, ‘Dialectics and Transformations: Exploring the International Theory of E.H. Carr’, *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society*, 17(2), 2003, 279-306.

Seán Molloy, *A Genealogy of Power Politics The Hidden History of Realism*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006, pp. 51-74.

Seán Molloy, ‘Hans J. Morgenthau vs. EH Carr: Conflicting Conceptions of Ethical Realism’, In Duncan Bell (ed) *Political Thought and International Relations Variations on a Realist Theme*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009, pp. 83-104.

See also: Seán Molloy, ‘Realism: A Problematic Paradigm’, *Security Dialogue*, 34(1), 2003, pp. 79-81.

²¹ Molloy, 2003: 283

²² See Wilson, 2000: 6, 11; and Molloy, 2003: 281

²³ Molloy, 2009: 86 quoting Carr *Twenty Years’ Crisis*

²⁴ Molloy, 2009: 88

In this conclusion he does not differ from arguments advanced in much earlier Carr studies. One such example is an article by Whittle Johnston.²⁵ Johnston explains that Carr uses the sociology of knowledge in works such as *Conditions of Peace* to expose the breakdown of the harmony of interests, and that the *Twenty Years' Crisis* is the synthesis of Carr's Marxist project with his interests in international relations.²⁶ Johnston furthermore argues that Carr's lack of a unified theory of international relations helps to explain the dilemma of his search for objective history (and his moral relativism) as an issue which he returned to, unsatisfactorily, in *What is History?*

In *Conditions of Peace* and the *Twenty Years' Crisis* he offers a strong value critique, not of morality in general (as is often interpreted), but of the very specific utilitarian principles of morality. Moreover, TYC offers Carr's most scrutinized criticism of *a priori* rationalism as it underlies the assumptions of the doctrine of harmony of interests. Wilson notes that there is often a failure to distinguish that what Carr objects to in his critique of the doctrine of harmony of interests is the nineteenth century liberal assumption in a natural harmony of interests, referring to a hidden hand that ensures the greatest possible welfare, peace and security for humanity as a whole.²⁷ The belief in an unforeseen force, or hidden hand, is a faith in absolute truth and reason. As Carr explains, it is the manifestation of a progressive or teleological philosophy of history by which "the firm belief that man (in pursuing his own business and interests) was thereby contributing towards some 'far-off divine event.'"²⁸

It is the complex critique of reason rightly noted to underlie Carr's work – a critique not only of morals and values but of principles of logic – that requires further consideration with regard to Carr's approach to understanding historical experience. Two things should be noted. First, Carr is doing more than attacking a straw man with his concept of utopianism; he is rejecting propositional logic of statements claiming to reflect absolute truth. Propositions or statements founded on the logic of *a priori*, absolute truth are Carr's true target. This allows him, as Dunne notes, to "assign the category (utopianism) to a multitude of referents."²⁹ While Carr does use several of his works (not only *Twenty Years' Crisis* and *Conditions of Peace* but also, among others, *Nationalism and After*, and *The New Society*) to criticize modern liberalism, he does so by criticizing very specific value and logic assumptions upon which those institutions were founded rather than on an abstract 'modern liberalism'. His criticism accounts for an assessment of both logic and value underlying the political institutions of liberalism and their perceived reasons and purposes within society. In this way 'modern liberalism' is not just a rhetorical target but something Carr sees as a culmination of rationalist and empiricist theories of knowledge, each claiming (through different means) to reflect absolute truths. Likewise 'utopianism', far from being a construct Carr simply invented, criticizes an unbending search for the objective facts of reality, *a priori* rationalism, and a faith in

²⁵ Whittle Johnston, 'EH Carr's theory of international relations: a critique', *Journal of Politics*, 29(4), 1967, 861-884.

²⁶ Johnston, 1967, 867-868

²⁷ Wilson 2000: 11; Emphasis in original

²⁸ EH Carr, *Conditions for Peace*, London: Macmillan, 1942: 103.

²⁹ Dunne, 1998: 29.

providential or teleological progress.³⁰ Carr gives consideration to the value and logic assumptions underlying the institutions of laissez faire economics, liberal democracy, and national sovereignty back to their foundations in Enlightenment individualist and rationalistic thought. In a method not unlike contemporary genealogy, after exposing the foundations of thought behind the institutions he is criticizing, he then proceeds to unpack ways in which these institutions are unsuitable for and thus unstable in the conditions of the twentieth century world.

Second, he is not only targeting the epistemology of rationalism with his criticisms of utopianism, but also that of empiricism with his criticisms of realism. TYC is a warning against the extremes of epistemological empiricism in the form of naturalism and positivism, where naturalism is defined as the belief that a single scientific method can analyze both the natural and social worlds and positivism is defined as a commitment to the search for objective knowledge through solely empirical methods. Linklater has also made this point stating that, “there are parallels here (in TYC) with Marx’s critique of utopian socialism, but no ringing endorsement of scientific socialism.”³¹ This is an important point because Carr, having offered a criticism of rationalism, does not then simply adhere to an empiricist epistemology himself. In fact, contrary to Wilson’s thesis that Carr, perhaps uncritically, adopted a position of Marxist materialism, in the ‘*limitations of realism*’ Carr rejects materialism as a ‘scientific’ thesis committed to naturalism and an inflexible predictability of the future; moreover, he rejects Schopenhauer’s philosophy of history for the “passive contemplation” it forces on the uncritical observer.³² Carr criticizes the materialist conception of history advanced by Marx and Engels as it is based on the philosophical derivative of Feuerbach’s object materialism.³³ Michael Joseph Smith’s and Seán Molloy’s considerations of Carr also note his supposed adherence to materialism.³⁴

Molloy claims that “Carr’s belief that international relations was the product of underlying social and economic forces manifesting themselves in the political sphere leaves no autonomy for the realm of thought.”³⁵ But Carr cannot so simply be labeled a materialist. He credited thought with the power of change. As Vendulka Kubáľková has shown, Carr makes the meaningful statement that “in the process of analyzing the facts Marx altered them.”³⁶ In TYC he explains that the economic philosophy of history substitutes material conditions as having the power of cause/effect in society; however, the mistake of this move by Marx is that economics becomes the drive of the whole ‘historical process’.³⁷ Carr believed logic and moral values to be reflective of thought processes and, as such, also susceptible to changing

³⁰ These criticisms, as discussed by Carr in TNS and WIH, are considered in further detail in a later section.

³¹ Linklater, 2000: 240.

³² EH Carr, *The Twenty Years’ Crisis 1919-1939: an introduction to the study of international relations*, New York: Palgrave, 2001: 86-87

³³ Carr, 2001: 64.

³⁴ Michael Joseph Smith, *Realist Thought From Weber to Kissinger*, Louisiana State University Press, 1986, pp. 68-98.

³⁵ Molloy, 2003: 298.

