E.H. Carr has generally been viewed by analysts of International Relations to be a pioneer of the ‘scientific’ study of the discipline as well as an important theorist of state-centric ‘realism’. His book *The Twenty Years’ Crisis* has traditionally been considered one of the major texts that helped shape post-war realism, especially in the United States. However, the significance of this text in the broader development of Carr’s thinking on International Relations has been seriously neglected by analysts, who have tended to conclude that Carr was an advocate of *raison d’état* in which ethics was largely a product of power. This view has also been reinforced by the sharp distinction Carr made in *The Twenty Years’ Crisis* between the school of state-centric realism and that of utopian idealism, which was accused of having little understanding of the role of power in international politics and of confusing prescription with description.

This simplistic reading of Carr has begun to be re-evaluated as a number of scholars have pointed to areas of common concern of both ‘idealists’ and ‘realists’. A recent collection of essays *Thinkers of The Twenty Years’ Crisis* points out, for instance, that a number of the interwar writers whom Carr castigated as idealist did recognize the importance of power in international relations and were by no means so ‘utopian’ as might be supposed. Indeed, the ‘idealist’ school emerges as a complex body of opinion ranging from unreconstructed utopians such as H.G. Wells and Clarence Streit who passionately believed in the idea of a world state as a means to end war and more pragmatically inclined thinkers such as David Mitrany and Alfred Zimmern who were concerned to work within state structures and seek a gradualist evolution in norms of interstate behaviour and conduct.
In this respect, a close reading of Carr’s work indicates that his own goals were not so very different. The drift of his thought in both *The Twenty Years’ Crisis* and his later study published in 1942 the *Conditions of Peace* suggests that his project for a ‘science’ of international relations was linked to a longer-term goal of educating idealist and opinion on the left into the dynamics of inter-state power politics. Carr considered that it was only the left that could think out ‘principles of political action and evolves ideals for statesmen to aim at’ and that the political right was largely bereft of original political ideas.\(^5\) The problem with idealist ‘utopianism’ was that it was bankrupt intellectually since it was incapable of providing ‘any absolute and disinterested standard for the conduct of international affairs’.\(^6\) What was needed, Carr concluded, was a political science of international affairs that was ‘based on a recognition of the interdependence of theory and practice, which can be attained only through a combination of utopia and reality’.\(^7\)

Carr’s approach was thus far from being a simple defence of an amoral Machiavellianism in international relations. He attacked the realist approach for being severely limited by its lack of any finite goal in politics as well as any emotional appeal, right of moral judgement or suitable ground for political action.\(^8\) The absence of all four of these crucial aspects of political thought rendered it almost impossible for any supposedly ‘realist’ theorist to be completely consistent in practice. There was always going to be some form of continuous engagement even by the most hardened of realists with some aspects of what might otherwise be termed ‘idealist’ thought.

When read together, *The Twenty Years’ Crisis* and *The Conditions of Peace* represent an attempt by Carr to shift the central axis of debate within IR towards a more professional concern with the examination and assessment of state interests and policy goals and objectives rather than to affirm the basic tenets of either realism or idealism as such. Carr was basically concerned during the early 1940s with shifting the central paradigm in IR away from what he considered to be the outmoded assumptions at the heart of the idealist vision with the nature and role of the state. Idealism, he considered, represented a continuation of nineteenth-century *laissez-faire* liberalism. Carr’s defence of realism, on the other hand, was part of a wider intellectual enterprise to moralise the idea of both national and international planning and the rational re-ordering of modern bureaucracy on an international plane.

By the middle 1940s, many of Carr’s aspirations became institutionalized as the assumptions of national planning developed at the national level in the US of the New Deal or war-time Britain. The onset of the