

# **The changing conceptual foundations of the debate on war and peace: morality and rationality in the international political thought of Mahan, Angell, and Carr**

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## **Abstract:**

The goal of this paper is to investigate the change in the narratives about war and peace brought with the professionalization of the discipline of International Relations (IR). It deals with three prominent figures of thought who wrote very impacting books to this debate over the decades: the Admiral Alfred T. Mahan, author of *The influence of sea power upon history* (1890), greatly influencing military conceptions and strategies that led to the pre-Great War arms race, Norman Angell, seen as a leading intellectual of the peace movement for his campaign on the general public and elite education of the dangers of *The Great Illusion* (1912), and Edward H. Carr, the English historian considered one of the founders of IR with his *Twenty Years' Crisis: 1919-1939* (1939). Besides their popularity in this field, and the different moments of their publications revealing the passing of the turbulent international historical events and the spreading of technological innovations of the late 19th and early 20th century, the three were chosen for the public arguing that had Angell standing up to the critiques of Mahan in 1912 and then Carr in 1940. The way these authors understood notions like morality and rationality led each of them to different conclusions about statecraft, the meaning, utility, and legitimacy of bellicose activities engaged by countries against each other, progress and civilization that clearly set a pre- and a post-IR conceptual frame for the debates of world politics.

This argument is not obvious in the history of international political thought, specially in disciplinary history of IR. Many would agree with the temptation “to see this division as foreshadowing the clash which would appear later between Realism and Idealism” in the yet to be founded discipline of IR. But that statement is not quite correct. This paper will identify the different concepts and semantic structures that clearly shows the different intellectual contexts of the Mahan-Angell debate and the later one between Carr and Angell, and suggests us to refrain

from the tendency to backwardly constructing artificial longstanding traditions out of the particular contexts in which they came to fore.

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