³⁶ Vendulka Kubáľková, 1998, ‘The Twenty Years’ Catharsis: EH Carr and IR’ in Vendulka Kubáľková, Nicholas Greenwood Onuf, and Paul Kowert (eds.), *International Relations in a Constructed World*, London, M.E. Sharpe: 25-57. See page 31; For the quote in context see Carr, 2001: 5.

³⁷ Carr, 2001: 64.

social and historical circumstances. As Kubáľková points out, Carr hints at Marx's insight in the *Eleventh Thesis on Feuerbach*, contrasting the position where theory and practice merge to the naturalist position that theory merely mirrors practical experience.³⁸ Contrary to Molloy's claims that "the only consistent feature of Carr's international relations career is an attachment to the principle of empiricism and a rejection of a priori rationalism,"³⁹ Carr's warning against the positivist, objectivist, and naturalist extremes of empiricism are as consistent a feature of his work as his warnings against the extremes of *a priori* rationalism. Carr further elaborates his stance on theory and practice in his essays on Mannheim and on Marxism in *From Napoleon to Stalin*. It is the dialectical relationship between theory and practice that drives Carr to use the sociology of knowledge. He explains that the study of historical circumstances is merely a short step from the sociology of knowledge, which aims to create a history of ideas from a social context.⁴⁰ What is more, he emphasizes that the reciprocal interaction between the base and superstructure, envisioned by Marx, is not static and is not necessarily driven by economics but by thought.⁴¹ His critical attitude toward empiricism is also present in WIH, as Dunne notes: "Even if Carr does not elaborate a full-blown pragmatist epistemology, the anti-empiricism evident in *What is History?* sets him apart from the dominant strand of positivism in International Relations."⁴²

Kubáľková furthermore argues that Carr was a consistent dialectician. Drawing from Hayward Alker, he is very clear about what dialectical logic is and how Carr uses it: "the choice of dialectics simply indicates a rejection of the monocausal approach and the notion of unilinear development in favor of the dynamic, multicausal, and multidirectional."⁴³ With relation to Carr's approach, it reflects his decision to use the 'sociology of knowledge' and focus on the social context of 'reality' rather than to analyze or test the absolute truth or falsity of facts. Kubáľková goes on to explain that dialectical thought focuses on conflict and contradiction and "seeks to understand change through a study of the past and the present that establishes a connection between future developments and the present."⁴⁴ This means dialecticians study history for change over time; see things as interdependent; and view society holistically.⁴⁵ The importance of this project for international politics, as in the 'post' movement, lies in the target of the criticism, or the philosophical foundations of how knowledge is put together.⁴⁶

It is now considered how Carr's use of dialectical logic and the sociology of knowledge are intertwined with his critique of the theories of rationalism and empiricism underlying Western liberal societies.

The Historical Approach and Dialectical Logic in Understanding Experience

³⁸ Kubáľková, 1998: 31.

³⁹ Molloy, 2003: 281

⁴⁰ EH Carr, *From Napoleon to Stalin and Other Essays*, New York: St. Martins Press, 1980, pp. 79-80; he clarifies his own definition of historicism as "the conditioned nature of our judgments in all sciences relating to human behaviour" (1980: 179) and differentiates his definition from Popper's definition of historicism.

⁴¹ Carr, 1980: 180.

⁴² Dunne, 2000: 281 (see note 5).

⁴³ Kubáľková, 1998: 30.

⁴⁴ Kubáľková, 1998: 30.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid, 34.

It is Carr's dual criticism of empiricism and *a priori* rationalism that helps him to expand upon his own approach to understanding historical experience. An epistemological philosophy of history (discussed in the following section) bolsters his commitments to the sociology of knowledge as a reflective, critical tool. However, it is first necessary to discuss Carr's historical approach to understanding ontological experience, which utilizes dialectical logic as a means of understanding and exposing the interrelation between theory and practice in society. Carr notes, the sociology of thought is rooted in the Marxist doctrine of base and superstructure.⁴⁷ Although, Carr distinguishes that the *Communist Manifesto* took the intellectual 'current coin' as its own model for history. From Babeuf and Blanqui Marx took the notion of class struggle and the class interpretation of history.⁴⁸ From Ludwig Von Stein, Proudhon, Pecquer and others he took economic materialism, or the connectedness of the 'laws of history' with the 'laws of economics'.⁴⁹ But what became the static and deterministic prediction of dialectical materialism did not undermine the great social insight Marx originally drew from Hegel – the reciprocal interaction between base and superstructure or the importance of action that shapes thought and vice versa.⁵⁰

A commitment to the dynamism of human nature and of society helps Carr in his project to expose the relativity of facts and values underlying social institutions. This is what Carr referred to as the "short and natural step" from 'historicism,' defined as "the conditioned nature of our judgments in all sciences relating to human behaviour,"⁵¹ to Mannheim's sociology of knowledge.⁵² The sociology of knowledge, unlike dialectical materialism, "refuses to attribute any specifically economic character to the base; and rejects as narrow and misleading the hypothesis that 'an intellectual attitude is dictated by a material interest'".⁵³ Nor does it "relate an intellectual standpoint directly to a social class".⁵⁴ In other words, Mannheim's sociology takes Hegelian and Marxist insights of dynamism, change, the conditioned nature of thought, and the importance of human action while leaving behind economic materialism and the class interpretation of history. Thus Mannheim's approach stands as a 'middle ground' between a 'no longer tenable absolutism' fettered by naturalism, and an 'intolerably negative relativism'.⁵⁵

An emphasis on understanding the relationship between theory and practice, as it is manifest in society, through the historical approach closely ties together Carr's earlier and later writings. The purpose of the historical approach, or being history conscious, is to provide a mode of understanding historical experience that exposes ideas behind facts and values and shows that social institutions and human actions form a dialectical relationship with the ideas and thoughts behind those institutions and actions. This dialectics of experience, where thought and action are mutually causally related, is a theme that reverberates throughout Carr's career. Carr acknowledges that there is a human 'will' behind knowledge production.⁵⁶ This

⁴⁷ Carr, 1980: 180

⁴⁸ EH Carr, 'The Communist Manifesto', *Times Literary Supplement*, December 13, 1947b: 637; and EH Carr, 'Marxism and Social Theory,' *Times Literary Supplement*, September 21, 1956: 553.

⁴⁹ Carr, 1947b: 637

⁵⁰ Carr, 1980: 180

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 179

⁵² *Ibid.*, 179

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 180

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 180

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 181; and EH Carr, *What is History?*, London: Penguin, 1990: 29.

