

Lost in reality: Carr, Morgenthau, and realism as utopia

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Against any notion of a realist intellectual tradition, pervasive through time and memories, it was Carr's and Morgenthau's job, with some other contributors', to settle foot on the academic debate of international politics with the idea of an approach to be called "realism". This act was mostly made not in the name of the past, the tradition or the present facts, but aimed at mastering the future. *Begriffsgeschichte* has emphasized the role concepts have not merely as descriptive of politics, but mainly as constitutive of the political power to shape the things to come in their horizon. For that, the realist narrative had to identify its opponents, activate older meanings, define counter conceptions, and offer a set of prescriptions to those interested in acting in the international scene. And, while it is mostly a debate over the common-sense of political action, in which in the aftermath of WWII and the prospect of a deadlier war between the US and the Soviet Union on one hand, and the fear of a non-Western rise on the other, played a crucial role, it is also a more localized strife for academic space, the dispute over wider audiences, funding, university jobs, academic posts, publications, and so on.

The goal of this paper is to retell this particular history of the foundations of the discipline of International Relations in the interwar period with the focus on Carr's and Morgenthau's ambitions, successes and failures in mastering the political time. Both were denouncing the liberal idealization of international politics, fostering the rigorous scientific study of reality as it is, freeing "realism" from its older particular pejorative meaning, and associating to a new objectively defined one, to explain any state in this imperfect world, imperfect even from the rational point of view. The lack of effectiveness of new grand narratives today in capturing the general imagination is confirmed by this discipline. The realist-idealist divide still sets the disputes, hides certain perspectives, fills the academic space. In the middle of the turbulent openness of the post-Cold War agenda: from financial crisis to climate change and nuclear proliferation, from human rights and poverty to terrorism, realism has even been revitalized by a pioneer effort in IR disciplinary history with the tools of the History of Ideas, which, not by coincidence, happens in a clearer "rise of the rest", severely challenging the(ir) existing world political frameworks.

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