⁵⁶ Carr, 1990: 27

notion he draws from both Nietzsche and Marx, as well as Sorel. The ‘will’ changes throughout history, however, whether religious dogma (Nietzsche) or the economic motivation of a bourgeois culture (Marx) Carr subscribes to Sorel’s conception of the socialist myth⁵⁷ considered a necessity for the mobilization of the masses.⁵⁸ For Carr, behind mass social actions and the establishment of social institutions throughout history have been myths of reason and myths of morality. According to the myth of reason, human rationality is a reflection, not of subjective character, but of an objective or transcendental reality. This feeds into the myth of morality that, if human rationality is capable of discerning absolute truths of reality, so too is it capable of discerning absolute moral values. Carr is committed both to stripping human rationality its ‘false reason’⁵⁹ as well as to exposing the ‘moral bankruptcy’ of *a priori* values and the morality myth.⁶⁰

His writings such as the *Twenty Years’ Crisis*, *Conditions of Peace*, and *Nationalism and After* follow the thesis that subjective interests of particular historical parties or groups (he focuses on liberal parties or groups in these listed works) have become manifest in the social collective consciousness and have therefore shaped the development and institutionalization of liberal societies. He conducts a political commentary on the failings of liberal democracy, national self-determination, and *laissez faire* economics using his historical approach. The approach also utilizes a particular logical move, the dialectical relationship of theory and practice, to strip the claim that liberal institutions reflect *a priori* values. Notably, the use of the dialectical relationship as a binary dichotomy is a logical move Carr makes often. The purpose of Carr using this type logic has been controversial, but the move has also been argued to be the reasoning of a dynamic process of history that differs from the Western-Marxist interpretation.⁶¹ This argument seems sound when considering Carr’s prolific and diverse use of the technique.

Carr shows that social reality and human action form a dialectical relationship with ideas and thoughts of the popular conscious in domestic and international societies. As Linklater notes, a valuable part of Carr’s project is in exploring the transcendence of the false antithesis.⁶² Throughout Carr’s political writings there is a focus on binary dichotomies as the key to understanding the relationship between theory and practice and change. For example, according to Molloy, Carr uses partly Hegelian Marxist and partly Jamesian binary typology in setting up his discussion of realism/utopianism.⁶³ In theoretical terms, it is the constant tension between these two categories that acts as a catalyst for social change and allows for action to perpetuate itself. As Molloy further points out, in TYC the dialectical relation between realism and utopianism is mirrored in the oppositions presented throughout the book that characterize the development of international politics: ‘coercion and conscience’, ‘enmity and good will’, ‘self-assertion and self-subordination’, ‘the ideal and the institution’, and ‘morality and power’.⁶⁴ In *Nationalism and After* he

⁵⁷ EH Carr, ‘The Adventure of Syndicalism,’ *Times Literary Supplement*, November 1, 1947a: 558; On Sorel see also Carr, 2001: 85.

⁵⁸ EH Carr, *The New Society*, London: Macmillan, 1951:105; and Carr, 2001: 85.

⁵⁹ Carr, 1951: 104-106

⁶⁰ Carr, 1942: 106

⁶¹ Kubáľková, 1998: 28.

⁶² Linklater, 1997: 324.

⁶³ Molloy, 2003: 284

⁶⁴ Molloy, 2003: 285 quoting *Twenty Years’ Crisis*

describes the development of nationalism as based on a dyad when he explains it as “fissiparous,” or reproducing itself as a complete ideology from an original division of two equal parts by which the nation-state was defined on the one hand, culturally, and on the other legalistically.⁶⁵ In WIH we also find sets of antithetical dyads, such as ‘the particular and the general’, ‘the empirical and the theoretical’, and ‘the objective and the subjective’, framing his discussion of “the Scylla of untenable theory of history as an objective compilation of facts...and the Charybdis of an equally untenable theory of history as the subjective product of the mind of the historian who establishes the facts of history and masters them through the process of interpretation”.⁶⁶ Also in WIH is a discussion of the ‘false antithesis of society and the individual’ used to explain Carr’s own conception of the role of the individual in society.⁶⁷ The notion of two antithetical theoretical categories perpetuating action through necessary change is present in Carr’s studies on revolution as well. He explains that revolution is a form of dynamic social action reflecting this process. As he explains in his *Studies on Revolution*,

*History never stands still – least of all in the middle of a revolution. What Lenin created and what Stalin inherited from him was a constantly changing entity, not a static system, but a process of development. It was a process in which, to borrow the Hegelian idiom, thesis was continually begetting antithesis [...] Put less abstractly, the truth seems to be that every revolution is succeeded by its own reaction [...].*⁶⁸

The constant dynamic of revolution is also discussed in *Conditions of Peace*, where he explains that the First and Second World Wars are revolutionary reactions against outdated nineteenth century liberal ideals.⁶⁹ As revolutionary projects these wars will “break up and sweep away the half-rotted structure of an old social and political order, and lay the foundations of a new”.⁷⁰

If a dynamic understanding of historical experience is why Carr repetitively uses the seemingly sloppy false antithesis, further evidence lies in his 1951 work *The New Society*. He opens the book with a chapter dedicated to explaining the historical approach, which serves to highlight how he uses his approach as a vehicle for understanding the interconnection of theory and practice in historical experience. What makes the work stand out is that in *The New Society* Carr gives an explicit discussion of the historical approach (more similar to the theoretical detail given in WIH) followed by an analysis of certain political and economic transitions in history. In each transition a practice is described as developing from a theoretical permutation. Again dyads form the structure of Carr’s chapters as we follow his discussion of the transitions of society through history: for example, in the transition ‘From Competition to Planned Economy’, where he explains the demand for ‘socialism’ as a response to laissez faire capitalism, which creates monopolistic capitalism, and the

⁶⁵ EH Carr, *Nationalism and After*, London: Macmillan, 1965: 37 and footnote 1 pgs 1-2.

⁶⁶ Carr, 1990: 29

⁶⁷ Ibid., 32.

⁶⁸ EH Carr, *Studies in Revolution*, London: Frank Cass, 1962: 213.

⁶⁹ Carr, 1942: 3; 10.

⁷⁰ Ibid, 3.

opposite extreme of communism.⁷¹ Or in the transition ‘From Economic Whip to Welfare State’, where he explains that the system of wages as the price of labour is a response “tempered by the principle of a minimum wage *adjusted to need*”.⁷² Or in the transition from ‘Individualism to Mass Democracy’, where it is elaborated that both political rights of the individual characteristic of eighteenth and nineteenth century democracy, as well as the political philosophy of individualism, have succumbed in the twentieth century to the dynamism of historical change because of a perceived need to broaden liberal democratic equalities beyond individual elites.

*The conception of democracy as a select society of free individuals, enjoying equal rights and periodically electing to manage the affairs of the society” has passed to “a vast society of individuals stratified by widely different social and economic backgrounds into a series of groups or classes, enjoying equal political rights the exercise of which is organized through two or more closely integrated political machines called parties.*⁷³

In other words as the beliefs or ideologies underlying political systems expose particular problems within a society, the dynamic of change is that, rather than in a linear progression from one form of society into a higher or more ‘advanced’ form of society, the system is constantly being reacted to and acted upon. Carr’s approach understands a dialectic of experience, or ways in which these thought-action reactions swing in pendulum-like shifts between often extreme and antithetical theoretical positions. His historical portrayal of the development of society is not in a state of ‘progression’ per se, but in a constant state of change or mutation dependent upon action and based upon perceived need. In this frame of reference Carr makes his famous statement about Marx as both the theoretician and the actor; in perceiving the facts a certain way and acting upon them Marx himself played a crucial role in shaping social reality of the nineteenth century.⁷⁴

***What is History?*, the influences of RG Collingwood, and the Philosophy of History as Epistemology**

Carr’s understanding of historical experience is a theory of ontology – a theory of how the world is (being) and how relations occur within it. However, his understanding of historical experience is directly related to an epistemic theory present in *The New Society* and even more so in *What is History?*.⁷⁵ The argument is that, in addition to the influences of Mannheim’s sociology of knowledge, an important influence on Carr’s understanding of the interconnection of thought and

⁷¹ Carr, 1951: 33; 38.

⁷² Ibid., 59 (emphasis added).

⁷³ Ibid., 74.

⁷⁴ Carr, 2001: 5.

⁷⁵ Notably, within the chapter on the ‘Historical Approach’ in TNS there are earlier iterations of the criticisms of conservative empiricism’s fetishism of facts and the liberal Whig tradition’s doctrine of progress that he would later expand upon in WIH. In WIH Carr gives an analogy that compares his dialectical understanding of experience with his theory of knowledge when he says, “the relation of man to his environment is the relation of the historian to his theme” (see Carr, 1990: 29).

action was R.G. Collingwood's philosophy of history.⁷⁶ In many ways this argument has parallels with Robert Cox's explanation of the 'historical mode of thought' as a means of comprehending the social world.⁷⁷ Here two areas are explored in which the influence of Collingwood's philosophy of history on Carr is unmistakable. First is the Historical Imagination, which encompasses aspects of an epistemological idealism. Second is a consideration of the problem of objectivity in history, whereby it is also considered how Collingwood and Carr use history as a critique of reason that exposes heuristic principles of modes of inquiry. Collingwood's thought is argued to have more implicit influence on the structure, inquiry, and analysis of WIH than might be assumed upon first glance. Rather than differing from the sociology of knowledge characteristic of works in which Carr focuses on an understanding of historical experience, the insights Carr drew from Collingwood can be seen as further presenting a categorical theory of knowledge that underlies his historical approach.

a) Fact and Historical Imagination

Because Carr credits Collingwood as "the only British thinker in the present century who has made a serious contribution to the philosophy of history" it is important to consider him carefully.⁷⁸ It is not so simple as to label either Collingwood or Carr as epistemologically 'idealist'. Collingwood made rejections of the prevalent realist empirical tradition and was against the ahistorical approach of philosophical realism.⁷⁹ In truth he considered himself neither philosophically realist nor idealist, differentiating his theory from these positions because neither of them take into account the interdependence of thought and object that make up experience.⁸⁰ However, it is necessary to note that the idealism Collingwood distinguishes himself from the idealism of Berkeley as well as the 19th century idealism characteristic of Oxford historians such as T.H. Green. In *The Idea of History* Collingwood explains the idealistic character of his thought, stating, "every act of thought, as it actually

⁷⁶ It must be noted though that to say that Carr's approach to understanding historical experience and his theory of knowledge are influenced by Collingwood is *not* to argue that Carr accepted all facets of Collingwood's thought or that Carr was merely a disciple carrying on Collingwood's project. This is as untrue as to imply that Carr was merely a disciple of Marx, carrying on the Marxist project. Although Carr admitted in his autobiography that Marx was one of the most influential thinkers on him, he maintained throughout his career staunch disagreements with aspects of Marx's theories. Likewise, though *What is History?* shows the unmistakable influence of Collingwood on Carr, there are points on which Carr disagreed avidly with Collingwood. For example, Carr does not consider his project a 'philosophical' one in the sense of disciplinary philosophy (see 1990: 10). Nor does he go to the extremes of Collingwood in painstakingly elaborating his own conception of aesthetic modes of thought. He also defends, to some extent, the usefulness of generalization in history as long as it is not seen to undermine the primary importance of change in society (see 1990: 64-66).

⁷⁷ Robert Cox, *Approaches to World Order*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996, p. 91. See also Robert Cox, 'Social Forces, States, and World Orders Beyond International Relations Theory', in Robert O. Keohane (ed) *Neorealism and its Critics*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1986, pp. 204-254.

⁷⁸ Carr, 1990: 21.

⁷⁹ Collingwood discusses the epistemological positions of realism and idealism in RG Collingwood, *An Autobiography* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978; as well as in RG Collingwood, *The Idea of History*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994: 300-302; for further discussion see Louis O. Mink, *Mind, History, Dialectic*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1969, pp. 111-113 and John Passmore, *A Hundred Years of Philosophy*, London: Gerald Duckworth, 1957: 397.

⁸⁰ Louis O. Mink, *Mind, History, Dialectic*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1969, pp. 111-113.

happens, happens in context out of which it arises and in which it lives, like any other experience, as an organic part of the thinker's life."⁸¹

In his philosophy of history, Collingwood refined Croce's 'science of spirit' by recasting it into a philosophical form of history; a methodology for historical criticism that does not take for granted an 'absolute' (as with Croce and Hegel), but combines the reflective and the historical as one.⁸² Collingwood's philosophy of history and likewise Carr's use of the philosophy of history is a reconstruction of concepts and categories of thought, skeptical of objective claims of fact, reminiscent of Kantian and post-Kantian German idealism.⁸³ An explanation of the German idealism that underlies Collingwood's philosophy of history is present in Kant's discussion of the receptive capacity of the human mind in terms of the 'categories' of *sensibility*, *understanding*, and *reason*. It is especially in regard to *relation* within the category of *understanding* that Collingwood's writings reflect idealist tendencies of thought on human receptive capacity; most notably, where *sensibility* (time-space) combine with *understanding* in rationalizing causal relations. Judgment and knowledge about the world become possible only when spatial and temporal experience are assimilated into the categories of human understanding.⁸⁴ Experience is filtered through the categories of the human mind, producing a rational chain of causality by means of subjective relation to that experience. All empirical facts exist in relation to the point at which they are linked to empirical sense experience.

Collingwood's Historical Imagination is from the second of the Epilegomena in the *Idea of History*, encompasses two idealistic aspects of his historiography.⁸⁵ First, he displays a skepticism toward objective factual knowledge; rather, historical facts represent the choices and values of the historian. Second, he holds that the 're-enactment' of thought from a first person (inside) perspective is the only way to produce historical studies. As he explains, in contrast to the positivistic third person (outside) perspective, which is concerned with externally observable human actions, the historian ought to be concerned with the thoughts and reasons behind historical actions.⁸⁶

Not only in IH but in a number of Collingwood's works (including *Speculum Mentis*, *The Principles of History*, and *An Essay on Metaphysics*) Collingwood's analysis is dedicated to explaining history as distinct a mode of thought. He sees a relationship between history and philosophy – to do history is to do philosophy and vice-versa, as history is more a reflective exercise than a gathering and interpreting of sense data. He explains that to understand his philosophy of history it is first necessary to understand that he defines philosophy as a reflective exercise combining the thought about objects with the *thought about* the thought about objects, or the 'thought about thought.'⁸⁷ In one of his earlier works, *Speculum Mentis*, he

⁸¹ RG Collingwood, 1994: 300.

⁸² W.J. Van der Dussen, *History as Science*, Boston: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1981: 60.

⁸³ For a full and detailed account of the Kantian influences of Collingwood's thought see Giuseppina D'Oro, *Collingwood and the Metaphysics of Experience*, London: Routledge, 2002.

⁸⁴ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, translated by Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998, 210-214.

⁸⁵ Collingwood, *The Idea of History*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1946: 232-349.

For a more elaborate discussion of Collingwood's historiography and the problems with his re-enactment doctrine see Dale Jacquette, 'Collingwood on Historical Authority and Historical Imagination', *Journal of the Philosophy of History* 3, 2009, 59-78 (see 59-64).

⁸⁶ Collingwood, 1994: 213.

⁸⁷ Collingwood, 1946: 1

differentiates art, religion, science, history and philosophy as different forms of experience.⁸⁸ This is the departure point for his argument that history has its own, distinct method and subject matter that differs from that of the natural sciences. In later works Collingwood revised his earlier reflections from *Speculum Mentis*, according historical inquiry with a special priority. In fact, he arguably subsumes the understanding of all human experience under the historical mode.⁸⁹ His positions on history are further laid out in the fourth Epilegomena of *The Idea of History*, which discusses the conditions of possibility of knowledge of past experience.⁹⁰ He believed that knowing is a process of questioning and understanding; no absolute truth or reality exists independently of the set of circumstances and presuppositions that frame historical events. This should not be confused with Berkeley's proposition of *Est Esse Percipi* (to be is to be perceived). Berkeley's proposition implies that ontology is *dependent* on perception, while Collingwood's understanding of history focuses only on what can be known about ontology *in the past* given the limits of human perception. As such historical events must be understood dually as actions that happened in the past but also as reflections of subjective thought.⁹¹ The fact that historical interpretation is necessarily ground in problems of the present creates a pragmatic aspect to his argument. Every historical action was a response to a particular problem. As he explains, an historian may read and translate an edict of an emperor made within the Theodosian Code; however, in order to understand the historical significance of the edict as a philosopher of history, one must first

*[...] see what the philosophical problem was, of which his author is here stating his solution. He must think that problem out for himself, see what possible solutions of it might be offered, and see why this particular philosopher chose that solution instead of another.*⁹²

When discussing the facts of history Carr displays a similar skeptical consideration of facts characteristic of German idealism and attention to history as a mode of conceptual and categorical thought as Collingwood. Consider Carr's epistemological reflections on the objectivity of factual knowledge. Similar to the position expressed by Collingwood, for Carr the 'objectivity debate', or the debate regarding absolute truth and objective and unbiased facts of knowledge, is framed by the consideration that the historian is not working with transcendental knowledge of the real, but with subjective concepts and categories of thought of the observer.

The reconstitution of the past in the historian's mind is dependent on empirical evidence. But it is not in itself an empirical process, and cannot consist in a mere recital of facts. On the contrary, the process of

⁸⁸ RG Collingwood, *Speculum Mentis or The Map of Knowledge*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1924.

⁸⁹ This is a matter of some speculation in Collingwood studies. See T.M. Knox, 'Editor's Introduction' in RG Collingwood, *The Idea of History*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1946, pp. ix-ilix. Lionel Rubinoff, 'History and Human Nature Reflections on R.G. Collingwood', *International Studies in Philosophy* XXIII(3), 1991: 75-89.

Louis O. Mink, *Mind, History, Dialectic*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1969.

⁹⁰ See Collingwood, 1946: 282-302 (especially 284).

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 292.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 263

*reconstitution governs the selection and interpretation of the facts: this, indeed, is what makes them historical fact.*⁹³

He also says, “our picture of the facts of our environment is moulded by our values, i.e. by the categories through which we approach the facts.”⁹⁴ Carr, like Collingwood, seems to be approaching the question, ‘How is historical knowledge possible?’ in the same way Kant approaches the question of ‘How is knowledge of objects possible?’ in his *Critique of Pure Reason*. Both seem to be asking, ultimately, to what extent ‘truth’ is a process of *understanding* in knowledge?⁹⁵ As Kant states,

*What is Truth? The nominal definition of truth, namely that it is the agreement of cognition with its object, is here granted and presupposed; but one demands to know what is the general and certain criterion of the truth of any cognition.*⁹⁶

For both Collingwood and Carr, the question is specifically applied to historical knowledge. Thinking historically is a process of understanding that cannot be entirely objective and unbiased, as absolute truth of historical experience is beyond the capability of human rational function. In *What is History?* Carr attempts to determine to what extent cognition in the study of history could/should be reconciled with notions of truth, and to what extent that cognition is reconciled with ‘history’ that can be methodologically and empirically executed. The theme and preoccupation with the subject underlies the entire structure of *What is History?* Case in point, in *WIH* Carr describes the historian him/herself as suspended in a dialectical relationship with ‘facts’. As it is explained in *WIH*, the historian is between two positions of a binary dichotomy, that of absolutism of the empirical theory of knowledge in which the facts make the man, and that of relative skepticism in which man makes the facts.⁹⁷ It is here that *TNS* and *WIH* find common ground: the historian’s project is to use the sociology of knowledge as categorical inquiry into the context and character of ideas and thought behind the ‘facts’. This means taking ‘facts’ from the past and reconciling them with his/her own present-tense subjective perception, or historical consciousness. The historian’s interpretation of the facts makes an impact on perceived history. Or, to emphasize a point made by Collingwood, history becomes a product of its own historical process. The historian is not outside history looking in, but is an active participant in constructing the historical process, as Carr describes,

*The historian is like an observer watching a moving procession from an aeroplane; since there is no constant or ascertainable relation between the speed, height, and direction of the aircraft and the movement of the procession, changing and unfamiliar perspectives are juxtaposed in rapid succession, as in a cubist picture, none of them wholly false, none wholly true. Any static view of history purporting to be recorded from a fixed point by a stationary observer is fallacious.*⁹⁸

⁹³ Carr, 1990: 22

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 131.

⁹⁵ See Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason* (1998, A 58)

⁹⁶ Kant, 1998: 197.

⁹⁷ Carr, 1990: 29.

⁹⁸ Carr, 1951: 13.

A further example of the 'idealistic' tone of Carr's consideration of facts can be seen in a comparison of Collingwood's and Carr's discussions of Caesar crossing the Rubicon. In the *Idea of History* Collingwood describes the necessity of differentiating between the 'outside' of an event and the 'inside' of an event.⁹⁹ The outside of an event can be seen to reflect ontology, or "everything belonging to it which can be described in terms of bodies and their movement," such as the passage of Caesar across the Rubicon.¹⁰⁰ The inside of an event can be seen to reflect epistemology, "or that in it which can only be described in terms of thought," such as Caesar's defense of Republican law.¹⁰¹ The historian is interested in both of these together; for instance, "the crossing of the Rubicon only in its relation to Republican law."¹⁰² Carr also makes use of the Caesar example in his explanation of historical 'facts'. He explains that Caesar crossing the Rubicon is a 'fact' in the same order as the fact that there might be a table in the middle of the room. To use Collingwood's terms, they represent the outside of the event, or as Carr says "both have the same objective character in relation to the person who knows them."¹⁰³ Carr goes on to make clear, like Collingwood, that "the facts speak only when the historian calls on them: it is he who decides to which facts to give the floor, and in which order and context."¹⁰⁴ It is the inside of the event (the historian's thoughts) that attaches to it a 'standard of significance'.¹⁰⁵

While Carr does express his own reservations of the 'Collingwood view of history,' namely that it could be logically pressed to an "infinity of meanings,"¹⁰⁶ he nevertheless accepts the main idealistic propositions of Collingwood's Historical Imagination:

- Facts are influenced by the values and logic of the historian (or, more generally, the person conducting the study)
- Understanding the practical and context specific thoughts of the historical actor is the only successful means by which to access knowledge about past events and actions

In Carr's own words it is,

[...] the historian's need of imaginative understanding for the minds of the people with whom he is dealing, for the thought behind their acts: I say 'imaginative understanding', not sympathy, lest sympathy should be supposed to imply agreement.¹⁰⁷

b) Objectivity vs. Categorical Reflection

⁹⁹ Collingwood, 1994: 213

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Carr, 1990: 10.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 11.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 123.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 26-27.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 24.

On this reading, Carr's project is not a search for 'objectivity' in history. Rather it is a type of epistemological inquiry into the categories of cognition. To further explain it is necessary to briefly consider some critics of Carr's history, which have focused specifically on his treatment of objectivity in history. First, Keith Jenkins, who has argued that Carr's final appeal to objectivity in history combined with his ideological 'victorianism' render him unhelpful in contemporary theorizing about history, points to Collingwood's influence on Carr.¹⁰⁸ He notes that Carr seems to be placing himself between empiricism and the relativism of Collingwood, further arguing that in *WIH* Carr asserts a relativist (Collingwoodian) epistemology, then spends the remainder of the book "clawing back" from that relativism."¹⁰⁹ For Jenkins, the question of objectivity in history is the point at which Carr's analysis fails to provide any substantial contribution to historical theorizing. Jenkins argues that Carr, failing to reconcile his desired belief in a process of history with his skeptical belief that subjective limitations keep human intellect from ever knowing transcendent reality, turned toward ideological explanations for historical knowledge.

Anders Stephanson makes a similar study of Carr in his 'The Lessons of *What is History?*'¹¹⁰ While he claims that Carr's theory of history has continuing significance for contemporary historical theory, he argues Carr fails to solve the 'problem of objectivity' in history. He outlines that Carr, while rejecting parts of both the British school of empiricism and the extreme relativism of the 'Collingwoodian' school in historical inquiry, has become trapped within the polarity of the two positions.

*The ensuing antinomies derive from the original subject-object distinction which governs his (Carr's) argument. Once the subject-object polarity is accepted, knowledge becomes a question of the procedures by which the subject can abstract inherent qualities from some externally given object with proper guarantees of certainty. But no grounds for certainty can ever be found which do not require other conditions of possibility. An infinite regress sets in. Carr, who dismisses any sharp separation between subject and object, nevertheless remains locked inside the polarity. Unable to find secure footing, he is forced into an argument that typically oscillates between the two poles.*¹¹¹

Accordingly, Stephanson suggests that Carr undertakes an attempt to redefine objectivity through the criteria of significance and causation, which amounts to a pragmatic logic driven by purpose.¹¹²

Jenkins' and Stephanson's studies on Carr moreover reflect the overwhelming perception of him as a moral relativist within the discipline of IR. To return to Whittle Johnson's 1967 study on Carr, Johnston remained convinced that Carr had failed in his earlier writings and in his later writings to resolve his 'dilemma' with

¹⁰⁸ Keith Jenkins, 'An English Myth? Rethinking the Contemporary Value of EH Carr's *What is History?*' in *E.H. Carr a critical appraisal*, edited by Michael Cox, New York: Palgrave, 2000, pp. 304-320.

¹⁰⁹ Jenkins, 2000: 313.

¹¹⁰ Anders Stephanson, 'The Lessons of *What is History?*' in *EH Carr a critical appraisal* edited by Michael Cox, New York: Palgrave, 2000, pp.283-303.

¹¹¹ Stephanson, 2000: 287.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 288.

objectivity in history. His relativism consequentially manifested in an inability to take seriously a normative vision of international society. The problem with IR readings on Carr's moral relativism is the same problem with readings on his failure to demonstrate a convincing objectivity in history: the parameters of his inquiry are assumed for him by assuming that he is seeking objective standards. Focusing solely on the prescriptive aspect does not do justice to the way Carr treats the complexity of the 'problem of objectivity' in WIH.

Alternatively Carr's project can be read, like Collingwood's, as philosophically categorical. Carr, taking Collingwood's stance, explains, "The philosophy of history is concerned neither with 'the past by itself' nor with 'the historian's thought about it by itself', but with 'the two things in their mutual relations'."¹¹³ This statement has important implications for how Carr perceives the process of conceiving subjects and objects of experience. Put in more accurate terms, ontological inquiry is separated from epistemological inquiry and knowledge of the subject is not conflated with real existing objects. Since it is here argued that Collingwood's 'anti-realism'¹¹⁴ underlies Carr's WIH, it is necessary to offer a discussion of Collingwood's attack on the correspondence theory of truth. The correspondence theory of truth states that truth is when objects as cognized are the same as objects in themselves (or when we have knowledge of objects in themselves). Collingwood's attack is opposed to this theory of truth because it implies that knowledge of things in themselves can exist. D'oro has explained that the nine maxims listed in Collingwood's *An Autobiography* serve to clarify Collingwood's stance.¹¹⁵ Speaking of objects in terms of knowledge means bringing *description* of those objects into the epistemic realm – a necessity for textual or linguistic representation. To say that objects *exist* independently of the mind is a safe enough assumption. It is however very different to then try and attach predicates to those objects and to put them into logical comparisons.¹¹⁶ Objects that simply exist cannot be described, understood, or logically cognized in any way because this presupposes knowledge of things in themselves. Therefore things in themselves cannot be known. This separates the questions of the existence of objects (an ontological inquiry) from the question of what can be known about objects (an epistemological inquiry). Furthermore, Collingwood describes in *Essay on Metaphysics* that History and Science differ as modes of inquiry.¹¹⁷ He defines both as having methods, subject matters, and heuristic principles, but emphasizes that the heuristic principles that govern the two types of inquiry are fundamentally different. In history, he explains, there is a focus on the conceptual understanding of the subject (rather than a focus on the polarity between the perceiving subject and the object of perception). Importantly, this leaves out the question of the object *Ding An Sich*, focusing rather on the perception of the subject as the basis for action upon objects. Action, he says, is "the unity of the outside (ontological) and the inside (epistemological) of an event."¹¹⁸ The important relationship of focus is the phenomenal one in which subjects' actions effect and interact with objects. Carr presents a similar thesis in his rejection of the

¹¹³ Carr, 1990: 21.

¹¹⁴ For a detailed discussion on the debates surrounding Collingwood's 'anti-realism' see D'oro, 2002: 37-52.

¹¹⁵ D'oro, 2002: 42-43.

¹¹⁶ Collingwood, 1978, Ch. 6 as reconstructed in D'oro, 2002: 42-43.

¹¹⁷ RG Collingwood, *An Essay on Metaphysics*, Oxford: Clarendon, 1940.

¹¹⁸ Collingwood, 1946: 213

subject-object polarity in WIH, stating that “it is not surprising that in the last fifty years philosophers have begun to call them (classical theories of knowledge) in question and to recognize that the process of knowledge, far from setting subject and object sharply apart, involves a measure of interrelation and interdependence between them.”¹¹⁹ The ‘continuous process between the historian and his facts’ that Carr refers to is reflected by the specific conceptual categories of thought of the subject.¹²⁰ An understanding of the relationship is dependent upon an understanding of the mode of thought of the acting subject. It is not motivated by ontological questions of being or questions about the nature of the object.

Carr’s project of the critique of reason can also be linked with Collingwood. With Collingwood there is a tendency to use history (as philosophical reflection) to critique that which is taken for granted as *a priori* reason itself.¹²¹ Likewise, Carr’s work demonstrates the use of critical reflection turned against reason itself. As discussed previously, his works offer a critique of the theories of knowledge of *a priori* rationalism and empiricism. He rejects the extreme claims that, on the one hand, reason, rationality and value are inherent to man and, on the other hand, that reason, rationality and value must be derived from an objective compilation of facts.¹²² As Tim Dunne has argued, to understand Carr’s philosophy of history it is necessary to understand “the movement of history and science through dialectical stages where the line between truth and falsehood is blurred rather than sharply defined opposites according to conventional logic.”¹²³

Both authors put their critique to use against the ‘paradigmatic’ English traditions of history. Two considerations must be made regarding the similarities of Collingwood’s and Carr’s reflective critique of these paradigmatic traditions. Firstly, a large portion of the text is dedicated to exposing and ‘debunking,’ as it were, the fallacies of paradigmatic history. Carr’s criticisms, much like Collingwood’s work as part of the reflective exercise of history in that historical inquiry is a larger part of the rational critique of reason. He takes much of the structure and content of his criticism of paradigmatic history in WIH directly from Collingwood, building his own positions from the criticisms of the English traditions of history that echo Collingwood’s critiques of ‘psuedo-history’ and especially the empirical theory of knowledge and the rational conception of progress.

In his analysis of the concepts of reason underlying the English traditions of history, Carr’s writings show his objection to, on the one hand, the dominance of ‘conservative empiricism’ and, on the other hand, the dominance of ‘liberal Whig historicism’ in the English speaking historical tradition. British conservative empiricism, what he also calls the “common sense view of history”, is a reflection of the empirical theory of knowledge:

¹¹⁹ See 1990: 9; 72-73

¹²⁰ See *ibid.*, 131.

¹²¹ He does this in *An Essay on Metaphysics* by exploring ‘absolute presuppositions’ (or heuristic principles) behind historical and scientific forms of inquiry. He also turns toward analysis of logical and value assumptions underlying political communities in *The New Leviathan*. See RG Collingwood, *The New Leviathan or Man, Society, Civilization and Barbarism*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1942.

¹²² Carr, 1990,

¹²³ Dunne, 1998: 32

*The empirical theory of knowledge presupposes a complete separation between subject and object. Facts, like sense-impressions, impinge on the observer from outside and are independent of his consciousness. The process of reception is passive: having received the data, he then acts on them.*¹²⁴

Carr objects to the “fetishism of facts” of conservative empiricism, which he states has arisen to distract the historian from his task.¹²⁵ In the fetishism of facts Carr saw nothing more than the resurfacing of remnants of a “dead tradition” empiricism descended from Leopold Von Ranke and Reinhold Neibuhr.¹²⁶ What is more, Carr viewed the “fashionable empiricism” of Lewis Namier, Hugh Trevor-Roper, Michael Oakshott, Karl Popper and others as “the loss of the pervading sense of a world in perpetual motion.”¹²⁷ Like the positivist view that history-is-science, conservative empiricism gives no concession to the dynamic and changing nature of history, nor does it account for the role of human will and human action in shaping historical and social circumstance.

Carr’s words echo Collingwood’s treatment of ‘scissor-and-paste history’ (what Collingwood calls the ‘common sense view of history’ and the ‘scientific view of history’), which is also a rejection of the empirical theory of knowledge. According to Collingwood as the discipline of history advances, it becomes necessary for historians to draw from the work of previous ‘authoritative’ historians who had already written on particular time periods.¹²⁸ The work of these authoritative writers cannot be checked on ‘Heroditean principles’ because the historians themselves are no longer living.¹²⁹ The layers of history build one story upon another, leaving the earlier layers completely covered and thus free from critical scrutiny. Collingwood explains that scissor-and-paste history further developed in a manner of scrutinizing ‘the facts of history’ for truth or falsity rather than for understanding of meaning and context. The difference is that former over emphasizes a logic of inductive generalizations based on experience to determine the ‘truth’ about historical accounts (eg empiricism), while the latter is based on ‘historical inference’ based on understanding categories of thought (eg the philosophy of history).¹³⁰ Collingwood’s assessment is not unlike Carr’s criticism of English conservative empiricism with its ‘fetishism with facts’ and the empirical theory of knowledge behind it.

It should also be considered that Carr’s definition of the concept of progress, upon which he builds his criticism of liberal Whig historicism, is strikingly similar to that of Collingwood. Collingwood’s purpose in addressing the idea of progress is to do away with the notion of the rational ‘law of progress.’ Specifically this means de-conflating naturalism and assumptions about the value of progress. Collingwood explains that the nineteenth century view of progress was governed by the notion that man had in him a natural tendency to realize absolute value, and that this was taken to mean that ‘progress is a law of nature’.¹³¹ Contrarily he argues that ‘man has in him nothing of absolute value,’ and that,

¹²⁴ Carr, 1990: 9

¹²⁵ Ibid., 16.

¹²⁶ EH Carr, ‘Progress in History,’ *Times Literary Supplement*, July 18, 1952: 469.

¹²⁷ Carr 1990, 155

¹²⁸ Collingwood, 1946: 33

¹²⁹ Ibid., 33

¹³⁰ Ibid., 261

¹³¹ Collingwood, 1946: 322

*His rationality, it may be said, only serves to make him the most maleficent and destructive of the animals, and is rather a blunder or cruel joke of nature than her noblest work; his morality is only (as the modern jargon goes) a rationalization or ideology which he has devised to conceal from himself the crude fact of his bestiality.*¹³²

However he does concede that the phrase ‘historical progress’ still has some *practical* meaning and therefore a dependence upon experience. As Collingwood states, it (the historical process) “progresses in so far as one stage of its development solves the problems which defeated it in the last, without losing its hold on the solutions already achieved.”¹³³ Collingwood offers a critique of reason and the ‘ideology of rationalism’, but not a blanket rejection of human reason as a tool for overcoming problems of the past. Collingwood reintroduces his own notion of historical process, which “happens only in one way: by the retention in the mind, at one phase, of what was achieved in the preceding phase.”¹³⁴

Carr gives his similar definition of progress by first discussing the concept of historicism, which he differentiates from the concept of historicism given by Karl Popper. That is, he separates his ‘historicism’ from determinism, which is a necessary product of the unwavering belief in *a priori* reason. In his essay on Karl Mannheim he clarifies that on his reading, historicism is the “study of the ‘conditioned’ nature of our judgments in all the sciences relating to human behaviour.”¹³⁵ In his reflections on the Marxist credo he further identifies two strands of historicism – the theological and the historical. While the theologian is concerned with absolute truth or falsehood and “seeks to validate his belief by an appeal to authority, or in terms of its consistency with other accepted items of belief or of its own inherent rationality”, the historian is not interested in truth or falsehood but in “ideologies of powerful movements as instruments in a struggle for power between conflicting factions.”¹³⁶ In contrast to the theologian, the historian denies any claims to objective truth through the validity of reason, which Carr states, over-emphasize the determinist elements in Marxian theory and are the reason that the theological approach to any form of Marxism is unsatisfactory.¹³⁷

As such, in WIH Carr rejects the eschatological direction attached to the idea of progress within liberal Whig histories¹³⁸, be it the belief in positive ‘providential’ progress of Macaulay or the negative portrayal of decay used by Arnold Toynbee and Oswald Spengler.¹³⁹ Nor is Carr’s notion of progressive history, as is often argued, the same teleological historical process of Hegel or Marx.¹⁴⁰ Again Carr differentiates his approach from determinism. His notion of progress is, to a certain extent, reliant on human reason. But it is a subjective and context specific reason rather than an *a priori* one. It is the practical application of thought, “the reality and efficacy,” and the “this-sidedness of thinking” that drive human reason.¹⁴¹ He states that it is not a

¹³² Ibid., 323

¹³³ Ibid., 332

¹³⁴ Ibid., 333

¹³⁵ Carr, 1980: 179.

¹³⁶ Ibid., 234

¹³⁷ Ibid., 236; 237

¹³⁸ Carr, 1951: 3-5

¹³⁹ Ibid., 13

¹⁴⁰ Carr outlines his own definition of progress (see Carr, 1990: 113-118).

¹⁴¹ Carr, 1980: 236

reliance on human reason in the “outdated” sense that nineteenth century empiricists believed in “secular and scientifically established laws of progress valid in social relations as in the physical world.”¹⁴²

Carr draws an interesting comparison of his own notions of progress and progressive history to those of sociologist and philosopher Morris Ginsberg in his work *Idea of Progress*. In the work Ginsberg puts forward the thesis (similar to the notion expressed by Collingwood that thought is conditioned to certain purposes) that the liberal notion of the unseen force should be replaced with a belief in human logic. Carr, in agreement with the thesis, states that it is necessary to “extricate the idea of progress from its nineteenth century setting as a social law and reinstate it as a belief in the possibility and opportunity of our faculties”; “above all, the idea of progress is linked with a belief in the validity – though, of course, not an exclusive validity – of reason.”¹⁴³ In WIH we get a clear sense of his criticism of rationalism, ironically, as the subordination of reason to assumptions of the existing order.¹⁴⁴ He rejects the appeal to reason as a validation of absolute facts, values, or to the teleological progress of history, but he does not issue a blanket rejection of all human reason.

Reasoning and logic remain fundamental to Carr’s notion of the historical consciousness, which furthermore rings familiar with Collingwood’s Historical Imagination, and especially his argument that past, present, and future are connected as “it is the knowledge of the past that conditions our creation of the future.”¹⁴⁵ In other words, human beings have a *categorical* perception that the present and future are inextricably linked to the past. This dynamic perception is what creates the illusion of the ‘absolute’ process of history.¹⁴⁶ However, according to Carr, the historical consciousness is a type of practical reason, or the individual’s ability to consciously and rationally place him/herself within the cycle of events of a given environment.¹⁴⁷ It is this conscious and rational subjective perception of circumstance and context that conditions action.

Conclusions

Some may argue that the study of Carr’s intellectual debts has been exhausted. Others may argue further that the study of Carr as a means to expose the inadequacy of certain claims to a realist theory of international politics has likewise been exhausted. Here the alternative view has been taken, that the further study of Carr merely brings about new and linguistically diverse interpretations in an ongoing and informative dialogue about his contributions to IR thought. Robert Cox’s summons to bring further analysis of Carr into the present has been taken up here. Specifically, the reason Carr is viewed and pursued as an important contributor to political thought within this article has mostly to do with the continuing importance of issues of epistemology and ontology in theorizing international politics. This is not to take a side on the debate over which has priority within the theorizing process, but to claim that both aspects of theorizing, and how they may be interrelated in various approaches to understanding politics, are relevant when offering an interpretation of a

¹⁴² EH Carr, ‘Reason in Progress,’ *Times Literary Supplement*, March 13, 1953: 169.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 169.

¹⁴⁴ Carr, 1990: 155.

¹⁴⁵ Collingwood, 1946: 334

¹⁴⁶ Carr, 1990: 121-122.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 134.

contributor to any discourse. Therefore, in focusing on issues of epistemology and ontology related to Carr's theories, this article also implicitly builds upon previous debates regarding Carr's intellectual debts as well as his complexity beyond a realist thinker.

This article has expanded upon discussions of Carr's contribution to political thought by focusing on the two themes of his critique of reason and his use of dialectical logic as related to his philosophy of history. It has been argued that dialectical logic is consistently present in many works throughout Carr's career as an intellectual. While dialectical logic is frequently used in his writing, he does not combine his dialectics with naturalism or materialism, rejecting the materialist conception of history as putting too much emphasis on economics as the base of the base-superstructure dynamic. As such, his work does not only criticize *a priori* rationalism but also empiricism. Moreover, Carr's historical approach uses the sociology of knowledge as a methodological and reflective tool to understand the interconnections of thought and action in social practices and institutions. The implications have been considered that the sociology of knowledge is compatible with the epistemological philosophy of history Carr advanced in WIH. His philosophy of history as a categorical mode of understanding reflects the influences of philosopher R.G. Collingwood. This article has also left room for further investigation, in particular with respect to how Carr's analyses of the dynamic and changing nature of society, a focus of many studies on him done in IR, can be reappraised in relation to his categorical understanding of the Historical Imagination and the problem of objectivity as discussed in *What is History?*